

## Vice President's Conversation on the Future

### Trend Research: Social Skills, Competencies and Relationships Across Community and Family Environments

#### Descriptor Definition

The research and information contained in this paper focuses on the interpersonal skills and civic participation that affect families and communities in Ohio. The paper will examine trends related to families, such as rates of marriage and divorce, changes in parenting, and definitions of family types. Also discussed in the paper will be trends and research focused on essential life skills, such as the changes in communication methods and interpersonal interactions over the past several years. Finally, trends in civic engagement, specifically voter participation and volunteerism, will also be discussed.

#### Authors' Insights<sup>1</sup>: Descriptor Relevance

The primary building block of community is the family. For most people, the family unit, in all of its various forms, represents the first example of community. It is within the family that most individuals first learn to communicate, build relationships, and care for others. Within the family, we also learn how to interact with and live in the larger communities and groups outside of the family. Understanding the trends related to family development and dynamics, interpersonal communication, and civic engagement can provide a clarifying context to the study and examination of other elements of society.

#### Trend Information and Interpretation

##### Definitions of the Family

Families are viewed as a major social structure within our society; however the definition of the family unit has changed over time and continues to evolve. The United States Census Bureau defines family as, "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family." Prior to 1980, unrelated families were classified as secondary families. In the 2010 census reporting, same-sex spouse/partner households were reported as non-married or unrelated family households. In 2014, unrelated individuals living together are no longer included in the count of families or of family members; however they are included in household statistics.

The proportion of family households in Ohio with children under age 18 years has decreased from 31.7% in 2000 to 28.1% in 2010. According to the Ohio Development Services Agency, the average household size in Ohio was 2.47 persons in 2013. This number has steadily decreased from 3.04

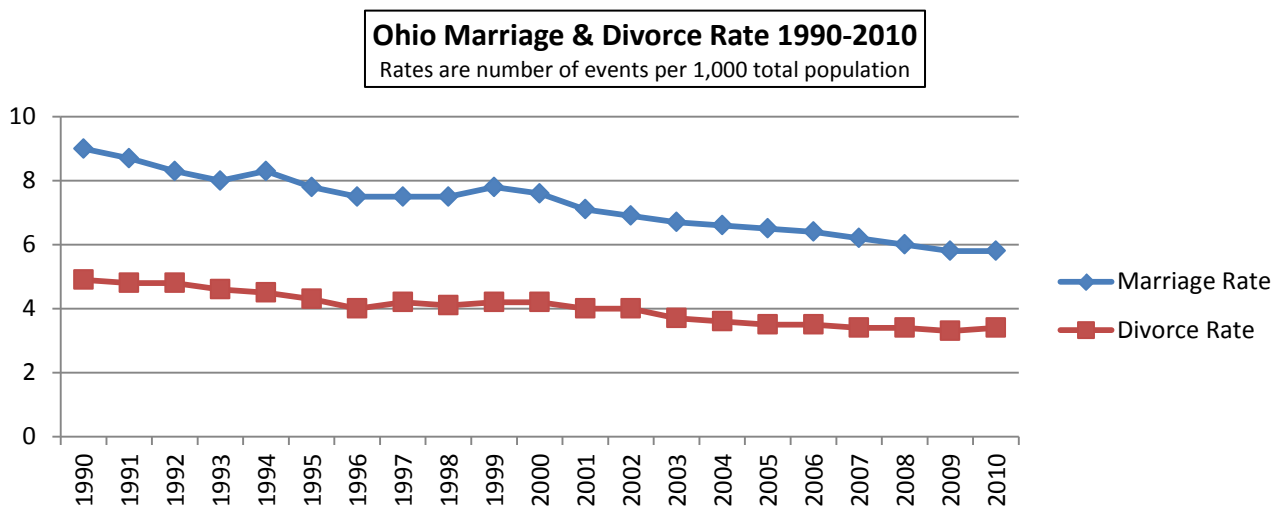


persons in 2010, 3.01 persons in 2000, 3.27 persons in 1980, and 3.43 in 1950. From 2000 to 2013, the average number of children in an Ohio family has increased slightly from 1.86 to 1.87.

### Marriage and Divorce

The overall number of marriages has significantly decreased over the past 20 years based on data from the Ohio Department of Health, Center for Public Health Statistics and Informatics. In 1990, Ohio saw more than 98,000 marriages representing a rate of 9.0 per 1,000 people. By 2010, the number had dropped to 86,156 marriages, representing a rate of 7.6 per 1,000 people. The latest statistics indicate that in 2013, the marriage rate dropped to 5.8 with a total of 66,433 marriages.

The state has also experienced a decrease in the number of divorces over the past 20 years, dropping from a rate of 4.9 per 1,000 people in 1990 to 3.4 per 1,000 people in 2010. The number of minor children affected by divorce has also decreased from 49,767 in 1990 to 33,444 in 2010.



### Teen Pregnancy

Teen pregnancy rates in Ohio are reported for youth ages 10-19 years. In 1997 the teen pregnancy rate for all youth ages 10-19 was 42.3 per 1,000 females. By 2010 this number has been reduced to a rate of 29.0 per 1,000 females aged 10-19. The greatest reduction was in the rate for ages 18-19 from 123.0 in 1997 to 93.3 per 1,000 females in 2010 (Ohio Department of Health, 2010).

### Authors' Insights

With the recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings related to same-sex marriage, the current census definition of “family” will need to be adjusted. Under a new definition of family, a significant increase in the number of families and marriages in the U.S. will be documented through the census reporting. This may also lead to an increase in the number of divorces reported, as well as the number of children affected by divorce. The shift in these statistics may also affect attitudes toward parenting.

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As the incidence of illegal drug use and abuse continues to rise, it continues to negatively affect the family structure and impact youth. This issue will continue to create societal impacts with regard to educating and caring for the children involved with these families.

Perhaps the decline in teen pregnancy is due to a more widespread acceptance and availability of birth control for teenagers. In addition, today's society supports more frank and open communication in families about sex and sexually transmitted diseases. Teens are more educated and aware of the consequences of sexual activity.

## **Trends in Communication:**

### **Methods of Communicating**

An examination of communication practices over the past 40 years quickly reveals that technology has demonstrated a significant impact on communication strategies. Since the introduction of the first personal computer in 1976, Americans have embraced the changing forms of communication offered through an ever-evolving technology industry.

### **Cell Phone Adoption Rates**

According to the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA), the number of cell phone subscribers in the U.S. increased more than 8,800% in 25 years, rising from 340,213 subscribers in 1985 to 300,520,098 subscribers in 2010. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2014 more than 90% of adults in the U.S. have a cell phone, with 58% of adults indicating that their primary mobile device is a smartphone (a cell phone that includes additional software functions, such as internet access and email). According to Connect Ohio, a nonprofit organization focused on broadband access and adoption in Ohio, mobile broadband use in the state has doubled since 2010. One-half of Ohioans reported using mobile connectivity to access information on their smartphones in 2010.

### **Social Media Use**

Social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter have also quickly grown since 2007. From the 2011 uprising in Egypt to the popular and effective use of social media by the Vatican, this form of communication has played a critical role in a real-time transfer of information. The Pew Research Center reported in January 2014 that 74% of adults use social networking sites to learn about and share information. Studies also show that in 2013, 64% of U.S. adults were active on Facebook, with 30% of adults indicating that they use the platform as a primary source of news.

Social media use extends beyond news and entertainment; in 2007, researchers found that 69% of U.S. adults reported accessing health information online. Among Internet users, 23% indicated that that used social networking sites to learn about and access health related information, 5% participated in an online support group, and 7% reported blogging about health related issues (Chow, et al, 2009).

## **Texting Practices**

Teenagers and young adults report the highest use of text messaging. Ninety-five percent of 18-29 year olds reported in 2011 that they send or receive an average of 88 text messages per day (Pew Research Center, 2011). The study also found that texting and calling are highly correlated. Cell owners who send or receive more than 50 texts on an average day also make or receive an average of 30 voice calls each day. This is compared to cell owners who send or receive zero to ten texts per day who report receiving or making an average of 8 voice calls.

## **Authors' Insights**

With the dramatic rise in the adoption of cell phone use, texting and social media, the pace of communication is much faster than in the past, and will continue to advance. Information and methods of communication are readily available, both on a computer and with mobile devices. The impact of this immediate access to information, while empowering, can also create issues related to accuracy and validity of the information received. The ready access to mobile devices and the Internet will also continue to create issues for families and youth related to personal safety and privacy.

The styles of communication and the rules of civility continue to change rapidly. Texting, distance communication, and social media offer immediate and available options for communicating. As a result, the incidence of face-to-face interactions will likely continue to decrease, impacting the manner in which we communicate and interpret our social norms of acceptable behavior. Virtual interactions carry a different set of expectations and behaviors, which will continue to drive a shift in the way we communicate and interact with each other.

Although cellular and broadband access is becoming more widespread and available, many parts of Ohio, including rural areas, still lack adequate access. Without the infrastructure improvement to support growth in these areas, some sectors of the state will continue to fall behind. This may negatively impact economic growth in these areas of the state. Moreover, as society continues to be dependent on Internet usage, it is critical to maintain and increase access to this essential infrastructure.

## **Civic Engagement**

According to the Ohio Secretary of State, since 1978, voter turnout during presidential elections years has remained fairly consistent, with the highest level of 71.77% reported in 2004 and the lowest turnout, 63.73% reported in 2000. Generally, non-presidential election years see a wide range of voter participation rates from 30.98% to 62.37%, with a general overall decline since 1978. Only 8% of residents report participating in public meetings.

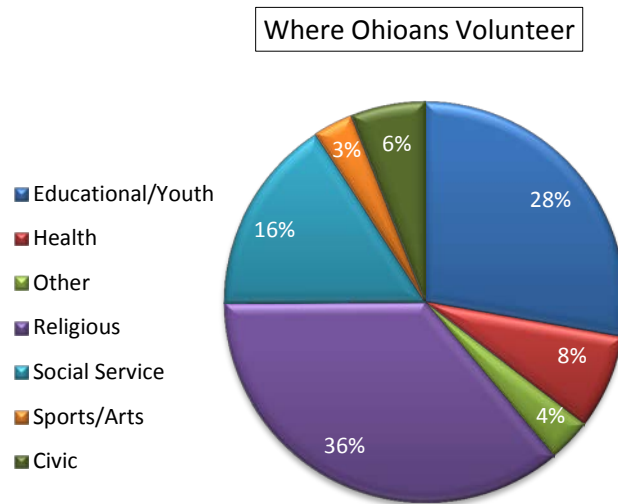
## **Volunteerism**

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 26.3% of Ohioans, translating to 2.26 million people, served as volunteers in 2013, ranking Ohio 30<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states for volunteerism. On average nearly 30 volunteer hours were spent per resident of the state, for a total of

nearly 283 million hours of service. Refer to the chart on the following page to see where Ohioans volunteer.

### Authors' Insights

Volunteer patterns appear to be more episodic and related to causes and issues that are important at the moment. The incidence of individuals volunteering for the same organization over many years appears to be unlikely. Ohioans will likely focus their volunteering efforts and charitable giving on their areas of interest, and these areas will continue to change over time.



### Summary of Trend Information

While the marriage and divorce rates in Ohio continue to decrease, so does family size. The definition of family – legal and social – continues to evolve, paving the way for a wider range of living situations among Ohioans. As communication strategies rapidly keep pace with technological advancements and opportunities, the use of technology continues to grow, further emphasizing the need to maintain, upgrade and expand availability to broadband and cellular access. Ohioans continue to demonstrate their generosity and compassion for others through public service and charitable giving.

### Authors' Insights – Possible Trends for the Future

Three outcomes are likely by 2035 for the trend in social skills, competencies and relationships across community and family. An *a priori* probabilities of occurrence for each is included below. Probabilities of occurrence are estimates (given the information available and knowing it will likely change) that provide a starting point for conversations about the future.

- A. The definition of “family” will undergo significant changes with the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling on same-sex marriage. This new family definition will impact legal aspects of governmental implementation, education, parenting, marriage, divorce, and, ultimately, communities. Rapidly increasing communication strategies will enhance and strengthen the family structure and Ohio communities, by providing an abundance of easily accessible information for decision-making and communication. Technology access will enable families to stay connected and interact with family and friends living and working in other locations. Technological advancements will enable employees to work virtually, from home, providing opportunities for more effectively balancing work and family responsibilities. Productivity at work will continue to rise with access to technology, enabling individuals to interact with a more diverse workforce. The use of technology will also affect voting and voter participation. With advancements in technology access and adoption, governments will begin an electronic voting option for residents. Based on 2014 trend information, this outcome has an *a priori* probability of occurrence of .45.
- B. Individual state governments will continue to battle over the definition of marriage. The U.S. will continue to be divided among those states that recognize same-sex marriage and those that do not. This social discourse will impact voter participation rates, causing voters to choose to be more involved or become less engaged in the voting process, based on their views of the adoption of new marriage definition laws. The use of technology to facilitate communication among families and for business will continue to grow at the current rate. Generational differences will continue to be realized between those who are technology “natives” and those who were required to adapt to technology later in life (teens or adulthood). The government will continue to struggle to keep pace with the technological changes, creating a wider chasm between the responsiveness of private industry and government with regard to the ever-evolving and changing consumer needs and desires. Based on 2014 trend information, this outcome has an *a priori* probability of occurrence of .30.
- C. Some states will continue to oppose the updated definition of marriage, creating a wider discord and sense of apathy among citizens toward state governments, driving down civic involvement and voter participation rates. The rate of marriage will continue to decline, creating a variety of societal issues related to parenting, custody and care of children, cohabitation, etc. The increased rate of telecommuting will continue to blur the line between work and personal time, creating issues for balancing work and family responsibilities. With widely available access to technology, individuals will continue to spend significant time interacting online with mobile devices, so families will experience less face-to-face communication among family members, creating unintended consequences related to building relationships and bonding. Based on 2014 trend information, this outcome has an *a priori* probability of occurrence of .25.

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<sup>1</sup> Along with the research-based data and statistics included in this document, is information provided by the research paper author(s). Although these author insights are not directly cited with research references, they reflect research, observation, logic, intuition, and well-considered expectations compiled by the author(s). The Author Insights sections of this paper are offered for discussion and to help provide a wider perspective for incorporating the descriptor data into the possible future trends. These conclusions are drawn by the author(s) using their knowledge of the scholarly references and their years of professional experience related to the descriptor, and are provided to help the reader more effectively envision the future impact and effects of the descriptor.

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