

Marriage in the U.S.

Twenty-five Years of Change, 1989-2014



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Over the past few decades, there have been rapid changes in marriage patterns in the U.S. The shift in marriage is marked by a declining marriage rate, a historically high median age at first marriage (29.2 among men, 27.5 among women), and growing premarital and postmarital cohabitation that less often eventuate in marriage (Cherlin 2004; FP-14-18; Manning et al. 2014). Using data from the 1989 and 2014 Current Population Survey, this profile examines women's experiences of marriage over the past 25 years. We present the share of American women aged 18-49 who had ever been married by race/ethnicity and by educational attainment. In a related profile (FP-15-01), we reported 25 years of change in cohabitation.

Share of Women Aged 18-49 Who Ever Married, 1989-2014

- A declining share of American women 18-49 are ever married.
- In 1989, 27% of women aged 18-49 were never married; by 2014, 40% had yet to tie the knot (Figure 1).
- The drop in the share of ever married women is largest among those who are younger (aged 18-29), suggesting much of the decline in marriage results from postponement rather than a retreat from marriage.

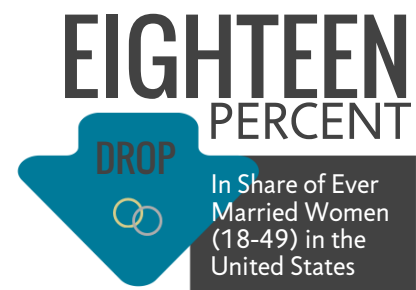
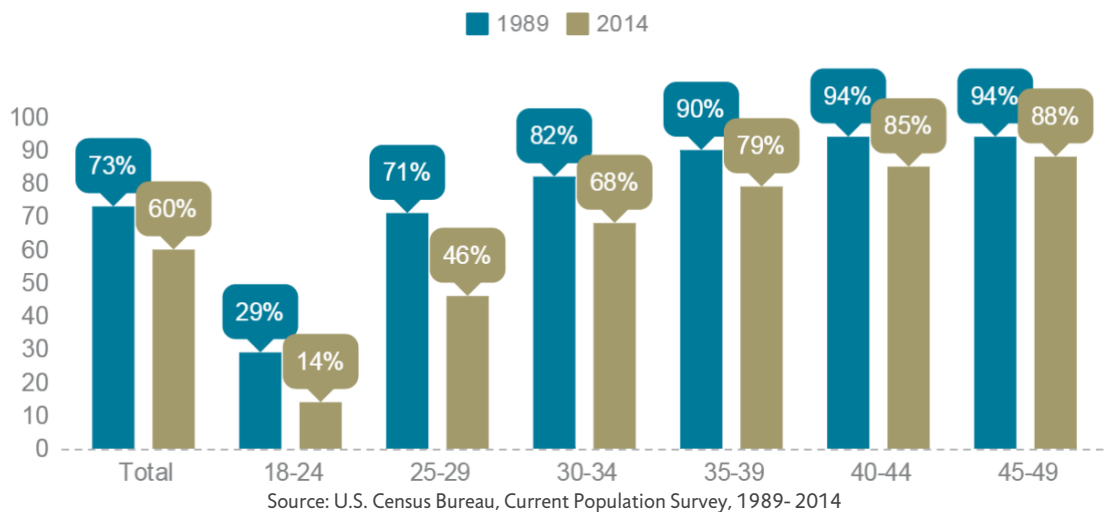


Figure 1. Twenty-five Years of Change in the Share of Women (18-49) Who Ever Married by Age at Interview



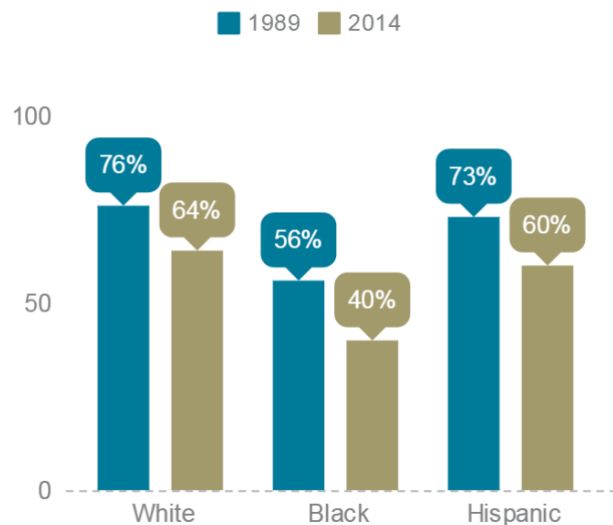
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Change in Marriage Across Race/Ethnicity

- The decline in marriage over the past 25 years cuts across racial/ethnic groups (Figure 2).
- Blacks experienced the greatest decline in the share of women aged 18-49 who had ever married (29%). Hispanics and Whites experienced similar declines (18% and 16%, respectively).
- White women were the most likely to have experienced marriage in 1989 and 2014—more than two-thirds (64%) of White women had been married in 2014.
- Larger shares of White and Hispanic women had been married in 2014 than Black women in 1989.

Figure 2. Twenty-five Years of Change in the Share of Women (18-49) Who Ever Married by Racial/ Ethnic Status



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1989-2014

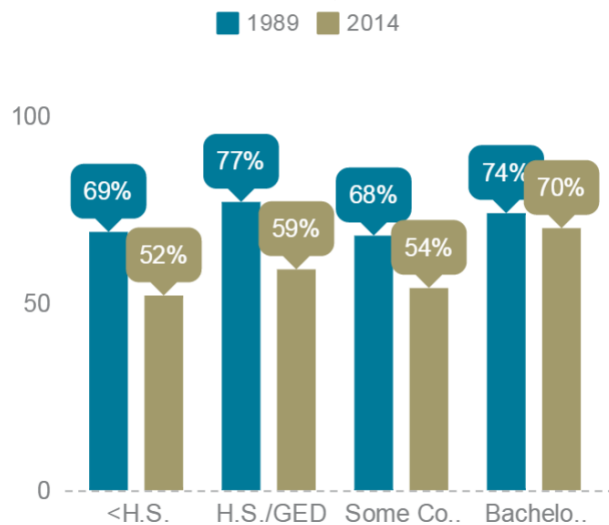
Suggested Citation:

Lamidi, E. (2015). Marriage in the U.S.: Twenty-five Years of Change, 1989-2014 (FP-15-17). National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from: <http://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr/resources/data/family-profiles/lamidi-marriage-25-yrs-change-fp-15-17>

Change in Marriage Across Education

- There is a large educational divide over time in the marriage patterns of women in the U.S.
 - Women with at least a Bachelor's degree experienced the smallest marriage decline.
 - Women with less than a high school education experienced the greatest decline in marriage.
 - Between 1989 and 2014, the share of college-educated women who ever married declined by 5% compared to more than a 20% decline among women with less than a Bachelor's degree.
- In the late 1980's women with a high school degree surpassed college educated women in their marriage experience. Yet today high school educated women are married at the same level as their counterparts without a high school degree or some college education. The highest share ever married in 2014 is among college-educated women.

Figure 3. Twenty-five Years of Change in the Share of Women (18-49) Who Ever Married by Educational Attainment



This project is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.

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