

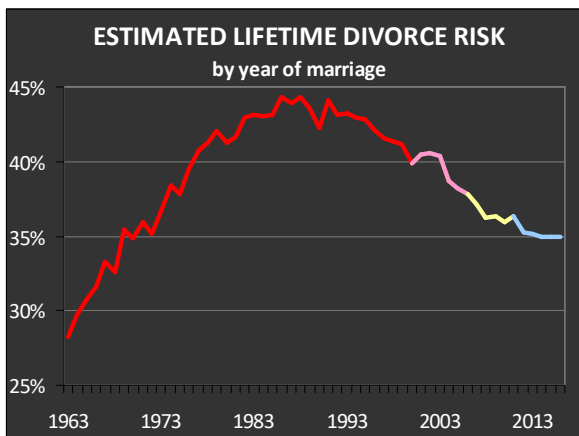


Marriage Foundation

Lifetime divorce risk: Back to the 1960s

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May 2019 – Marriage Week UK

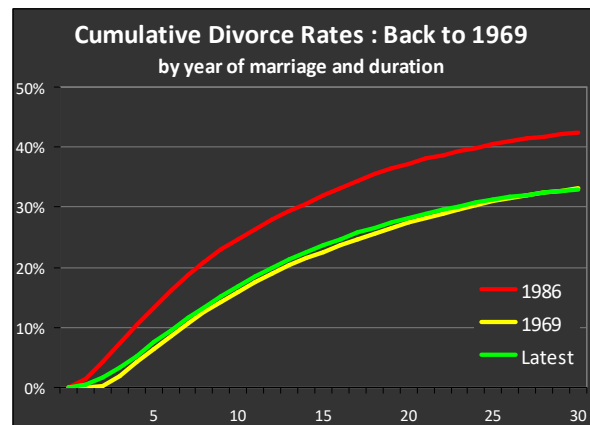
- Discussion of divorce rates in the media usually revolves around the number of divorces in the most recent year, by 'year of divorce'. However what most of us really want to know are the chances of getting divorced by 'year of marriage'.
- To coincide with [Marriage Week UK, 13-19 May](#), we have especially commissioned data from the Office for National Statistics that allows us to map the number of actual divorces that occurred after any duration of marriage onto the year in which those marriages took place.
- We make a conservative adjustment to the number of weddings by adding 50 per cent of people marrying overseas, which has boosted the number of weddings overall by between 3 and 8 per cent per year since the 1990s.
- We can then calculate actual and projected divorce rates for each 'year of marriage' since 1963.
- The net result is that lifetime divorce risk has risen from 28 per cent for couples who married in 1963, peaking at 44 per cent for couples who married in 1986, falling back down to 35 per cent for couples marrying today. These levels have not been seen since 1969.



New data commissioned from the Office for National Statistics (*ONS 2018a,b; 2019*) allows us to estimate the lifetime divorce risk for couples marrying in any given year, as far back as 1963.

Estimates for cohorts marrying prior to 2000 (*red line in chart above*) are most reliable since they have already experienced at least 75 per cent of their likely lifetime divorce.

Estimates for those marrying after 2011 (*blue*) are least reliable because less than 25 per cent of likely divorces have occurred. Predictions are then based on the latest data for other cohorts.



We estimate that the cumulative lifetime divorce risk for today's newlyweds will be 35 per cent. The trajectory of divorce for these couples is only lower among couples who married prior to 1969.

Divorce rates peaked between 1982 and 1996 where more than 42 per cent of marriages in any of these years have ended, or will end, in divorce.

The worst year in which to marry was 1986, where the cumulative risk is 44 per cent. This estimate is likely to prove extremely accurate as 96 per cent of the 1986 couples who were going to divorce will have already done so.

TABLE OF LIFETIME DIVORCE RISK

WEDDING YEAR	LIFETIME DIVORCE RISK	DIVORCES ALREADY OCCURRED	WEDDING YEAR	LIFETIME DIVORCE RISK	DIVORCES ALREADY OCCURRED	WEDDING YEAR	LIFETIME DIVORCE RISK	DIVORCES ALREADY OCCURRED
1963	28%	100%	1983	43%	97%	2003	40%	66%
1964	30%	100%	1984	43%	99%	2004	39%	61%
1965	31%	100%	1985	43%	96%	2005	38%	57%
1966	32%	100%	1986	44%	96%	2006	38%	52%
1967	33%	100%	1987	44%	95%	2007	37%	46%
1968	33%	100%	1988	44%	94%	2008	36%	40%
1969	35%	100%	1989	44%	93%	2009	36%	35%
1970	35%	100%	1990	42%	92%	2010	36%	29%
1971	36%	100%	1991	44%	92%	2011	36%	25%
1972	35%	99%	1992	43%	90%	2012	35%	16%
1973	37%	99%	1993	43%	89%	2013	35%	10%
1974	38%	99%	1994	43%	87%	2014	35%	5%
1975	38%	99%	1995	43%	86%	2015	35%	2%
1976	39%	99%	1996	42%	84%	2016	35%	0%
1977	41%	99%	1997	42%	82%			
1978	41%	99%	1998	41%	80%			
1979	42%	98%	1999	41%	78%			
1980	41%	99%	2000	40%	74%			
1981	42%	98%	2001	41%	72%			
1982	43%	99%	2002	41%	69%			

METHODOLOGY

We calculate divorce rates by dividing the ‘number of divorces by duration of marriage’ by the ‘number of marriages in the appropriate year’. For example (in green below), there were 4,446 divorces in 2017 affecting marriages that had lasted between 3 and 4 years. These mostly affect the 272,433 couples who married in 2013 – including an adjustment of 50 per cent of people married overseas (ONS 2008, 2017).

By doing the same for divorces that took place in 2016 and 2015, etc – for each year’s duration up to 60 years – we can build an entire model of actual divorce rates for every year of marriage going back to 1963.

Although there is clearly a built-in overlap error, this is the same method used by ONS when they calculate divorce rates by year of marriage. It shows trends very clearly.

Calculating divorce rates, by year of marriage and duration of marriage

Year of marriage	No. of opposite sex marriages	Adjust for +50% overseas weddings	Adjusted number of marriages	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years
2012	263,640	23,826	287,466					1.9%
2013	240,854	31,579	272,433				1.6%	
2014	247,372	23,154	270,526			1.1%		
2015	239,020	23,048	262,068	0.0%	0.6%			
2016	242,774	22,500	265,274					
Divorces during 2017				44	1,534	3,091	4,446	5,462

REFERENCES

ONS (2008) Marriages abroad 2002-2007. Population Trends, 133, 65-70.

ONS (2017) British citizens married abroad

ONS (2018a) Divorces in England and Wales 2017

ONS (2018b) Marriages in England and Wales 2015

ONS (2019) Divorces in England and Wales by duration of marriage by party to whom granted (husband and wife) and by previous marital status, 2010 to 2017