

New IFS Report: The Vanishing American Father

Dads are more engaged in their kids' lives than ever. But fewer and fewer young men are becoming fathers at all.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA, UNITED STATES, June 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [New research](#) from Dr. Brad Wilcox and Grant Bailey at the Institute for Family Studies finds that American fatherhood is increasingly concentrated among men with the resources, social capital, and cultural viewpoints that make it possible to prioritize family formation.

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Brad Wilcox

As a result, a gulf is forming between today's fathers, the most involved generation of fathers in recorded history, and the surging ranks of childless men coming disproportionately from secular, liberal, and less educated

backgrounds.

KEY FINDINGS:

53% of men aged 25-45 are fathers, down from two-thirds in the 1980s

23 million men aged 25-45 are childless, up from 10 million in 1980

34% of working-class men between 25 and 45 are married fathers, a drop from 58% in the 1980s

25% of liberal men aged 25–45 are married fathers, compared to 44% of their conservative peers.

52% of men between 25 and 45 who attend religious services twice a month are married fathers. Only 31% of men who attend less often are married fathers.

“A growing number of American men are walking away from fatherhood—and working-class, liberal, and secular men are leading the retreat,” said co-author Dr. Brad Wilcox. “Research shows many of these men pay a steep price: without the anchor of family life, they face higher

rates of loneliness, unhappiness, and lost purpose.”

Indeed, married fathers are the happiest group of men in their mid-twenties in America. They are more than twice as likely to report being “very happy” compared to their childless and unmarried peers.

“Fatherhood in America is becoming less common, especially for young men,” said co-author Grant Bailey, Research Fellow and Insights Editor at the Institute for Family Studies. “These declines in fatherhood aren’t uniform, with liberal, secular, and working-class men seeing the largest drops since the 1980s. Such trends are concerning for the future of the country.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brad Wilcox is Distinguished University Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies, a nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and author of *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*. He is available for media interviews.

Grant Bailey is a Research Fellow and the Insights Editor at the Institute for Family Studies.

ABOUT IFS

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