



The Brookings Institution

Metropolitan Policy Program

Matt Fellowes, Senior Research Associate

Redefining Working Family Policy: State Innovation in the Ownership Society

National Conference on State Legislatures – Fall 2005 Forum



Redefining Working Family Policy: State Innovation in the Ownership Society

I

What's the context for state innovation? How are low-income families fairing in the ownership society?

II

What are the different types of state innovations that benefit low-income working families?

III

What are the promises and perils of this state innovation?



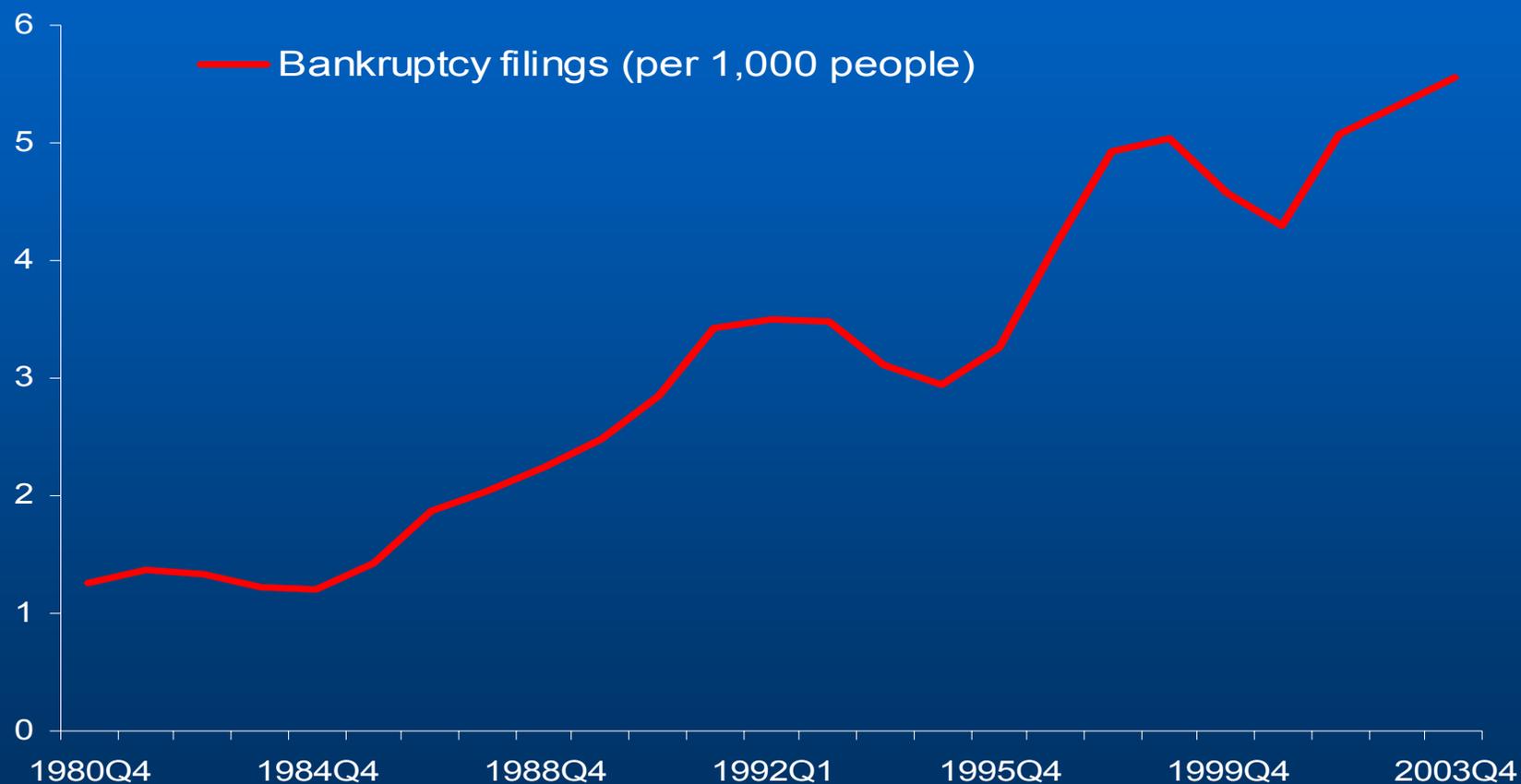
How are low income families fairing in the ownership society?



A seesaw comes to mind...



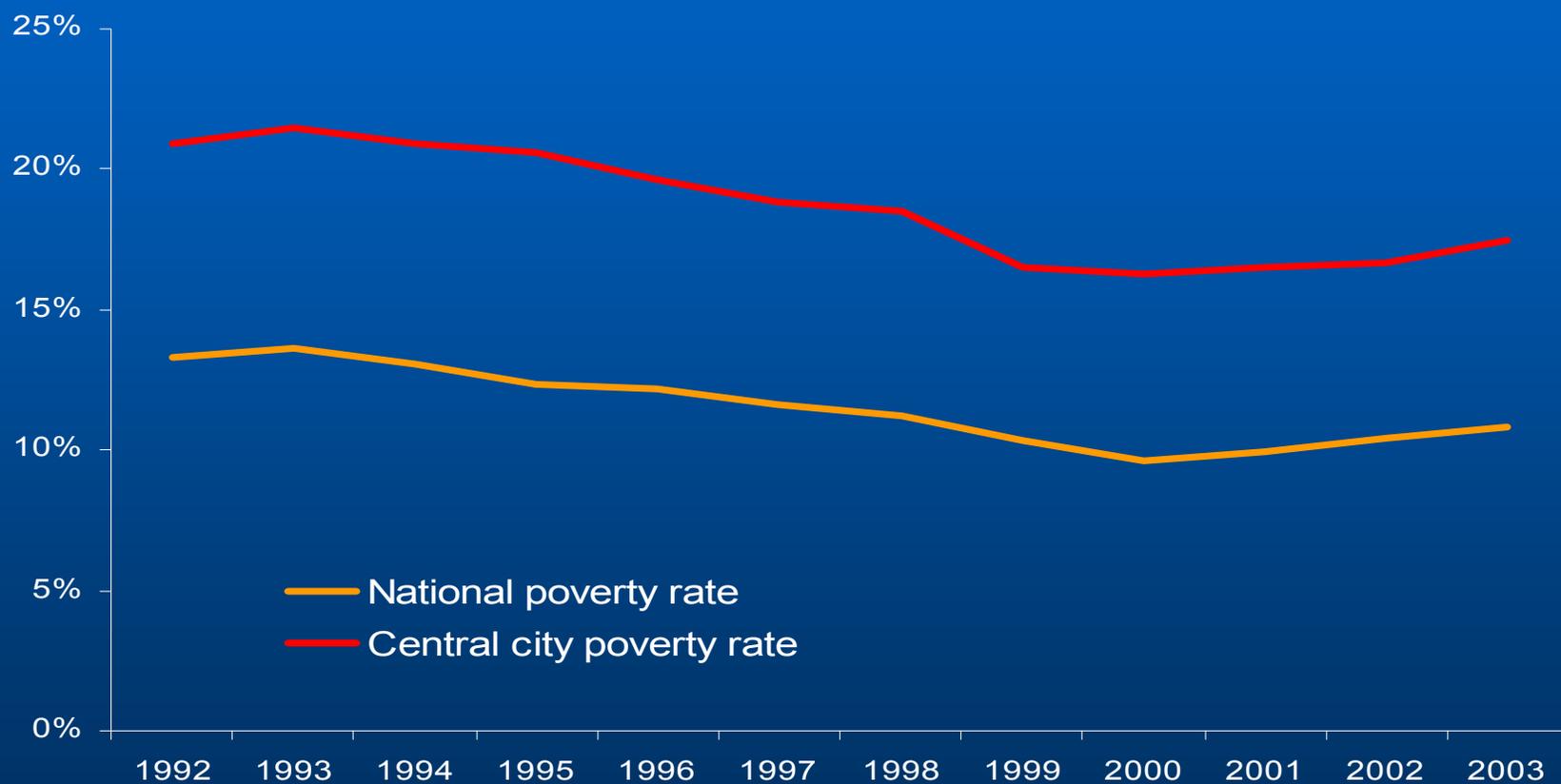
Homeownership is up, but so are foreclosures and bankruptcies



Source: Fellowes and Katz (2005), The Brookings Institution



Welfare rolls are down, but the poverty rate is trending up



Source: Fellowes and Katz (2005), The Brookings Institution



Unemployment is falling, but wages lagged inflation for most of the last three years

Real Average Hourly Earnings

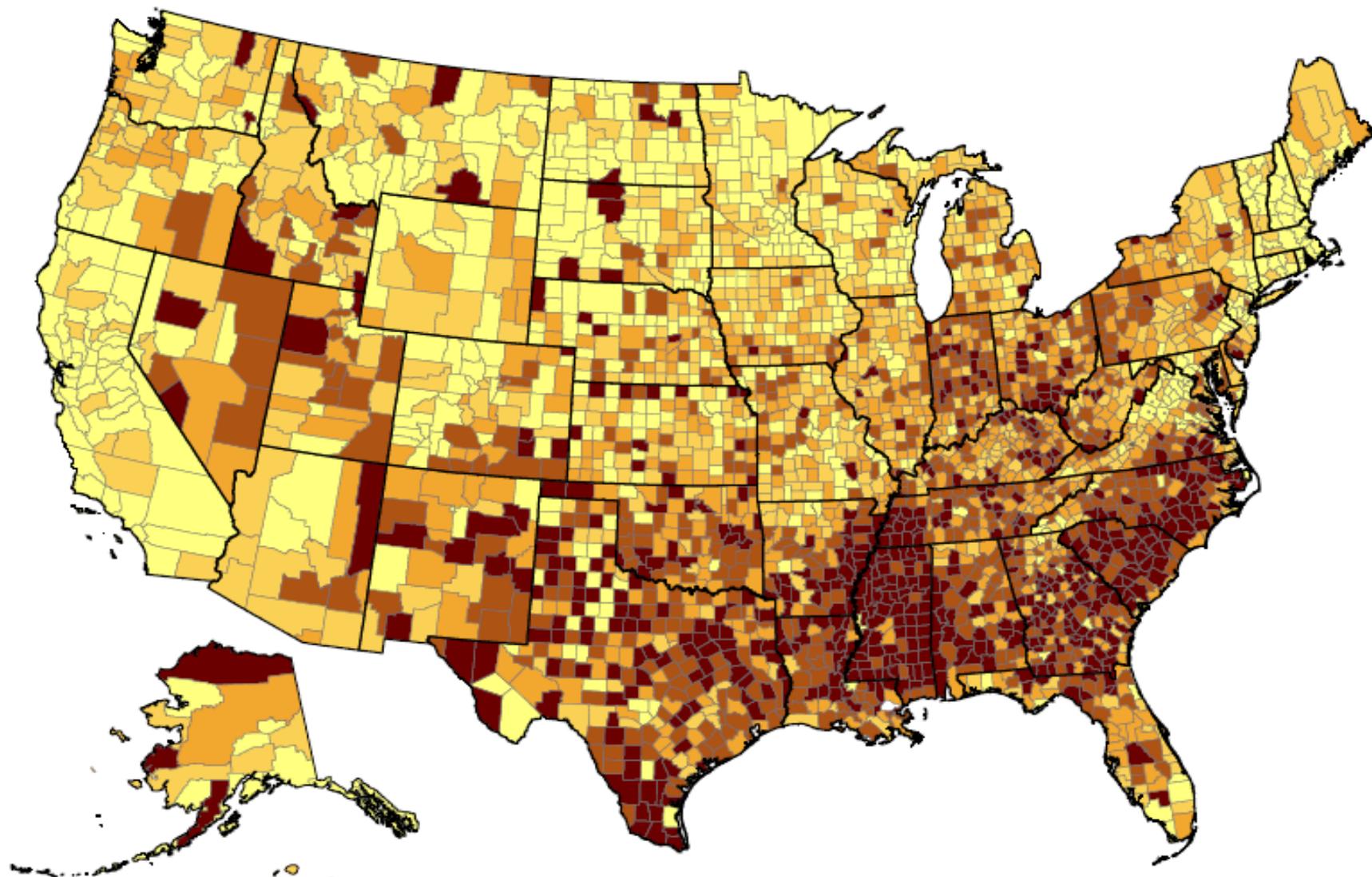


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



Bottom line: An increasing number of low-income families work and own assets like homes; but at the same time financial insecurity has significantly increased.

Of course, none of these trends are even across the country.



Ratio of Past-Due Mortgages to All Mortgage Borrowers (2004)

- Low (Less than 1.3%)
-
-
- High (More than 3.5%)

Source: Matthew Fellowes, Senior Research Associate, The Brookings Institution
 Note: Data displayed by county; past due mortgages are 60 days + past due



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There has been some state innovation within the traditional envelope of working family policies

1. Broaden access to jobs

Includes: Workforce development, spatial access to jobs, economic development, education..

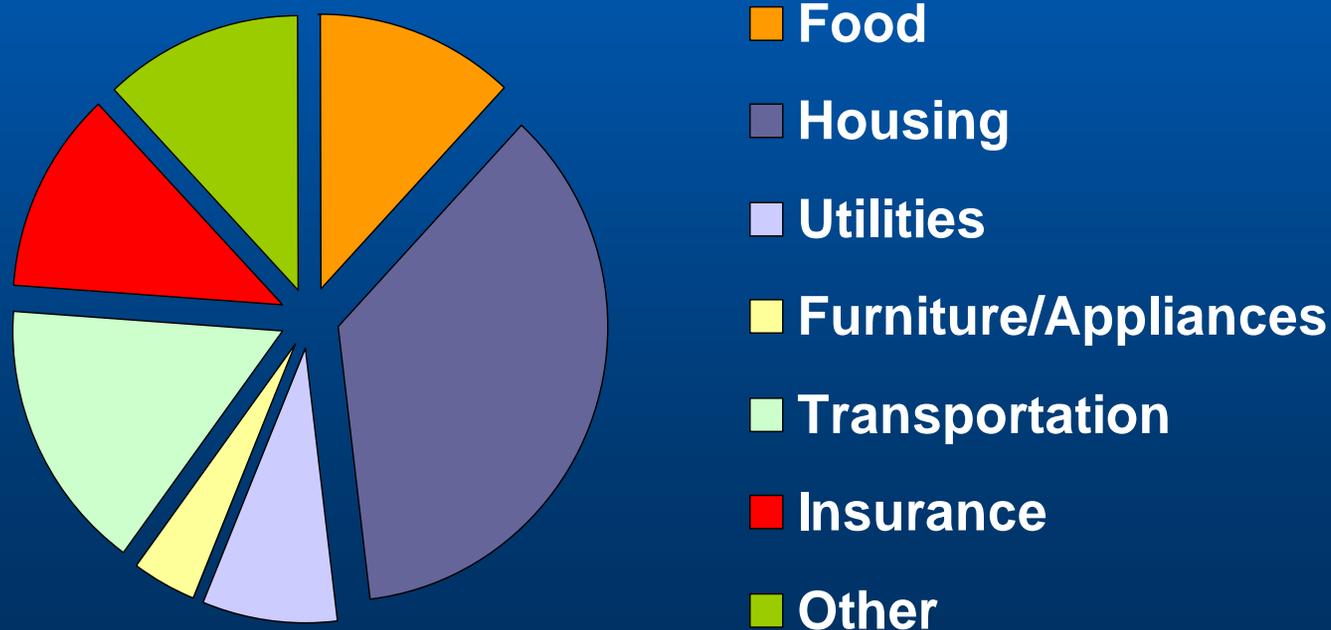
2. Make work pay

Includes: Minimum wage laws, access to federal benefits (e.g., EITC), asset development, worker benefits..



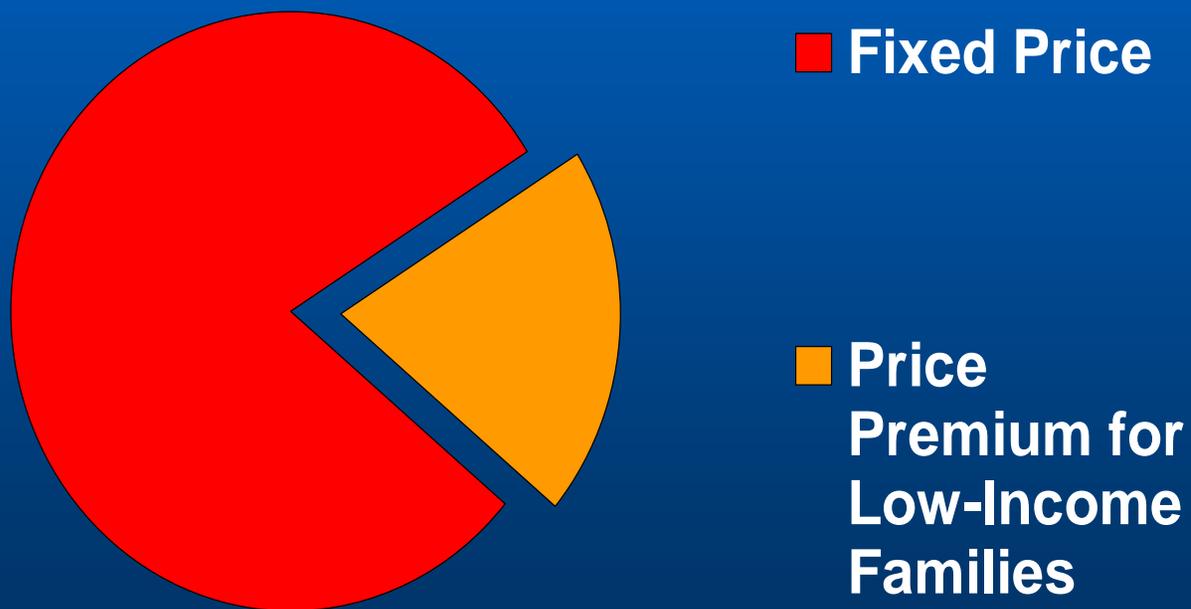
But, there's also a 3rd set of strategies emerging, which hold out a potentially powerful set of opportunities

3. Reduce the costs of living



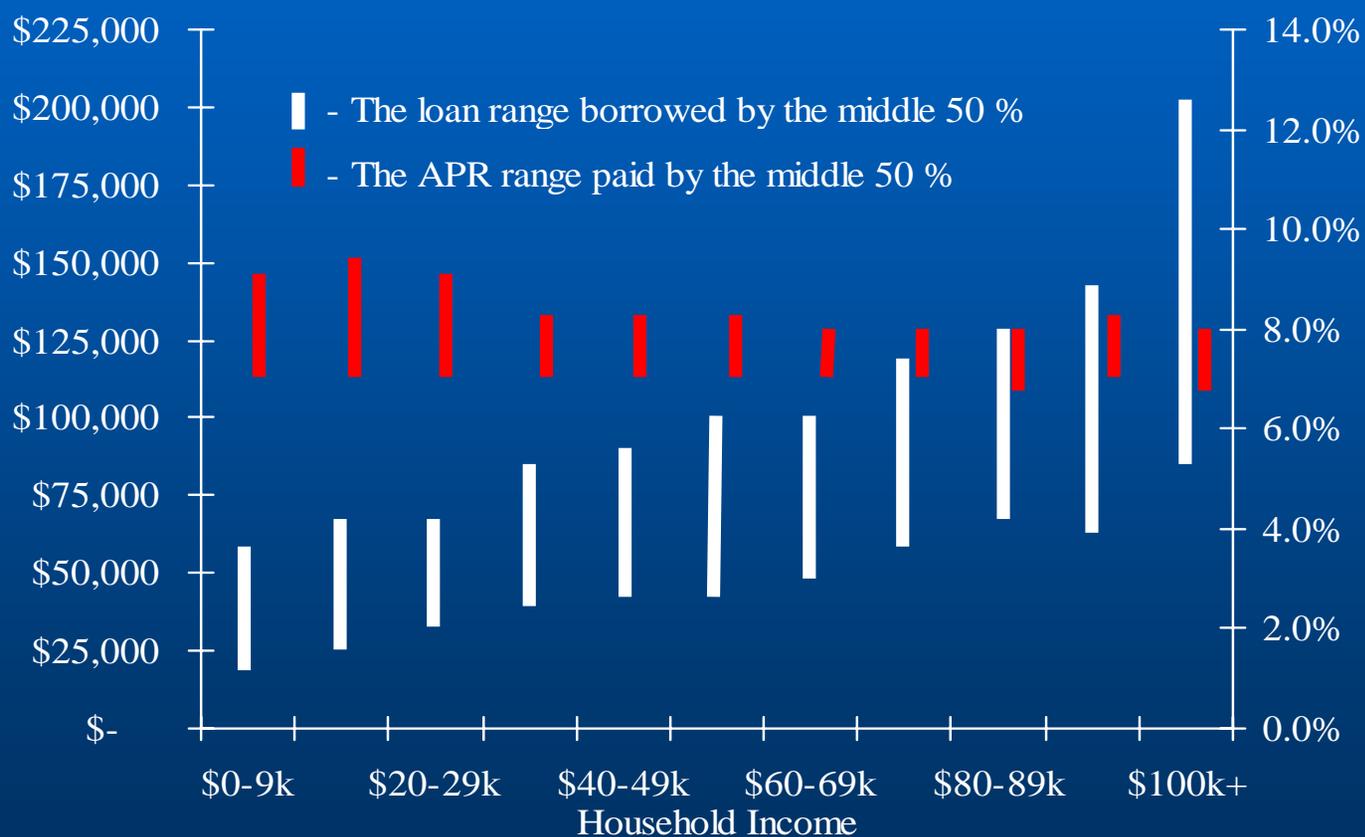


Low-wage families pay higher prices than higher income HH for nearly every basic necessity





For example, low-income families pay higher prices for mortgages



Source: Fellowes and Katz (2005), The Brookings Institution



Potentially thousands of dollars in extra income can be put back into the pockets of low-income working families for investments in educations, homes, and retirements.

- **\$100s** more to buy the same car
- **\$100s** more to borrow the same amount of money for an auto loan
- **\$100s to \$1,000s** more to insure the same car and driver
- More to buy food in their neighborhood
- **\$100s** more to access the same amount of money
- **\$100s** more to borrow the same short-term loan amount
- **\$100s** more to establish the same type of utility service
- **\$100s** more to borrow the same amount of money for a home loan
- **\$100s** more to insure the same value of a home
- **\$100s** more to buy the same appliances and furniture



To do this, state and local leaders are contending with three major causes of higher prices

Higher Risk



Market Abuses



Information Deficits





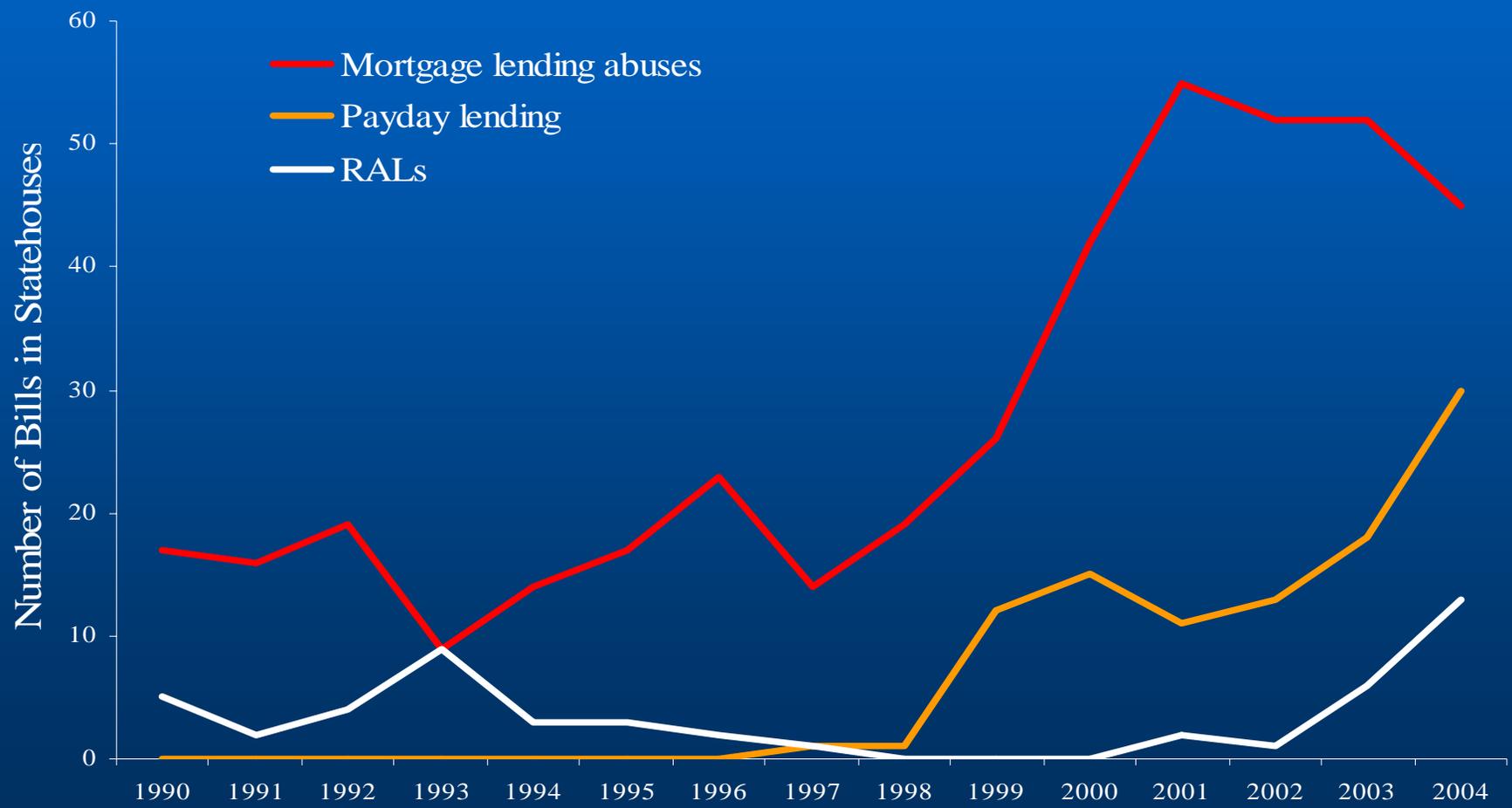
States and market entrepreneurs have taken a number of steps to address these problems in the past decade, particularly the last four years.

This activity now makes states look like
Laboratories of Capitalism.

Here are some examples:



Statehouses and the private sector have taken a number of steps to reduce **market abuses**. For example:



Source: Matthew Fellowes, The Brookings Institution



Statehouses and the private sector have taken a number of steps to reduce **risks of doing business**.

Among other strategies, they have moved to:

1. **Subsidize higher risks**



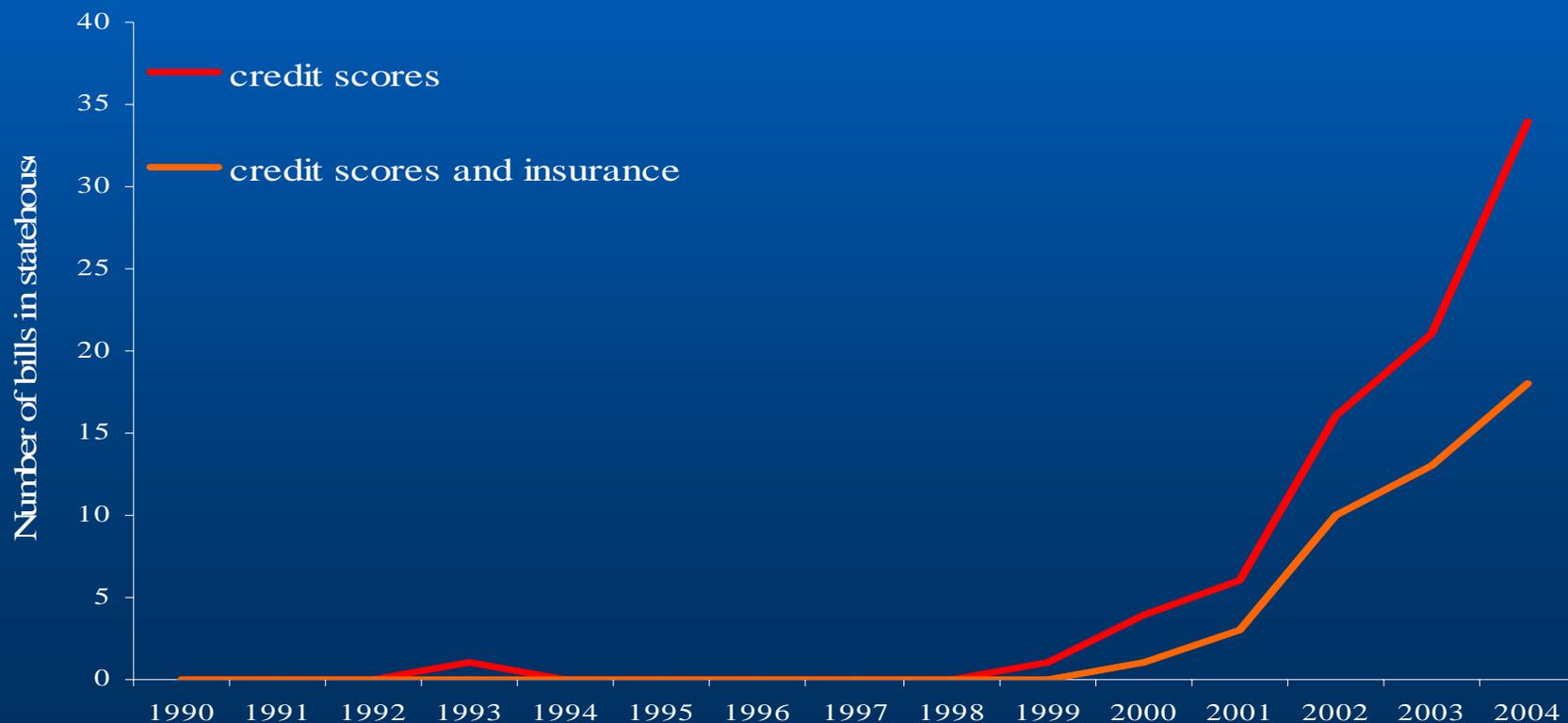
2. **Pool risks among consumers**





Statehouses and the private sector have taken a number of steps to reduce **risks of doing business**.

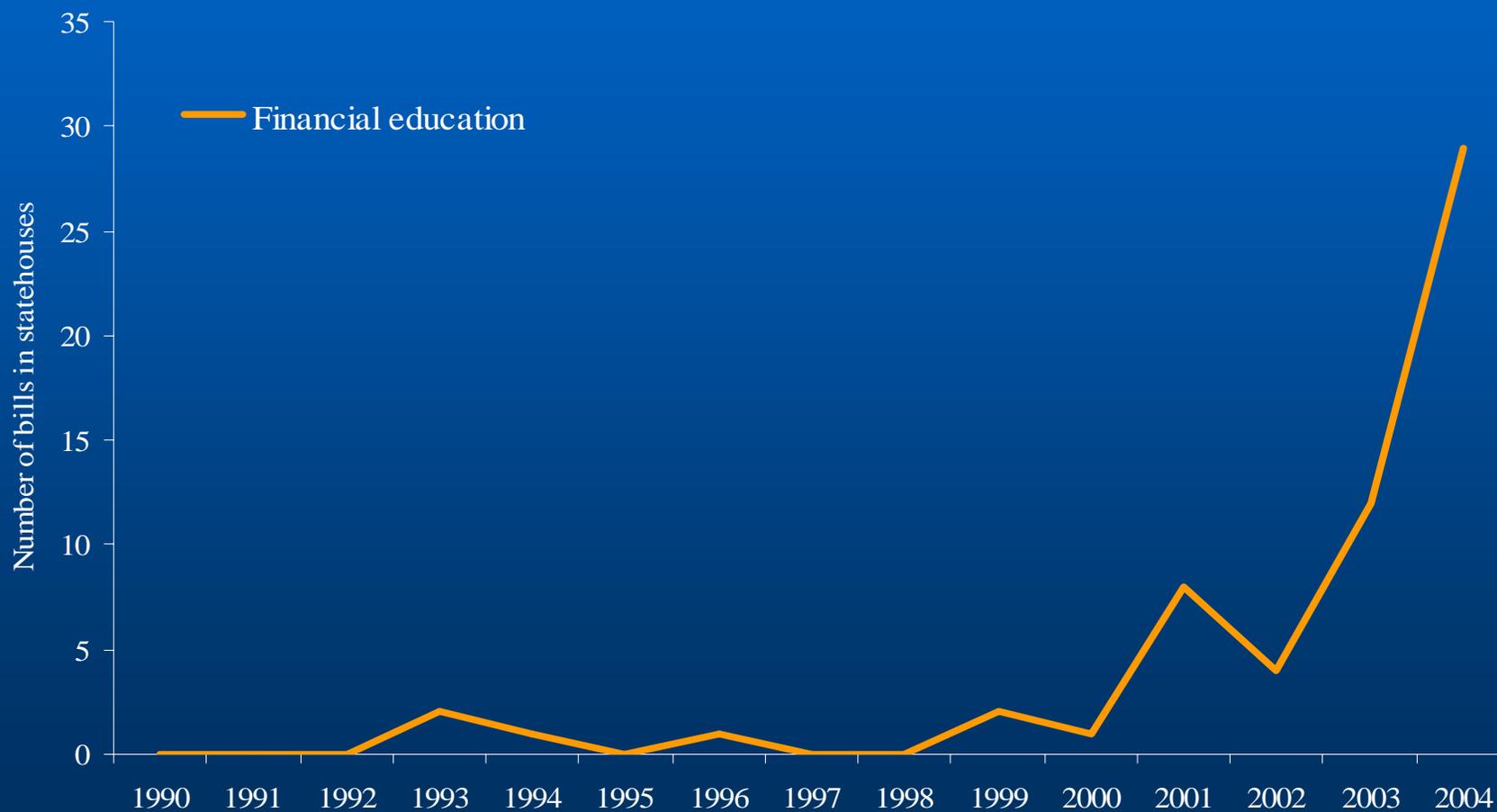
3. Examine how risk is measured



Source: Matthew Fellowes, The Brookings Institution



Statehouses and the private sector have taken a number of steps to boost **market transparency**.



Source: Matthew Fellowes, The Brookings Institution



For these reasons, state economies – both the rules in the marketplace and the opportunities for working families – are increasingly looking like **laboratories of capitalism**.

New earmarked expenditures, regulations, and market innovations are defining this experimentation in the states



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Time will tell.

In the meantime, it's important to note that:

State innovation is predictably uneven

Much of the focus is on traditional policies

The federal government is trying to usurp state power in many areas



It is absolutely essential that efforts to help low-income families get ahead involve more than just new government programs;

Leaders must also harness the self-interest of entrepreneurs and area businesses.

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▶ read an open letter from Brookings President Strobe Talbott

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