

Methodology

This analysis draws on data from three sources: the [National Center for Health Statistics](#) (NCHS), the [American Community Survey](#) (ACS) and the [Survey of Income and Program Participation](#) (SIPP).

The National Center for Health Statistics

Some of our analysis of trends in divorce is based on vital statistics data from the NCHS. The NCHS provides aggregate summary statistics on divorce. From 1958 to 1996, it provided detailed divorce statistics for states that were part of the Divorce Registration Area (DRA), with 31 states participating in 1990. These vital statistics provided by NCHS are considered the best data on divorce trends [up through 1990](#).

Declining divorce rate (Fact #1)

For the 1960 to 1990 divorce rate per 1,000 married women, we use the [Advance Report of Final Divorce Statistics, 1989 and 1990](#) (Table 1. Divorces and annulments and rates: United States, 1940-90).

For the 1997 divorce rate per 1,000 married women, we use [Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths for 1997](#) (see text on page 3).

Increase in ‘gray divorce’ (Fact #2)

For the 1990 divorce rate per 1,000 married women ages 15 to 49 and ages 50 and older, we use the [Advance Report of Final Divorce Statistics, 1989 and 1990](#) (Table 5). To calculate age-specific divorce rates from the five-year age groups provided, we follow the methods used by [Susan L. Brown and I-Fen Lin \(2012\)](#). Specifically, we sum the numbers of divorced and numbers of those at risk of divorce across age groups, then divide the number divorced by the number at risk for women ages 15 to 49 and ages 50 and older. To account for the fact that the DRA sample represents 49% of all divorces, we divide age-specific numbers of those divorced and those at risk by 0.49.

The American Community Survey

The ACS is the largest household survey in the United States, with a sample of more than 3 million addresses. Collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, it covers topics previously included in the long form of the decennial census. The ACS estimates the size and characteristics of the nation’s resident population.

The ACS microdata files used for this analysis were provided by the [Integrated Public Use Microdata Series](#) (IPUMS) from the University of Minnesota. IPUMS standardizes variable names and coding across years as much as possible, making it easier to analyze data over time.

Starting in 2008, the ACS began asking if respondents had divorced in the past 12 months. Since then, [the ACS is considered to be the best data source for calculating divorce trends](#).

The analyses of trends in divorce, marriage length prior to divorce, employment status, and household income come from the ACS.

Tests for statistical significance are conducted using 95% confidence intervals and [ACS replicate weights](#).

Declining divorce rate (Fact #1)

We use the ACS to calculate the 2008 to 2019 and 2021 to 2023 divorce rates for married women ages 15 and older. We obtain number of divorces in a given year from [Table B12503: Divorces in the Last Year by Sex and by Marital Status for the Population 15 Years and Over](#). We obtain the number of women currently married in a given year from [Table B12001: Sex by Marital Status for the Population 15 Years and Over](#).

Note: The Census Bureau links are currently not accessible due to the shutdown of the federal U.S. government.

Increase in ‘gray divorce’ (Fact #2)

We use the ACS to calculate the 2008 and 2023 divorce rate for married women ages 15 to 49 and ages 50 and older. We estimate counts of the number of women divorced in the past year, and the number of women currently married, using ACS microdata provided by IPUMS.

When divorces occur (Fact #3)

To calculate marriage length, we use information on whether respondents were divorced in the past year, current marital status, and year most recently married. If respondents reported having divorced in the past year and their current marital status is divorced, we calculate their marriage length as 2023 (the survey year) minus the year married. In 3.3% of cases, a respondent reported being divorced in the past year, but their current marital status as married. This means they divorced and then subsequently married in the year leading up to the survey. In these cases, information on “year most recently married” reflects their current marriage, not the one that ended in divorce. We exclude these respondents when calculating marriage length.

Divorce and employment (Fact #5)

We use information on current marital status, employment status, and number of times married to calculate shares of employment by marital status.

Divorce and household income, wealth (Fact #6)

We look at household income among working-age (ages 18 to 64) householders and spouses/partners. Adjusted household income for this report follows the methodology from [Pew Research Center's previous work on the American middle class](#).

The Survey of Income and Program Participation

The SIPP is a household panel survey collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. Its primary focus is the income of U.S. households and their participation in government programs. It also collects a detailed marital history – including the number of times respondents have married and whether each marriage ended in divorce – and a household relationship roster describing how each member of the household is related to one another.

We use the SIPP for analyses of the share of married adults that have ever divorced, household wealth differences by marital status, the share of divorced adults that have ever remarried, and children among adults who are remarried.

In some cases, SIPP provides monthly-level data; we use data from the month of December for all variables. We exclude respondents who are not living in the U.S. and respondents living in group quarters or other non-permanent residences.

Tests for statistical significance are conducted using 95% confidence intervals and [SIPP replicate weights](#).

First marriage and divorce (Fact #4)

We use information on whether respondents have ever been married and whether their first marriage ended in divorce to determine the share of ever-married adults whose first marriage ended in divorce.

The analysis of education is based on adults ages 25 and older. All other analyses are based on adults ages 15 and older.

Divorce and household income, wealth (Fact #6)

We use information on total household net worth (or wealth), and calculate medians based on the marital statuses of householders and spouses/partners.

Remarriage after divorce (Fact #7)

We use information on whether respondents have ever been divorced, whether each marriage ended in divorce, and number of times married to determine the share of respondents that have remarried following a divorce.

Analyses are based on those ages 15 and older, except for education, which is based on adults ages 25 and older.

We use information on whether respondents have an unmarried (or cohabiting) partner in the household, current marital status, and gender to calculate the share of divorced men and women who have an unmarried (or cohabiting) partner.

Living with stepchildren (Fact #8)

We use information on whether the current union is a childbearing union, current marital status, number of times married to determine whether the respondent has any biological children with their current spouse, among remarried adults. We further use the household relationship roster to identify if respondents live with any stepchildren.