

# General Marriage Rate and General Divorce Rate, 2008: A Comparison of ACS & NVS Data

Julissa Cruz & Wendy D. Manning

The estimated numbers of marriages and divorces from 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) data differ with those drawn from 2008 National Vital Statistics (NVS) data. Therefore, calculating General Marriage and Divorce Rates with ACS data and NVS data produces dissimilar results. The following figures compare the General Marriage Rates (GMRs) and General Divorce Rates (GDRs) in 2008 for states in the U.S., among women 15 years and older, using each data source. A 2010 Census report (Elliott, Simmons, & Lewis)<sup>1</sup> compares U.S. crude marriage rates (CMR) and crude divorce rates (CDR) calculated with 2008 ACS data and 2007 NVS data and concludes they are comparable. The Census report uses the total population count as the denominator for the CMR and the CDR (the typical strategy for estimation of crude rates).

We estimate the GMR, and for the denominator this report uses the number of women age 15 or older at risk of marrying (those who are never married, widowed, or divorced and those who married in the past year). For the GDR denominator, this report uses the number of women age 15 or older at risk of divorce (those who are currently married or separated and those who divorced in the past year). The same denominators are used in this report for computations of the GDR and GMR for ACS and NVS rates.

## 2008 General Marriage Rates by State, Women 15+ (Figure 1)

- Although the U.S. GMR calculated with NVS data (34.45) is similar to the U.S. GMR calculated with ACS data (35.46), it is outside the margin of error.
  - 2008 NVS data for Arizona, New Mexico, and New York are incomplete. These states are excluded from the comparison.
- Twenty-four states have NVS GMRs that are within the margin of error of the GMRs calculated with ACS data.
- Twenty-three states (and Washington, D.C.) have NVS GMRs that are outside the margin of error of the GMRs calculated with ACS data. On average, GMRs calculated with ACS data are higher than GMRs calculated with NVS data.
  - Some states, such as Nevada and Hawaii, are wedding destination locations. Therefore, the GMR produced with NVS data are inflated, as NVS counts all marriages that take place in the state, regardless of residency status.

## 2008 General Divorce Rates by State, Women 15+ (Figure 2)

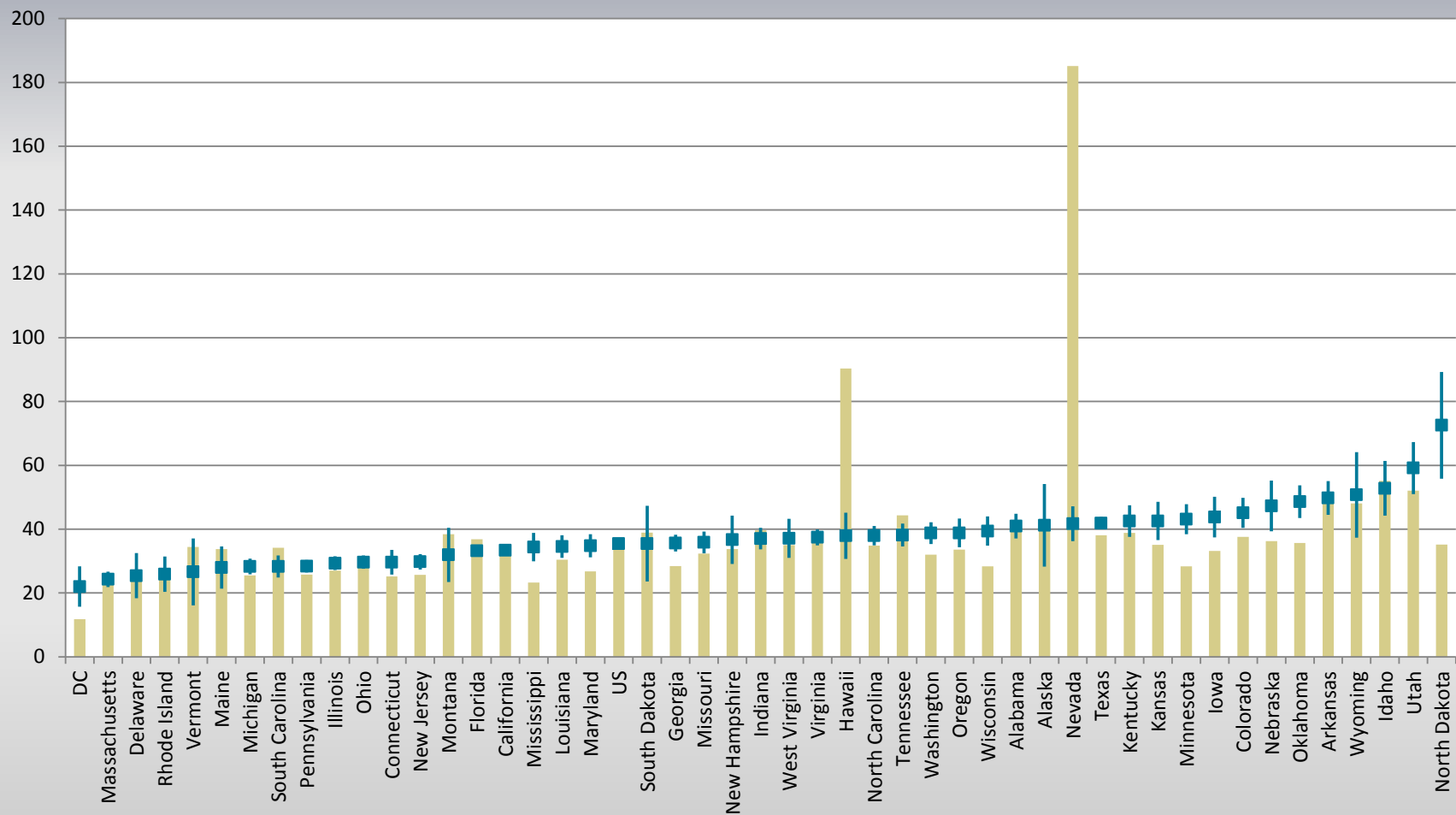
- The U.S. GDR calculated with NVS data (16.65) differs significantly from the U.S. GDR calculated with ACS data (20.59).
  - 2008 NVS data are unavailable for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota. These states are excluded from the comparison.
- Most states (and Washington, D.C.) require a period of divorce residency to file for divorce; exceptions include Alaska, South Dakota, and Washington. The residency requirement period for most states is at least 6 months, but some require as little as 6 weeks residency. In addition, some states require not only residency, but domicile (where a spouse has a fixed, permanent home in that state with the intention of staying) to file for divorce.
  - The 2008 NVS GDRs for Alaska and South Dakota are within the margin of error of the 2008 ACS GDRs, but Washington is not.
- Twenty-three states (and Washington, D.C.) have NVS GDRs that are within the margin of error of the GDRs calculated with ACS data.
- Twenty-one states have NVS GDRs that are outside the margin of error of the GDRs calculated with ACS data. On average, GDRs calculated with ACS data are higher than GDRs calculated with NVS data.
  - A content test of the ACS found that 8% of women who indicated having divorced in the past 12 months had not yet finalized their divorce. This may be why the ACS reports are slightly higher (Elliott, Simmons, & Lewis 2010).
  - Note that the NVS GDRs include annulments, so this may bias the results toward higher GDRs with the NVS.

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, D. B., Simmons, T., & Lewis, J. M. (2010). Evaluation of the Marital Events Items on the ACS. [http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/marriage/data/acs/Evaluation\\_paper.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/marriage/data/acs/Evaluation_paper.pdf).

# Figure 1. 2008 General Marriage Rates by State, Women 15+

Excluding states: Arizona, New Mexico, and New York, as 2008 NVS data are incomplete

■ NVS GMR ■ ACS GMR



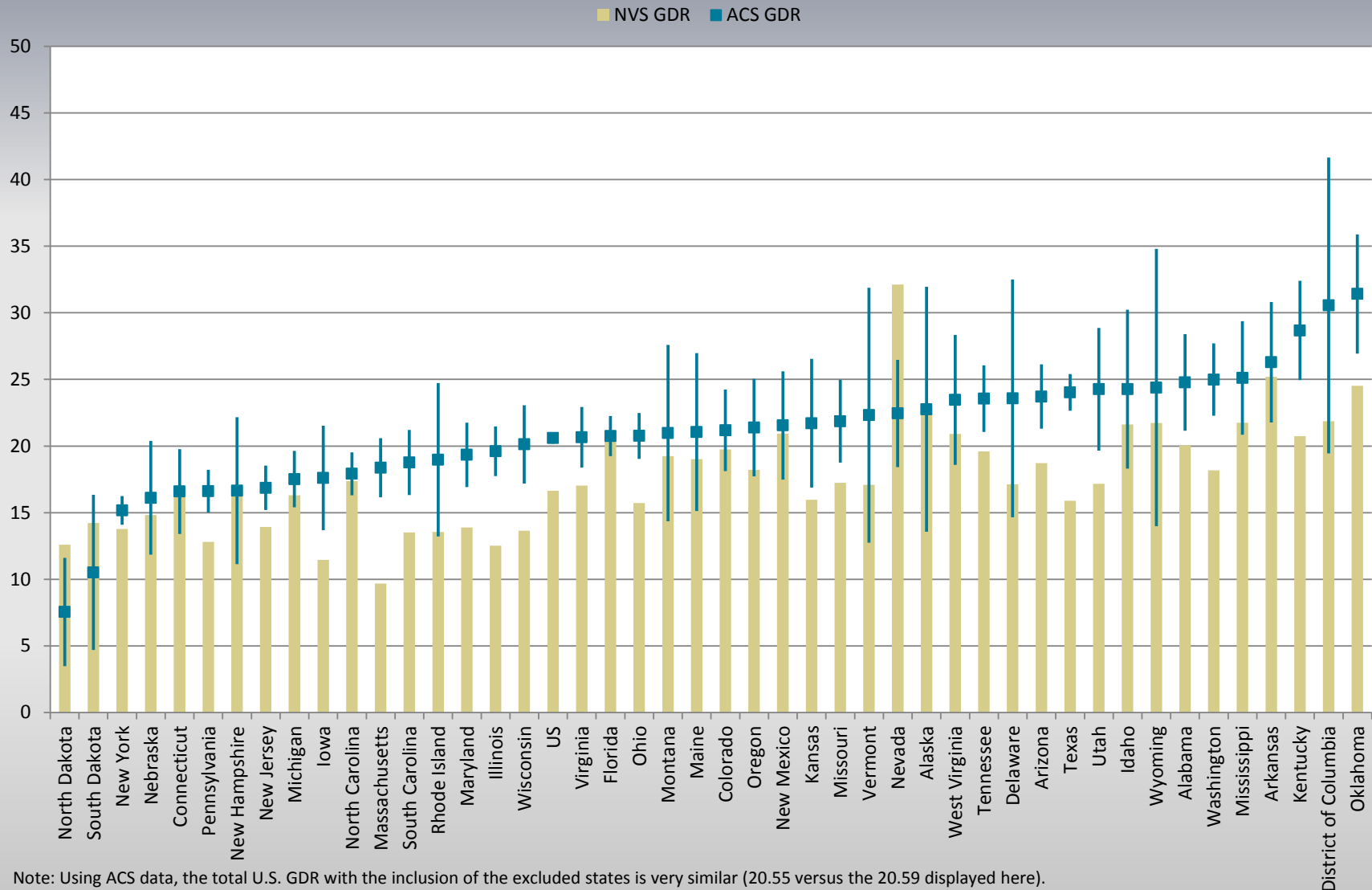
Note: Using ACS data, the total U.S. GMR with the inclusion of the excluded states is very similar (34.78 versus the 35.46 displayed here).

Sources: 2008 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; Tejada-Vera B, Sutton PD. Births, marriages, divorces, and deaths: Provisional data for 2009. National vital statistics reports; vol 58, no 25. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2010.



## Figure 2. 2008 General Divorce Rates by State, Women 15+

Excluding states: California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota, as 2008 NVS data are unavailable



Note: Using ACS data, the total U.S. GDR with the inclusion of the excluded states is very similar (20.55 versus the 20.59 displayed here).

Sources: 2008 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; Tejada-Vera B, Sutton PD. Births, marriages, divorces, and deaths: Provisional data for 2009. National vital statistics reports; vol 58, no 25. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2010.

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