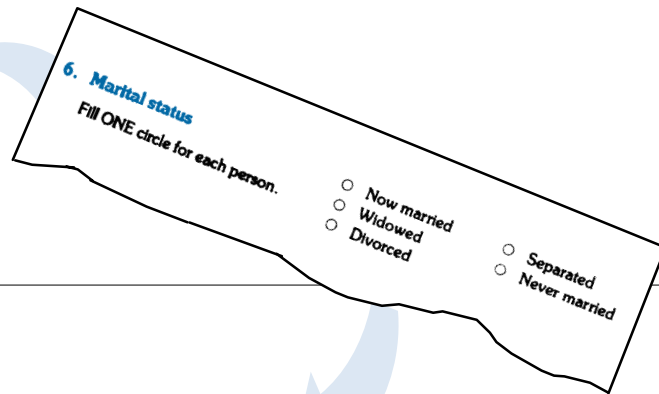


# We asked... You told us

## Marital Status



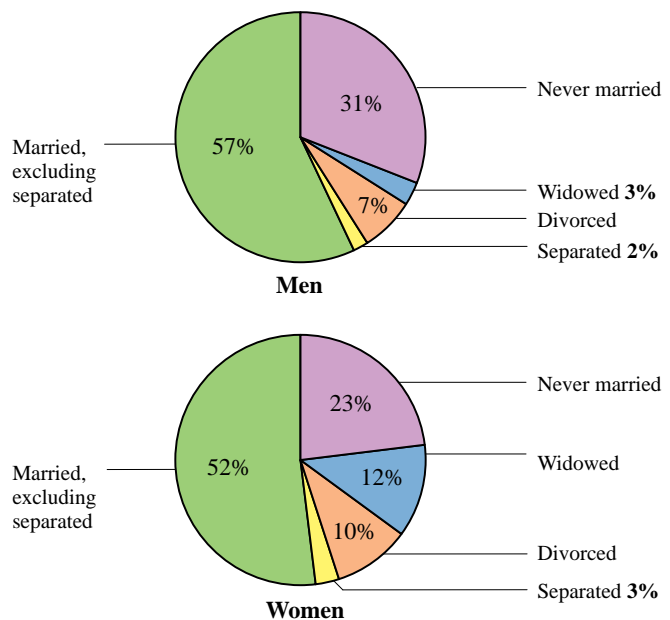
The Census Bureau conducts a census of population and housing every 10 years. This bulletin is one of a series that shows the questions asked in the 1990 census and the answers that you, the American people, gave. Each bulletin focuses on a question or group of questions appearing on the 1990 census questionnaires.

In question 6 on the 1990 census forms, we asked people to mark their current marital status. The pie chart shows what you told us in replying to this question.

- A majority of U.S. residents 15 years and over reported they were married in 1990—59 percent of the men and 55 percent of the women. These figures include persons who were married but were separated from their spouse.
- Another 31 percent of the men and 23 percent of the women reported they had never married, making this the second most common marital status for both sexes. Men had a higher proportion never married because they tend to marry about 2 years older than women.
- The proportions of widowed or divorced were both higher for women than for men. The reason for this is that women live longer than men on the average and are less likely than men to remarry after being widowed or divorced.

### Most Adults Were Married

Marital Status of Persons 15 Years and Over, by Sex: 1990



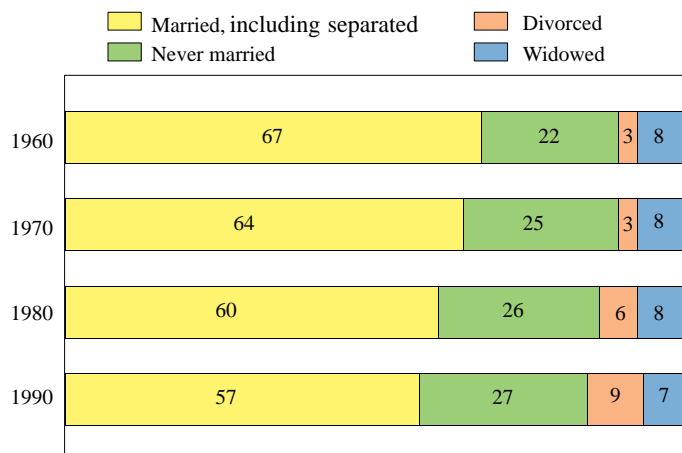
### Trends in Marital Composition

- As the bar chart shows, striking changes have occurred in the marital composition of American adults during the past three decades. For example, the proportion of persons who had never married rose from 22 to 27 percent between 1960 and 1990.
- As more adults were choosing to postpone marriage, more adults also were ending their marriages through divorce. The proportion of persons who reported they were divorced tripled during the 1960-90 period from 3 to 9 percent. The proportion widowed remained relatively stable at about 7 or 8 percent.
- Thus, with the increase in delayed marriages and frequency of divorce, the proportion of married persons among adults declined from 67 percent in 1960 to 57 percent in 1990.

### Relatively Fewer Persons Were Married and More Were Divorced

Marital Status: 1960 to 1990

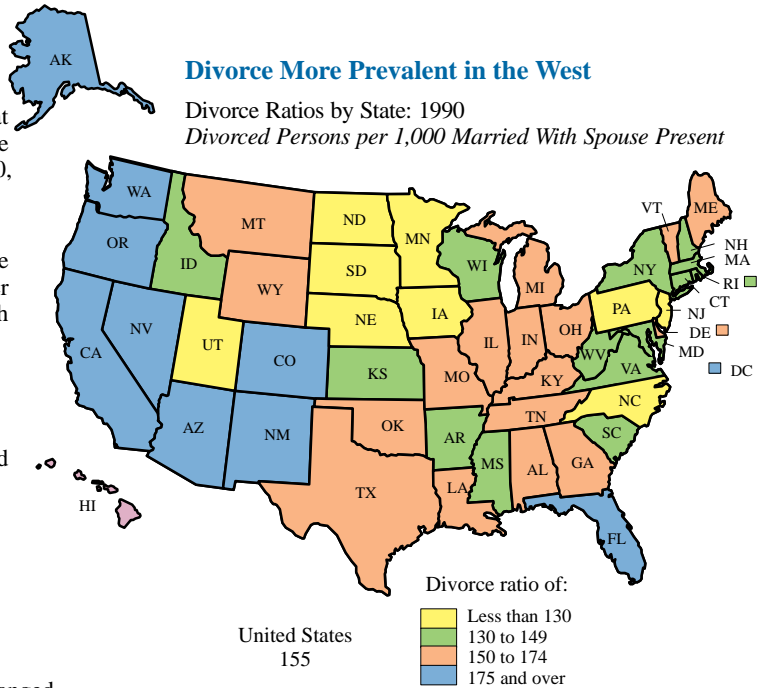
Percent of Persons 15+ for 1980 and 1990: 14+ for 1960 and 1970



**Census Trivia:** According to the 1990 census, which State had the highest percentage married among its adults? Which one had the highest percentage widowed? (Answer on reverse.)

## Divorce Ratio Varied Among Regions and States

- The proportion of divorced persons increased markedly at the national level in recent decades, but the increases were not the same for all areas of the country. In fact, by 1990, sharp regional and State differences were noted in the prevalence of divorce (see map).
- One measure often used to highlight the differences in the level of divorce is the divorce ratio, defined as the number of divorced persons per 1,000 married persons living with their spouse.
- The West had the highest divorce ratio of any region in 1990, with 182 divorced persons per 1,000 persons in intact marriages. In contrast, the Northeast had the lowest ratio (130 per 1,000). The ratios for the South and Midwest were 156 and 151, respectively.
- Not surprisingly, Nevada led the States in 1990 with the highest divorce ratio (268 per 1,000), more than double the ratio for North Dakota (101), with the lowest.

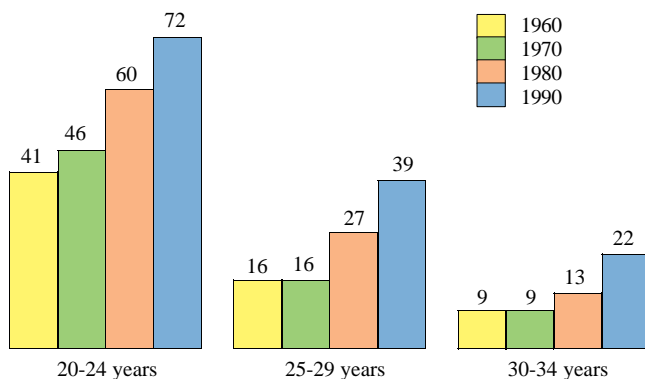


## Young Adults Were Postponing Marriage

- The marital situation for adults in their early twenties changed during the last 30 years from one in which most persons in this age group were married to one in which most had not married for the first time. In 1990, about 72 percent of persons 20 to 24 years old had not yet married, compared with 41 percent of their predecessors in 1960 (see bar chart).
- In addition, increasing proportions of adults in their late twenties and early thirties had not married yet. After showing no change in the 1960's, the proportions of never-married persons in these age groups more than doubled between 1970 and 1990—from 16 to 39 percent for persons 25 to 29 years old and from 9 to 22 percent for those 30 to 34 years old.
- The trend of delaying marriage suggests that more young people were pursuing educational, career, or other goals before marrying. It is likely, however, that the vast majority of young adults who have not yet married will do so at some point in their lives.

## Young Adults Staying Single Longer

Percent Never Married by Age: 1960 to 1990



*Trivia Answer:* Idaho had the highest percentage married (62 percent) in 1990; West Virginia had the highest percentage widowed (10 percent).

### Who Uses This Information?

Just a few examples:

- Sociologists, economists, political scientists, and other researchers to analyze social and economic trends
- Community organizations to provide housing and job training for displaced homemakers
- Along with information from the question on age, government social service agencies to plan facilities and services for elderly widowed persons and to set up adolescent family life projects

### Want to Know More?

Consult the series of 1990 census reports, CP-1, *General Population Characteristics*, at a large public or university library. Also for sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO).

If you want to know more, call:

- Customer Services at the Census Bureau, **301-763-4100**, for ordering information from GPO about the reports listed above OR for copies of CQC bulletins
- Karen Mills, **301-763-4263**, for general information on CQC bulletins
- Population Division, **301-763-7987**, for more information on marital status



Issued November 1993

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS