



Divorce: More than a Century of Change, 1900-2022

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Although the divorce rate in the United States increased throughout much of the twentieth century, it has declined in recent decades. Here we explore the variation in women’s rate of divorce and the proportion of ever-married women separated/divorced from 1900 to 2022 using National Vital Statistics, Decennial Census, and American Community Survey data. We then examine the proportion of currently separated/divorced among ever-married women from 1940 to 2022, disaggregating trends by race/ethnicity and educational attainment. This profile is an update to [FP-20-22](#) and a companion profile to [FP-24-10](#), which details variation in marriage trends over the last century.

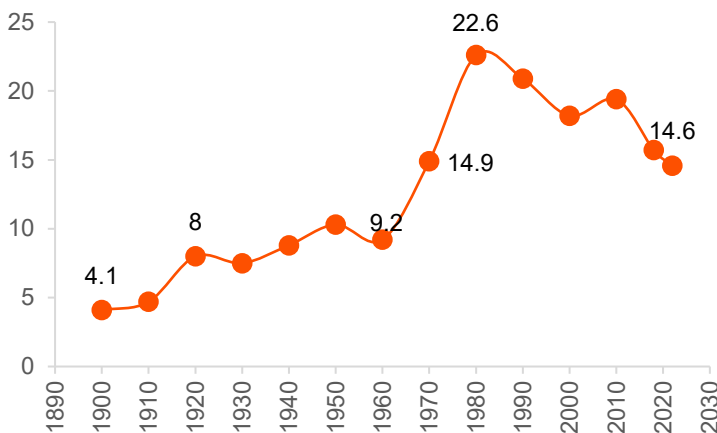
Change in the Divorce Rate in the U.S., 1900-2022

- The rate of women experiencing a divorce has nearly quadrupled from 4.1 per 1,000 married women in 1900 to 14.6 in 2022.
- Generally, the U.S. divorce rate has declined since reaching its peak of 22.6 in 1980.

Marital Status of Ever-Married Women, 1900-2022

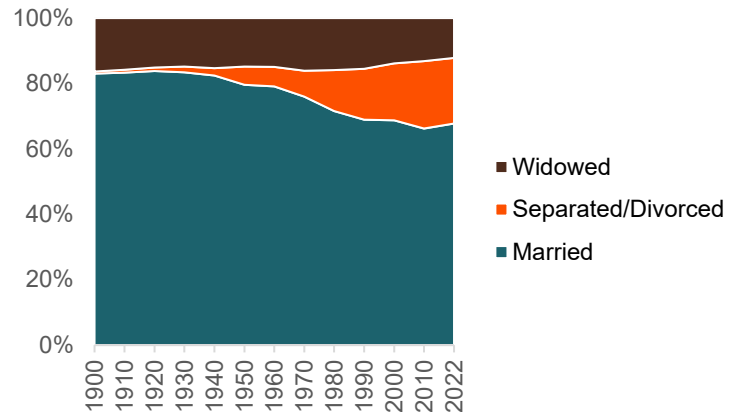
- The share of the currently separated or divorced among ever-married women increased from less than 1% in 1900 to 20% in 2022.
- Since 1900, the percentage of ever-married women who were currently married decreased from 83% to 68% in 2022.
- Whereas the proportion currently widowed among ever-married women has remained relatively stable since 1900, this share reached its lowest point of 12% in 2022.

Figure 1. Women’s Divorce Rate, 1900-2022



Source: NCFMR analyses of data from the National Vital Statistics, CDC/NCHS, 1900-2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Decennial Census; U.S. Census Bureau (IPUMS), American Community Survey, 2010 and 2022 (IPUMS). Note: Data for Alaska begin in 1959. Data for Hawaii begin in 1960.

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



Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1900-2010 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 (IPUMS). *Note:* Data for separated were not available until 1950. The term “ever-married” refers to women who are either currently or previously married and thus includes all women except those who are never-married.

Data Sources:

Plateris, A. A. (1973). 100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics United States, 1867-1967. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital and Health Statistics. Series 21: Data from the national vital statistics system. Data on natality, marriage, and divorce, no. 24; DHEW publication no. (HRA) 74-1092. Retrieved from <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/12831>

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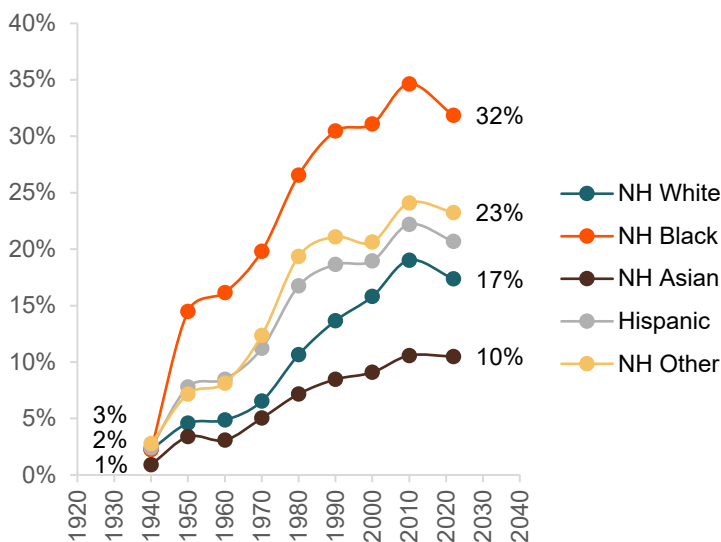
References:

Schweizer, V. J. (2020). Divorce: More than a century of change, 1900-2018. Family Profiles, FP-20-22. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-20-22>

Variation in Percentage Currently Separated/Divorced According to Race and Ethnicity, 1940-2022

- Approximately 2% of ever-married women of any racial/ethnic category in 1940 were separated/divorced, with the only exception being Asian women (0.9%).
 - For each decade from 1940 onwards, ever-married Asian women had the lowest share separated or divorced.
 - Only 10% of ever-married Asian women in 2022 were currently separated or divorced.
- From 1940 to 2022, ever-married Hispanic women and women of Other racial/ethnic groups displayed similar shares of those who were separated or divorced, with levels at 21% and 23% respectively in 2022.
- Among all racial/ethnic groups in 2022, ever-married White women exhibited the second lowest share separated or divorced at 17%.
- The largest rise in the share separated or divorced by 2022 occurred among ever-married Black women (32%), but this share peaked in 2010 at 35%.

Figure 3. Percentage of Ever-Married Women Currently Separated/Divorced, by Race/Ethnicity, 1940-2022

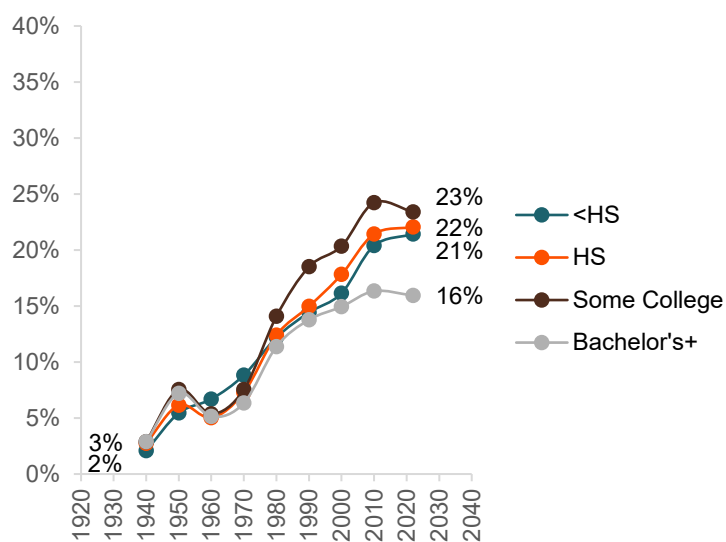


Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1900-2010 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 (IPUMS) *Note:* Data for separated were not available until 1950; the category of currently separated/divorced excludes those who are in a remarriage.

Variation in Percentage Currently Separated/Divorced According to Educational Attainment, 1940-2018

- In 1940, approximately 3% of ever-married women in all education groups were separated or divorced.
- Among ever-married women, being separated or divorced was most common for those with some college education (23%) in 2022, followed closely by women with a high school education (22%) and those with less than a high school education (21%).
- The lowest percentage of ever-married women who were currently separated or divorced was seen among those with a bachelor's degree or higher at 16% in 2022.

Figure 4. Percentage of Ever-Married Women Currently Separated/Divorced, by Educational Attainment, 1940-2022



Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1900-2010 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 (IPUMS) *Note:* Data for education were not available until 1940; data for separated were not available until 1950; the category of currently separated/divorced excludes those who are in a remarriage.



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