



Marital Status Distribution of U.S. Adults Aged 65 and Older, 1990-2022

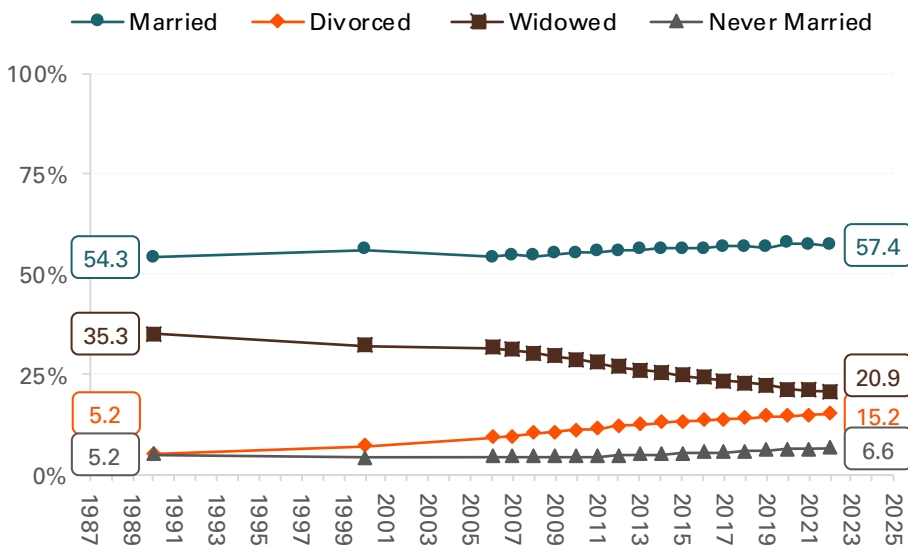
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The U.S. is an aging population with more than 10,000 Baby Boomers turning age 65 this year (Ansberry, 2024). The marital status composition of older adults is changing, reflecting earlier experiences and transitions during the adult life course as well as contemporaneous changes, such as the rise in divorce in later life. One in ten persons divorcing in the U.S. today is aged 65 or older (Brown & Lin, 2022). Unlike prior generations, today's older adults are increasingly never-married or divorced. At the same time, gains in life expectancy have reduced widowhood and contributed to enduring marriages. Still, nearly 1.4 million Baby Boomers experienced a marital transition (i.e., marriage, divorce, or widowhood) in 2021 (Westrick-Payne, 2023). This profile investigates change in the shares of currently married, divorced, widowed, and never married U.S. adults aged 65 and older since 1990. Along with overall trends, we show the patterns separately by sex. For the two time points of 1990 and 2000, we use Decennial Census Data. We then use American Community Survey Data for annual estimates from 2006 to 2022.

Distribution of Marital Status

- Regardless of year, a majority of older adults were currently married, increasing from 54.3% in 1990 to 57.4% in 2022.
- The share of widowed older adults dropped precipitously over the observation period. In 1990, more than one-third (35.3%) of older adults were widowed versus just one-fifth (20.9%) in 2022.
- The shares of divorced and never married older adults were modest in 1990 at 5.2% and gradually rose over time.
 - The share of older adults who were never married increased to 6.6% in 2022.
 - The share of older adults who were divorced in 2022 (15.2%) was nearly triple the 1990 level (5.2%), a much more extreme shift than observed among the never married.

Figure 1. Distribution of Marital Status among U.S. Adults Aged 65 and Older, 1990, 2000, & 2006-2022



Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-USA Decennial Census, 1990 & 2000; IPUMS-USA American Community Survey, 2006 to 2022

Suggested Citation:

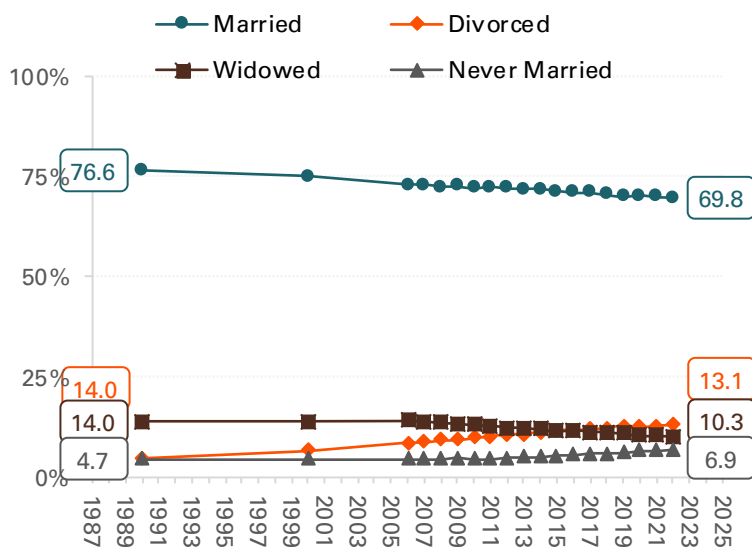
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Distribution of Marital Status among Men

- Most older men were married throughout the observation period.
- Despite the increase in the share of older adults (men and women combined) who were currently married, this share declined over time for men, falling from 76.6% in 1990 to 69.8% in 2022.
- In 1990, a larger share of older men was widowed (14.0%) than divorced (4.8%). However, from 2015 onward, this relationship reversed. In 2022, 13.1% of older men were divorced compared to the 10.3% who were widowed.
- The share of never married older adult men steadily rose over time (4.7% in 1990 to 6.9% in 2022) but always remained the smallest group.

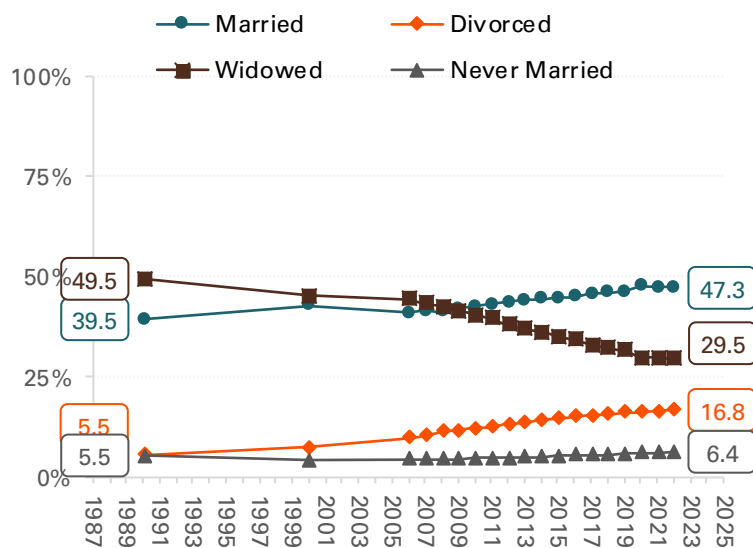
Figure 2. Distribution of Marital Status among U.S. Men Aged 65 and Older, 1990, 2000, & 2006-2022



Distribution of Marital Status among Women

- The share of older women who were married grew over time, climbing from 39.5% in 1990 to 47.3% in 2022.
- Older women were more often widowed (49.5%) than married (39.5%) in 1990, whereas by 2022 the pattern had reversed.
 - The greatest overall change observed was among the share of widowed women, which dropped from about half (49.5%) in 1990 to less than one-third (29.5%) in 2022.
 - Currently married did not emerge as the modal marital status for older women until 2010.
- Similar to older men, older women experienced increases in the shares divorced and never married (each were hovering at 5.5% in 1990).
 - By 2022, the share of divorced older women increased by three-fold to 16.8%, whereas the share of never married increased only slightly to 6.4%.

Figure 3. Distribution of Marital Status among U.S. Women Aged 65 and Older, 1990, 2000, & 2006-2022



Source: NCFMR analyses of IPUMS-USA Decennial Census, 1990 & 2000; IPUMS-USA American Community Survey, 2006 to 2022

Data Source:

Flood, S., King, M., Rodgers, R., Ruggles, S., Warren, J. R., Warren, D., Chen, A., Cooper, G., Richards, S., Schouweiler, M., & Westberry, M. (2023). IPUMS USA: Version 15.0 American Community Survey, Decennial Census. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0>

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