Marriage: More than a Century of Change, 1900-2022
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Despite the substantial decline in the U.S. marriage rate in recent decades, there is significant variation in the pace and magnitude of this decline across demographic groups. This Family Profile charts the marriage patterns of women aged 15 and older since 1900 using data from the National Vital Statistics, Decennial Censuses, and the American Community Survey. It also explores marital status variation by race/ethnicity and educational attainment. This profile is an update of FP-20-21, FP-18-17, and FP-13-13.

Change in the Marriage Rate in the U.S., 1900-2022

- The marriage rate in 2022 (31.3 women married in the last year per one thousand unmarried women) represents a 54% decline since 1900 (68.2).
- The U.S. marriage rate peaked in 1920 at 92.3, which was almost triple the 2022 rate.
- The marriage rate steadily dropped from 1970 to 2010 but has since stabilized.

The U.S. marriage rate has decreased by 54% since 1900.

Change in Marital Status, 1900-2022

Figure 2: Current Marital Status of Women, 1900-2022

- The share of currently married women (including those in a remarriage) has decreased from its peak of 65.4% in 1960 to 46.4% in 2022.
- Since 1900, the proportion of women who were currently separated or divorced has increased dramatically from 0.4% of women to 13.7% in 2022.
- After remaining relatively stable since 1900, the proportion of currently widowed steadily declined from 12.8% in 1970 to 8.3% in 2022.
- At 31.5% the percentage of women who were never married in 2022 was nearly equivalent to the rate seen in 1900 (31.3%). The lowest percentage was seen in 1960 with only 17.3% of women being never married.
Variation in Percentage Currently Married According to Race and Ethnicity, 1940-2022

- Regardless of race/ethnicity, about two-fifths of all women were married in 1940.
- Except for Asian women, by 2022 the share of currently married women across all racial and ethnic groups had declined.
- The percentage of Asian women who were currently married remained relatively stable from 1940 (57%) into 2022 (58%).
- The largest drop in the share of currently married women was observed among Black women—dropping by more than half from 59% in 1940 to 27% in 2022.
- In 2022, the percentage of currently married Hispanic women and women of other races/ethnicities dropped to their lowest observed levels, at 42% and 39% respectively.
- Since 1940, the percentage of White women who were married dropped from 61% to 51% in 2022.

Figure 3. Percentage of Women Currently Married among Racial/Ethnic Groups, 1940-2022

Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1900-2010 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 (IPUMS).

Data Sources:


References:


Suggested Citation:

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