

# The Changing Shape of the American Family

## Report

Prepared for:

Martindale-Hubbell's lawyers.com from LexisNexis,  
in conjunction with REDBOOK magazine

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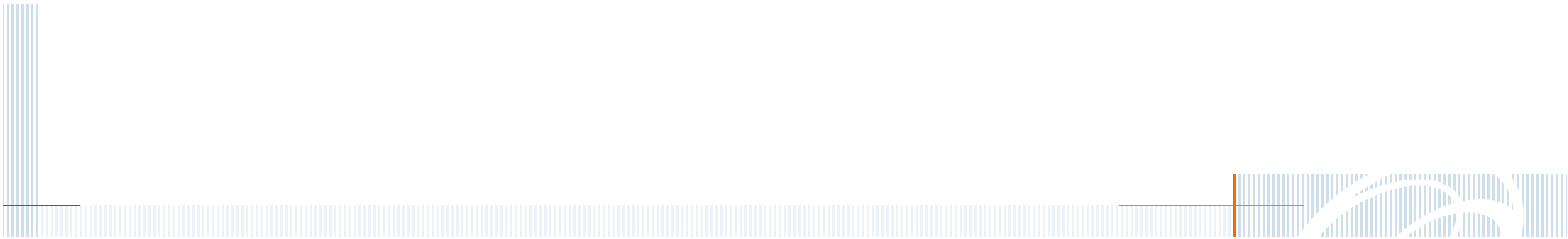
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## ***Background & Objectives***

- ✓ **Martindale-Hubbell's lawyers.com from LexisNexis, in conjunction with REDBOOK magazine, commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a study among U.S. adults age 18+.**
  
- ✓ **Key objectives of this study were to:**
  - Examine current attitudes about the makeup and importance of the American family;
  - Uncover changing views of the American family;
  - Assess knowledge of family law issues; and,
  - Explore beliefs about same-sex couples.
  
- ✓ **Results from this study are intended for public release.**

## Sample & Methodology

- ✓ **Total sample includes 1,092 U.S. adults age 18 or older.**
  - Data are weighted to be representative of U.S. adults age 18 or older.
  
- ✓ **Interviewing was conducted between August 16<sup>th</sup> and August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006.**
  - All interviews were conducted online using The Harris Poll Online (HPOL) database.
  - Interviews averaged 15 minutes in length.
  
- ✓ **In reviewing this report, please note that:**
  - Questions may not add up to 100% due to rounding, the acceptance of multiple responses or the exclusion of any “not sure” or “decline to answer” responses.
  - An asterisk (\*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent. A dash (-) represents a value of zero.
  - Throughout, “adults” is used to refer to U.S. adults age 18 or older.
  - The subgroup analyses included are based on age and gender. For the most part, “younger adults” refers to 18-29 year olds or 18-39 year olds, while “older adults” refers to adults 60 or older or adults 50 or older.



# ***Executive Summary***

## Executive Summary

### Importance of the Family

**Family is seen as more important to U.S. adults than their health, job or friendships. It contributes to defining individual personalities and is seen as a huge factor in maintaining a stable society.**

- ✓ More than half of adults (55%) say that their family is the most important aspect of their life at this time – more important than their health (10%) or job (4%).
  - Married adults with children are especially likely to say that their family enriches their life.
- ✓ Three-quarters of adults (75%) believe that family helps build an individual's identity and even more (79%) agree that their family had the biggest influence on their own identity.
- ✓ Three-quarters of adults (73%) see family life as very important to upholding a stable society – a greater proportion than education (61%) or the economy (45%).

## *Executive Summary*

### ***Composition of the Family***

**A significant number of U.S. adults describe their current family structure as typical in comparison to their peers. A majority are married, living with their spouse and some have children living at home.**

- ✓ 71% of adults agree that their family structure is similar to that of their peers.
- ✓ 57% of adults are married and 31% have children under 18 living at home.
- ✓ Half of adults (50%) live with their spouse or partner of the opposite sex.

## Executive Summary

### Evolution of the Family

**Many U.S. adults, especially older adults, believe the family is changing dramatically and mostly for the worse. Most also say that it is now harder to maintain family relationships, that marriage has become less important to couples, and that family bonds are not as strong as they once were.**

- ✓ About seven in ten adults think the family is changing too much (74%) and for the worse (70%).
  - This is especially true for older adults (80% say the family is changing too much and 77% say the family is changing for the worse).
- ✓ Adults wish they had stronger relationships with their family (65%) and most are continually trying to build robust family bonds (77%).
- ✓ A majority of adults believe that relationships are becoming harder to maintain (63%) and that, compared to ten years ago, marriage is becoming less important to couples (70%).



## Executive Summary

### The “Traditional” Family Structure

**Most U.S. adults say their current family - as well as the family they grew up in - is “traditional”. However, the majority express acceptance for alternative family structures and do *not* feel that there is pressure today to conform.**

- ✓ About seven in ten adults think there is more than one way to define a family (72%) and nearly half disagree that there is a need to have a traditional family (51%).
  - Women (79%) and younger adults (82% of 18-29 year olds) are more likely than their respective counterparts to have a more diverse view of the family.
  
- ✓ While a traditional family structure, such as a married heterosexual couple with or without children, is seen as acceptable to the vast majority of adults (94% and 92%, respectively), many non-traditional structures have also gained acceptance.
  - A majority of adults believe that...
    - ✓ Single parents (84% single fathers; 81% single mothers),
    - ✓ A heterosexual couple who live together (71%),
    - ✓ Teenage mothers (58%), and
    - ✓ An unmarried heterosexual couple raising a child (58%)... are acceptable family structures.

## Executive Summary

### Role of the Family

**While a significant number of U.S. adults feel that society doesn't place enough emphasis on family life, most also believe that it is the *families themselves* (not society) who should act as the primary role models for teaching individuals about family.**

- ✓ Most adults (95%) say they learned about family life from their own family – primarily their parents.
  - Married men (78%) are more likely to learn about family from their spouse or partner than married women are (61%).
- ✓ 94% of adults believe it is the job of the family itself to educate its members about how to maintain family life.
- ✓ Nearly half of adults (45%) say society does not place enough importance on family life.

## Executive Summary

### Same-Sex Couples

**U.S. adults are relatively evenly divided on whether they believe same-sex marriage is acceptable, though there is a marked gender and age gap. In general, women and younger adults view same-sex couples more favorably and express greater support of their right to marry.**

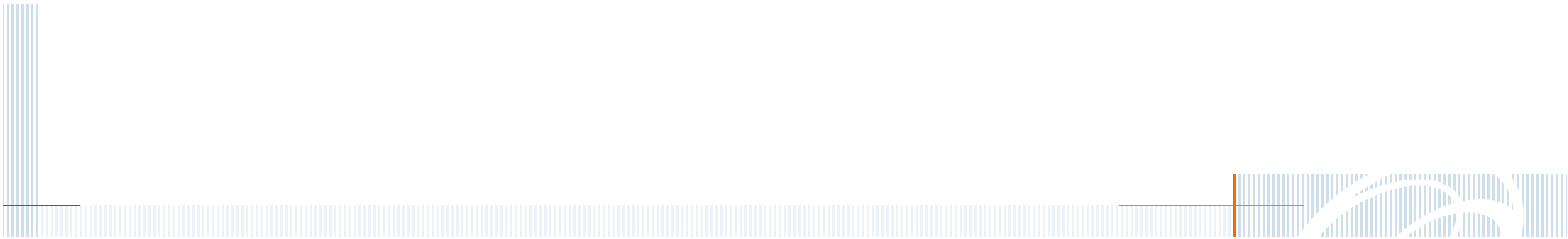
- ✓ Half of adults (51%) support same-sex couples' right to marry or have civil unions.
  - Both women (54% vs. 46% of men) and younger adults (54% of 18-39 year olds) express even greater support.
  
- ✓ Just over half of adults (52%) find same-sex couples who live together without children to be acceptable.
  - The majority of 18-29 year olds (62%) and females (56%) find same-sex couples without children to be an acceptable family structure.

## Executive Summary

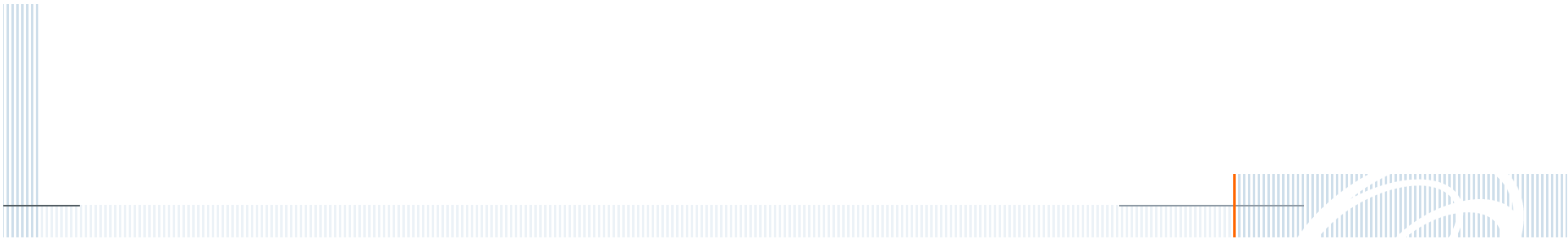
### Family Legal Issues

**In general, U.S. adults do not feel very knowledgeable about family law issues – specifically divorce and civil unions.**

- ✓ 52% of adults have contacted a lawyer about a family law issue, but only one in seven (15%) say they are knowledgeable or very knowledgeable about these laws in general.
  
- ✓ Many adults are unaware that:
  - Marriage and civil unions provide different legal rights (54%).
  - Grandparents are not always entitled to visitation rights after a divorce (45%).
  - Divorce laws are *not* determined by the federal government (40%).



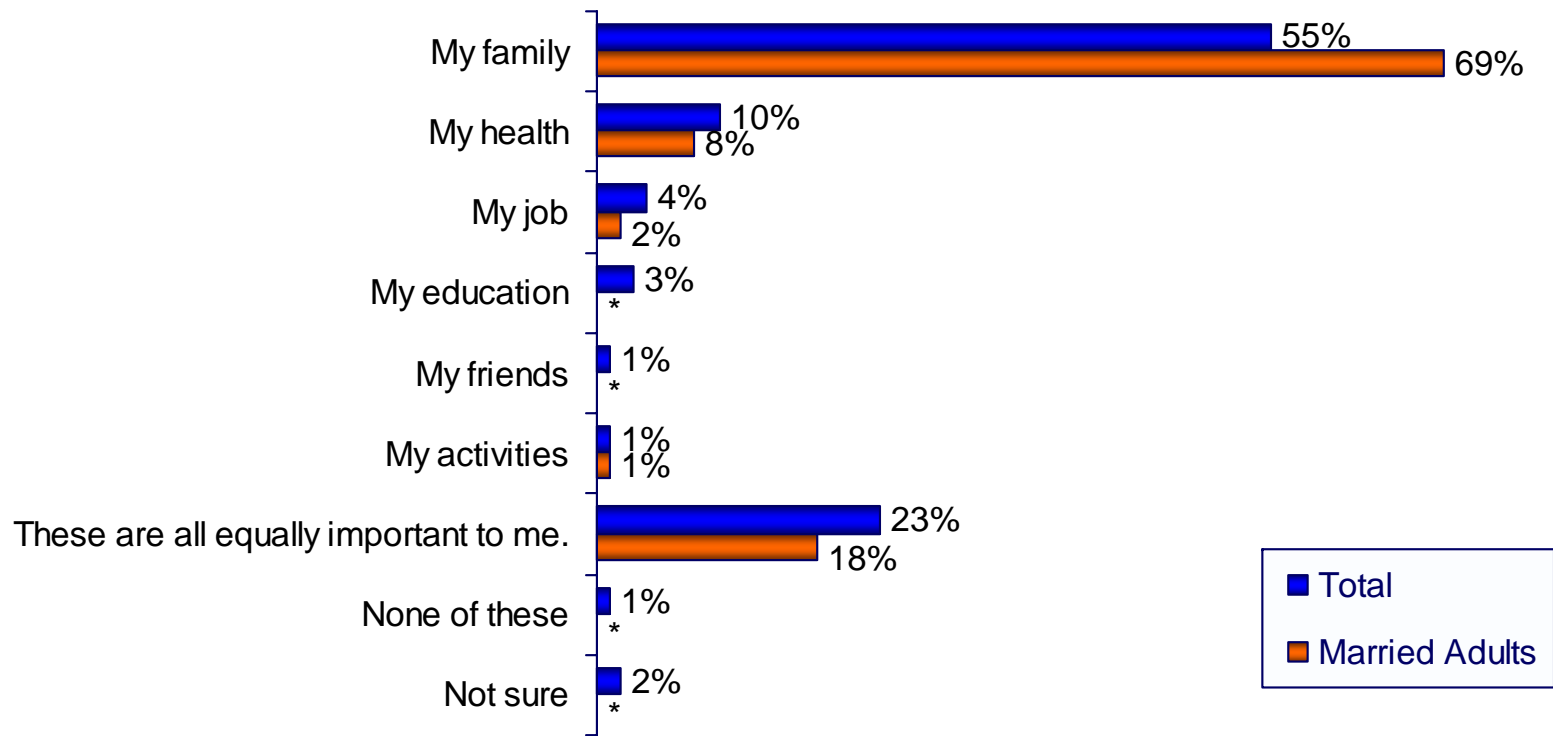
# ***Detailed Findings***



# ***Importance of the Family***

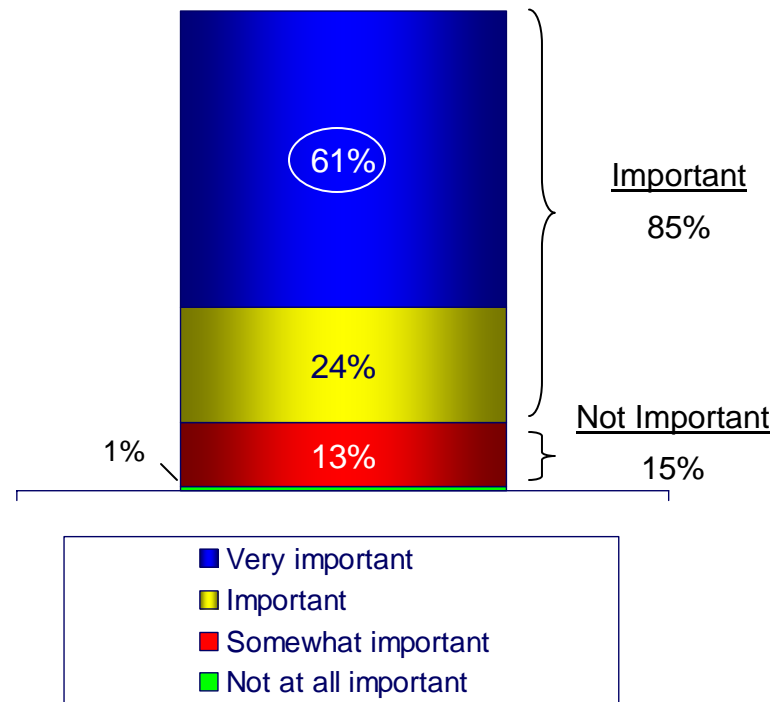
The family is the most important aspect of adults' lives. This is especially true for married adults.

**Importance in Life**



Three in five adults consider it very important to maintain close relationships with family members.

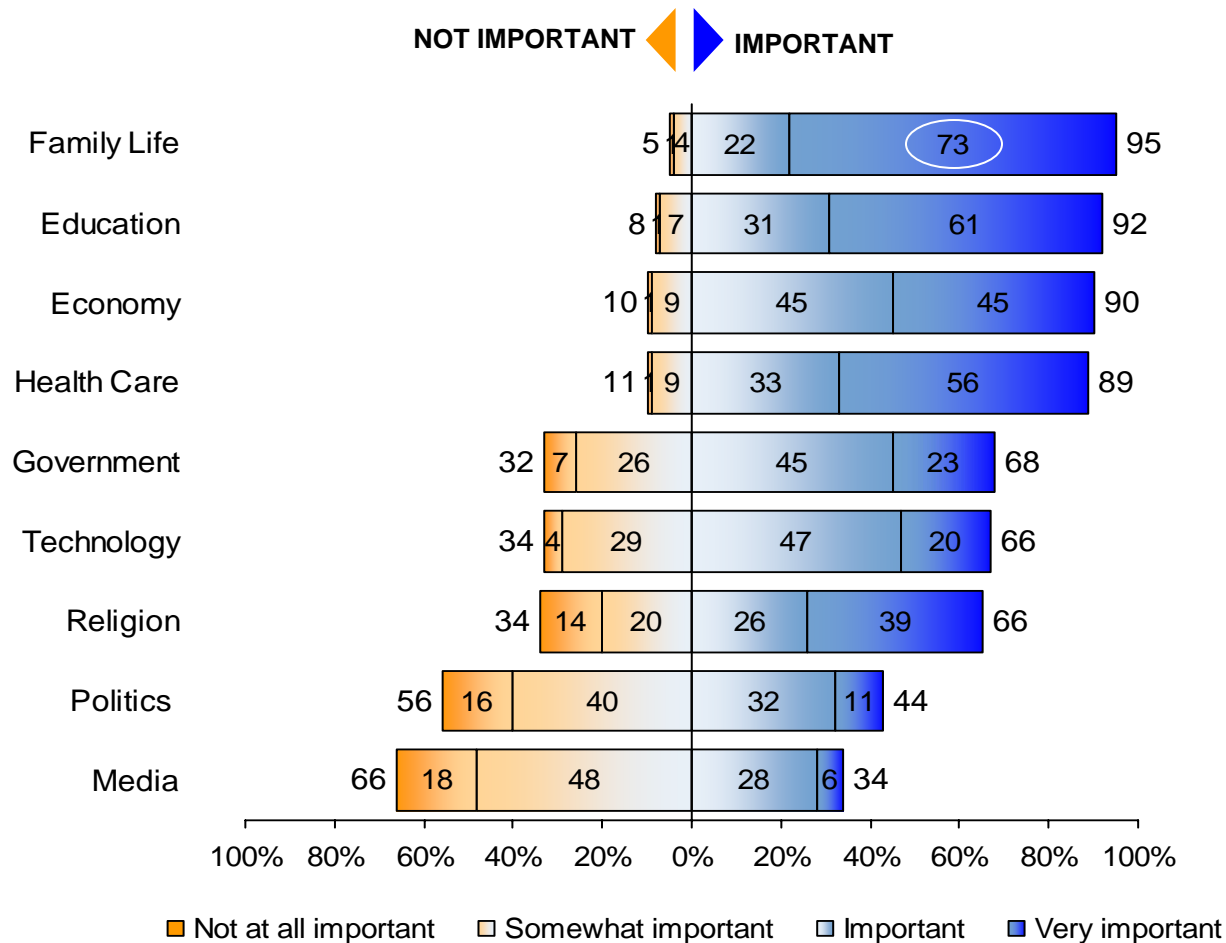
**Importance of Relationships with Family Members**





About three-quarters of adults say the family is very important to maintaining a stable society; a greater proportion than for education, the economy or health care.

**Importance to Maintaining a Stable Society**



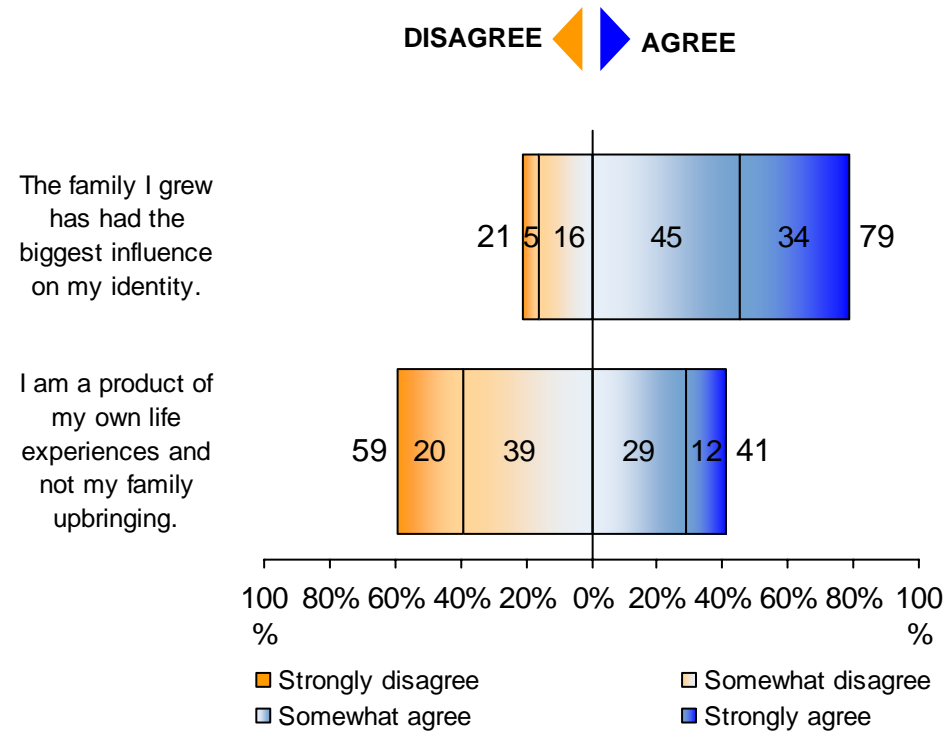
Q500: In your opinion, how important do you think each of the following is in maintaining a stable society?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

**Most adults believe that a stable family provides children with a sense of identity and a strong moral foundation, helping them become caring, competent, and respectful adults.**

**Ways a Stable Family Contributes to Society**

	Total
Base	1,092
	%
It gives children a strong foundation for their future.	89
It helps individuals grow up to be caring and competent adults.	86
It offers a way to learn about morals and ethics.	85
It teaches respect for others.	84
It builds individuals' sense of identity.	75
It helps to maintain social order.	66
It creates future generations.	66
It gives individuals financial and emotional security.	63
Other	4
A strong family life does not contribute to society.	1

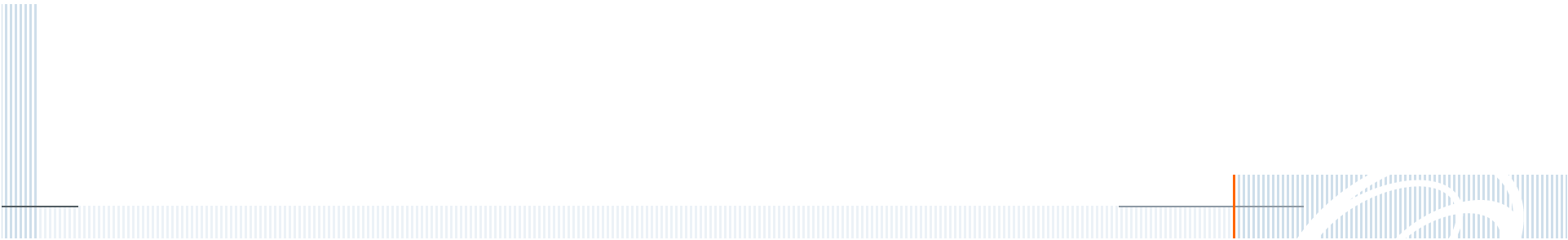
**Family Influence on Identity**



**Q505:** In your opinion, in what ways, if any, do you believe having a stable family life contributes to society in general? Please select all that apply.

**Q645:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

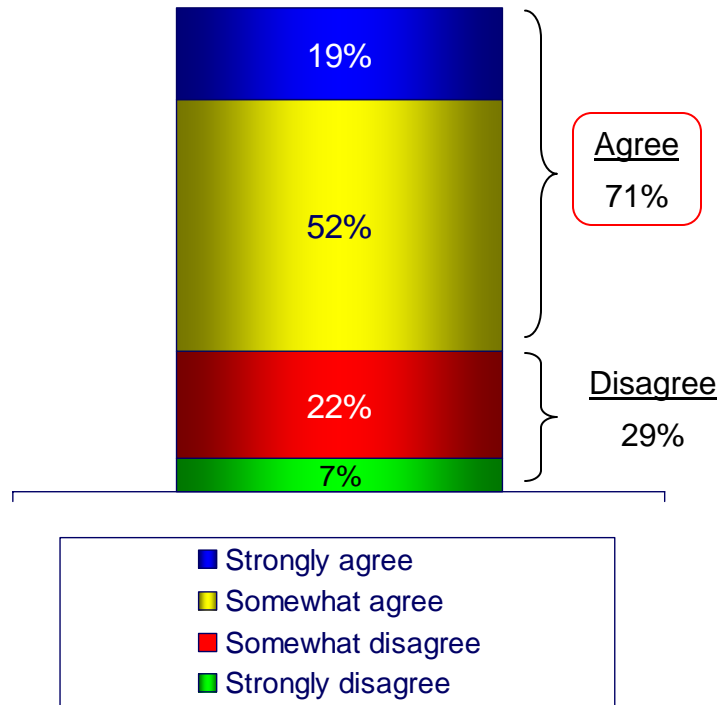
Base: All respondents (n=1,092)



# ***Composition of the Family***

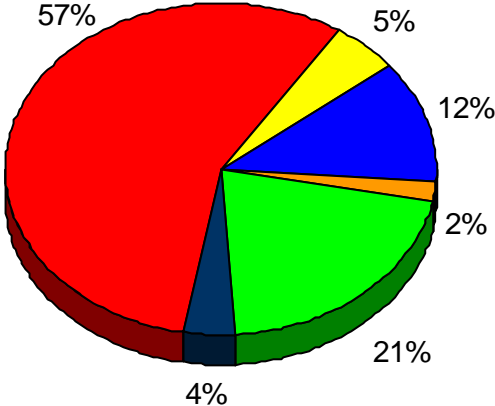
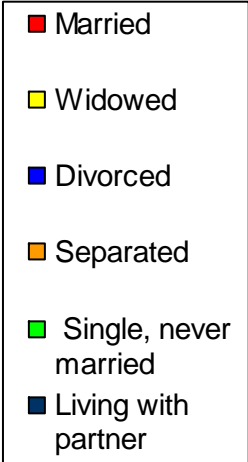
About seven in ten adults believe that their family structure is typical relative to that of their peers.

**“The structure of my family is fairly typical compared to my peers.”**

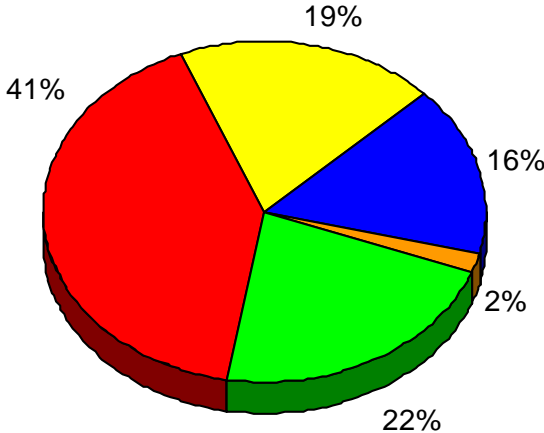
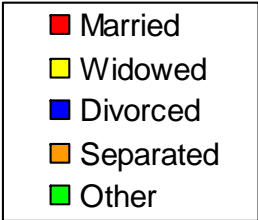


# More than half of adults are married, as are most of their parents.

**Marital Status**



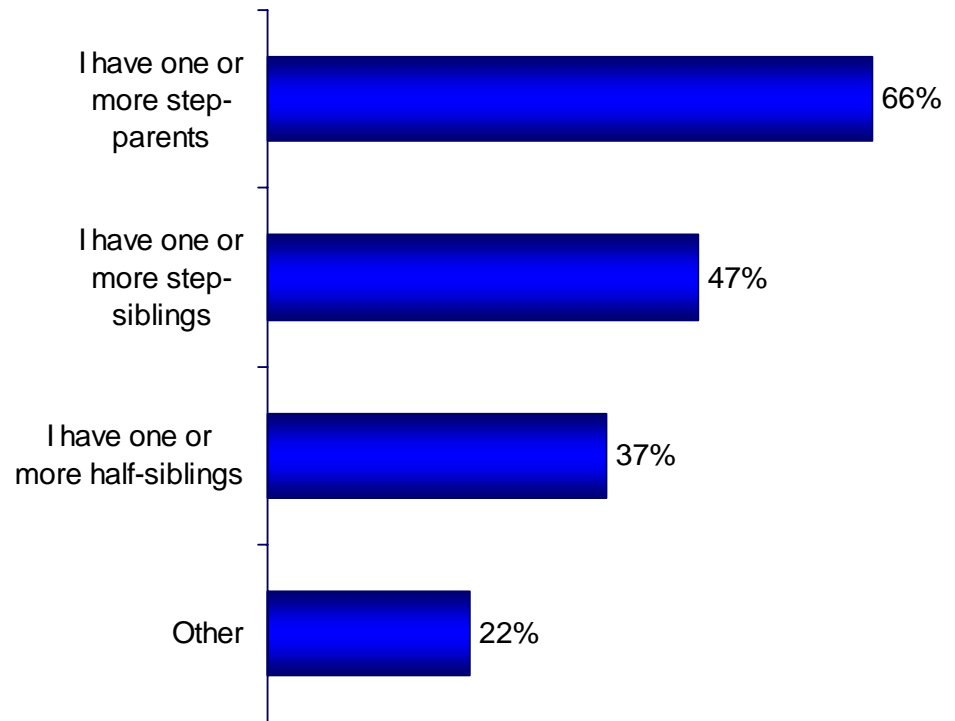
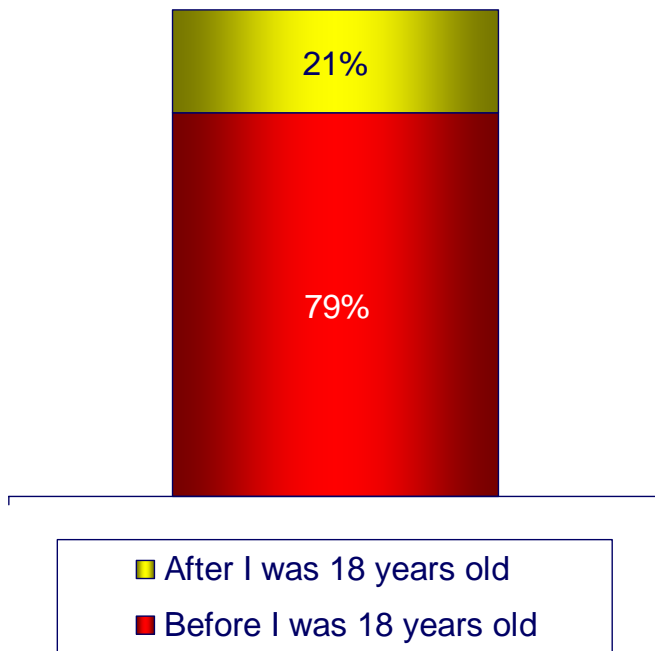
**Parental Relationship Status**



Q605: Which of the following best describes your marital status?  
 Q615: Which of the following best describes your parents' current relationship status?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

For most adults whose parents divorced, the divorce generally occurred before they reached adulthood and their parents later remarried.

### Family Life After Parental Divorce



Q620: Did your parents divorce before or after you were 18 years old?  
Q625: Which of the following best describes your family life following your parents' divorce?  
Base: Have divorced parents (n=146)

**About one in five adults live alone. For those who live with others, about half live with their spouse or partner of the opposite sex and nearly three in ten live with their biological children.**

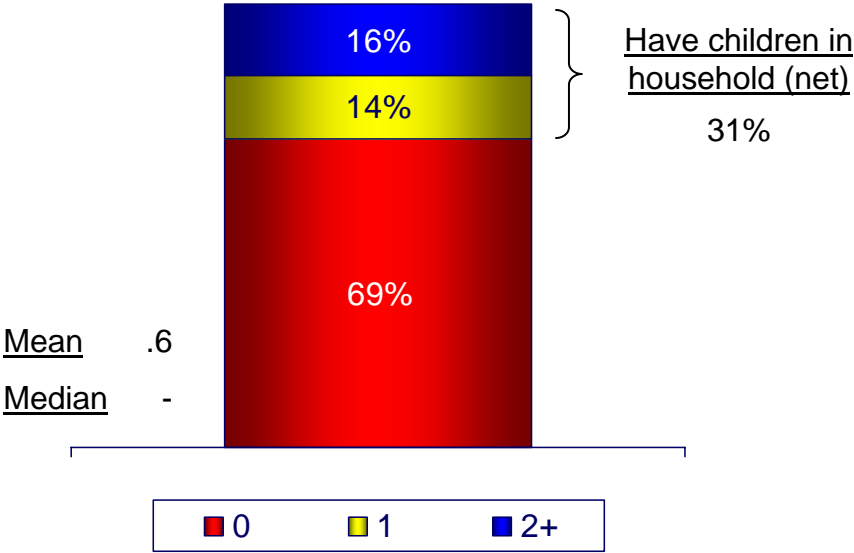
**Living at Home**

	Total
Base	1,092
	%
Spouse or partner of the opposite sex	50
My biological child(ren)	29
My biological parent(s)	12
Spouse or partner's parent(s)	5
Non-family member(s) (e.g., roommate)	5
Spouse or partner of the same sex	5
Spouse or partner's biological child(ren) (but not related to me)	3
Adopted or foster child(ren)	2
My stepparent(s)	1
Spouse or partner's stepchild(ren) (but not related to me)	1
Other family members (e.g., grandparent, aunt, uncle)	9
No one else besides me lives in the household.	17

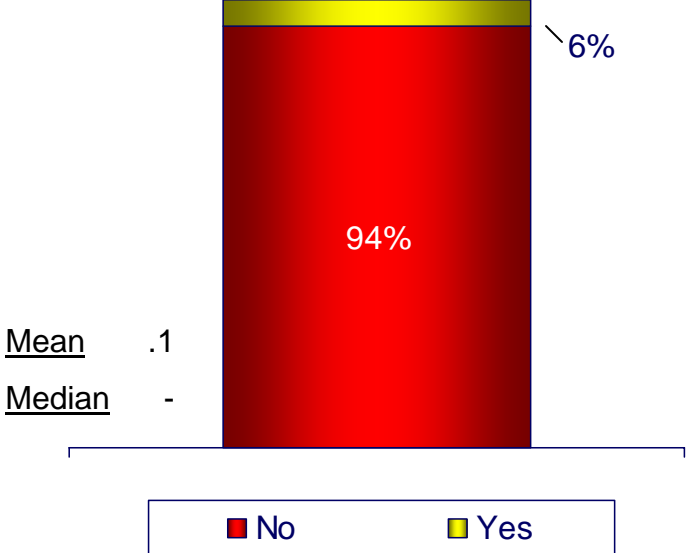
Q630: Besides yourself, who else lives in your household at least half the time in a typical week?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

# About three in ten adults have children in their household and fewer than one in ten are living with dependent seniors.

## Children Living at Home

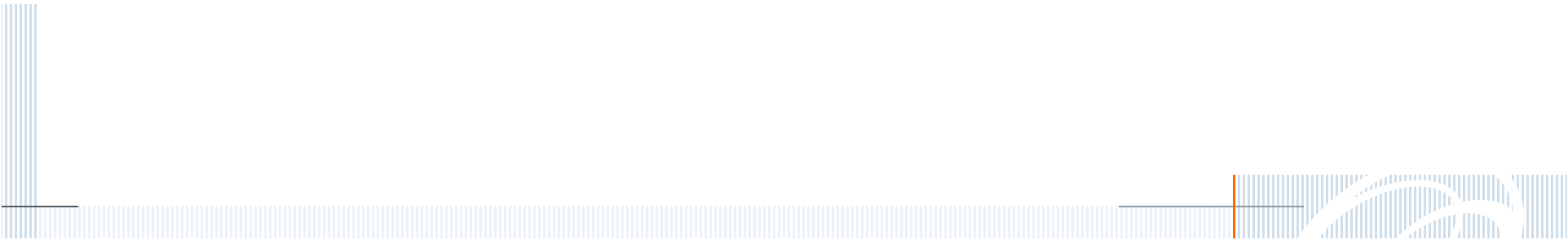


## Dependent Seniors Living at Home



**Q635:** How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?  
**Q640:** How many dependent seniors live in your household? By dependent seniors we mean a parent or grandparent who is over age 60 and does not contribute significantly to the household income.  
*Base: All respondents (n=1,092)*

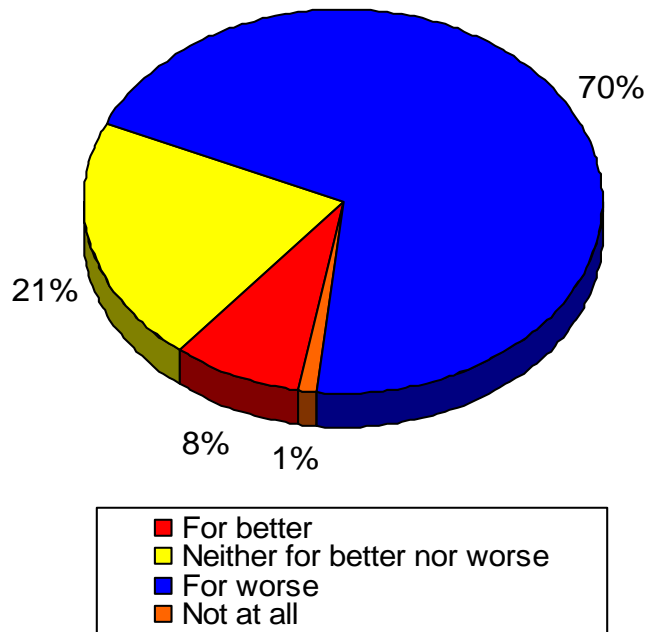




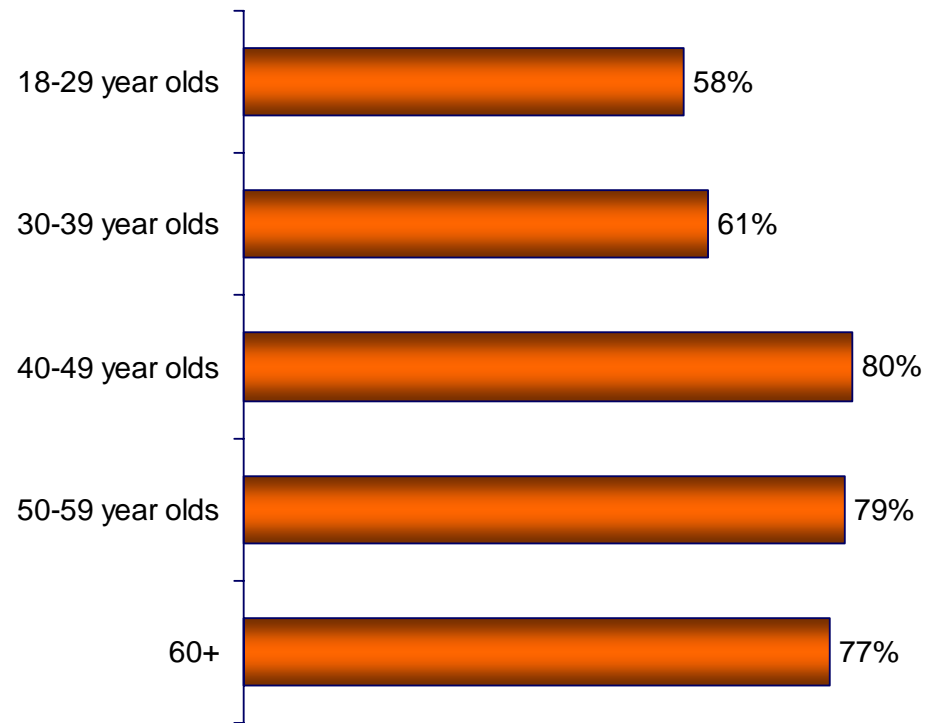
# ***Evolution of the Family***

# Seven in ten adults believe the American family has changed for the worse over the last generation, especially those ages 40 or older.

**Change in the American Family**



**Families Have Changed for the Worse**  
**— by Age**



**Q520:** Compared to a generation ago, how much do you think American families have changed?

*Base: All respondents (n=1,092)*

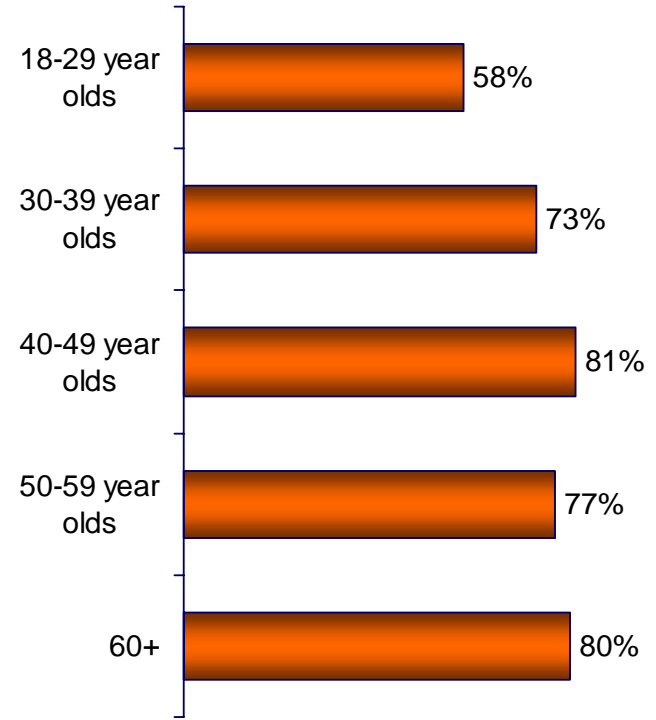
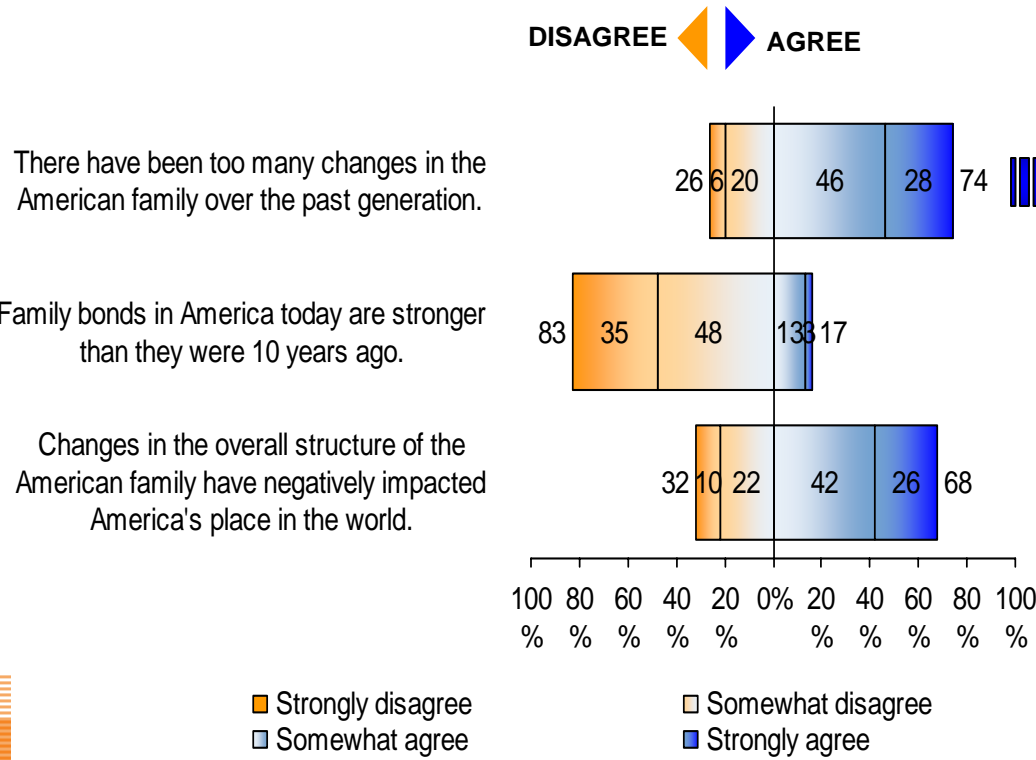
**Q522:** You mentioned that you believe American families have changed compared to a generation ago. Would you say that American families have changed...?

*Base: Feel families have changed somewhat or a great deal (n=1,077); 18-29 year olds (n=173); 30-39 year olds (n=180); 40-49 year olds (n=202); 50-59 year olds (n=206); 60+ (n=316)*

# Nearly three-quarters of adults believe there have been too many changes in the American family, and more than four in five don't believe family bonds have gotten stronger.

## Weaker Families

## Too Many Changes in the Family – % Agree by Age

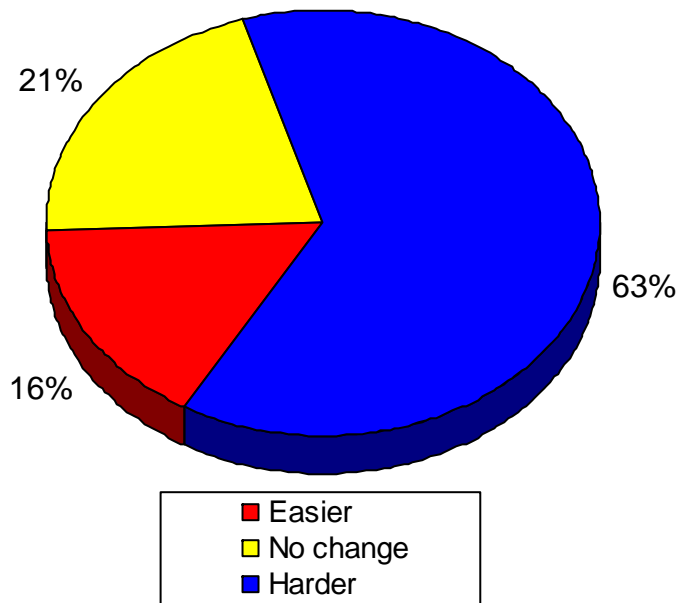


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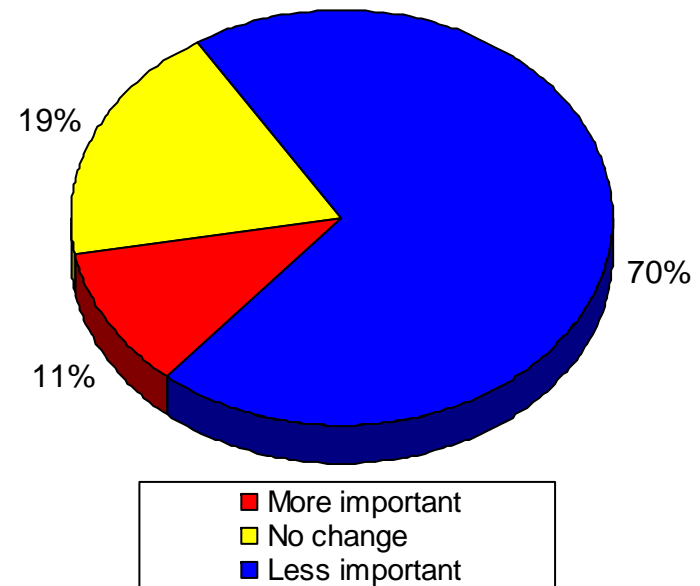
Q525: How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092); 18-29 year olds (n=176); 30-39 year olds (n=184); 40-49 year olds (n=203); 50-59 year olds (n=209); 60+ (n=320)

About two-thirds of adults say that relationships are more difficult to maintain today and that marriage has become less important to couples, though younger adults (ages 18-39) and women are less likely to express such pessimism.

**Nature of Maintaining Relationships**



**Importance of Marriage to Couples**



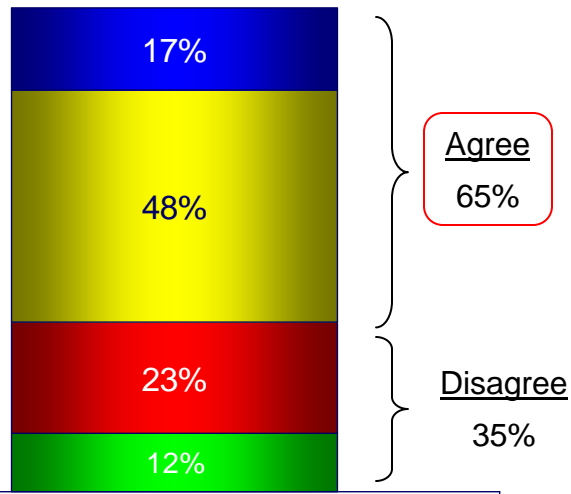
**Q415:** Compared to 10 years ago, do you believe it is easier or harder for people to maintain relationships with friends and family or has there not been a change?

**Q420:** Compared to 10 years ago, do you think that being married has become more or less important to couples or has there not been a change?

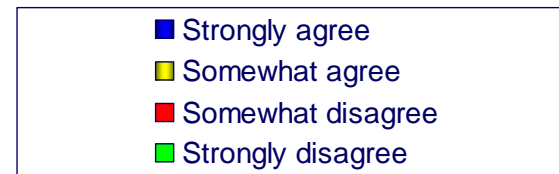
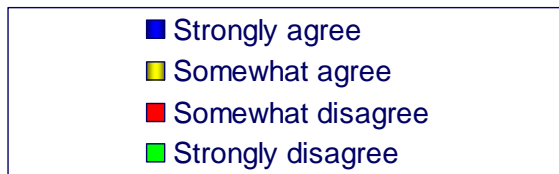
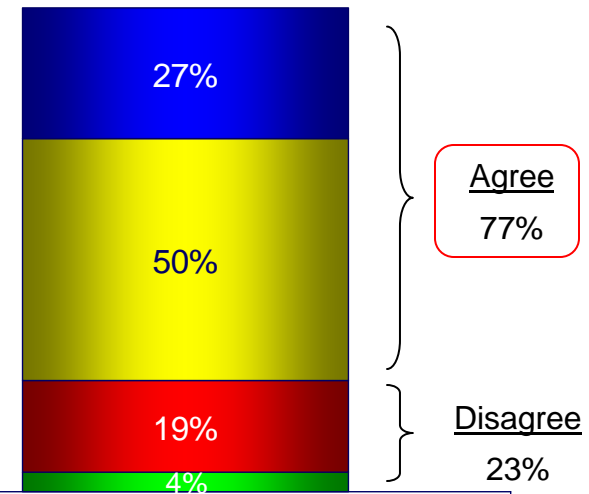
Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

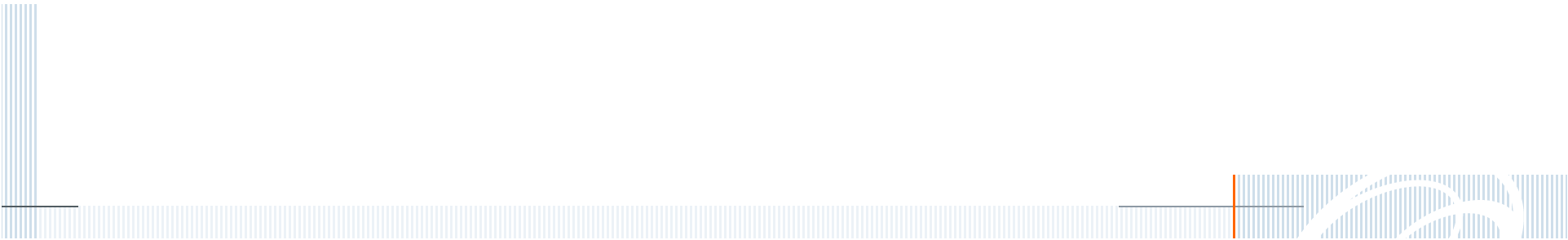
Nearly two-thirds of adults would like to be closer with their family and more than three-quarters are actively trying to build a stronger family life.

**“I wish I had a closer relationship with my family members.”**



**“I am constantly looking for new ways to build a stronger family life for myself.”**

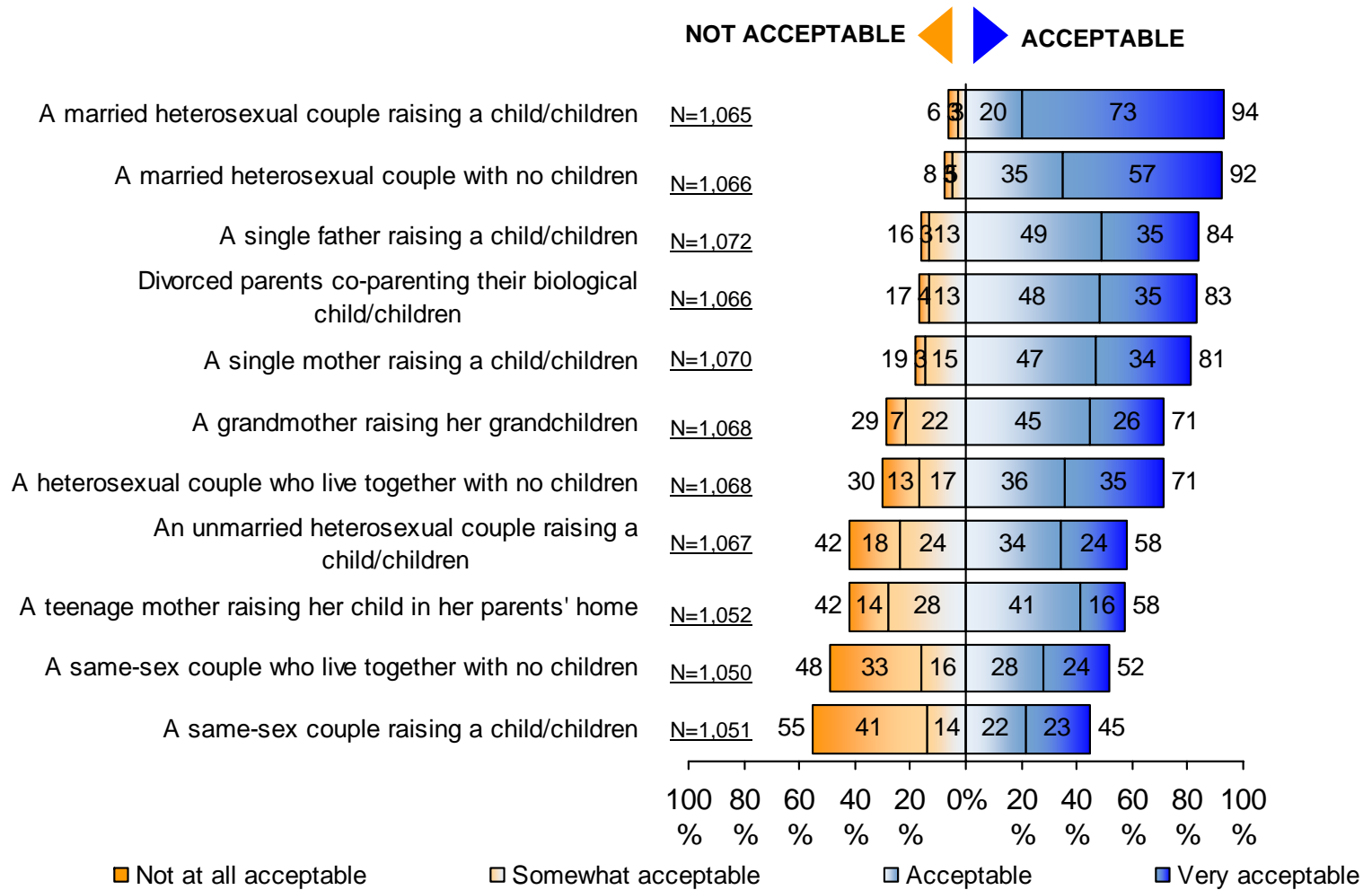




# ***The “Traditional” Family Structure***

Traditional family structures (e.g., heterosexual couples with or without kids) receive more widespread acceptance than less traditional ones (e.g., unmarried couples raising kids, teenage mothers with kids or same-sex couples with kids), but most are acceptable to at least half of the adult population.

### Level of Acceptability for Different Family Structures

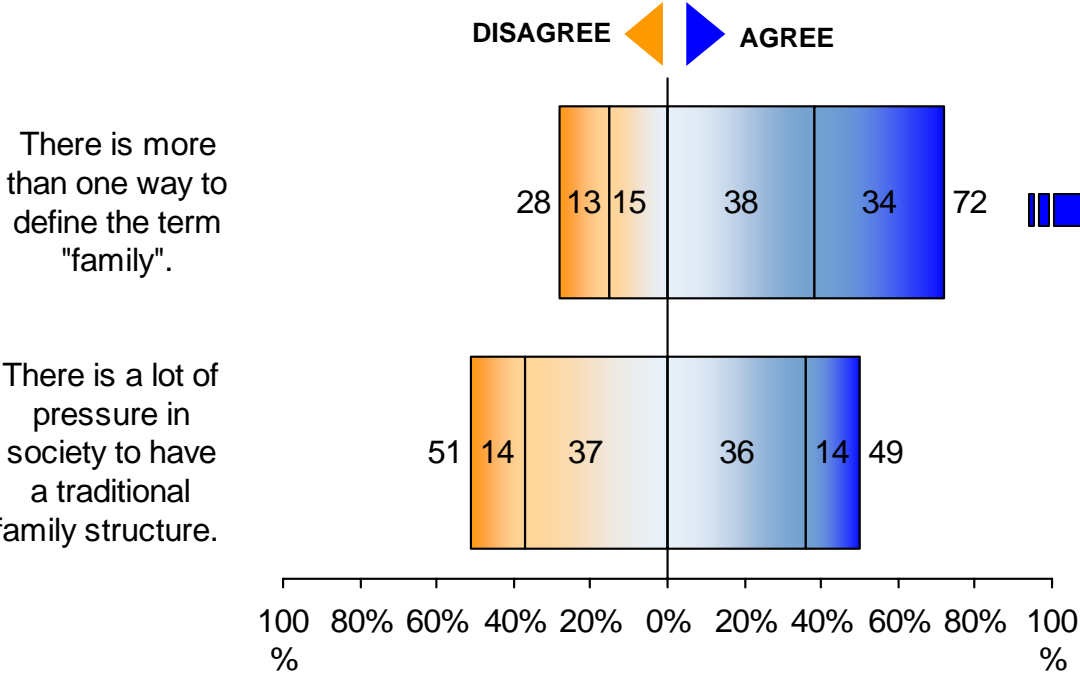


Q535: In your opinion, how acceptable do you believe each of the following situations is?

\* The bases for each of these statements vary because we removed the "not sure" responses and re-percentaged accordingly.

Almost three-quarters of adults believe there is more than one definition of “family”, with women and young adults even more likely to agree than their respective counterparts. About half of adults don’t feel there is pressure to have a traditional family structure.

**Definition of Family**



**% Agree – by Age and Gender**

Female	79%
Male	65%
18-29	82%
50-59	63%
60+	69%

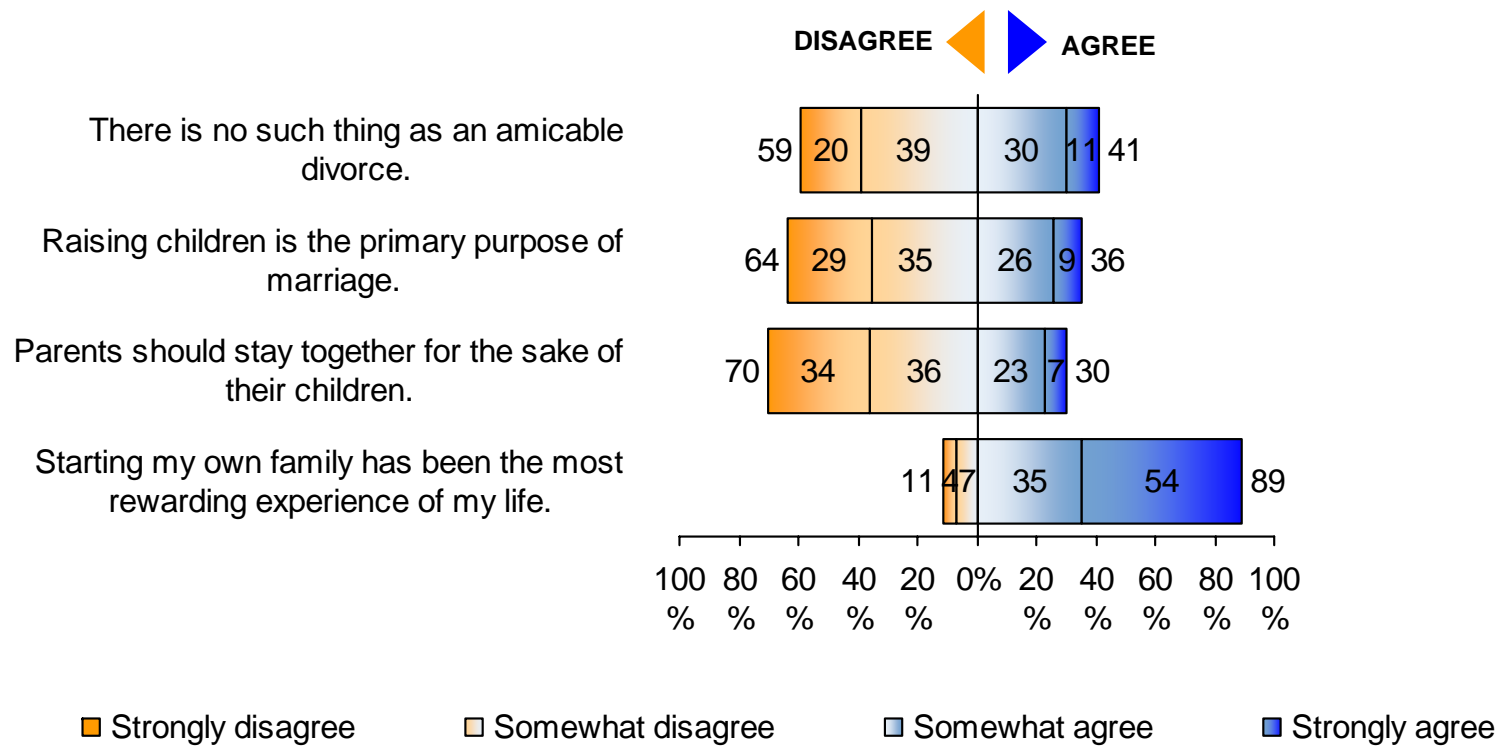
- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q645: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
 Q525: How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092); Male (n=536); Female (n=556); 18-29 year olds (n=176); 50-59 year olds (n=209); 60+ (n=320)



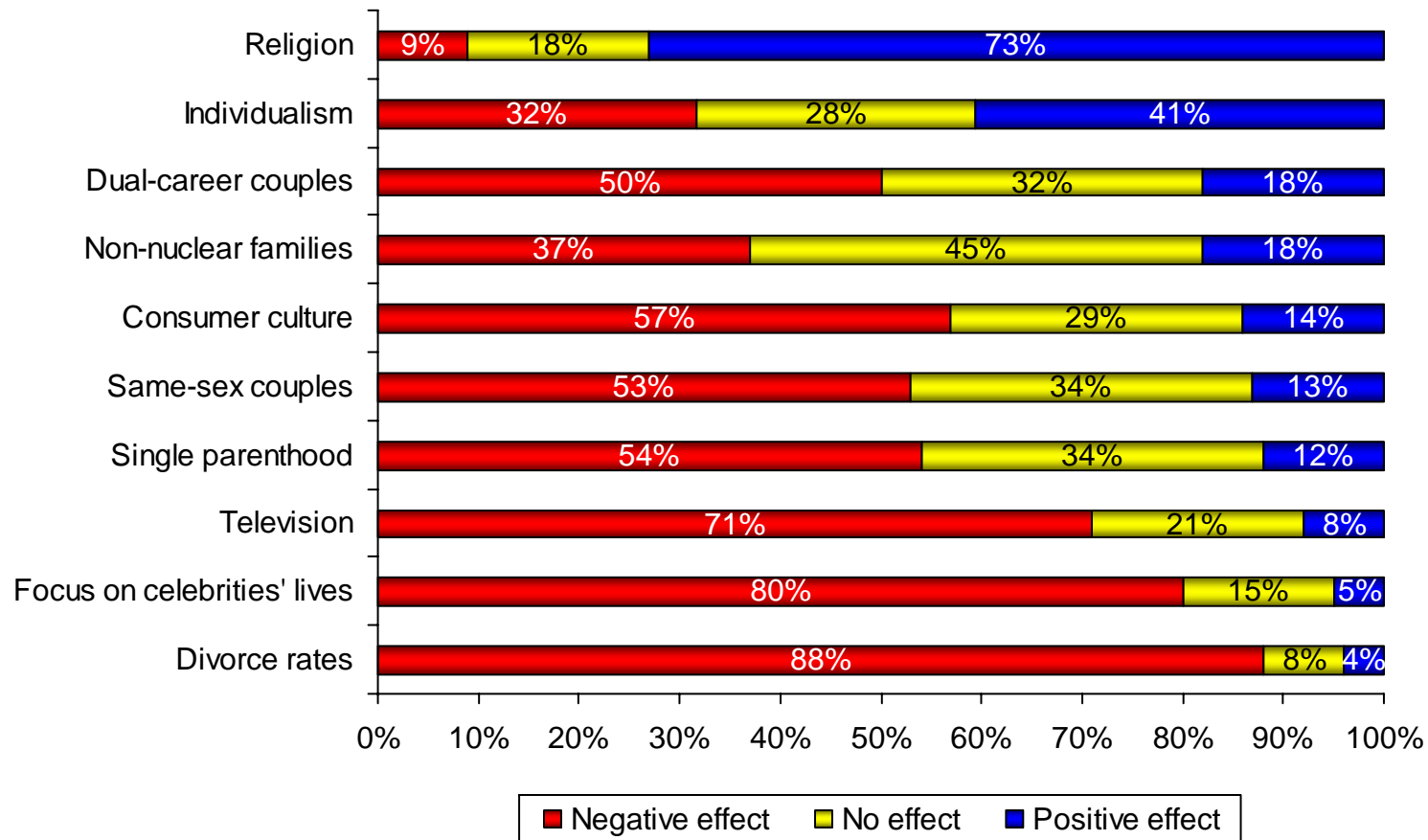
# Most adults *disagree* that raising children is the primary purpose of marriage or that parents should stay together for their children.

## Opinions on Marriage and Divorce



Among a list of pop culture and family influences, divorce is rated by more adults as having a negative impact on the family than single parenthood, same-sex couples, non-nuclear or dual-career couples.

**Effect on Maintaining Family Life**

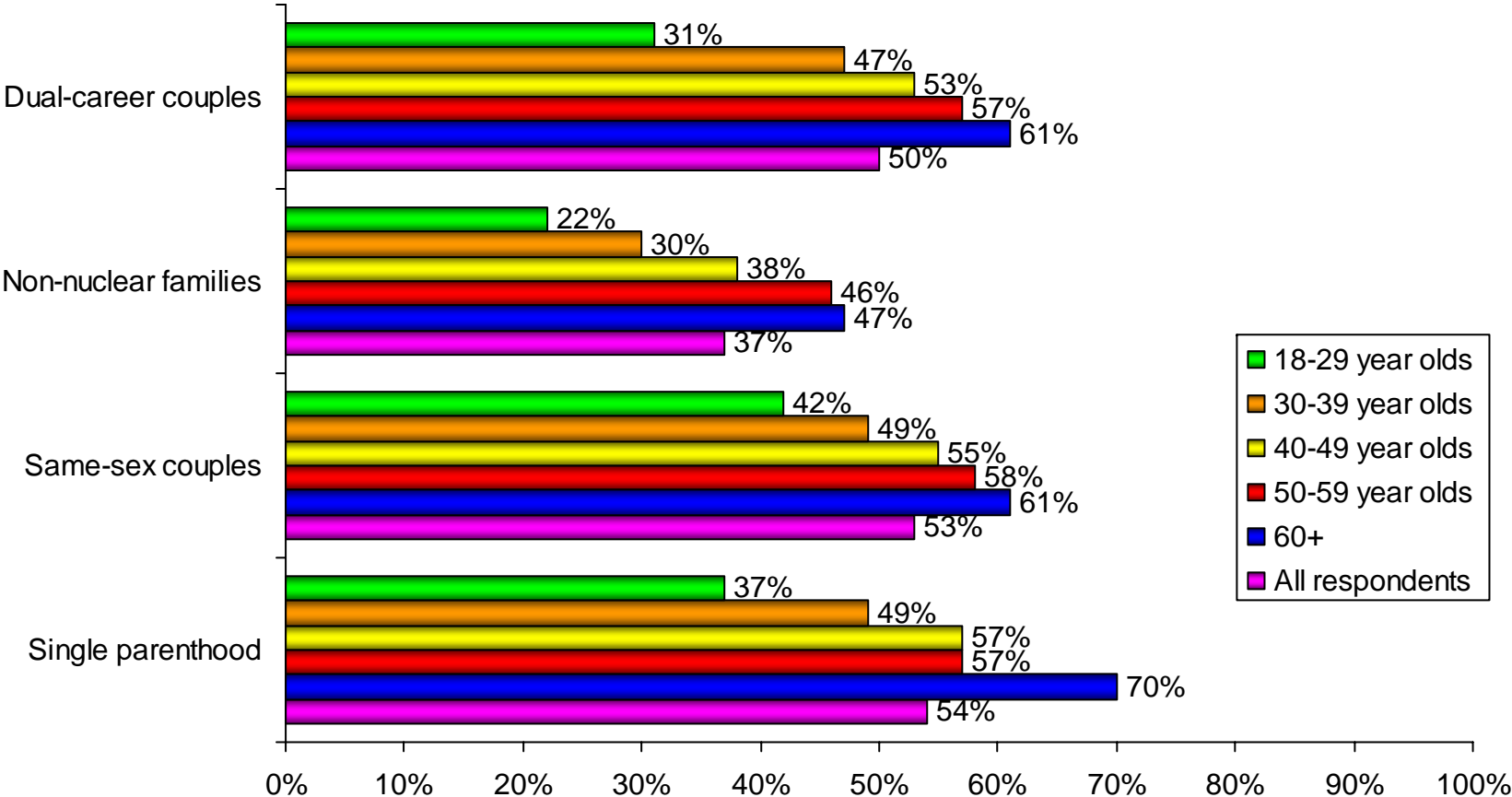


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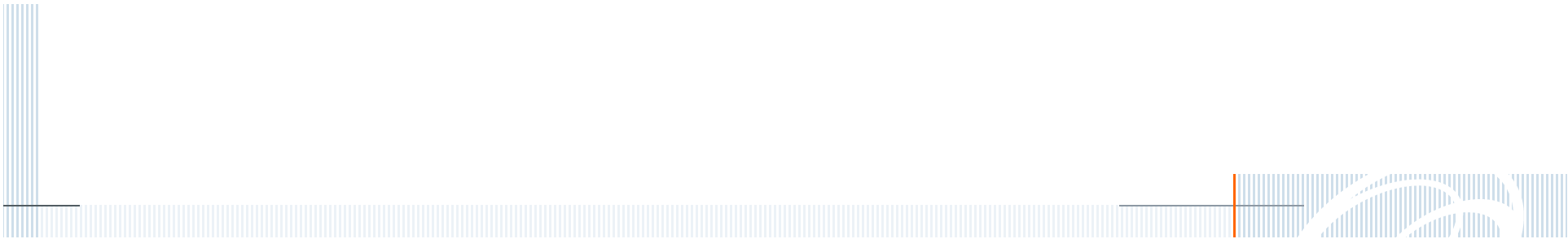
Q530: Do you think that each of the following has a positive, negative or no effect on maintaining a stable family life?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

# Older adults demonstrate more negativity about the impact of single parenthood, dual-career couples, non-nuclear families and same-sex couples on the family structure.

**Negative Effect on Maintaining Family Life**  
 — % by Age



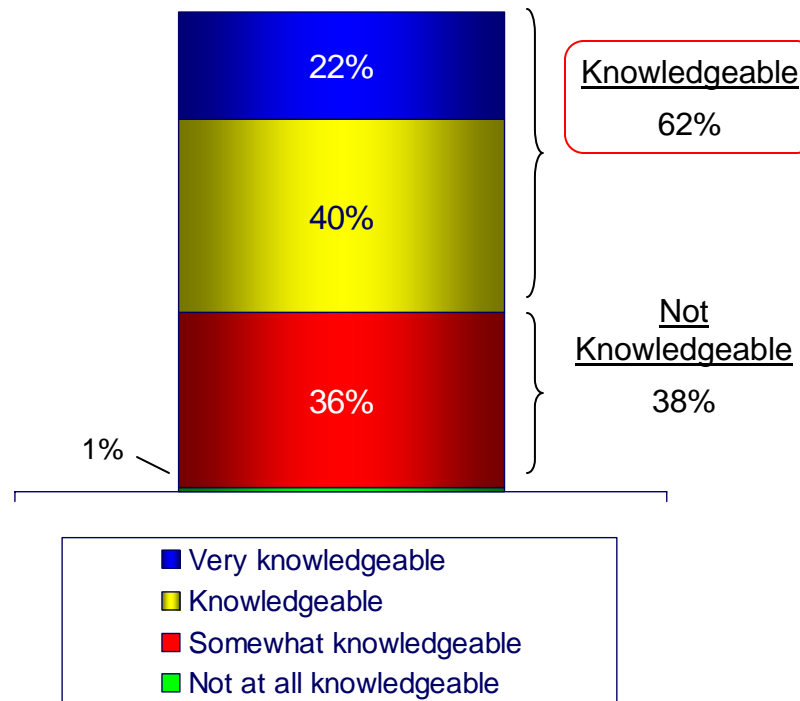
Q530: Do you think that each of the following has a positive, negative or no effect on maintaining a stable family life?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092); 18-29 year olds (n=176); 30-39 year olds (n=184); 40-49 year olds (n=203); 50-59 year olds (n=209); 60+ (n=320)



# ***Role of the Family***

About three in five adults feel knowledgeable about how to maintain a healthy family life.

**Knowledge of Maintaining a Healthy Family Life**



Almost all adults cite their family – especially their parents – as the primary source in teaching them about what a family is. Married men, however, are much more likely than married women to have learned about maintaining a healthy family from their spouse or partner.

**Sources for Maintaining a Healthy Family Life**

	Total	Married Men	Married Women
Base	1,092	305	313
	%	%	%
Family (net)	95	95	97
Parent(s)	83	85	84
Grandparent(s)	57	59	52
Spouse/partner	52	78	61
Sibling(s)	38	39	29
Other family members	54	62	48
Friends	49	49	47
Religious leaders	38	45	40
School	29	29	23
Media	14	9	14
Health care provider	8	5	10
Support group	6	3	6
Government	3	5	*
Other care provider not related to me	3	3	3
Other	6	3	5
None	3	3	*

Q510: From which of the following sources did you learn how to maintain family life? Please select all that apply.  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092); Married Men (n=305); Married Women (n=313)

Nearly all adults think families themselves shoulder the primary responsibility for providing information and guidance on how to maintain one's family life.

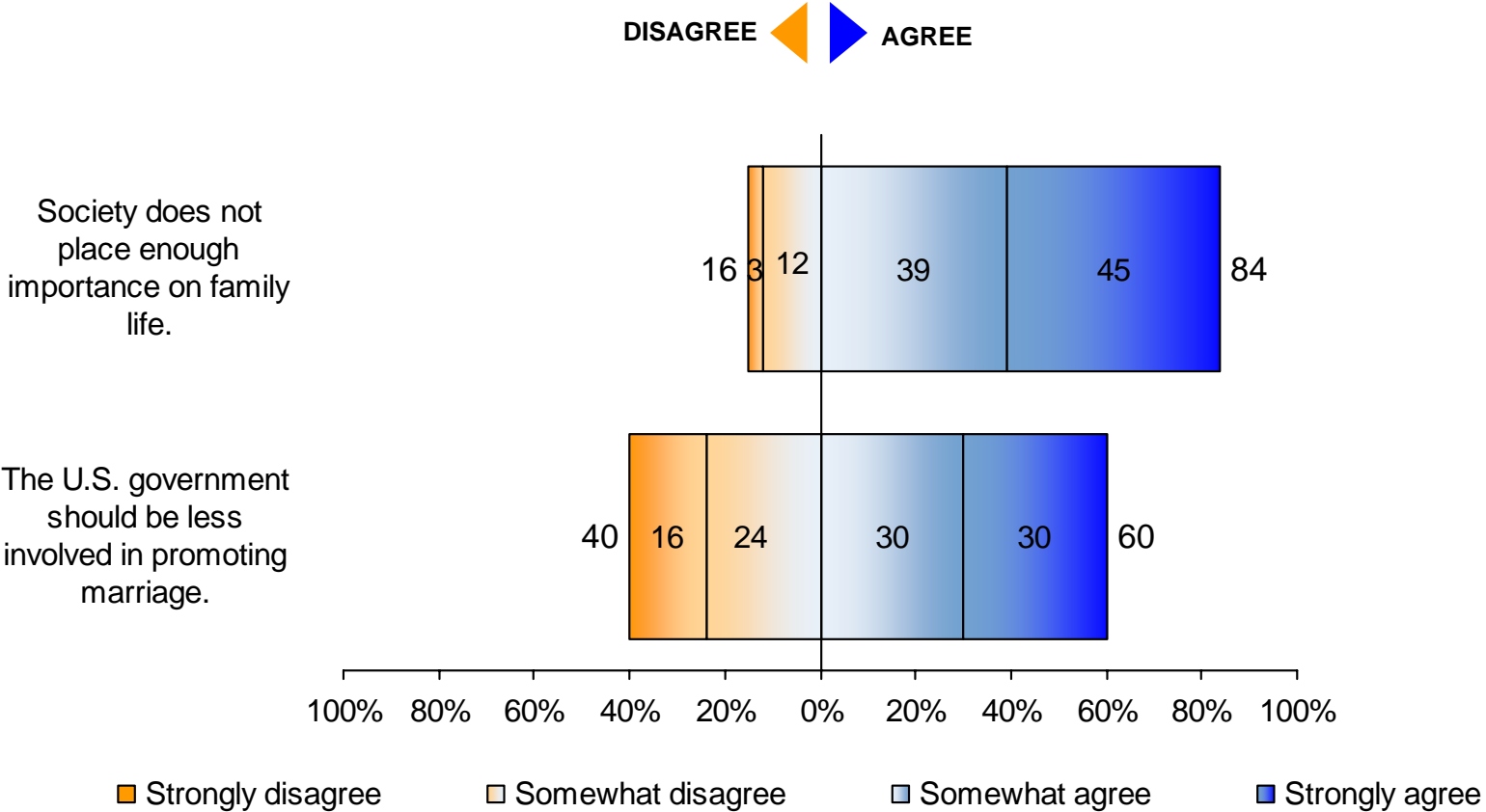
**Responsibility for Providing Guidance on Maintaining Family Life**

	Total
Base	1,092
	%
Families themselves	94
Religious institutions	48
Schools	30
Community organizations	23
Health care providers	17
Government	8
Employers	4
Other	2
No one is responsible for educating individuals on how to maintain one's family life.	4

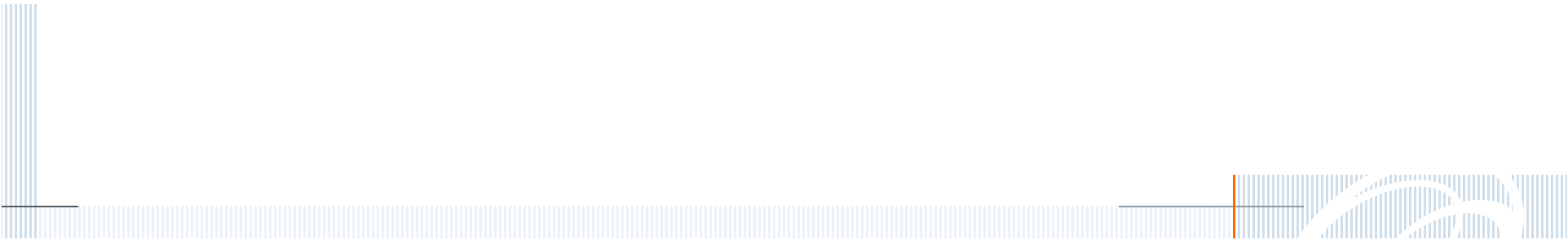
Q515: Who do you feel is responsible for providing information and guidance on how to maintain one's family life?  
 Please select all that apply.  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

# Most adults don't believe that society places enough importance on family life, but still do not expect the government to intervene in promoting marriage.

## Society's Role in Promoting the Family



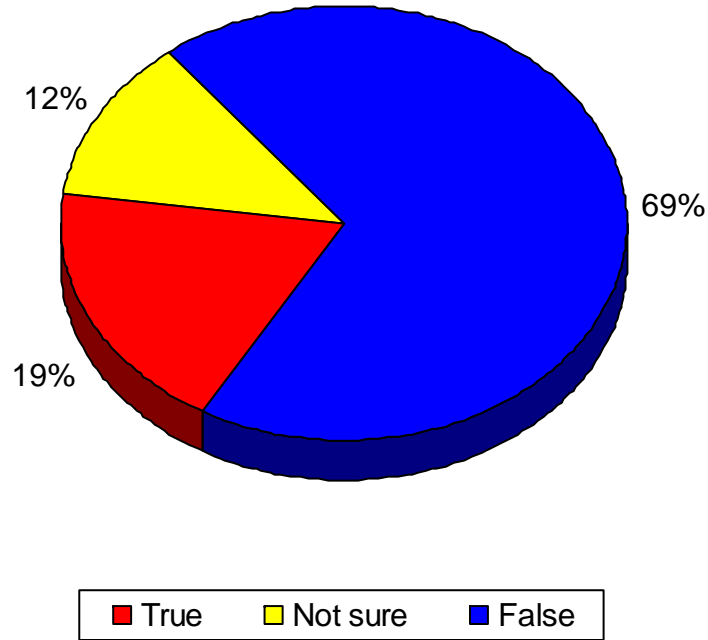




# ***Same-Sex Couples***

# Nearly seven in ten adults think that same-sex marriage is allowed by law somewhere in the U.S.

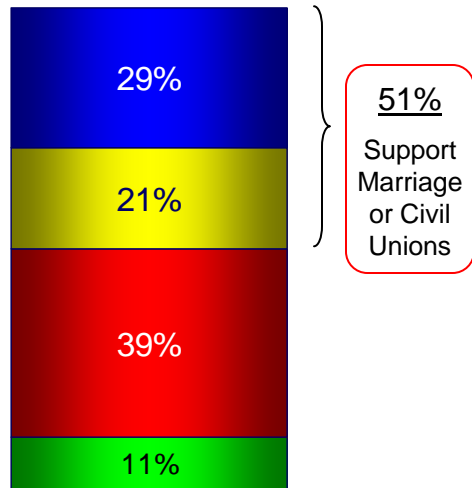
**Legality of Same-Sex Marriage**



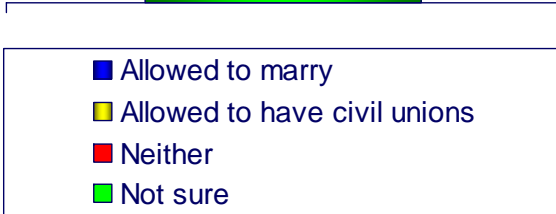
Q800: As far as you know, is the following statement true or false: Same-sex couples are not allowed to be legally married anywhere in the U.S.  
Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

# About half of adults believe that same-sex couples should be allowed to either marry or have civil unions and that denying these couples the option to marry goes against a fundamental American right.

## Views on Same-Sex Marriage



**51%**  
Support Marriage or Civil Unions

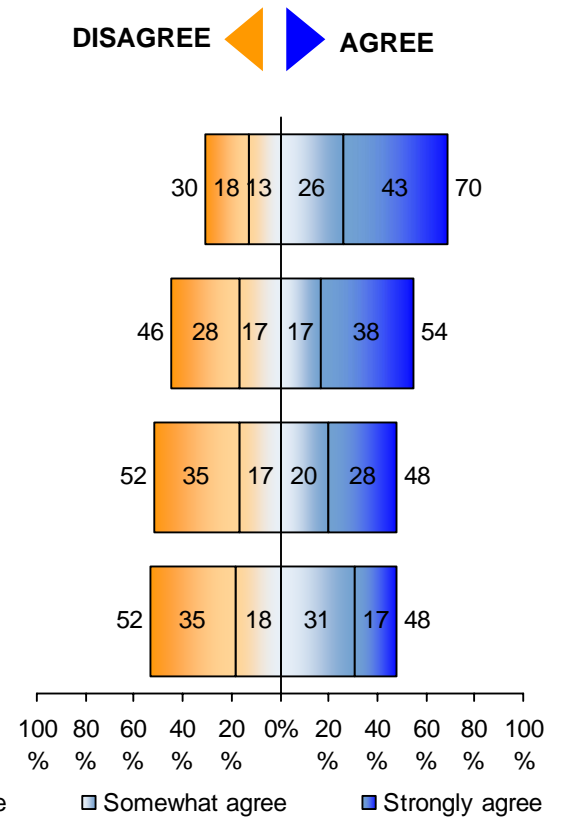


All couples should have a right to a legal marriage regardless of their plans to have children.

Legalizing same-sex marriage would have a negative impact on the institution of marriage in the U.S.

Not allowing same-sex couples to marry goes against a fundamental American right that all people should be treated equally.

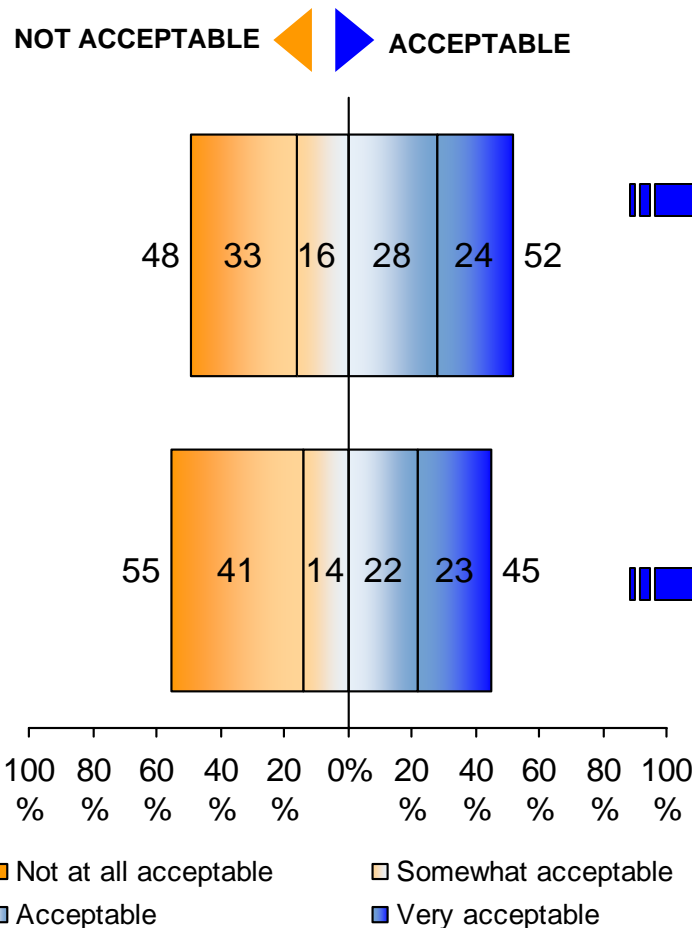
When same-sex couples want to be legally married, it shows how important marriage is in our society.



Q805: Do you think that same-sex couples should be...?  
 Q810: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,092)

# Adults are slightly more likely to find a same-sex couple who live together with no children an acceptable family structure than a same-sex couple raising a child.

## Level of Acceptability



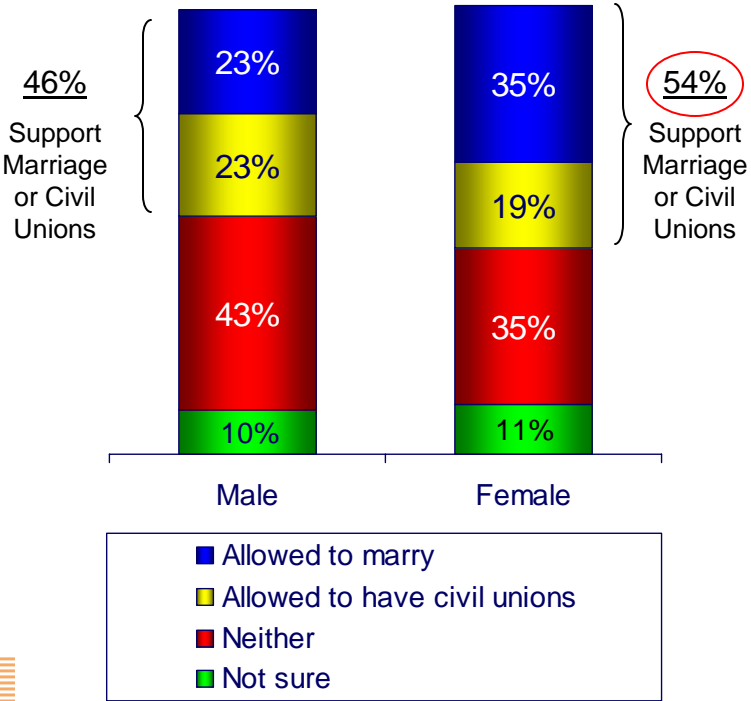
## % Acceptable – by Age and Gender

Female	56%	18-29	62%
Male	47%	30-39	57%
		40-49	50%
		50-59	43%
		60+	48%

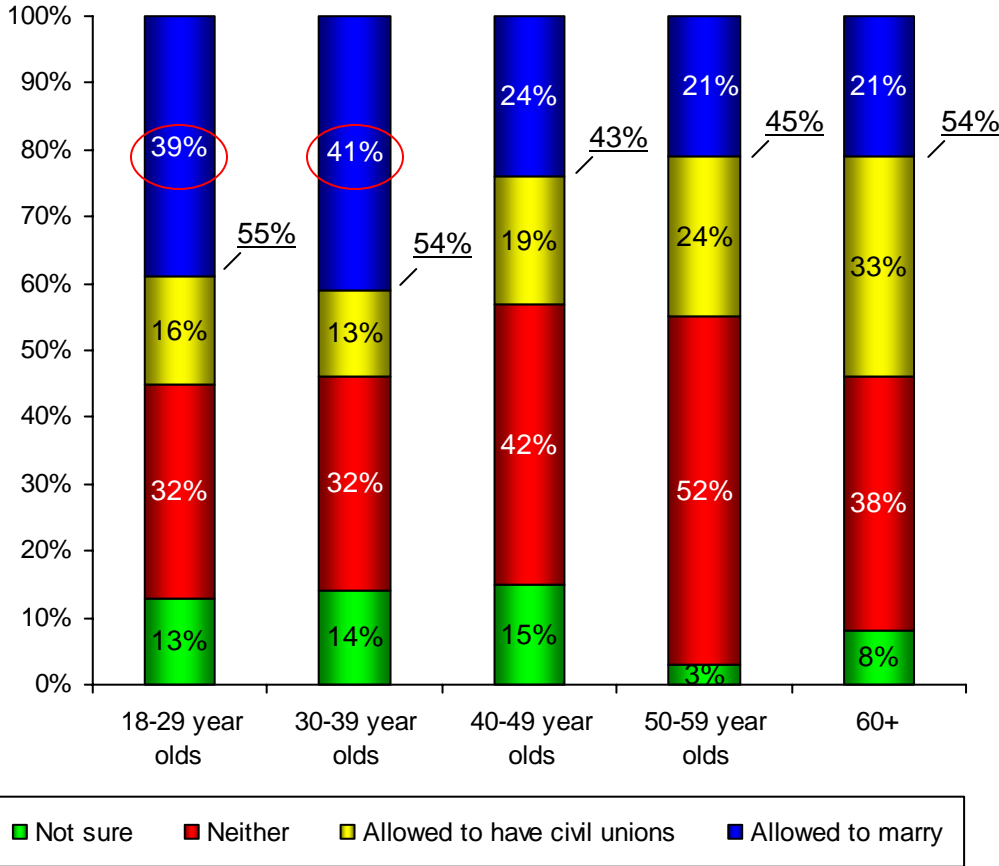
Female	51%	18-29	55%
Male	38%	30-39	51%
		40-49	41%
		50-59	39%
		60+	40%

# Women and younger adults ages 18-39 are more likely to support same-sex marriage or civil unions.

**Approval of Marriage or Civil Unions for Same-Sex Couples— by Gender**

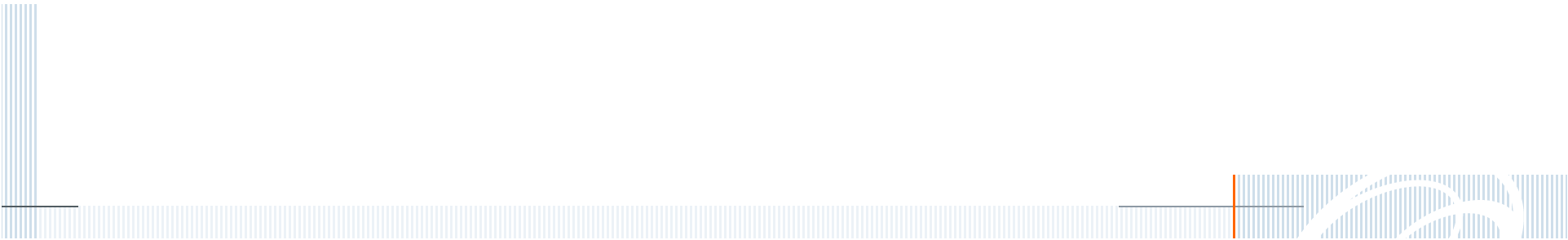


**Approval of Marriage or Civil Unions for Same-Sex Couples— by Age**



Q805: Do you think that same-sex couples should be...?

Base: Male (n=536); Female: (n=556); 18-29 year olds (n=176); 30-39 year olds (n=184); 40-49 year olds (n=203); 50-59 year olds (n=209); 60+ (n=320)



# ***Family Legal Issues***

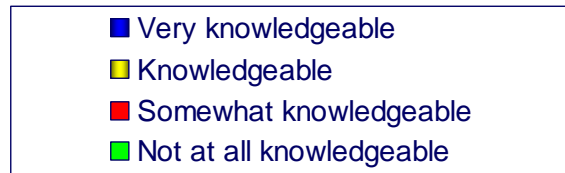
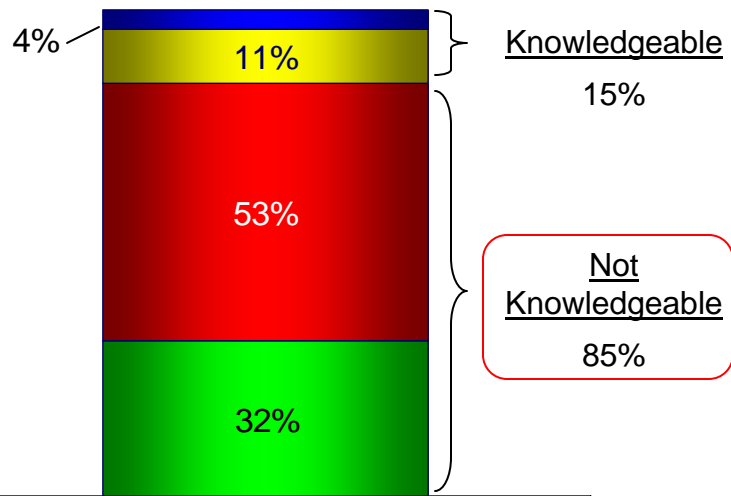
Approximately one in two adults have contacted a lawyer at some point about a family legal issue.

**Have Contacted a Lawyer For a Family Legal Issue**

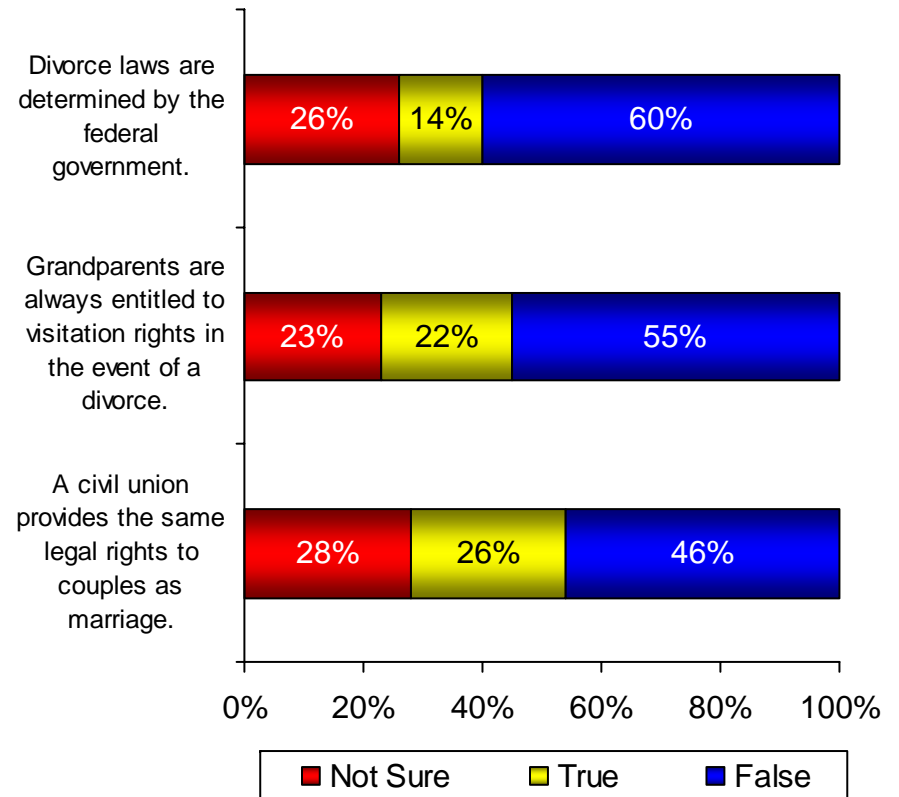
	Total
Base	1,092
	%
Have ever contacted a lawyer (net)	52
Estate planning documents (e.g. wills or trusts)	30
Divorce	25
Child custody issues	13
Financial issues involving a parent or grandparent	8
Adoption	6
Co-habitation agreement	1
Pre- or post-nuptial agreement	1
Other relationship agreement	2
Other family legal issue	12
None	45
Decline to answer	3

A large majority of adults do not consider themselves to be knowledgeable about family legal issues, further proven by the fact that a substantial minority is either unsure or incorrect about basic family law issues.

**Knowledge of Family Legal Issues in General**



**Knowledge of Actual Family Legal Issues**

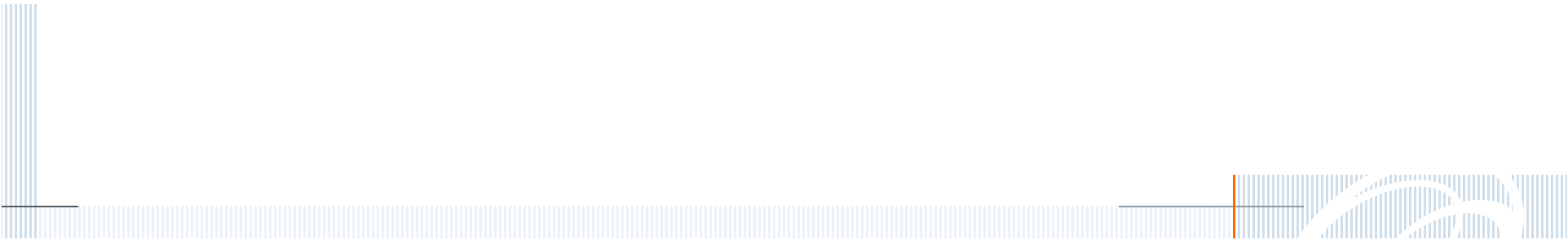


Q710: Overall, how knowledgeable do you feel about family law issues?

Q715: As far as you know, are the following true or false?

Base: All respondents (n=1,092)





# ***Respondent Profile***

# Respondent Profile

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	48
Female	52
<b>Age</b>	
	<b>%</b>
18-29	21
30-39	18
40-49	20
50-59	17
60 and older	23
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
	<b>%</b>
White	71
Hispanic	13
Black/African-American (net)	10
Black	6
African-American	5
Native American/Alaskan native	1
Mixed racial background	1
Asian or Pacific Islander	*
Other race	*
Decline to answer	3

<b>Adults in Household</b>	<b>%</b>
1	17
2	56
3+	26
<i>Mean</i>	2.2
<i>Median</i>	2
<b>U.S. Region</b>	
	<b>%</b>
East	22
Midwest	32
South	23
West	23

<b>Total Household Income</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than \$35,000 (net)	27
Less than \$15,000	9
\$15,000 to \$24,999	8
\$25,000 to \$34,999	9
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000 (net)	30
\$35,000 to \$49,999	13
\$50,000 to \$74,999	17
\$75,000 or more (net)	28
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11
\$100,000 to \$124,999	9
\$125,000 to \$149,999	4
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2
\$200,000 to \$249,999	1
\$250,000 or more	1
Decline to answer	16

## Respondent Profile (Cont.)

Education	%
High school graduate or less (net)	46
Less than high school	*
Some high school	3
High school or equivalent (e.g., GED)	43
Some college (net)	28
Some college, but no degree	20
Associate's degree	8
College graduate or more (net)	26
College (e.g., B.A., B.S.)	17
Some graduate school, but no degree	3
Graduate school (e.g., M.S., M.D., Ph.D.)	6

Sexual Orientation	%
Heterosexual (straight)	94
Lesbian	*
Gay	1
Bisexual	1
Transgender	*
Other	*
Not sure	1
Decline to answer	2

Political Philosophy	%
Moderate	43
Conservative	34
Liberal	23

Political Party	%
Democrat	34
Republican	29
Independent	27
Other	9