

Article

Marital Status: Overview, 2011

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- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| . | not available for any reference period |
| .. | not available for a specific reference period |
| ... | not applicable |
| 0 | true zero or a value rounded to zero |
| 0 ^s | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| P | preliminary |
| r | revised |
| X | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i> |
| E | use with caution |
| F | too unreliable to be published |
| * | significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$) |

Marital Status: Overview, 2011

This article analyses patterns related to marital status and nuptiality in Canada. Data on marital and conjugal status come primarily from the 2011 Census of Population,¹ with comparisons to historical data where appropriate, particularly 1981.²

In addition, data from the Canadian Vital Statistics Database on marriage and divorce are also analysed, with an emphasis on recent trends.³

Legal marital status

Legal marital status refers to the marital status of the person under the law (e.g., never married, married, divorced or separated, or widowed). In 2011, 46.4% of the population aged 15 and over was legally married, while 53.6% was unmarried—that is, never married, divorced or separated, or widowed—a widening of the gap first observed among the total population in 2001.⁴ In contrast, thirty years earlier, in 1981, 60.9% of the population aged 15 and over was married, while 39.1% was unmarried.

The provinces with the largest shares of the population aged 15 and over that were married in 2011 were Newfoundland and Labrador (52.9%), Prince Edward Island (51.7%), Ontario (50.3%) and Alberta (50.2%). The smallest shares of the population that was married were found in the territories: Yukon (37.6%), Northwest Territories (35.0%), Nunavut (29.7%) and in the province of Quebec (35.4%).

The decreasing share over time of the population that was married and the corresponding increase in the unmarried population may be related to a number of factors, including a higher average age at marriage and an increase in the divorced or separated population. In addition, a higher proportion of people live in common-law unions than in the past—either as a relatively shorter-term relationship prior to marriage or as a longer-term alternative, as well as a fairly large share of young adults who live in the parental home, most of whom have never been married.

The population pyramids of the marital status categories for 1981 and 2011 show not only the changing age structure of the population but also the shifting concentrations of marital states. Specifically, in 2011 there was a smaller population that was married in the younger to middle adult years combined with a larger population of middle-aged to older adults that was never-married, divorced or separated compared to 1981 (Figure 1).

Among the population that was never married, there was a large increase in the proportions for those in their twenties and thirties in 2011 compared to 1981. For young adults aged 25 to 29, the proportion who were never married rose from about one-quarter of this population (26.0%) in 1981 to close to three-quarters (73.1%) in 2011.

Prior to age 65 in 1981 and before age 75 in 2011, men were more likely than women to have never been legally married—especially for men under age 60 in 2011 and under age 35 in 1981 (Figure 2). This reflects that, on average, men tend to enter unions at slightly older ages than do women, and among opposite-sex couples, men tend to partner with women slightly younger than themselves. The share of men in their late twenties who were never married increased from 32.0% in 1981 to 78.8% in 2011; and for women in this age group, the corresponding increase was from 20.0% to 67.4%.

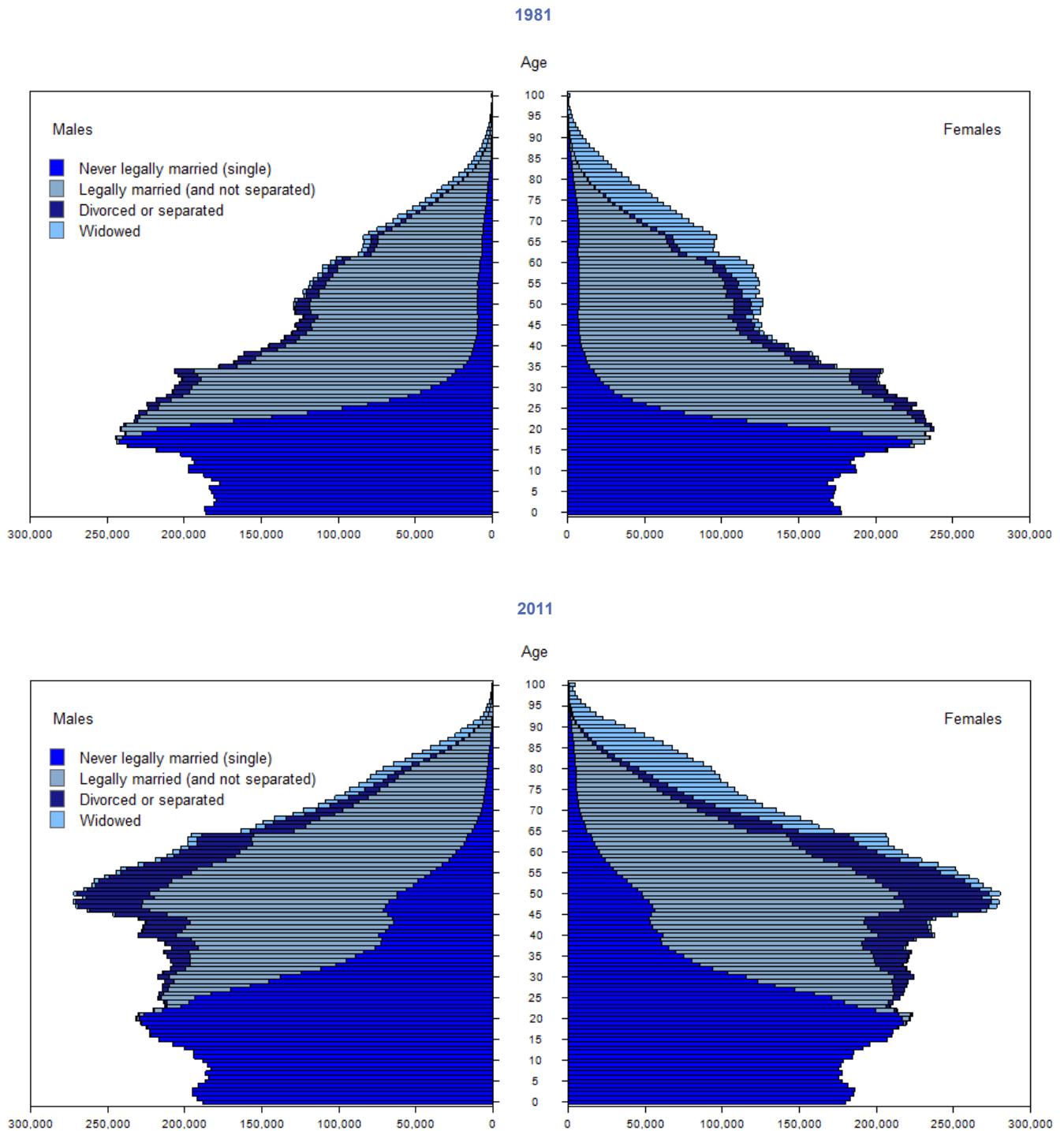
1. In this article, 2011 Census of Population data in the section on legal marital status are based on the total population, including analysis of the legally married, never-married, and divorced or separated population. Data in the sections on conjugal status and opposite-sex and same-sex couples are based on the population living in private households.

2. In 1981, common-law partners were included with the married population. This represents about 715,700 people or 3.8% of the population aged 15 and over. Consequently, the legally married population is slightly overestimated and the single (never married), divorced or separated and widowed populations are slightly underestimated.

3. The collection of marriage and divorce data in the Canadian Vital Statistics Database has been discontinued. The final year available for these data is 2008.

4. When using data for the population aged 15 and over in private households, a higher share of unmarried than married population was first observed in 2006.

Figure 1
Population pyramids of legal marital status by single year of age and sex, Canada, 1981 and 2011

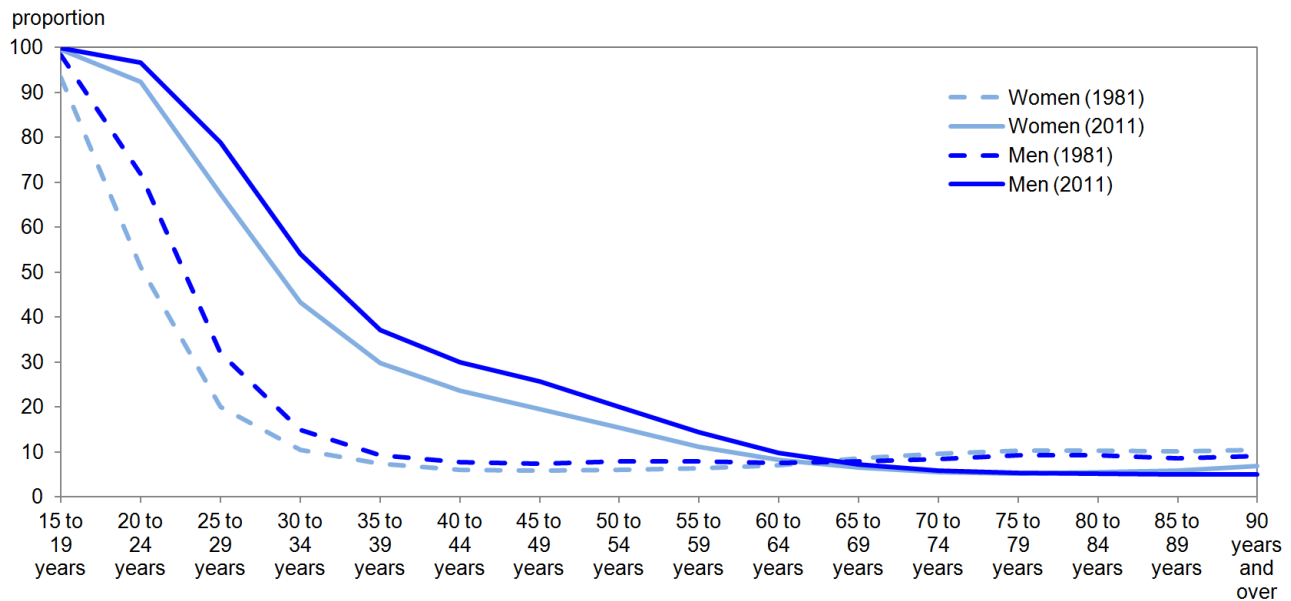


Notes: In 1981, common-law partners were included with the married population. This represents about 715,700 people or 3.8% of the population aged 15 and over. Consequently, the legally married population is slightly overestimated and the single (never married), divorced or separated and widowed populations are slightly underestimated.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1981 and 2011.

Figure 2

Proportion of population aged 15 and over that was never married by age group and sex, Canada, 1981 and 2011



Notes: In 1981, the never-married population excludes common-law partners whose legal marital status was never-married. Less than 4% of the population aged 15 and over lived common-law in 1981.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1981 and 2011.

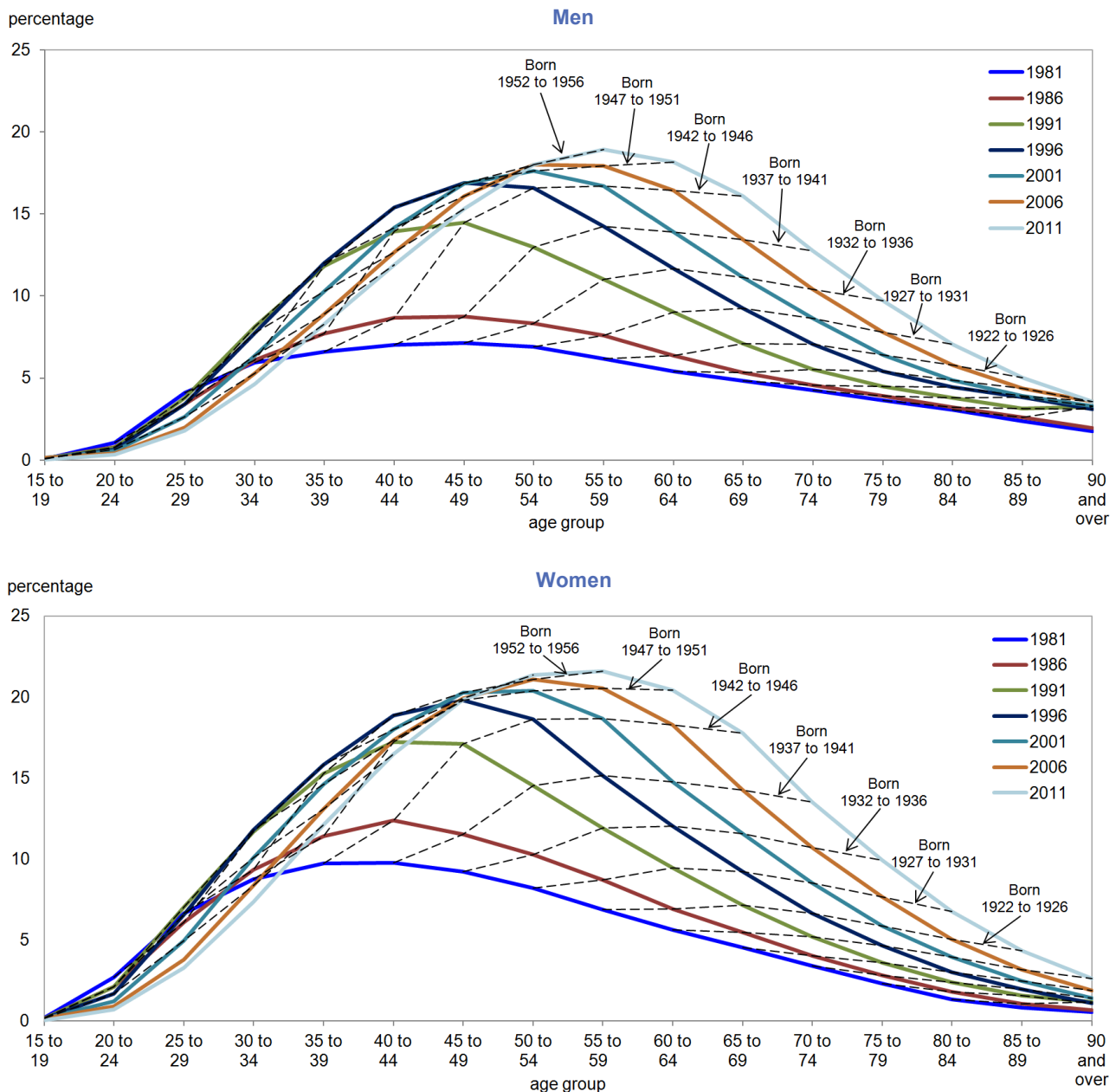
Even among individuals in their early thirties, the proportion of men who were never married increased from 15.0% in 1981 to 54.0% in 2011. For women, the increase was from 10.5% in 1981 to 43.4% in 2011. From age 65 onward, however, there was relative convergence between the sexes, and for both, the share that was never married was slightly larger in 1981 than in 2011.

There has been an overall increase over the past three decades in the share of the population aged 15 and over that was divorced or separated, rising from 5.1% in 1981 to 11.5% in 2011. During the past decade, however, there has been a decreasing proportion of the population under age 50 that was divorced or separated, for both men and women (Figure 3). For some age groups, the decline in share began even earlier: for example, 12.0% of men in their late thirties were divorced or separated in 1996, dropping to 8.3% in 2011. For women in this age group, the shares fell from 15.8% to 12.1% between 1996 and 2011. This could reflect the decreasing proportions of the population in these younger age groups that were legally married—largely due to the increase in common-law unions—therefore, the share that was divorced or separated would, in turn, be lower.

In contrast, for both women and men, the age of people who are divorced or separated has been shifting upward and the share has been increasing especially for individuals aged 50 and over. In 2011, about one in five people in their late fifties were divorced or separated (21.6% of women and 18.9% of men), the highest among the age groups. In comparison, in 1981, 6.9% of women and 6.2% of men in this age group were divorced or separated. The largest share of the population who was divorced or separated thirty years ago, however, was for women in their late thirties and early forties (just under 10%) and for men it was during their forties and early fifties (about 7%).

The increase in the share of the population who are divorced or separated can also be examined from a birth cohort perspective. For example, 55- to 59-year-olds in 2011 were born in 1952 to 1956 and were, therefore, aged 25 to 29 in 1981. Over this thirty year period, there was about a three-fold increase in the share of women in this birth cohort who were divorced or separated and a nearly five-fold increase for men. Older cohorts also experienced increases in the proportion that were divorced or separated until about their senior years, followed by slightly decreasing shares as they continued to age.

Figure 3
Proportion of population aged 15 and over that was divorced or separated by age group, sex and birth cohort, Canada, 1981 to 2011



Notes: In 1981, the divorced and separated population excludes common-law partners whose legal marital status was divorced or separated. Less than 4% of the population aged 15 and over lived common-law in 1981. For simplicity, not all birth cohorts are labelled.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1981 to 2011.

There may be an overall larger share of the population who are divorced due to legislative changes during the past several decades which have made it easier to obtain a divorce.⁵ Furthermore, people who do not subsequently remarry retain the legal marital status of divorced, including those who form common-law unions. It should also be noted that some separated individuals may not pursue a divorce—in the short or long term—for a variety of reasons.

5. For more discussion of the divorce legislation, see the section of this article entitled Divorces, 2008.

Conjugal status

Conjugal status refers to the nature of the relationship between the members of a couple. Specifically, it indicates whether the members of a couple are legally married to each other or whether they are living in a common-law relationship. The majority of people aged 15 and over were part of a couple in 2011, either as a common-law partner or a married spouse.⁶ In 2011, 57.7% of the population aged 15 and over who lived in private households were part of couples, down slightly from 61.1% thirty years earlier in 1981.

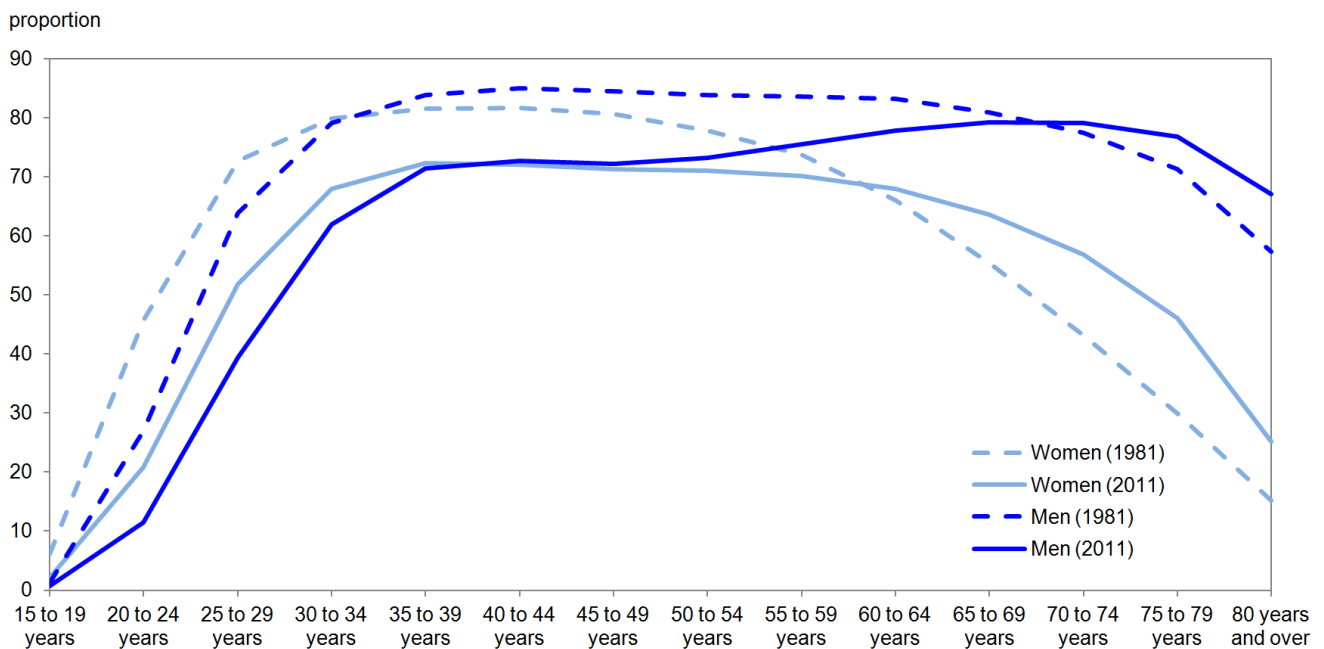
While the overall share of the population in couples has not changed substantially over these three decades, some aspects related to the diversity of couples themselves—and the people who comprise them—have increased. In some cases, conceptual changes allow for the measurement of more varied characteristics of individuals in couples, such as whether they are married spouses or common-law partners and whether they are in a relationship that is opposite-sex or same-sex.

Most people in couples are married spouses, but the share has dropped over time. In 2011, about four-fifths (80.1%) of individuals in couples were married spouses and the remaining one-fifth (19.9%) were common-law partners. Three decades earlier, in 1981, 93.7% of people in couples were married spouses while 6.3% were common-law partners.

Overall, the shares of women in a couple were lower in 2011 than in 1981 for all age groups under 60. For men, the proportion of each age group in a couple was lower in 2011 than in 1981 for all age groups under 70 (Figure 4).

In contrast, the increased share of women in couples is particularly evident for those in their seventies. In 2011, 46.0% of women aged 75 to 79 were in couples, up from 29.9% in 1981. For men, the largest increase in proportion occurred at age 80 and over: in 2011, 67.0% of men in this age group were in couples compared to 57.3% in 1981.

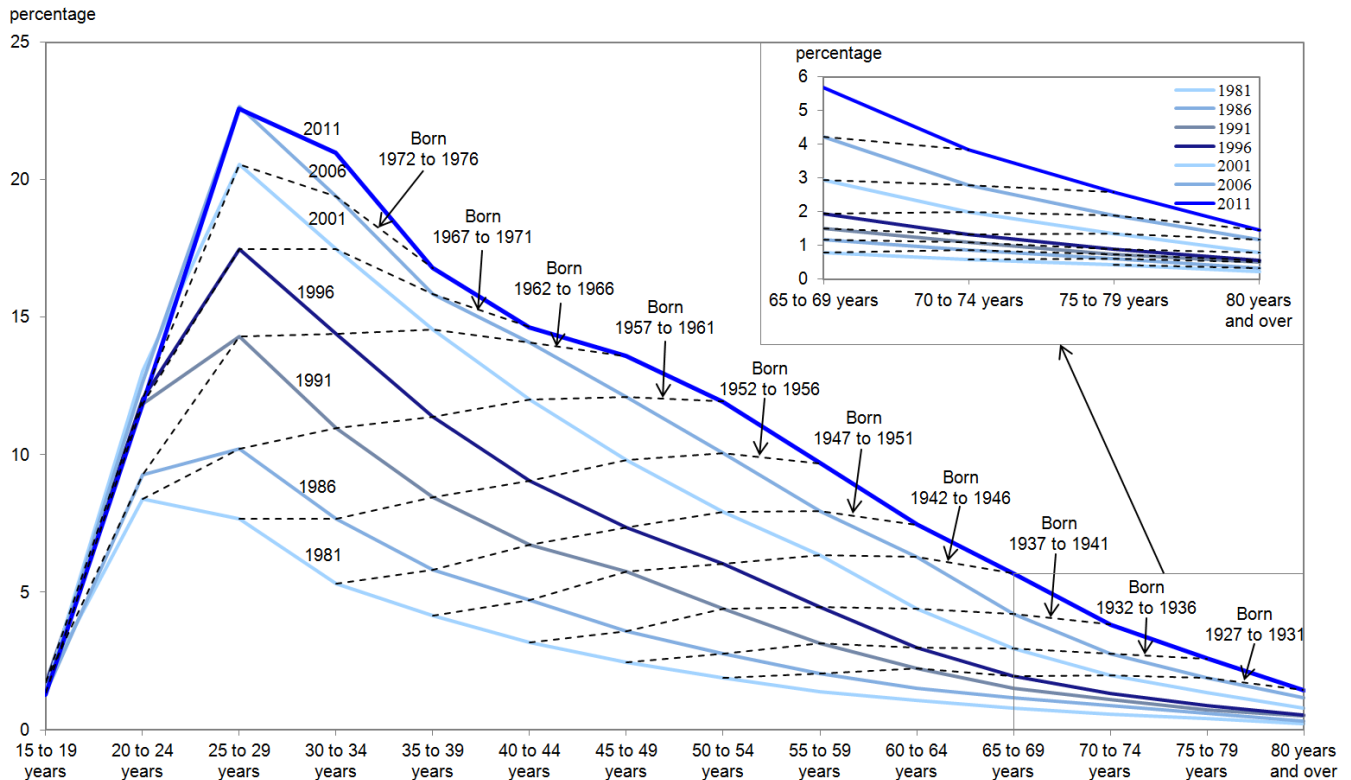
Figure 4
Proportion of population aged 15 and over in couples, by age group and sex, Canada, 1981 and 2011



Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1981 to 2011.

6. See also Statistics Canada. 2012. *Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada*, Catalogue no. 98-312-XWE2011001.

Figure 5
Proportion of population aged 15 and over that lived common-law by age group and birth cohort, Canada, 1981 to 2011



Note: For simplicity, not all birth cohorts are labeled.
Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1981 to 2011.

The increase in the senior population in couples, particularly senior women, can be at least partially attributed to the decreased gap in the life expectancy between men and women. While it remains higher, on average, for women than for men, gains have been more rapid for men in recent decades allowing more unions to endure, or be formed, at older ages.⁷

Common-law unions have continued to increase over the past three decades in Canada. In 2011, 11.5% of the population aged 15 and over lived in a common-law union, up from 3.8% in 1981.

Common-law unions were most prevalent among young adults, particularly those aged 25 to 29. However, the share has generally been increasing within cohorts, as well as for age groups over time (Figure 5). In other words, increases in persons living as common-law partners are evident both within and across cohorts for most census years between 1981 and 2011. For example, in 1981, 7.7% of 25- to 29-year-olds lived common-law, nearly tripling to 22.6% in 2011. From the cohort perspective, individuals in their late twenties in 1981 were born between 1952 and 1956. This cohort was aged 55 to 59 in 2011, of whom, 9.7% lived common-law that year.

One of the important exceptions to this increase is for those in their early twenties. Although the proportion of young adults living common-law has generally been increasing since it was first measured in 1981, the share of those in their early twenties that lived common-law has slightly declined over the past decade. The proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds that lived common-law decreased from 13.1% in 2001 to 11.8% in 2011. These young adults may be concentrating more on educational, employment or other objectives beyond those related to being a spouse or partner.

7. See also Statistics Canada. 2012. "Living arrangements of seniors", *Census in Brief series*, Catalogue no. 98-312-X2011003.

Common-law unions have also become increasingly popular at older ages, probably reflecting more social acceptance of this living arrangement by older age groups, more 'aging in place' of common-law partners (that is, older partners who formed their union while at younger ages), a cohort effect or all of these factors. In general, individuals may still want to be part of a couple but perhaps with fewer perceived obligations compared to marriage. In 1981, over half (50.6%) of all individuals in common-law unions were aged 20 to 29 and 19.0% were aged 40 or over. By 2011, less than one-quarter (23.7%) of all common-law partners were in their twenties, while approximately half (49.6%) were in their forties or older.

Common-law unions have grown most rapidly among older age groups in recent years, specifically for people in their late forties and over. The number of individuals aged 65 to 69 in common-law unions rose 66.5% between 2006 and 2011, the fastest pace of all age groups. Conversely, growth occurred at a much slower pace among younger individuals, and there were declines in some cases.

Partially accounting for the growth is that members of the large baby-boom cohort, born between 1946 and 1965, were aged 46 to 65 in 2011. In fact, married spouses in this age group also grew between 2006 and 2011 but growth was more rapid for common-law partners. For example, married spouses aged 60 to 64 grew 24.6% in the five years prior to 2011 but growth for common-law partners in this age group was more than double at 53.7%. In contrast, people in their early forties were baby-busters, the first cohort to follow the large cohort of baby-boomers. The number of people aged 40 to 44 in a common-law union fell more than 7% between 2006 and 2011, reflecting an overall decline in the population of this age group during the past five years.

As a share of all couples, common-law unions have always been proportionally higher in the province of Quebec as well as in the territories. Nearly half (45.6%) of couples in Nunavut were common-law, and shares were also large in the Northwest Territories (36.4%) and Yukon (31.5%). Among the provinces, 37.8% of couples in Quebec were common-law, much higher than the average of the other provinces (14.4%).

The larger proportion of common-law couples in Quebec compared to other provinces is a long-term pattern dating back to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s—a period of declining influence of the Catholic church in the context of broadened divorce legislation, more accessible contraception, and increased education and labour force participation of women.⁸ The territories, particularly Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, have a higher Aboriginal population as well as a younger population, characteristics which are associated with a greater tendency to be in common-law unions than married unions.

Same-sex and opposite-sex couples

Same-sex common-law couples were first enumerated in 2001 and same-sex married couples were first counted in 2006,⁹ following the legalization of same-sex marriage across Canada in 2005.¹⁰

In 2011, there were 64,575 same-sex couples, of which about 3 in 10 were married couples.¹¹ Five years earlier, in 2006, there were 45,345 couples, of which 16.5% were married couples.

8. Peron, Y. 2003. "Du mariage obligatoire au mariage facultatif", in Piché, Victor and Céline Le Bourdais. 2003. *La démographie québécoise. Enjeux du XXI^e siècle*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, chapter 3, pages 110 to 143, Canada.

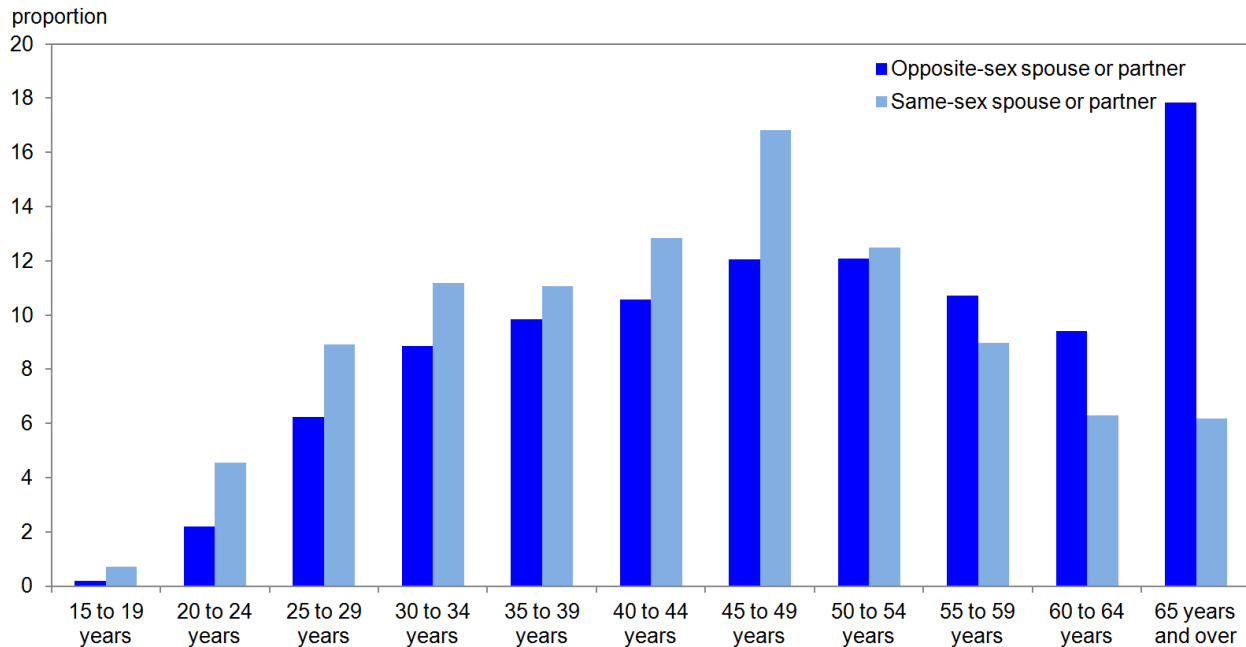
9. Data on same-sex married couples were collected in the 2006 Census of Population as a write-in response to the 'Other' category on Question 6, Relationship to Person 1.

10. Bill C-38, the *Civil Marriage Act*, was adopted on July 20, 2005 which legalized same-sex marriage across Canada. Some provinces and territories had already legalized same-sex marriage, beginning with Ontario in June, 2003.

11. The questionnaires of the 2011 Census of Population and the 2011 National Household Survey introduced for the first time a specific response on household relationships to determine the number of same-sex married couples. Analysis of the data on same-sex married couples has shown that there may be an overestimation of this family type and marital status. The 2011 Census shows a total of 64,575 same-sex couples in Canada, of which 21,015 are married couples. The range of overestimation of both these counts, at the national level, is between 0 and 4,500. For more information see the *Families Reference Guide, 2011 Census*.

Figure 6

Distribution (in percentage) of married spouse or common-law partner by opposite-sex or same-sex status and age group, Canada, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011.

The proportion of same-sex couples in Canada (0.8% of all couples in 2011) is consistent with recent data from other countries including Australia (0.7% in 2011)¹² and the United Kingdom (0.4% in 2011).¹³ Measured as a share of all households, 0.6% of households in the United States consisted of same-sex couples in 2010.¹⁴

A larger share of same-sex couples was male (54.5%) than female (45.5%) in 2011, similar for both married and common-law couples. Individuals in same-sex couples were also younger than those in opposite-sex couples (Figure 6). For all age groups under age 55 there were larger shares of same-sex spouses or partners. About one-quarter (25.3%) of individuals in same-sex couples were under the age of 35 compared to 17.5% of individuals in opposite-sex couples. The age difference was most pronounced for those aged 65 and over. The prevalence of individuals in opposite-sex couples who were seniors was close to three times greater than that for same-sex spouses or partners (17.8% compared with 6.2%).

Marriages, 2008¹⁵

Marriages in Canada are analysed using administrative data from the Canadian Vital Statistics Database. In addition to the number of marriages, the marriage indicators examined in this section include the crude rate, monthly distribution and average age at marriage for the nation as a whole, as well as some provincial and territorial differences.

In 2008, there were 147,848 marriages in Canada, the second year of decline, and the lowest number of marriages since 2004 (Figure 7). The crude marriage rate, that is, the number of marriages per 1,000 population, was 4.4 marriages in 2008, down slightly from 4.5 in 2007 (Table 1). This was the lowest crude marriage rate in the history of the vital statistics data on marriages.

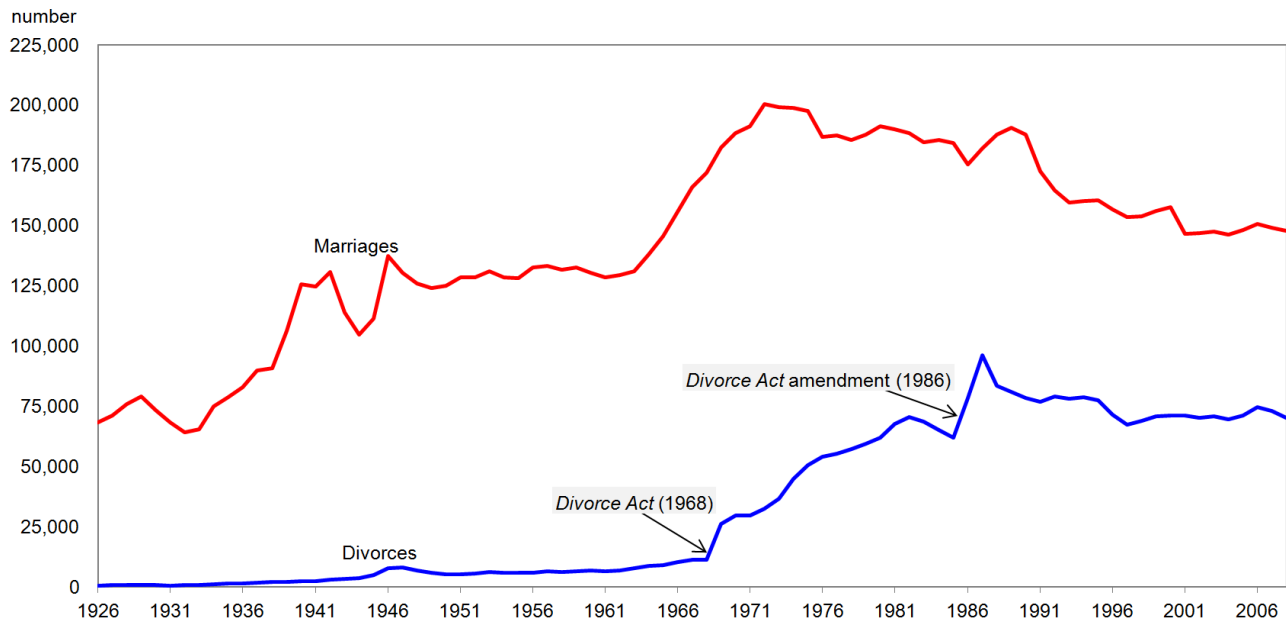
12. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2012. *Counts of same-sex couples in the 2011 Census*.

13. Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics. 2011. *Bulletin: Families and Households, 2001 to 2011*, table 1: families by family type in 2001 and 2011.

14. U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. *2010 Census Briefs. Households and families*, C2010B4-13, table 2: households by type: 2000 and 2010.

15. Marriage data in this section are from Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriage Database, Survey 3232.

Figure 7
Number of marriages and divorces, Canada, 1926 to 2008



Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3232 and Canadian Vital Statistics, Divorces Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3235.

Table 1
Marriages and crude marriage rates, Canada, provinces and territories, 1981 to 2008

Year	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nvt.	Canada
	number													
1981	3,758	849	6,632	5,108	41,006	70,283	8,123	7,329	21,782	24,700	235	282	...	190,088
1986	3,421	970	6,445	4,962	33,083	70,839	7,816	6,820	18,896	21,826	183	257	...	175,518
1991	3,480	876	5,845	4,521	28,957	73,083	7,032	5,923	18,612	23,691	196	215	...	172,431
1996	3,195	924	5,392	4,366	23,999	66,241	6,449	5,671	17,283	22,839	198	206	...	156,763
2001	2,967	901	4,903	3,906	22,014	62,582	5,970	5,068	17,436	20,568	148	142	101	146,706
2002	2,963	901	4,899	3,818	22,017	61,630	5,906	5,068	17,985	21,263	143	145	72	146,810
2003	2,880	824	4,746	3,724	21,167	63,517	5,661	4,983	17,624	21,999	158	141	67	147,491
2004	2,859	851	4,610	3,590	21,312	62,480	5,706	5,050	17,460	22,094	150	132	69	146,363
2005	2,777	892	4,863	3,758	22,289	61,712	5,729	5,125	17,907	22,652	145	123	41	148,013
2006	2,662	843	4,759	3,845	21,996	62,982	5,776	5,161	18,725	23,529	154	108	61	150,601
2007	2,755	883	4,774	3,761	22,209	61,179	5,797	5,245	19,099	22,977	176	128	73	149,056
2008	2,705	942	4,622	3,624	22,310	60,343	5,609	5,339	19,045	22,977	134	120	78	147,848
	rate per 1,000													
1981	6.5	6.9	7.8	7.2	6.3	8.0	7.8	7.5	9.5	8.7	9.8	5.9	...	7.7
1986	5.9	7.6	7.2	6.8	4.9	7.5	7.2	6.6	7.8	7.3	7.5	4.7	...	6.7
1991	6.0	6.7	6.4	6.1	4.1	7.0	6.3	5.9	7.2	7.0	6.8	5.6	...	6.2
1996	5.7	6.8	5.8	5.8	3.3	6.0	5.7	5.6	6.2	5.9	6.3	4.9	...	5.3
2001	5.7	6.6	5.3	5.2	3.0	5.3	5.2	5.1	5.7	5.0	4.9	3.5	3.6	4.7
2002	5.7	6.6	5.2	5.1	3.0	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.7	5.2	4.7	3.5	2.5	4.7
2003	5.6	6.0	5.1	5.0	2.8	5.2	4.9	5.0	5.5	5.3	5.1	3.3	2.3	4.7
2004	5.5	6.2	4.9	4.8	2.8	5.0	4.9	5.1	5.4	5.3	4.8	3.0	2.3	4.6
2005	5.4	6.5	5.2	5.0	2.9	4.9	4.9	5.2	5.4	5.4	4.5	2.8	1.4	4.6
2006	5.2	6.1	5.1	5.2	2.9	5.0	4.9	5.2	5.5	5.5	4.8	2.5	2.0	4.6
2007	5.4	6.4	5.1	5.0	2.9	4.8	4.9	5.2	5.4	5.3	5.4	2.9	2.3	4.5
2008	5.3	6.8	4.9	4.9	2.9	4.7	4.7	5.3	5.3	5.2	4.0	2.7	2.5	4.4

Note: Nunavut is included in the Northwest Territories before 2001.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 1981 to 2008, Survey 3232 and Demography Division, demographic estimates.

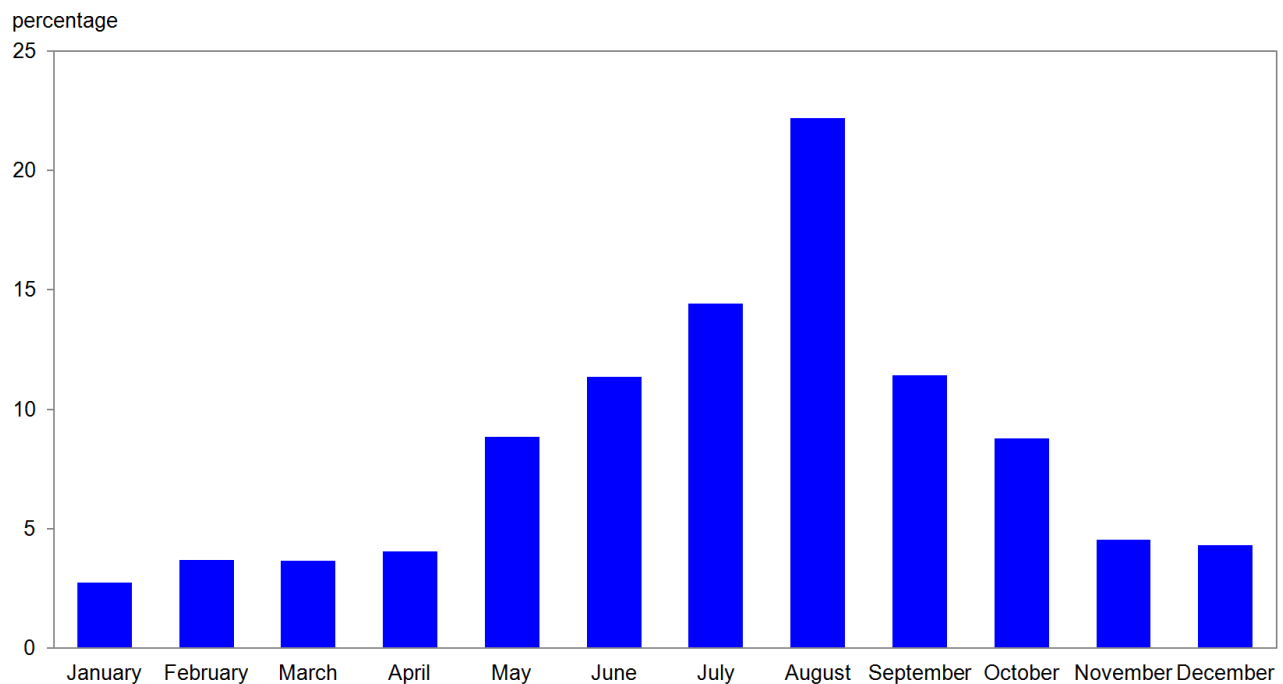
The number of marriages has fluctuated over the past century and has been influenced by historical events. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, there were fewer marriages and a lower crude rate as people were probably less willing or able to marry during a period of high unemployment and challenging economic circumstances. In 1939, Canada entered the Second World War and some couples may have married to reduce the likelihood of possible conscription—which would have affected never-married men more than married men. While low during the war years, the number of marriages rose again in 1946 at the end of the war. The number of marriages was then relatively stable throughout much of the 1950s and early 1960s before increasing during the subsequent decade, peaking at 200,470 marriages in 1972. This corresponded to members of the large baby-boom cohort reaching ages where marriage rates were high at that time. In 2000, there was a small increase in the number of marriages perhaps as some people wanted to marry in the millennium. Despite a growing total population over time, the number of people getting married has been on an overall downward trajectory for close to forty years.

Since the 1960s, the age of people getting married for the first time has been rising. In 2008, women married for the first time at 29.6 years of age, on average, younger than that of men (31.0 years). In contrast, women and men married for the first time at much younger ages throughout the 1960s and 1970s, at roughly age 23 for women and age 25 for men. Despite an increasing average age at marriage during the past four decades, there has been a fairly consistent age differential between women and men.

One of the consequences of relatively high divorce rates is that more people in the population are potentially able to marry again. People who divorce tend to be younger than those whose marriages end through death, and these people may be more able or willing to enter a subsequent union. The average age of divorced women at remarriage in 2008 was 44.8 years and for men it was 48.4 years. For women and men who married in 2008 and who had previously been widowed, the average age at marriage was 63.4 years and 72.0 years, respectively.

Seasonal trends in marriages are evident from the marriage data (Figure 8). Most marriages took place in the summer months of August (22.2% of marriages in 2008) and July (14.4%), followed by September and June (11.4% each). The lowest number of marriages took place from January to April—with January being the least popular month for weddings as 2.8% of the marriages in 2008 occurred this month—as well as November and December.

Figure 8
Distribution of marriages, by month of occurrence, Canada, 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 2008, Survey 3232.

Across Canada, in 2008, the number of marriages increased for Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Nunavut over the previous year. British Columbia had a stable number of marriages while there were decreases for the other provinces, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. In 2008, the crude marriage rate was highest in Prince Edward Island (6.8 marriages per 1,000 population) up from 6.4 one year earlier. The crude marriage rate in 2008 was lowest in the territories: Yukon (4.0), the Northwest Territories (2.7) and Nunavut (2.5) as well as in the province of Quebec (2.9). In the territories and Quebec, the proportion of people who live common-law is much higher than elsewhere in the country.

Divorces, 2008¹⁶

This section on divorces analyses the number of divorces, the crude divorce rate and age at divorce for both Canada overall and for the provinces and territories, using administrative data from the Canadian Vital Statistics Database. Divorces can be granted only following a legal marriage.¹⁷

There were 70,226 divorces in Canada in 2008, or a crude divorce rate of 21.1 divorces per 10,000 population (Table 2). Historical patterns in the number and rates of divorces are primarily associated with legislative changes. For much of the 20th Century, there were few divorces given existing social norms and restrictive grounds for divorce. Over the last century, the number of divorces peaked following the 1968 Divorce Act, which introduced 'no fault' divorce based on separation of three years or more. In 1986, the Divorce Act was amended to reduce the separation requirement to one year or more. The following year, in 1987, there was a record high of 96,200 divorces and a crude rate of 36.4 divorces per 10,000 population. For about the last twenty years, the number of divorces and the crude divorce rates have been fairly stable.

Table 2

Divorces and crude divorce rates, Canada, provinces and territories, 1981 to 2008

Year	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nvt.	Canada
	number													
1981	569	187	2,285	1,334	19,193	21,680	2,399	1,932	8,418	9,533	75	66	...	67,671
1986	687	199	2,609	1,729	19,026	27,549	2,982	2,479	9,556	11,299	94	95	...	78,304
1991	912	269	2,280	1,652	20,274	27,694	2,790	2,240	8,388	10,368	67	86	...	77,020
1996	1,060	237	2,228	1,450	18,078	25,035	2,603	2,216	7,509	10,898	115	99	...	71,528
2001	755	246	1,945	1,570	17,094	26,516	2,480	1,955	8,252	10,115	91	83	8	71,110
2002	842	258	1,990	1,461	16,499	26,170	2,396	1,959	8,291	10,125	90	68	6	70,155
2003	662	281	1,907	1,450	16,738	27,513	2,352	1,992	7,960	9,820	87	62	4	70,828
2004	837	293	2,000	1,415	15,999	26,374	2,333	1,875	8,317	10,049	66	71	15	69,644
2005	789	283	1,961	1,444	15,423	28,805	2,429	1,922	8,075	9,954	109	65	10	71,269
2006	831	287	2,161	1,527	14,965	31,983	2,221	1,983	8,329	10,235	84	54	21	74,681
2007	969	278	2,006	1,499	14,336	31,242	2,279	1,850	8,466	10,071	95	64	12	73,167
2008	907	306	1,902	1,458	13,899	29,692	2,241	1,858	8,868	8,903	108	58	26	70,226
	rate per 10,000													
1981	9.9	15.1	26.7	18.9	29.3	24.6	23.2	19.8	36.7	33.7	31.4	13.9	...	27.3
1986	11.9	15.5	29.3	23.8	28.4	29.2	27.3	24.1	39.3	37.6	38.5	17.4	...	30.0
1991	15.7	20.6	24.9	22.2	28.7	26.5	25.1	22.3	32.4	30.7	23.2	22.2	...	27.5
1996	18.9	17.5	23.9	19.3	24.9	22.6	23.0	21.7	27.1	28.1	36.6	23.7	...	24.2
2001	14.5	18.0	20.9	20.9	23.1	22.3	21.5	19.5	27.0	24.8	30.2	20.3	2.8	22.9
2002	16.2	18.8	21.3	19.5	22.2	21.6	20.7	19.7	26.5	24.7	29.6	16.3	2.1	22.4
2003	12.8	20.5	20.3	19.3	22.4	22.5	20.2	20.0	25.0	23.8	28.1	14.6	1.4	22.4
2004	16.2	21.3	21.3	18.9	21.2	21.3	19.9	18.8	25.7	24.2	21.0	16.4	5.0	21.8
2005	15.3	20.5	20.9	19.3	20.3	23.0	20.6	19.3	24.3	23.7	34.2	15.0	3.3	22.1
2006	16.3	20.8	23.0	20.5	19.6	25.3	18.8	20.0	24.3	24.1	26.0	12.5	6.8	22.9
2007	19.1	20.1	21.4	20.1	18.6	24.4	19.1	18.5	24.1	23.4	29.2	14.7	3.8	22.2
2008	17.9	21.9	20.3	19.5	17.9	23.0	18.6	18.3	24.7	20.3	32.6	13.3	8.2	21.1

Note: Nunavut is included in the Northwest Territories before 2001.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 1981 to 2008, Survey 3235 and Demography Division, demographic estimates.

16. Divorce data in this section are from Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Divorce Database, Survey 3235.

17. Therefore, this article does not analyse common-law union dissolutions.

Similar to the fluctuation in the number of divorces and the crude divorce rate at the national level from year to year, this also occurs at the provincial and territorial level. Few divorces occur in the territories where the populations are relatively small, resulting in greater annual variation.

Across Canada, the crude divorce rate was highest in Yukon (32.6 divorces per 10,000 population). Provincially, the crude divorce rate was highest in Alberta in 2008 (24.7 divorces per 10,000 population), followed by Ontario (23.0). In both 2006 and 2007, Ontario had the highest provincial crude divorce rate, followed by Alberta.

In contrast, the lowest crude divorce rates in Canada in 2008 were in Nunavut (8.2 divorces per 10,000 population) and the Northwest Territories (13.3). Among the provinces, the crude divorce rate was lowest in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, at 17.9 divorces per 10,000 population in each province in 2008. These two provinces both have proportionally higher senior populations than the national average, who in turn are less likely to divorce. Because the crude divorce rate is influenced by the age structure, an older population would be expected to have a lower crude divorce rate. Alberta, in contrast, has a younger population, which helps to account for a crude divorce rate that is higher than the national average.

Close to one-fifth (19.4%) of divorces that were finalized in 2008 were for marriages of up to five years duration, while a further 22.6% of divorces were for marriages that lasted between five and nine years. An additional 41.6% of divorces in 2008 were for marriages that had lasted between 10 and 24 years and 16.4% were for marriage durations of 25 years or more.

In Canada, the average duration of marriage for persons who finalized their divorce in 2008 was 13.7 years (Table 3). The average duration was shortest in Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories (13.1 years) and longest in New Brunswick (15.6 years), as well as Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia (15.5 years each).

The primary reason provided for divorces finalized in 2008 was separation of at least one year (93.6%).¹⁸ An additional 3.7% of the reasons provided for marital breakdown on the divorce application were for adultery, followed by mental cruelty (1.6%) and physical cruelty (1.2%). Other provinces and territories did not vary substantially from the Canadian average except in Quebec where the reasons for marital breakdown were: separation of at least one year (78.9%), adultery (12.0%), mental cruelty (5.6%) and physical cruelty (3.6%).

The total divorce rate is an indicator describing divorce frequency which provides the number of marriages (out of 10,000) that would end in divorce if the duration-specific divorce rates, calculated by length of marriage in a

Table 3
Mean duration of marriages for divorced people, Canada, provinces and territories, 1981 to 2008

Year	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nvt.	Canada
in years														
1981	13.8	14.9	13.2	14.2	14.8	14.6	13.2	12.6	12.6	14.4	14.6	12.8	..	14.1
1986	14.5	15.7	13.5	14.2	14.2	14.6	13.2	12.9	13.2	15.3	12.7	15.7	..	14.2
1991	13.7	15.5	13.4	14.1	13.7	13.6	12.3	13.2	13.4	14.4	12.7	11.7	..	13.7
1996	13.8	15.0	13.8	14.4	13.2	14.0	13.2	13.0	13.5	14.0	13.4	13.3	..	13.7
2001	14.0	17.0	14.8	14.9	13.5	13.6	13.2	12.9	13.9	14.1	14.0	13.2	..	13.8
2002	13.8	15.0	14.5	15.3	13.5	13.7	13.4	13.0	13.8	14.0	13.8	12.5	..	13.8
2003	14.5	16.3	15.0	15.0	13.4	13.4	13.3	13.5	14.1	14.3	15.0	13.7	..	13.7
2004	15.1	16.0	15.2	15.1	13.5	13.7	13.4	13.9	13.9	14.4	12.0	11.8	..	13.9
2005	14.7	16.8	15.0	15.4	13.4	13.7	13.3	13.6	14.2	14.5	15.5	12.1	..	13.9
2006	15.2	16.5	15.3	15.5	13.4	13.5	13.6	13.5	14.1	14.2	13.4	12.9	..	13.8
2007	14.4	15.9	15.4	15.4	13.3	13.5	13.7	13.9	14.0	14.4	13.6	13.8	..	13.7
2008	15.5	15.2	15.5	15.6	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.1	14.0	14.4	14.3	13.1	..	13.7

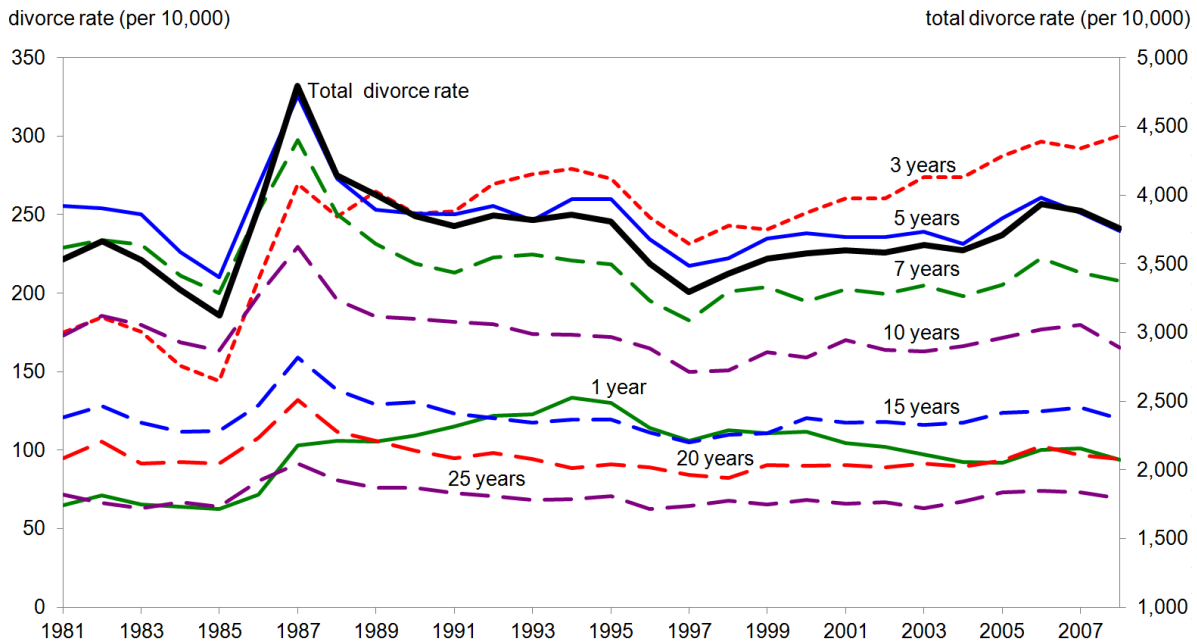
Notes: Includes divorces for marriages of all durations. The mean duration of marriages for divorced people is based on rates in order to control for fluctuations in age structure over time, which allow for comparisons between provinces. The mean duration of marriages for divorced people cannot be calculated for Nunavut because marriage data only exists since 1999 for that territory.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3232 and Canadian Vital Statistics, Divorces Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3235 and Demography Division, demographic estimates.

18. Proportions are based on reasons for marital breakdown made on the application. In some cases, multiple reasons were selected, consequently, there was a higher number of reasons than divorces.

Figure 9

Duration-specific divorce rates for various durations of marriage, by year of divorce and total divorce rate, Canada, 1981 to 2008



Note: Total divorce rate is based on divorces for marriages up to 25 years.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriages Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3232 and Canadian Vital Statistics, Divorces Database, 1926 to 2008, Survey 3235 and Demography Division, demographic estimates.

given calendar year, were applied to those 10,000 marriages. As a result, this indicator statistically controls for the effect of annual fluctuations in the number of marriages. Bias does occur, however, as the result of two events: death and migration. Following the death of a spouse, divorce is not possible, consequently underestimating the total divorce rate. If a divorce is not obtained in the province where the marriage took place, this results in an overestimation of divorce frequency where there is a net migration gain and an underestimation where there is a net loss.

The trend in the total divorce rate has been relatively stable since the late 1990s with a slight increase in 2006 (Figure 9). However, the divorce rate for three-year marriages has been increasing fairly steadily since this time, unlike marriages of other lengths. The divorce rates for marriages of other durations have generally been falling in the past several years and tend to be lower for marriages of longer duration. In 2008, the divorce rate for one-year marriages was about the same as that of marriages of 20 years (about 94 divorces per 10,000 marriages of each duration in 2008), a trend that began around 2004.

If the duration-specific divorce rates calculated for 2008 remain stable then the 25-year total divorce rate per 10,000 marriages was 3,758 in 2008, meaning that 37.6% of marriages entered in 2008 are expected to end in divorce before the 25th year of marriage. The 50-year total divorce rate in 2008 was 4,307, meaning that 43.1% of marriages entered in 2008 are expected to end in divorce before the 50th year of marriage.

Both the average age at divorce and the average age at which these individuals married increased slightly between 2006 and 2008, and were higher for men than for women. The average age of marriage among persons who divorced in 2008 was 27.6 years for women and 30.2 years for men, and the average age at divorce was 41.9 years and 44.5 years, respectively. In 2006, among people who divorced that year, the average age at marriage was 27.1 years for women and 29.7 years for men, while the respective average ages at divorce were 41.6 years and 44.2 years.

In 2008, the average age of divorce was highest for women in Nova Scotia and Quebec (43.7 years each) and lowest for Nunavut (38.4 years) while for men the average age was highest in Yukon (47.1), Nova Scotia and Quebec (46.2 each) and also lowest in Nunavut (42.6 years).

