



# *The Future of Family*

Policy Possibilities for Public Discussion

Edited by Jeff Prudhomme and Jack Byrd

2013

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# Introduction: The Future of the Family as a Public Matter

What makes a family a family? Who should get to decide the answer to this question? What does family mean to us as a society? When does the notion of family become a matter of public concern? What might the future hold in store? These are the kinds of questions at the root of the following exploration of the future of the family.

Our idea of family continues to shift with changes in cultural norms and in demographics. In a culturally diverse society, what roles should cultural heritage play in policy decisions about the family? Different cultures have different ideas about how families are formed, how big they should be, and the roles people have within them. Speaking of different family roles, what about our changing ideas about gender roles and of human sexuality? How might public policy for the family take these into account?

Other social changes will impact our family policies. If we face an increasingly aging or mobile population, what concerns might arise for families? What about the economic concerns facing families? How might public policy respond to each and all of these concerns? What are the values or moral considerations that might shape these policies? What are the rights and responsibilities in regard to the family that public policy should take into account? How should we approach the relationship between political power and the family? What are other moral, legal, or political concerns that our family policies might need to address?

A group of 12 of your fellow citizens worked together to think through questions such as these as they explored the future of the family. This discussion project was unique in that it involved the participation of Interactivity Foundation fellows and staff as a way to provide them with direct experience as participants in our discussion process. Still, as with all of our reports, the ideas presented for discussion do not represent the opinions or policy recommendations of the participants or of the Interactivity Foundation itself. The goal of the participants was to think broadly about various concerns about the family as a public matter. Participants went on to generate contrasting ways that our society could address these concerns. These contrasting approaches are captured here as nine conceptual policy possibilities.

In what follows, you'll find a brief description of the policy approaches our society might take as it seeks to address policy questions and concerns regarding the family unit. What the panelists have to offer are ideas that could be useful for you to discuss as you consider the future of the family in a democratic society such as our own.



## I. What's in a Family?

- What makes a family?
- Who gets to decide?
- What roles might family play in our society?

# Charter Whatever Family You Want



## The Basic Idea

People are increasingly choosing to live together in different ways. Why shouldn't our families reflect these different kinds of groupings? This policy approach responds by saying that people ought to be able to create their own kind of family—with the same legal and social status that traditional families receive. It empowers people to charter whatever family structure they would like by offering legal and social supports. Rights that are currently provided to “traditional” families would be provided to these new family units. These rights include those that are extended through governmental provisions, as well as those provided by employers and social services.

This policy grows out of the recognition that in a time of great social and

cultural diversity and increasing personal liberty, individuals should have greater freedom to choose their own model of family. We live in a time when people live together in all sorts of configurations that might be independent of romantic connections or blood relations. They might entail any mix of gender or sexuality.

The important thing is that these family configurations provide stable structures that benefit the lives of the individuals in them and, as an extension, the overall stability of our society. Rather than forcing one model of family structure on to society, this policy recognizes the benefits of diverse family structures and gives individuals the freedom to create their own. This policy further recognizes that this freedom is real only if a broad and diverse notion of what constitutes a family is formally recognized by the state.

The policy might set certain basic parameters for chartering a family, but the overall thrust of it is to enable people to form whatever unions they desire. State recognition would mean that “charter families” would have the legal rights and benefits (such as favorable tax treatment) given to “traditional families.” This would include legal protection of family properties and other assets. Individuals in such families would have rights and responsibilities in the group, and the group would likewise have rights and responsibilities in regard to the individual. These charter families would not be casual affiliations, but legally recognized families, so the dissolution of charter family bonds would have to take place through legally recognized processes.



## Notes

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## How It Might Work

1. The policy would have to set up a deliberative process for determining the broad parameters of what kinds of family charters would be acceptable. This might include reaching some broad consensus about how to deal with age of maturity concerns (when is an individual old enough to charter a family?) and issues surrounding national citizenship (could individuals charter families include non-citizens?).
2. The policy would require some broad public deliberation about the kinds of benefits and rights that accrue to families, both in governmental and non-governmental contexts.
3. The policy would require greater interaction of governmental and non-governmental entities in order to accommodate the new kinds of family structures that would emerge. For example, employers and government agencies alike would have to adapt to greater complexity when it comes to allocating rights and benefits to family members (such as family leave policies or survivor benefits).

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could you imagine this policy approach might have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

[illegible]



## **The Basic Idea**

What if the traditional nuclear family, consisting of a married heterosexual couple and their dependent children, is the ideal social unit for our society? This policy responds by strengthening our nuclear families. It treats nuclear families, with a married heterosexual couple at the core, as the preferred basic social unit of our society. The policy would support nuclear heterosexual families by offering incentives or benefits to encourage the formation of families and to help them thrive. This policy would include disincentives or outright prohibitions of other forms of families.

This policy possibility flows from a belief that the health and well-being of the nuclear family as a nation's basic social unit is vital to the well-being of society as a whole. It is also motivated by concerns about the many forces

that threaten the well-being of our nuclear families. To help keep such families together, the policy would create disincentives for the dissolution of nuclear families, including making divorce very difficult or impossible to attain.

This policy would not recognize the legal status of other kinds of families. It would give the nation's nuclear families special status, with rights and privileges, as our nation's preferred basic social units. Marriage would be restricted to the union of a man and a woman. The policy could be implemented in more or less restrictive ways. It could be implemented in a way that creates special incentives for nuclear families based on married heterosexual couples—or it could erect barriers to discourage other types of families. An example of this

more restrictive approach would be limiting adoption rights only to legally married heterosexual couples. It might even restrict access to assisted reproductive technologies to married heterosexual couples, since such a family would be the ideal setting for children.

The policy would both encourage the formation of traditional nuclear families and work to sustain and preserve them. Government would prioritize them in the formation of governmental policy. For example, a “family impact statement” could be required for all legislative proposals and federal rule making. These impact statements could be used to ensure that legislation and subsequent rule making does not have negative consequences for traditional nuclear families.

The policy might extend the protection of nuclear families into the economic domain as well. It might make the preservation of family assets into a national priority. It could, for example, lessen or eliminate estate taxes. Family-owned property might enjoy preferential treatment such as protection from eminent domain laws. For traditional nuclear families that are struggling to get a foothold economically, the policy might go so far as to offer a standard base level of support, recognizing that economic distress can be destructive for families. This support might include health care, nutritional support, expanded educational access, adequate housing, and other like support.



## Notes

[illegible]



## How It Might Work

1. The policy might establish tax incentives to encourage the formation of nuclear families and to help sustain them.
2. The policy might create disincentives for divorce, whether by prohibiting it outright, making it more difficult to acquire, or by subjecting it to tax penalties.
3. The policy might establish more family-friendly policies to help sustain traditional nuclear families. This might include support for family leave and flexible work schedules. It could also include public assistance and public resources for nuclear families that are struggling economically.
4. The policy might encourage the prioritizing of nuclear families in the formation of government policy. This could include raising the idea of “traditional nuclear families” to a cabinet- or department-level governmental focus. It could also include requiring a “family impact statement” on relevant policy or legislative initiatives so that nuclear families are not undermined or threatened by the effects of governmental policies.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural affects could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

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## The Basic Idea

What if the extended family, with its robust network of connections, is the ideal social unit for our society? What if it's really best to make sure that we have grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, and cousins close by? What if the tendency to break down families into small "nuclear" units seriously weakens our society by undervaluing our extended family relationships? This policy approach responds by working to strengthen extended family ties. It aims to make it easier for families to maintain these vital extended family connections. This policy approach recognizes the extensive benefits to society and individuals that come from being able to sustain extended family bonds. Modern life has placed enormous pressures on

extended families, dispersing them and making it harder for them to remain connected in meaningful relationships. This policy seeks to reverse or lessen those pressures.

This policy is motivated by the belief that the extended family is the proper model of what "family" means. The policy would use public resources to help with housing, communication, and transportation costs to keep close bonds within extended families. Public funding for telecommuting, for example, would make it easier for extended families to stay close together. By providing such support, the policy would lessen the need for individuals to move away from their home communities for job

opportunities. Furthermore, zoning and design codes could be structured to encourage more multi-generational housing and multi-generational neighborhoods. In communities where urban blight or vacant lots are prevalent, homesteading would be permitted. Tax policies could be structured to encourage people to settle near their extended families, with tax incentives provided to families that stay close together and disincentives for those that move apart.

Encouraging and sustaining extended family relationships would have many payoffs, including taking some of the burden off of our public social care efforts, as extended families can often step in to provide much of this support. For example, families could help out with things such as child and elder care, thus lowering the need for paid caregivers. The policy might make this financially feasible for families by creating tax incentives or providing other public support for family caregivers.

By enabling people to stay closer to their extended family networks, this policy encourages community stability. This community stability would have positive effects not only on individual well-being, but also communal well-being. Neighborhoods and communities filled with stable extended family connections are likely to have lower crime rates and better health outcomes.



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## How It Might Work

1. The policy might establish tax incentives and other favorable policies to encourage employers to adopt telework policies and other extended-family-friendly policies that enable individuals to live and work near the home communities of their extended families.
2. The policy might establish tax incentives, or other forms of public support that enables extended families to provide needed care for relatives.
3. The policy would encourage the establishment of zoning codes and community design plans that would make it possible for extended families to live closer together. This would mean, for example, supporting multi-generational housing and neighborhoods.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

1. What social and cultural impacts affects could this policy approach have?
2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?
3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?
4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?



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## The Basic Idea

What if the most important thing about families is not who's in them but the role they play in our lives and in our society? This policy approach holds that the key role of families is to provide a safe harbor or sanctuary for family members. The goal of this policy is to support families regardless of how those families are composed. A safe harbor requires support to be sustained, and so families need support to fulfill this role. Families face many challenges, some internal and some external. This policy responds by offering public support to help families serve as a protective space for their members.

Families provide us with a place where we can feel safe, where we can let our guard down and feel "at home." Sustaining and protecting this safe place is of vital public interest. To do this, the

policy would consider all families a national priority. This could mean establishing a departmental-level government office to focus on the support and protection of families. Such a governmental body might create a family code of rights to monitor and enforce within society. This would spell out the rights of the family in respect to how families are treated by the state. It could offer protection against challenges, such as financial insecurity, that assail families. Spelling out family rights would also apply to individuals within families, including protection against harm from other family members, as in the case of domestic violence.

The policy might also protect the idea of the family's role as a safe harbor by establishing family-friendly labor policies. For example, limiting the number of work hours to allow for more family

time. Such formal policies would aim at fostering a culture of valuing families.

This policy is based on the idea of valuing all families, but it would offer special support for families that are at risk. This could mean offering public support to counter the effects of poverty, perhaps by providing public subsidies for housing and healthy foods. Families that can meet their basic needs for food and shelter are likely to serve as stable, nurturing environments. To help stabilize at-risk families, the policy might offer financial support for child care or transportation to enable parents to work outside the home. Or it might offer a subsidy for a stay-at-home parent—recognizing that parenting is a socially valuable “job,” one that is worthy of pay.

This policy approach could also mean providing instructional support to parents regarding financial literacy, drug-prevention, and making better nutritional choices. Providing additional social services (including parenting classes, conflict resolution services, and nutritional help) could also help families get on their feet. The idea behind this approach is to offer material and educational support to families to prevent or remediate problems before they become more expensive to address and thus more socially problematic. Every family experiences challenges. This policy would put public resources into a support system to help families successfully deal with these challenges.



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## How It Might Work

1. The policy might establish a governmental office at a cabinet or departmental level to focus policy-making on protecting and promoting the well-being of families.
2. The policy might focus on promoting family-friendly policies in the workplace, such as enabling flexible work schedules, workplace day care, and family-related leave policies.
3. The policy might focus on providing resources to help sustain the well-being of families, especially families that are at risk. This could include counseling and mental health support, nutritional guidance, and resources for maintaining a household.
4. For economically strapped families, the policy would provide public assistance, with food and housing subsidies.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

[illegible]





## II. Family and Democracy

- What role should families play in a democratic society?
- How might families encourage the development of a healthy democratic society?



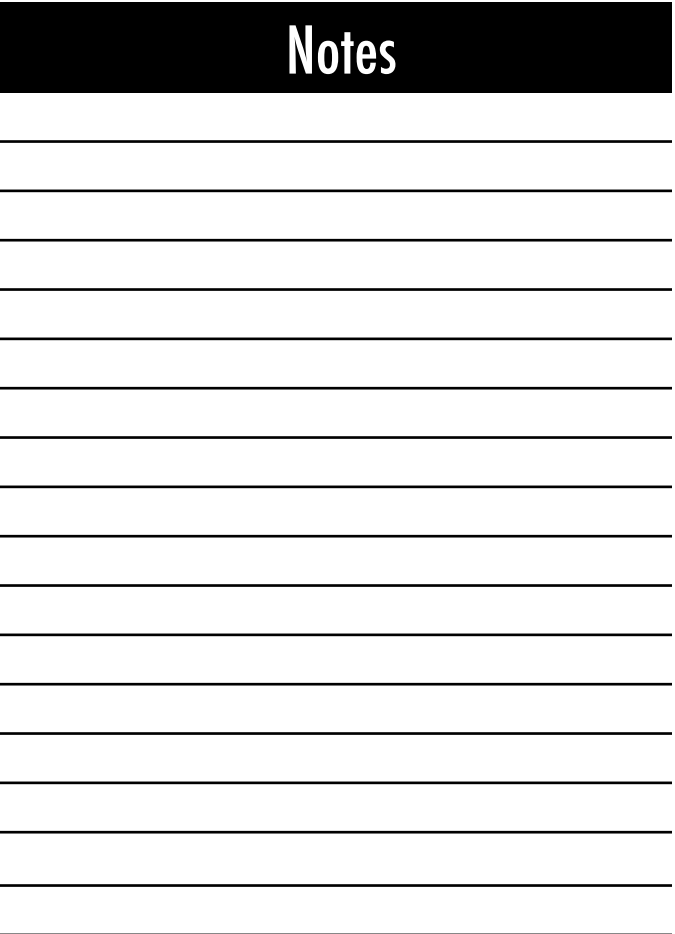
## **The Basic Idea**

What if the key role for the family in a democratic nation is to prepare children for active participation in civic life? Families, in their many forms, serve as basic building blocks of society as they prepare children and young adults for participation in society. This policy possibility focuses on supporting the role that families can play as schools for democracy. It would support possibilities to expand family participation in civic discussions. It would help families model democratic participation for their members and support family mentors and coaches in fostering democratic participation by family members. It would help bridge the gap between formal civic education that younger family members receive in school and their actual involvement in the community. The goal of the policy is to place

families in a better position to support children and young people as they transition into adult citizens.

Families were at one time stronger vehicles of participation in our democratic civil life. Entire families and successive generations would often affiliate themselves with a fraternal organization, a trade union, a political party, or a branch of the armed services. This type of participation reinforced democratic values and civic virtues, as children and young adults witnessed and absorbed lessons from direct practical experiences. These types of experiences are less available in today's society. This policy recognizes that family participation in democratic civic life requires more explicit support to renew these paths of civic connection.

Under this policy, governance institutions and government agencies with citizen participatory programs (such as public hearings) would need to adapt them to enable family or youth participation. The policy might create participatory structures for young people so they could take part in democratic deliberations long before they are able to vote. The policy might also provide financial or other support to enable family participation in civic events. This might include providing family leave for participation in deliberative democratic events. It could also entail providing incentives to reward such participation, including tax benefits for families that engage in civic activities. These forms of public support would encourage families to fulfill their role of raising active democratic citizens.





## How It Might Work

1. The policy would support the creation and expansion of civic participatory events for youth and families, such as public deliberative forums or community deliberative events.
2. The policy would support mechanisms to make it easier for families to participate in civic life, such as work leave (as with jury duty) and assistance with child care or transportation.
3. The policy might require governmental agencies to structure civic participation events in ways that are more family friendly.
4. The policy might establish incentives for family participation in civic life. These incentives could simply involve social recognition, such as community awards, since such forms of public acclaim can be powerful ways to reinforce community bonds. These incentives could also be financial in nature, such as providing support for lost wages (as with jury duty), for travel expenses, or for child care to enable family participation.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



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## The Basic Idea

What if families, especially those that have accumulated great wealth and political power, are actually a stumbling block for a healthy democratic society? Families, in general, might play a role in teaching us how to be good democratic citizens, but what if the growing power of wealthy families undoes the equality that is essential for a democracy? This policy approach aims to counteract the negative effects on society of the concentration of wealth and power in a relatively small number of families. This policy possibility is motivated by the concern that some families have accrued so much power that it is no longer possible for us to have a democracy where everyone is equal before the law. If we don't counteract the growing power of this relatively small group of wealthy families, we risk becoming a society where some people are "more equal than others."

This policy aims to break down the power of accumulated wealth and social status in some families so that all citizens would be treated more equally in our democracy. In our communities, in our states, in our nation, we all know families that enjoy special privileges not open to others. Political office, for example, is often treated as an inherited right, with the sons and daughters of the powerful rising to positions based not on merit, but on name recognition and the advantages of family connections. In contrast, this policy approach is motivated by belief in a meritocracy and the equal status of all families. It seeks to improve social cohesion and create a more egalitarian society. A level playing field would not only benefit our democracy, but also benefit our economy. This policy would work to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens in education, employment, political office, etc.

The policy approach would remove special access to opportunities that might be enjoyed only by members of powerful families. It would support measures against nepotism in employment and education opportunities. It might bar the direct succession of political office by family members. In a democracy, governmental offices should not have the appearance of inherited succession. For any school that receives governmental support or public subsidy, this policy approach would enable educational access based on merit. It would restrict or bar policies that favor access based on family connections. The policy might remove favorable tax policies or even create economic disincentives for private educational organizations if those private schools are functioning to further the inequality of our society.

The policy would also work to break down the concentration of political and economic power in certain families by establishing tax policies to diminish the political power of wealth. For example, it might establish an estate tax sufficiently high enough to diminish the advantages of inherited wealth versus earned wealth. All the efforts of this policy approach would focus on lessening the negative effects that family dynasties can have on a democratic society.



## Notes

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## How It Might Work

1. The policy might establish or encourage the development of anti-nepotism policies in education, employment, and political life, so that families cannot accumulate power within organizations. Opportunities then would be distributed by merit rather than family connections.
2. In higher education, this approach could mean that any school accepting federal aid would disallow admissions policies that favor legacy students or students who are the direct relatives of donors. There would have to be a level playing field for all students regardless of family connection.
3. In government service, there would be strict anti-nepotism laws prohibiting favoritism in governmental hiring or governmental appointment of family members. For elected offices, there would be a ban on the direct succession by family members.
4. The policy might set estate taxes at a high enough level to break up the accumulated power of inherited wealth.

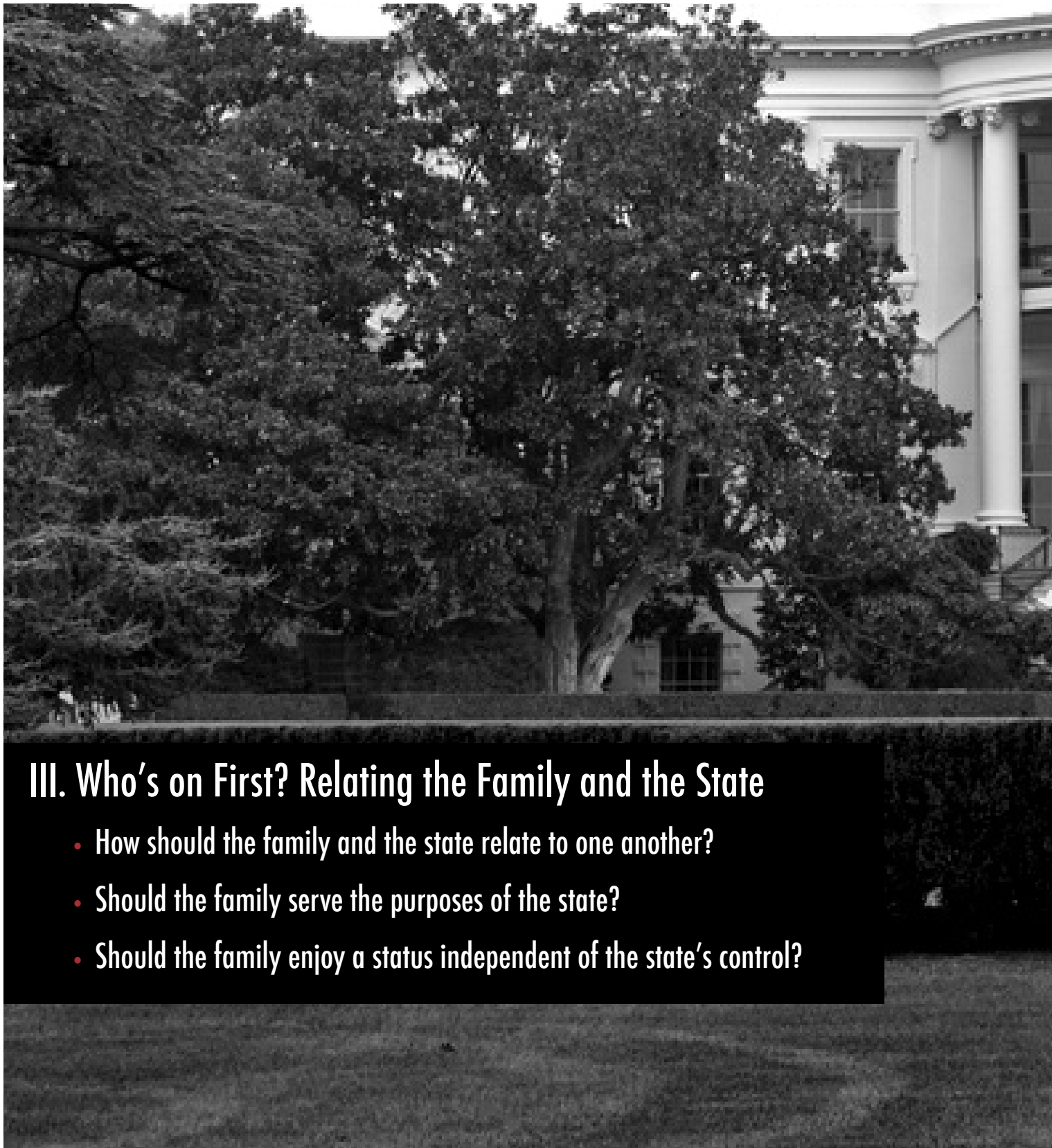
## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



# Notes

[illegible]



### III. Who's on First? Relating the Family and the State

- How should the family and the state relate to one another?
- Should the family serve the purposes of the state?
- Should the family enjoy a status independent of the state's control?





## The Basic Idea

This policy holds that the family comes first. Family is primary because it reflects our key moral traditions and values. The state is secondary. The state should defer to the family as it relates to people's private lives. This policy approach means the state should adopt a neutral approach toward the family, allowing individuals or groups to structure families and to govern family life as they choose. This approach is shaped by the belief that the family is primarily a cultural and/or religious reality, largely functioning beyond the scope of the state.

This policy is motivated by a concern to maintain a zone of privacy for family life that is free from state interference. This means that the state would have no explicit policies prohibiting or favoring certain kinds of families. It's

important that people be free from state interference. This policy approach would set a high threshold for any state involvement with the family, perhaps restricted to cases where children are subject to gross mistreatment or might otherwise become wards of the state. Limiting the power of the state in this way should empower families to deal with the issues they face. Families are more nimble and so can be more responsive than governmental bureaucracies in dealing with the problems people confront in their everyday lives.

In this policy, the role of family as a source of social and economic support, and as a source of cultural heritage, would be strengthened. The role of the state would recede. By taking a neutral approach to the

family, the state would make way for individuals to define their own families. It would also enable other cultural or social agents, such as religious organizations, to play a stronger role in defining the family. This policy is shaped by the belief that the family is primarily a matter of cultural or religious significance, so the state should largely defer to these cultural or religious views of the family. When it comes to determining the features of family life and behavior, it is our cultural or religious beliefs, institutions, and traditions that are central. These cultural or religious beliefs should play the primary role, free from state involvement, in determining things such as family formation, marriage, parenting, etc.

This policy approach recognizes that there are multiple belief systems, including ones that are not explicitly religious, that are central to family life. According to this policy, the state would recognize the role of these multiple beliefs and traditions in regard to governing the family and family life, without necessarily giving preference to one over another. Under this policy, for example, the formation of a family union, or marriage, would fall wholly within the domain of the family's belief system. The state's role would simply be to recognize the family union as determined by that belief system.



## Notes

[illegible]



## How It Might Work

1. The policy would set up a zone of freedom or non-interference for individuals. People would largely be free to act within their own cultural or religious traditions to make their own decisions about their families. The government would neutrally provide civil recognition for those cultural or religious decisions. It would be up to one's religion or cultural practice, for example, to determine what constitutes a marriage. The government would simply provide the formal legal recognition of it.
2. The policy might set up some general boundaries for state intervention, such as the physical well-being of children and protection from abuse or gross negligence.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

[illegible]

# HAVE MORE CHILDREN TO KEEP WAGES LOW.

**thank you**  
*The Management*

## The Basic Idea

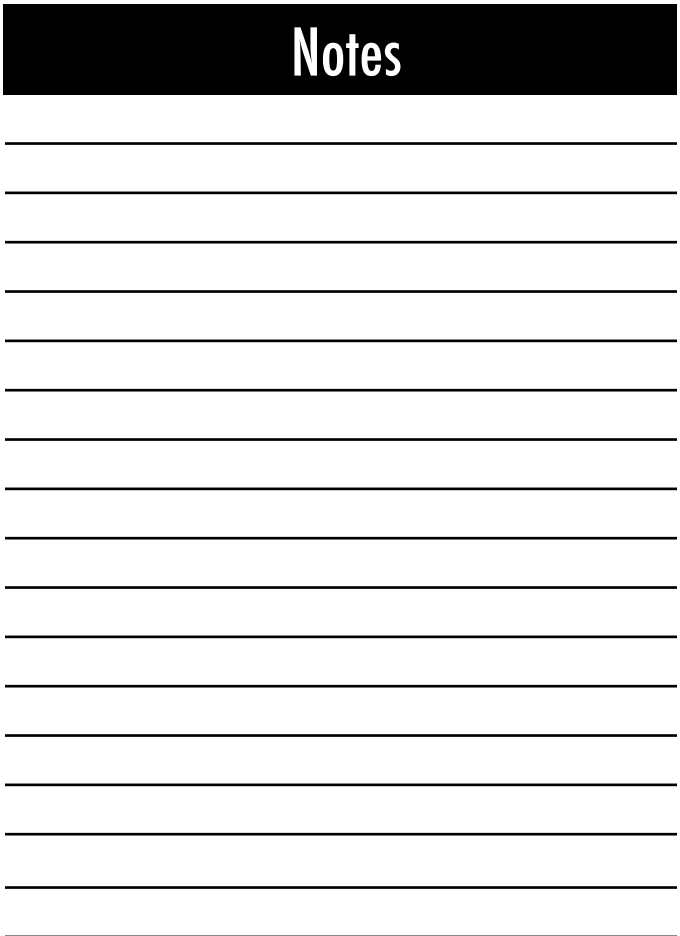
What if the family, and the governance of family life, is too important for the good of society to leave it up to individuals? This policy responds by saying it is up to the state, working in the public's interest, to manage families appropriately for the greater good. Families should serve the greater good of society, and the state has the role of looking out for the greater good. There are several important aspects of this policy approach, relating to considerations such as the size of families, child rearing, and social cohesion. By and large, this policy holds that societal needs and values should trump the interests of particular individuals and families.

According to this policy, the state should have more to say about the size of families. Having a manageable population size is essential for the stability of a nation. The state should be able to target an optimal size for families in order to deal with existing and future social, economic, or environmental problems. This could mean using incentives or disincentives (say, through tax policy) to encourage smaller or larger

families (depending on the societal needs at the time). The number of children in a family can have such large social repercussions that it should be the prerogative of the state to structure policy to encourage an optimal family size.

The state, acting in the public interest, has a responsibility to minimize the societal costs of reproductive choices. This could mean, for example, that access to reproductive technologies could be limited, whether to manage the size of families or to reduce the incidence of births that lead to greater societal costs. For instance, assisted reproductive technologies that routinely implant multiple embryos might lead to an increase in premature births, which, in turn, lead to more developmentally delayed infants requiring greater social expenditures. The exact nature of limiting family size need not be rigid, and might vary, depending upon a family's capacities to meet its own needs. Some families, due to their private resources, may thus be eligible to have more children (or have greater access to reproductive technologies) than others, since their choices would not lead to greater societal burdens.

This policy is also motivated by a desire to foster greater social cohesion by supporting the expansion of our sense of “family” responsibility to include the society as a whole. The narrow notion of “family” has negative consequences, creating unnecessary divisions in our society between who is “in” or “out” of our family. This policy works to overcome those divisions by creating a role for the common or public interest in the management of our families. This could expand our sense of “family” responsibility to be a responsibility to society as a whole—to the point where we all might feel like we are part of one big “family.”





## How It Might Work

1. The policy might develop social impact reviews for family practices (such as decisions to use assisted reproductive technologies), so that people would have a better understanding of the potential social costs of private family decisions. This could include the development of financial agreements that the individual would bear the extra costs generated by their private decisions rather than relying on public assistance.
2. The policy might develop public financial assistance or incentives (such as favorable tax policies) to encourage families of a certain size. At times, this could mean encouraging larger families; at others, smaller ones.
3. The policy might develop an expanding repertoire of professional resources for parenting and education. This could include expanding the school day and the school year, making sure that children have access to adequate nutrition, health services, etc.

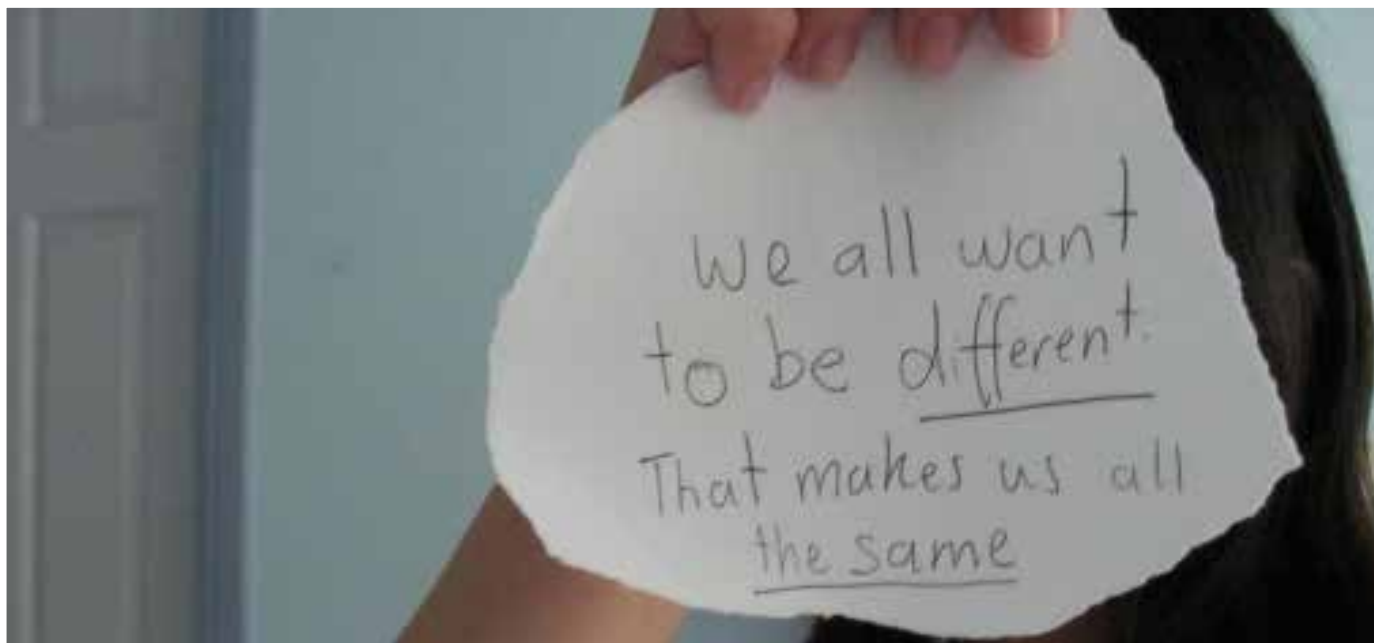
## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

[illegible]



## The Basic Idea

What if the main public policy concern is to figure out *how* the government should be involved in family matters? Over the years, government has become increasingly involved in family issues. Child care, adoption practices, reproductive rights, elder care, and marriage practices are just a few of the areas where government is increasingly called upon to make decisions. This policy possibility responds by focusing on how the government might be involved in such family issues. It embodies a process-oriented approach that focuses on the general goals and values that shape decisions about family matters. It holds that governmental involvement in family matters should be minimal and encourage families to develop solutions that work for them. This approach embodies the opposite of a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach.

You could call this policy a principle-based approach to family matters rather than a rule-based one. A rule-based approach tries to spell out in complex detail what must be done in every situation. In contrast, a principle-based approach focuses on the spirit not the letter of the law. It spells out the general principles that will guide decision making in a way that is adaptable to particular situations. This policy approach aims to empower people to take more responsibility for resolving their own family issues and to adapt specific policy decisions to the individualized situations of each family.

This possibility supports the notion that families should largely resolve their own matters. Governmental intervention in family matters would be limited. When governmental intervention does

occur, it would be principle-based rather than legalistic or rule-based. A principle-based approach could mean adopting a general principle of “doing what’s best for the child” in the place of detailed rule making regarding children’s issues. The focus of governmental efforts would be on articulating the broad principles governing family issues, not trying to spell out detailed rules to meet every instance.

This approach would encourage alternative methods of dispute resolution to replace courts as the place where family matters are resolved. A rule-based approach tends to foster an attitude of legalism, with a focus on the “letter of the law” and dependence on external authority to resolve conflicts. This policy’s approach relies more on people developing a sense of the “spirit of the law.” It encourages people to develop their own sense of judgment to apply the principles to their own situations.

As a general proposition, there would be minimal federal or state limitations on family issues with this policy approach. There would be a high hurdle for any type of family issue to become of such importance as to require legislation. This would possibly encourage and require citizens to accept responsibility for their families.



## Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## How It Might Work

1. The policy might set up mechanisms for public deliberations to determine the basic principles that would shape this approach to family matters.
2. The policy would dedicate public resources to provide mediation and conflict-resolution services to help families resolve their own issues.

## Exploring Possible Consequences

- 1. What social and cultural impacts could this policy approach have?**
- 2. How might it impact individuals in the way they live their lives?**
- 3. What impact might it have on the role of diverse cultures that make up society?**
- 4. How might the consequences of this policy approach relate to other public interests or areas of public policy?**



## Notes

[illegible]

## **Published Discussion Books**

*Let's Talk Politics: Restoring Civility Through Exploratory Discussion* (2013)

## **Discussion Report**

The Future of the Arts and Society (2013)  
The Human Impact on Climate Change (2013)  
Human Migration (2013)  
The Future of Higher Education (2012)  
America's Democratic Promise (2011)\*  
Democratic Nation Building (2011)  
Food: What Might Be For Dinner? (2011)\*  
The Future of Energy (2011)  
The Future of K-12 Education (2011)\*  
Future Possibilities for Civil Rights Policy (2011)\*  
Helping Out: Humanitarian Policy for Global Security (2011)\*  
Health Care: The Case of Depression (3rd edition, 2010)  
How Will We All Retire? (2010)  
Privacy & Privacy Rights (2nd edition, 2010)  
The Future of Regulation (2009)  
Property (2009)  
Rewarding Work (2007)  
Science (2007)  
Anticipating Human Genetic Technology (2006)

## **Other Discussion Reports**

Julius "Jay" Stern: A Biography (2010)  
Contrasting Possibilities & the IF Discussion Process (2nd edition, 2009)  
Facilitation Guidebook for Small Group Citizen Discussions (2nd edition, 2009)  
Support Materials for the IF Discussion Process (2009)  
Teaching Tips (2009)  
Guidebook for Student-Centered Classroom Discussions (2008)  
Public Discussion as the Exploration & Development  
of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities (2006)  
Facilitation Guidebook (2005)  
\*Reports are available in Spanish

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