



Think-tank's Report Shows That Strong Families Create Prosperous States

The American Enterprise Institute's Institute for Family Studies issued a report on October 19 indicating that higher levels of married-parent families "are strongly associated with more economic growth, more economic mobility, less child poverty, and higher median family income at the state level in the United States."



The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a Washington-D.C.-based think tank founded in 1938 whose mission includes (among other things) the defense of limited government, private enterprise, individual liberty, and responsibility. Its affiliated Institute for Family Studies (IFS) states as its mission: "strengthening marriage and family life, and advancing the well-being of children, through research and public education."

The IFS report, *Strong Families, Prosperous States*, culled data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 Current Population Survey, a 2014 Gallup Poll (religious attendance), and The American Presidency Project to document four key sets of facts about the links between families and the economic welfare of states across the country. It found a direct link between the rate of marriage in states and the state's economic prosperity, and noted:

- "Higher levels of marriage, and especially higher levels of married-parent families, are strongly associated with more economic growth, more economic mobility, less child poverty, and higher median family income at the state level in the United States."
- "The share of parents in a state who are married is one of the top predictors of the economic outcomes studied in this report."
- "The state-level link between marriage and economic growth is stronger for younger adults (ages 25-35) than for older adults (36-59)," suggesting "that marriage plays a particularly important role in fostering a positive labor market orientation among young men."
- "Violent crime is much less common in states with larger shares of families headed by married parents, even after controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors at the state level."

CNS News reported that Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) spoke ahead of panel discussions on the report, asserting,

"What's happening now is a genuine tragedy. Not just for the individuals involved — we know that market forces and families are the two most important institutions in human history for lifting people



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out of poverty.”

Sasse called the decline of the traditional family “an existential threat to our country,” citing statistics from Johns Hopkins University research that showed 64 percent of women who reported having a birth by 2011 had had at least one of their children outside of marriage.

The IFS report made an interesting statement at its beginning that suggested that free-market economists often overlook an important ingredient when considering the factors responsible for economic prosperity — the role of the family:

Since the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith and his latter-day disciples—today’s economic conservatives and libertarians—have attributed dramatic increases in economic growth in the West, starting in the 18th century, to the development of free markets. A growing appreciation of individual liberty and limited government helped fuel the rise of the free market....

Conservatives’ focus on free markets and limited government, as valuable as they are, tends to obscure other social and cultural factors conducive to prosperity....

But surprisingly, despite the clear economic gains associated with strong families at the individual level, economists across the ideological spectrum have failed to investigate whether strong families increase economic growth. This is a potentially serious oversight.

The report cited factors that help strong families foster economic prosperity:

- “Marriage, for instance, encourages men to work harder, more prudently, and more successfully, whereas motherhood causes women to work less.”
- “Strong families often serve as seedbeds for the kind of virtues—such as a strong work ethic and the capacity for delayed gratification—that success in a vibrant free market requires.”
- “Growing up in intact, two-parent homes makes children, especially boys, more likely to avoid disciplinary problems and stay on track in school, and makes both young men and women more likely to be gainfully employed later in life.”
- “Families help to supply the human and social capital that undergirds successful free-market economies in today’s world.”

The conclusions of the IFS report will hardly surprise longtime defenders of the traditional family. It concurs with findings [reported in *The New American* back in 2012](#), in an article summarizing studies made by several social scientists who maintained that traditional marriage is, effectively, a cure for poverty.

Among these were Robert Lerman of the Urban Institute, who believes that unmarried status accounts for 40 percent of the poverty in single-parent families.

The article also quoted Dr. Bradford Wilcox of the National Marriage Project, who noted that statistics show that married men tend to work harder and make more money than unmarried men:

[Married men] work about 160 hours more compared to their similarly credentialed peers after they transition into marriage in that first year of married life. Men who get married and stay married tend to be better workers. They work harder, they work longer hours, they think more strategically, and as a consequence, they tend to earn more money.

Also quoted was Dr. Jennifer Morse of the Ruth Institute, who stated: “The family is absolutely



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necessary for the market to function.... The substitutes to the family are expensive and ineffective, and taxpayers end up paying the price.”

The New American article also cited Heritage Foundation reports that married men earn, on average, \$8,000 more per year than their unmarried counterparts who are living with women, and that the yearly household income for married couples is \$12,500 higher than for couples simply living together. Additionally, married couples are a whopping 700 percent more likely to own a home than are unmarried couples, and are also more likely to own stock and bonds. Married couples are also significantly more likely to have savings accounts and much less likely to default on home loans.

Of course, all of these studies have considered only the material and economic benefits of marriage, which — as beneficial as they may be — are only part of the story. Christians often quote the words of Jesus found in Mark 8:36: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Those who defend traditional Judeo-Christian morality and the traditional family say it offers benefits that go far beyond material prosperity. A term for the family often used by some Christians is “the domestic church.” It is the institution where faith and morality is germinated and cultivated. As such, it sustains its members’ eternal spiritual life, which people of faith regard as infinitely more important than their material well being on Earth.

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