



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 24, 2011

## Census Numbers Show Fewer Divorces, More Enduring Marriages

Marriages in America are lasting longer and divorce is declining slightly, according to a recent Census Bureau report. The research, taken from a sampling of 55,497 individuals surveyed in 2009, found that more than half of couples currently married have been married for at least 15 years, 35 percent have been married for more than 25 years, and six percent have been married for more than 50 years. The latest numbers are all one to two percentage points higher than Census statistics in 1996.



The report also found that the divorce rate in the U.S. has dropped slightly over the ten-year period studied, with around 19 percent of 25- to 29-year-old women who had been married reporting a divorce in the 1996 study, compared to around 14 percent in 2009. For women 30 to 34 years old, the rate of divorce dropped from 25.6 to 21.3 percent over the same period. There was an increase in divorce among women aged 50 and older, and overall the survey found that 21 percent of men and 22 percent of women reported they had been divorced. The [Christian Post](#) noted that divorce rates in the U.S. “peaked in the early 1980s after the legal process for divorcing was made easier, but the census finds that divorce rates across most age groups have fallen by an average of five percentage points since 1996.”

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The Census report found that more Americans are waiting until later to get married, with many couples choosing to live together rather than commit to marriage. The 2009 report found that nearly 47 percent of women aged 25 to 29 had never been married, almost double the 26 percent reported in 1986, with the increasing age of most newly married couples being “the most noticeable changes in marital patterns,” according to the report. “As marriage rates have decreased and cohabitation has become more common, marriage has become more selective for adults who are better off socio-economically and have more education.”



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Age, education, and affluence were three of the main factors cited by sociologists in the increasing longevity of marriages, with many Americans waiting to marry until they have finished college and both partners are financially established. Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist from John Hopkins University, told the [Washington Post](#) that having two incomes was a major factor for matrimony. “People seem to be finding a new marriage bargain that works for 21st-century couples,” said Cherlin, whose specialty is family studies. “It’s based on pooling two incomes, replacing the old breadwinner-homemaker bargain that worked well in the ’50s.”

W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the [National Marriage Project](#) at the University of Virginia, confirmed that education and affluence, along with religious belief, are all factors in the longevity of marriage. “Marriage has become a much more selective institution in today’s society,” Wilcox told the *Post*. “People who are college-educated, more affluent, or more religious are more likely to get married and stay married. People who are not are less likely to get married in the first place, and if they do marry, they’re more likely to divorce.”

Wilcox said that those without college degrees are three times as likely to divorce within ten years of marriage than those who have finished college. “The odds of getting divorced are much lower for educated and affluent Americans,” he said, “the escapades of Schwarzenegger and John Ensign notwithstanding,” referring to the two latest wealthy and educated politicians whose marriages have been compromised by issues of infidelity.

Among the other findings included in the latest [Census Bureau report](#):

- Among women who have been married, those who ultimately divorced reached a high of 41 percent among those aged 50 to 59. Among black women, some 48 percent in that age group had been divorced at least once, while divorce rates among Hispanics and Asians were 30 percent or lower.
- Divorce has decreased among women aged 30 to 49, while it has increased slightly for those aged 25 to 29.
- The average age for first marriages in 2010 was 28 for men and 26 for women, up from 23 for men and 20 for women in 1950.

While the latest numbers appear to show some positive trends in marriage, research by noted Christian pollster George Barna shows that the institution of marriage is still in crisis mode in America. A 2008 study by the [Barna Group](#) found that while marriage continues to be the norm for the majority of Americans, among those who have been married one in three have also been divorced at least once.

Barna found that among the groups facing the highest incidence of divorce are “downscale” adults (uneducated and living in poverty, 39 percent), Baby Boomers (38 percent), those aligned with non-Christian faiths (38 percent), African-Americans (36 percent), and those who identified themselves as socially and politically liberal (37 percent).

Predictably, Barna found that Americans with the lowest likelihood of marriage ending in divorce are Catholics (28 percent), evangelical Christians (26 percent), “upscale” adults (educated and affluent, 22 percent), Asians (20 percent), and those who identify themselves as socially and politically conservative (28 percent).

One alarming trend that Barna noted is the extent to which Americans have grown comfortable with divorce, viewing marital failure as somewhat of a given — if not for them, at least for someone they know. “There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce,” Barna observed. “It is now



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seen as an unavoidable rite of passage.”

While young adults certainly seem to want their marriages to last, they “are not particularly optimistic about that possibility,” said Barna. “There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life.”

The continuing trend toward co-habitation is particularly troubling, Barna wrote. “Government statistics and a wealth of other research data have shown that co-habitation increases the likelihood of divorce, yet cohabiting is growing in popularity,” he said. Additionally, while studies have emphasized the importance of preparation for marriage, much of that valuable counsel has fallen on deaf ears. “America has become an experimental, experience-driven culture,” Barna noted. “Rather than learn from objective information and teaching based on that information, people prefer to follow their instincts and let the chips fall where they may. Given that tendency, we can expect America to retain the highest divorce rate among all developed nations of the world.”



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