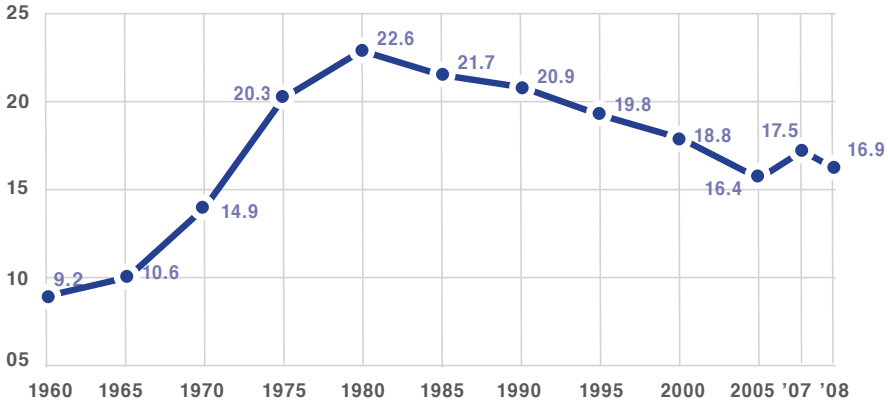


DIVORCE

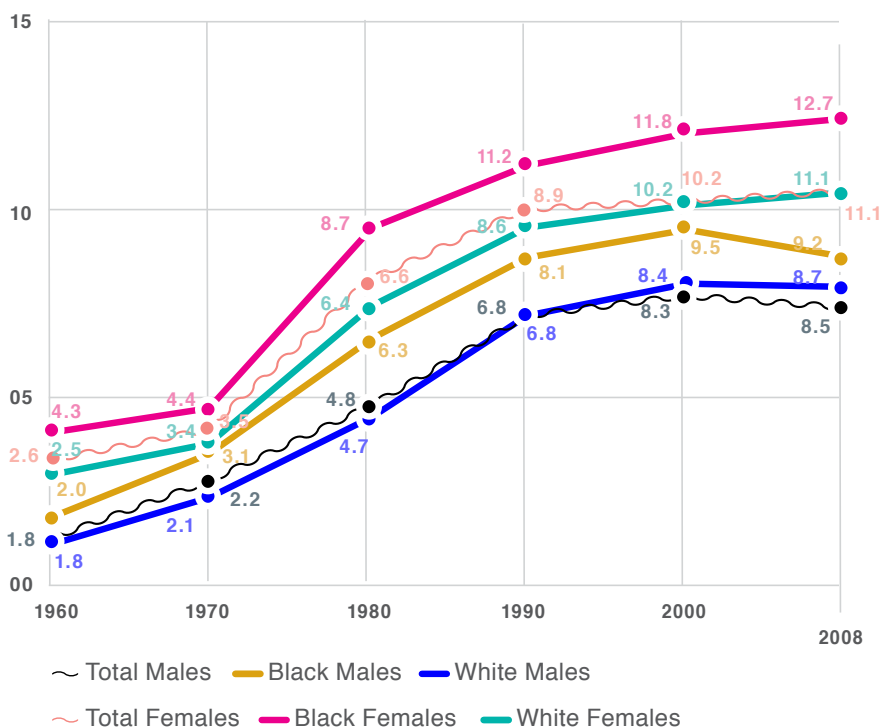
FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF DIVORCES PER 1,000 MARRIED WOMEN AGE 15 AND OLDER, BY YEAR, UNITED STATES^A



^A We have used the number of divorces per 1,000 married women age 15 and older, rather than the Crude Divorce Rate of divorces per 1,000 population to help avoid the problem of compositional changes in the population. Even this more refined measure is somewhat susceptible to compositional changes.

SOURCE: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2001*, Page 87, Table 117; National Vital Statistics Reports, August 22, 2001; California Current Population Survey Report: 2000, Table 3, March 2001; *Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths: Provisional Data for 2007*, National Vital Statistics Report 56:21, July 14, 2008, Table 2 (www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr55/nvsr56_21.pdf); *Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths: Provisional Data for 2008*, National Vital Statistics Report 57:19, July 29, 2009, Table 2 (www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57_19.pdf); and calculations by the National Marriage Project for the U.S. less California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana and Minnesota using the Current Population Surveys, 2007-2008, and the American Community Surveys, 2005-2007.

FIGURE 6. PERCENTAGE OF ALL PERSONS AGE 15 AND OLDER WHO WERE DIVORCED^B, BY SEX AND RACE, 1960-2008 UNITED STATES



^A In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau expanded its racial categories to permit respondents to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race. This means that racial data computations beginning in 2004 may not be strictly comparable to those of prior years.

^B *Divorced* indicates family status at the time of survey. Divorced respondents who later marry are counted as “married.”

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537; America’s Families and Living Arrangements (www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008/tabA1-all.pdf).

KEY FINDING: The American divorce rate today is nearly twice that of 1960, but has declined since hitting the highest point in our history in the early 1980's. For the average couple marrying for the first time in recent years, the lifetime probability of divorce or separation remains between 40 and 50 percent.

The increase in divorce, shown by the trend reported in Figure 5, probably has elicited more concern and discussion than any other family-related trend in the United States. Although the long-term trend in divorce has been upward since colonial times, the divorce rate was level for about two decades after World War II, during the period of high fertility known as the baby boom. By the middle of the 1960s, however, the incidence of divorce started to increase and it more than doubled over the next 15 years to reach an historical high point in the early 1980's.

Since then the divorce rate has modestly declined, a trend described by many experts as “leveling off at a high level.” The decline apparently represents a slight increase in marital stability.¹ Two probable reasons for this are an increase in the age at which people marry for the first time, and the fact that marriage is increasingly becoming the preserve of the well-educated, both of which are associated with greater marital stability.² Moreover, Figure 5 indicates that the divorce rate has fallen since the Great Recession began in 2008. This decline in divorce is likely driven by an increase in family solidarity in the face of serious economic crisis, as well as the fact that some couples are postponing a divorce until the economy (and the value of their home) improves.

Although a majority of divorced persons eventually remarry, the growth of divorce has led to a steep increase in the percentage of all adults who are currently divorced (Figure 6). This percentage, which was only 1.8 percent for males and 2.6 percent for females in 1960, quadrupled by the year 2000. The percentage of divorced is higher for females than for males primarily because divorced men are more likely to remarry than divorced women. Also, among those who do remarry, men generally do so sooner than women.

Overall, the chances remain very high—estimated between 40 and 50 percent—that a first marriage started in recent years will end in either divorce or separation before one partner dies.³ (But see the accompanying box: “Your Chances of Divorce May Be Much Lower Than You Think.”) The likelihood of divorce has varied considerably among different segments of the American population, being higher for Blacks than for Whites, for instance, and higher in the South and West than in other parts of the country. But these variations have been diminishing. The trend toward a greater similarity of divorce rates between Whites and Blacks is largely attributable to the fact that fewer Blacks are marrying.⁴ At the same time, there has been little change in such traditionally large divorce rate differences as between those who marry when they are teenagers compared to those who marry after age 21, high-school dropouts compared to college graduates, and the non-religious compared to the religiously committed. Teenagers, high-school drop outs, and the non-religious who marry have considerably higher divorce rates.⁵

- 1 Joshua R. Goldstein, "The Leveling of Divorce in the United States," *Demography* 36 (1999), 409-414.
- 2 Tim B. Heaton, "Factors Contributing to Increased Marital Stability in the United States," *Journal of Family Issues* 23 (2002), 392-409.
- 3 Robert Schoen and Nicola Standish, "The Retrenchment of Marriage: Results from Marital Status Life Tables for the United States, 1995," *Population and Development Review* 27-3 (2001), 553-563; R. Kelly Raley and Larry Bumpass, "The Topography of the Divorce Plateau: Levels and Trends in Union Stability in the United States after 1980," *Demographic Research* 8-8 (2003), 245-259.
- 4 Jay D. Teachman, "Stability across Cohorts in Divorce Risk Factors," *Demography* 39-2 (2002), 331-351.
- 5 Raley and Bumpass, 2003.

**YOUR CHANCES OF DIVORCE
MAY BE MUCH LOWER THAN YOU THINK**

By now almost everyone has heard that the national divorce rate is almost 50% of all marriages. This is true, but the rate must be interpreted with caution and several important caveats. For many people, the actual chances of divorce are far below 50/50.

The background characteristics of people entering a marriage have major implications for their risk of divorce. Here are some percentage point decreases in the risk of divorce or separation *during the first ten years of marriage*, according to various personal and social factors^a:

FACTORS	PERCENT DECREASE IN RISK OF DIVORCE
<i>Annual income over \$50,000 (vs. under \$25,000)</i>	-30
<i>Having a baby seven months or more after marriage (vs. before marriage)</i>	-24
<i>Marrying over 25 years of age (vs. under 18)</i>	-24
<i>Own family of origin intact (vs. divorced parents)</i>	-14
<i>Religious affiliation (vs. none)</i>	-14
<i>Some college (vs. high-school dropout)</i>	-13

So if you are a reasonably well-educated person with a decent income, come from an intact family and are religious, and marry after age twenty five without having a baby first, your chances of divorce are very low indeed.

Also, it should be realized that the “close to 50%” divorce rate refers to the percentage of marriages entered into during a particular year that are projected to end in divorce or separation before one spouse dies. Such projections assume that the divorce and death rates occurring that year will continue indefinitely into the future—an assumption that is useful more as an indicator of the instability of marriages in the recent past than as a predictor of future events. In fact, the divorce rate has been dropping, slowly, since reaching a peak around 1980, and the rate could be lower (or higher) in the future than it is today.^b

A Matthew D. Bramlett and William D. Mosher, *Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the United States*, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital and Health Statistics, 23 (22), 2002. The risks are calculated for women only.

B Rose M. Kreider and Jason M. Fields, "Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces, 2001," *Current Population Reports*, P70-80, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.