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## **Role of Government in Protecting the Institution of Marriage**

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This is an author's draft of an article published in the PA Times.

The final version, the version of record, is available online at:

<https://patimes.org/role-of-government-in-protecting-the-institution-of-marriage/>



## Role of Government in Protecting the Institution of Marriage

We have courses in our MPP and MPA programs with titles like: Role of Government in Regulating the Economy, Role of Government in a Market-based Economy and Role of Government in Contracting Out Services. We do not have a course about the role of the government in protecting the institution of marriage. I believe this is a real flaw. Divorce rates are on the rise, and with the presence of the COVID-19 Pandemic over the past few years, the situation has continued to worsen.

More and more countries have reported increasing rates of divorce and separation during the pandemic. These increasing numbers have been captured not only by official registries, but also by law offices and media organizations. Some analysts associate this with the pandemic lockdown and couples simply having to spend more time together. This led, in many cases, to increasing arguments about household chores, parenting responsibilities and the optimal division of roles. The situation was especially stressful for working parents with young children in school. As parents were trying to manage their own online work, they were also having to oversee their kids' online classes. Having the kids home 24/7 with no time for outings, sports or any other extracurricular activities, added an additional burden. Other analysts attribute the rising divorce rate to pandemic-associated stress, the absence of other support mechanisms besides one's spouse and the heightened level of unmet expectations. Additionally, we have to factor in the increase in the unemployment rate, the implemented salary reduction for some and the overall difficult economic conditions. Most importantly, the pandemic reminded everyone that life is short and that we have to think more carefully about how we want to spend it, and with whom.

Several questions arise: 1) Should governments play a role in protecting the institution of marriage?, 2) What are governments currently doing to protect the institution of marriage?; and 3) What else needs to be done?

No one is keen on a nosy government that interferes with its citizens' affairs, but protecting the institution of marriage may no longer be considered a private affair. The nuclear family has always been a core building block of any society, and this still holds true today. The institution of marriage ensures, to a large extent, the option of a safe haven for raising and caring for children—something governments should want to safeguard for future generations.

Additionally, according to many sociologists and psychologists, the negative impacts of a broken marriage, on all parties involved, are quite high. Thus, if nations want to cut down on litigation costs, reduce time wasted in courts resolving marital disputes, ensure a safe, nourishing and enabling environment for kids in well-functioning families and make sure that their citizens are well developed, then they should do all that is possible to enable marital relationships to thrive.

### **What are governments currently doing/can they do more of to protect the institution of marriage?**

- **Regulatory Policies:** Governments all over the world have laws in place that regulate marriage starting by setting a suitable minimum age for marriage, designing registration procedures and a contractual agreement, requiring health certification and allowing for tax exemptions.
- **Educating Both Children and Adults on Marriage:** Educating children and adolescents early on about how to manage long term marital relationships is key. We need to properly prepare future couples for married life. Couples need to learn about good communication and negotiation skills, value-based relationships, and empathy and compromising, to make relationships work. In the United Kingdom, sex and relationship education is mandatory for children 11 years and older in all schools. Part of the curriculum covers the importance of the institution of marriage in developing stable relationships, and for raising children. Quoting the United Kingdom's policy on Family Formation: "Given that married relationships tend to have

greater longevity and stability than other forms...government believes marriage often provides an excellent environment in which to bring up children. So, the government is clear that marriage should be supported and encouraged.”

- **Government Funded Counseling Services:** Many governments provide free counseling services to married couples. In Egypt, the Mawada (“affection”) Program was initiated by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, offering a free online training program to young people when first entering into marriage. Additionally, Lam El Shaml (“bringing us together”) is an initiative put forth by the religious institution that offers an online platform, a hotline and, when needed, free face to face sessions, for resolving marital disputes.
- **General Support for Marriage Institutions:** In the United States, many states employ the help of different programs, such as The Healthy Marriage Initiative, to help preserve the institution of marriage. Through a range of services, employment aid, direct economic assistance when needed and free marriage education are offered to married couples.

Despite all these efforts, divorce rates are still on the rise. Governments simply need to do more—especially considering the alarming spike in the divorce rate following the pandemic. We also need to see more within our public administration curriculum, as well as additional published research on the role of the government in protecting this key institution.