



The Canadian Marriage Map

2024

CARDUS



How to Cite

Cardus. “The Canadian Marriage Map.” 2024. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/research-report/the-canadian-marriage-map>.



Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society’s institutions can work together for the common good.

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About Cardus Family

Cardus Family conducts, compiles, and disseminates research on family stability and healthy marriage, and their strengthening impact on civil society. We envision public policy and social institutions that support flexibility for families to make the best decisions for their children.



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Introduction

Updated October 2024

Healthy marriages contribute to stable families and vibrant communities. Economic and cultural shifts have made it more difficult to enter and sustain healthy marriages. Reliable data can help us better understand changes in Canadian family life and inform the questions we need to pursue in supporting families in the years ahead.

The Canadian Marriage Map compiles data on marriage in one convenient place, highlighting current trends at the national and provincial/territorial levels. The project provides historical context and regional and international comparisons to help better understand marriage within Canadian family life.

Using the Marriage Map

The data below are compiled from a number of sources clearly labelled on each graph and chart. The sources provide additional data and analysis that users may find helpful.

Where possible, marriage is distinguished from other family structures. Some sources refer to couple families (married or common-law couples, with or without children) and intact families (a couple family in which all children in the household are the biological and/or adopted children of both members of the couple). Lone-parent families are defined as families of only one parent and his or her child(ren). It's helpful to note these distinctions where marriage is specifically referenced.

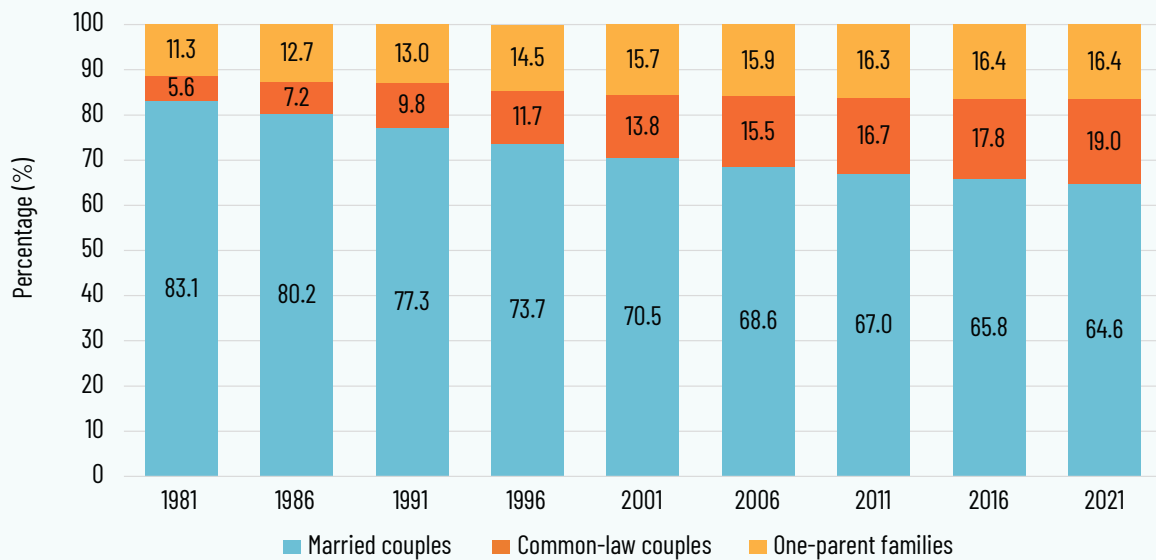
The Marriage Map explores the following themes:

- Marriage and Family Structure
- Marriage and Divorce
- Marital Status and Children's Living Arrangements
- Household Size
- Marriage and Income
- Attitudes on Marriage

Marriage and Family Structure

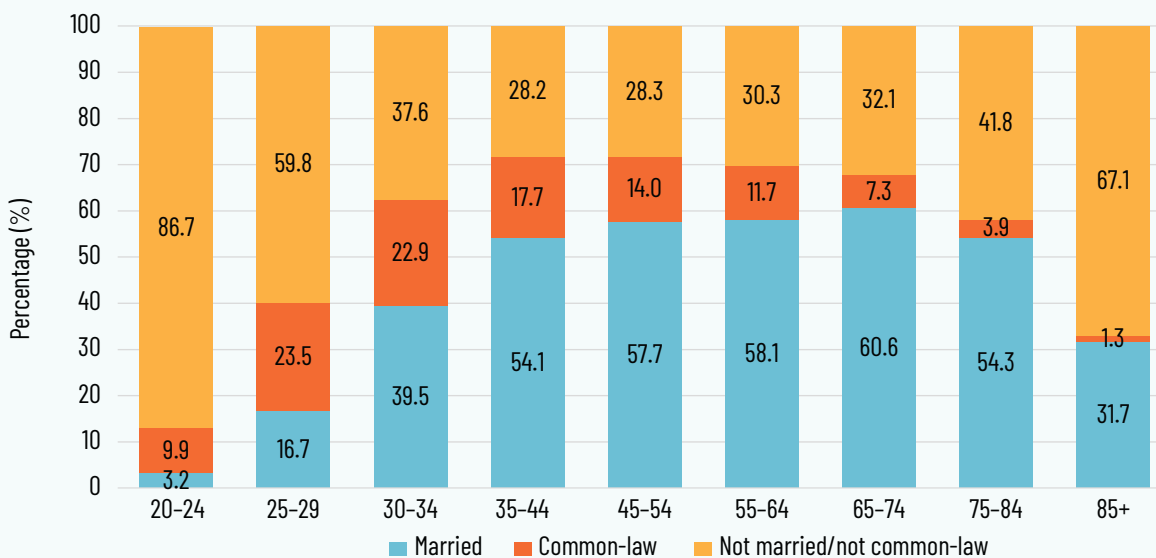
Family structure in Canada has been shifting for decades. While married families remain the majority of all census families, the portion of married families has decreased, while common-law and lone-parent families have increased.

Distribution of Census Families by Family Structure, 1981-2021



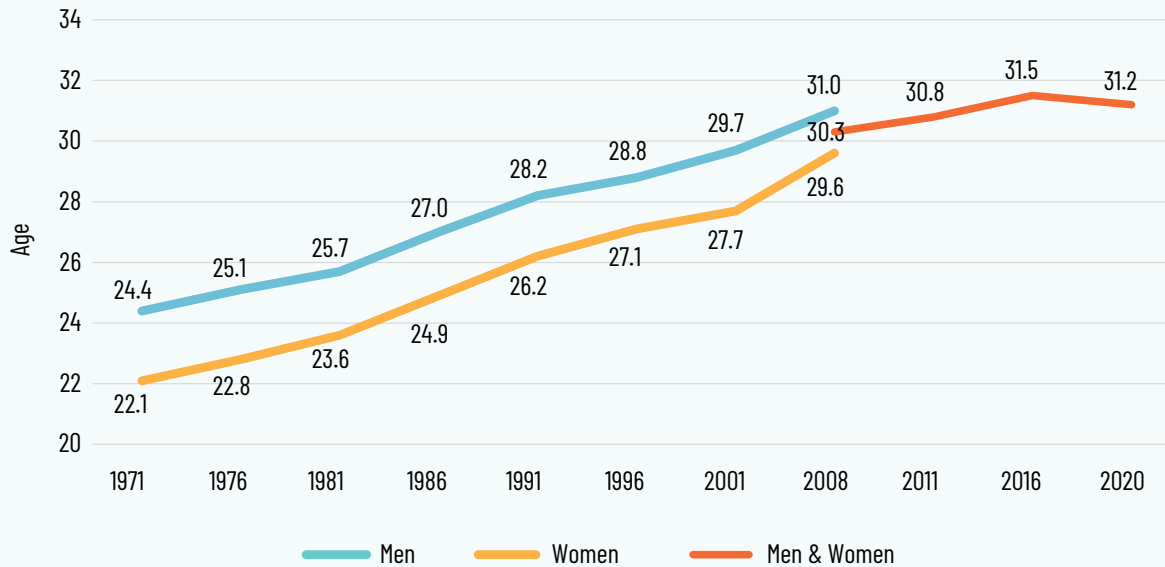
Note: Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population*, (1981-2021).

Marital Status by Age, 2021



Note: Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, *2021 Census Tables*.

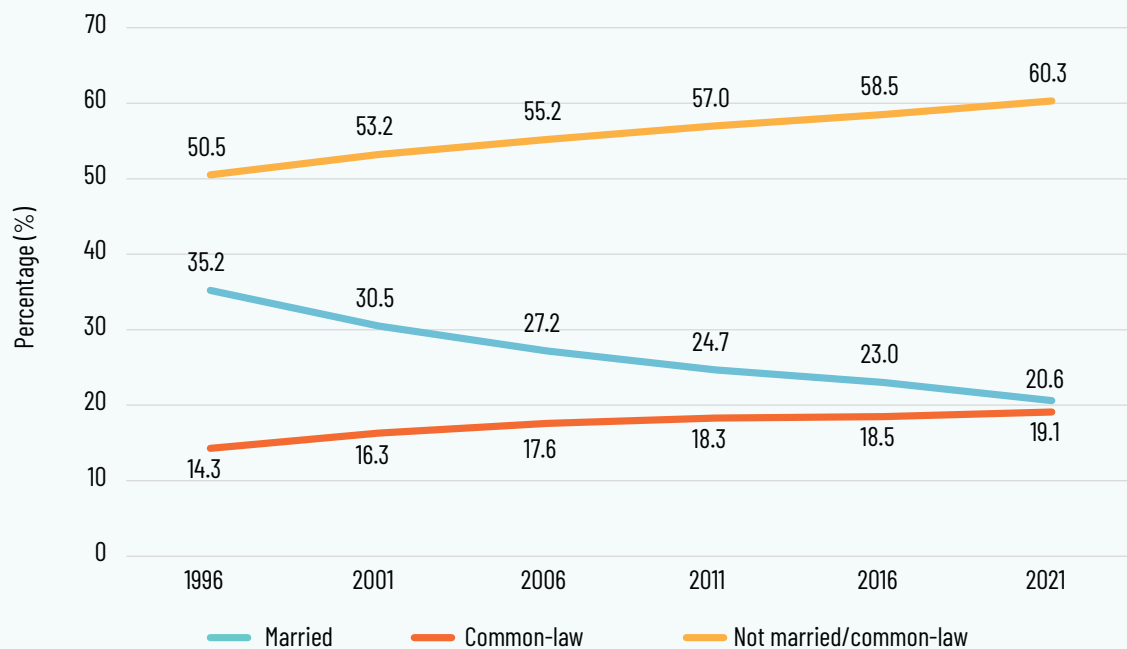
Average Age at First Marriage, Men and Women, Canada, 1971-2020



Note: As of 2008, Statistics Canada does not report data by gender.

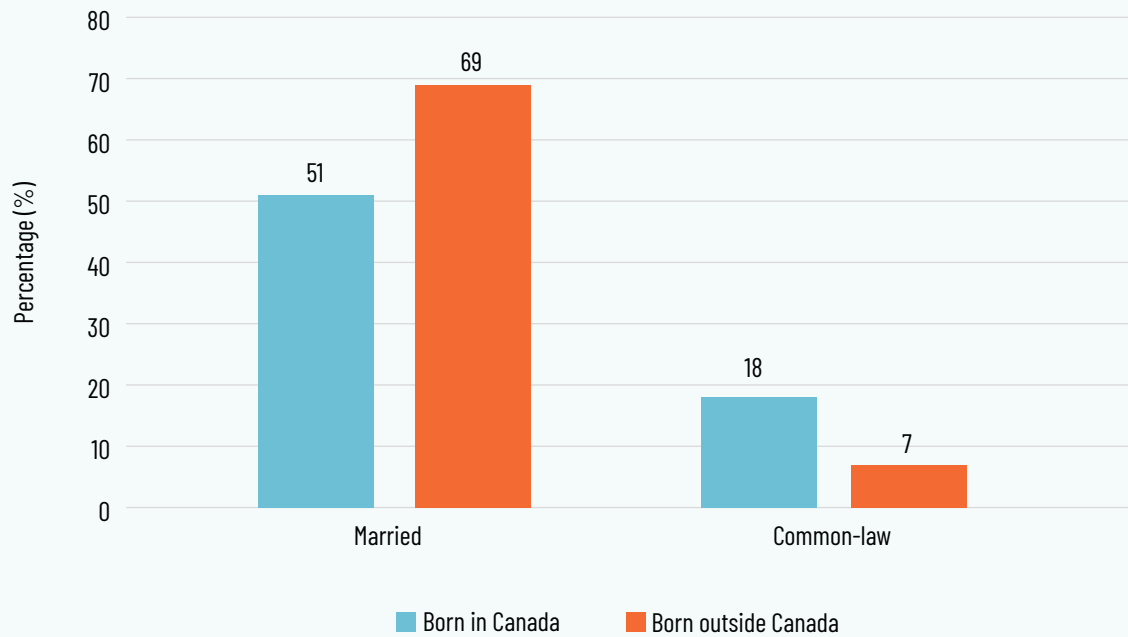
Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 84-212-XPB, Table 2.3, *Marriages and average age at first marriage, 1971 to 2002*, Health Statistics Division; A. Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011" (July 2013), Statistics Canada; Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0056-01, *Mean age and median age at marriage, by legal marital status* (Nov. 14, 2022).

Percentage of Canadians, Aged 20-34, Who Are Married, Common-law, or Not Married/Common-law, 1996-2021



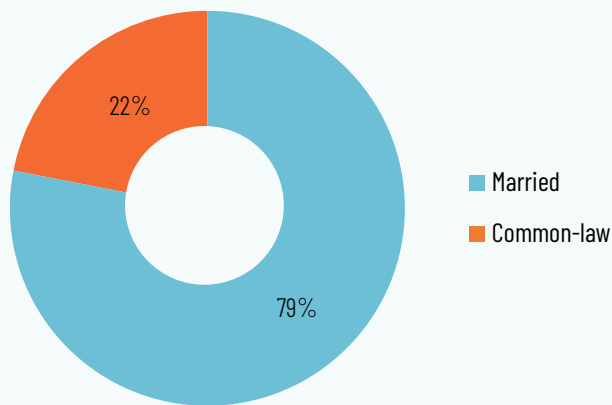
Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population*, (1996-2021).

Portion of People Aged 25–64, Married and Common-law, by Place of Birth, 2017



Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey (Families)* (2017).

Marital Status of Adults Aged 55 and Over in Partnerships of 30 Years or More, 2017

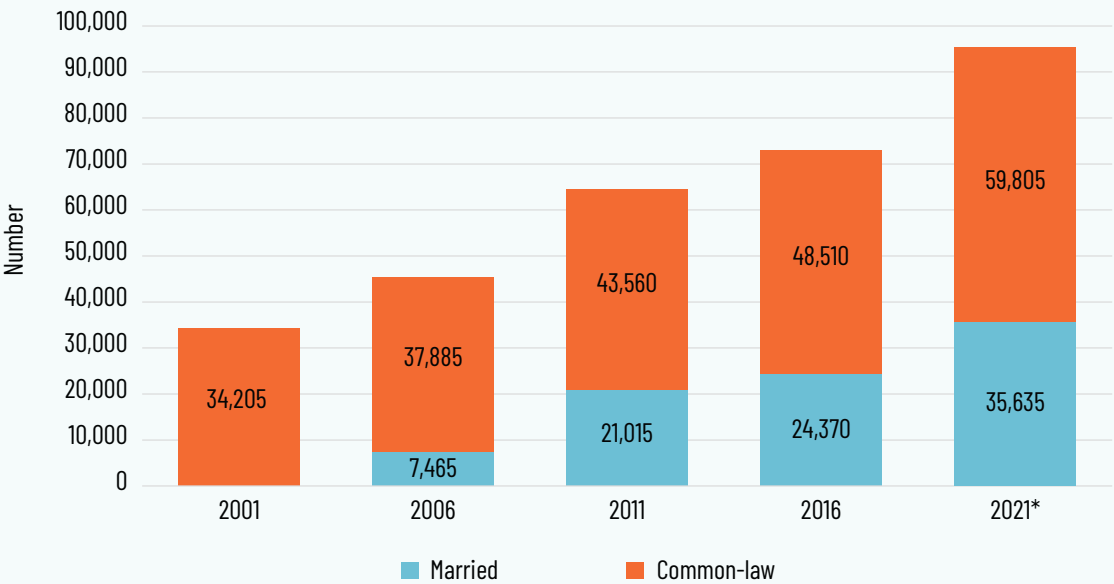


Note: Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey (Families)* (2017).

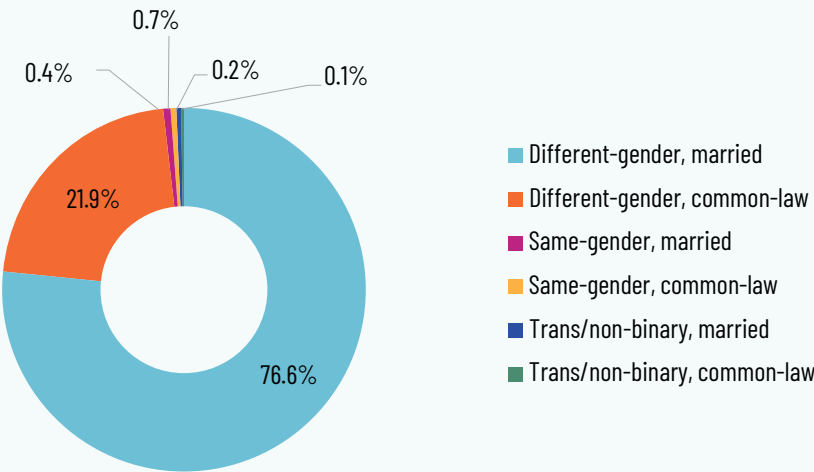
Same-sex marriage was legalized federally in 2005, and the 2006 census was the first to capture data on married same-sex couples. With the latest census in 2021, we now have fifteen years of census data on same-sex marriages in Canada.

Distribution of Same-Sex Couples, by Conjugal Status, Canada, 2001-2021



*Census 2021 replaces the term "same-sex couples" with "same-gender couples (cisgender)."
Sources: Statistics Canada, *Same-Sex Couples in Canada in 2016* (2017); Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (2021).

Different-Gender, Same-Gender, Trans and Non-Binary Couples as a Percent of All Couples, Canada, 2021

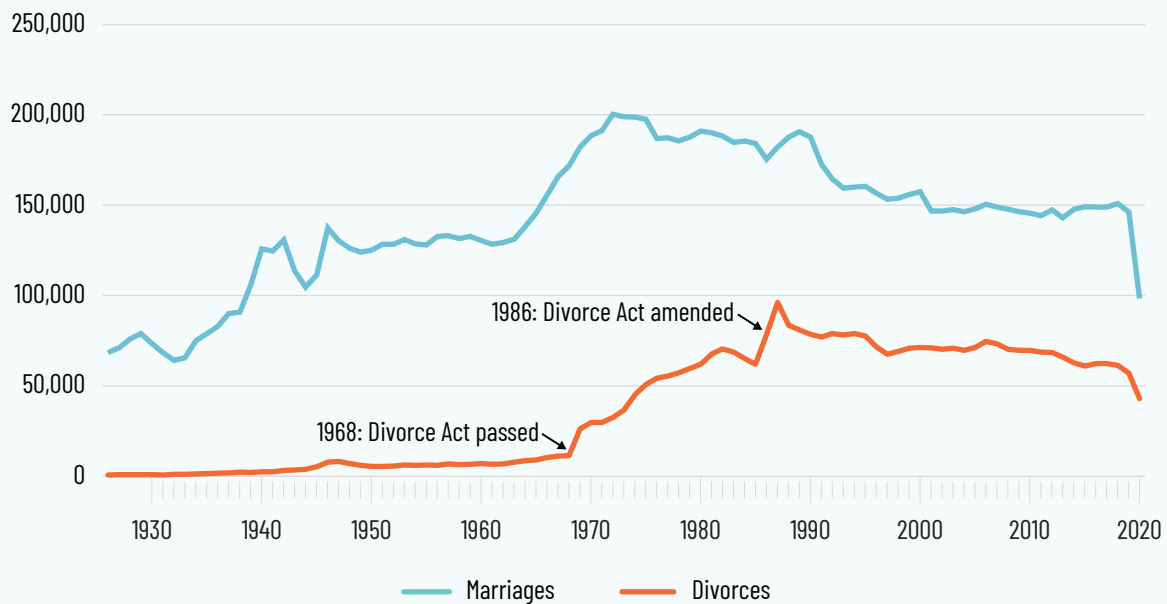


Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (2021).

Marriage and Divorce

National marriage and divorce rates are derived from vital statistics. The collection and publication of national data ceased in 2011. In 2022, Statistics Canada returned to publishing data on the divorce rate and marriage rate. There are a number of measures that social scientists use to estimate rates of marriage and divorce. Below are the number of marriages and divorces over time, and the crude marriage and divorce rates (number per 1,000 population).

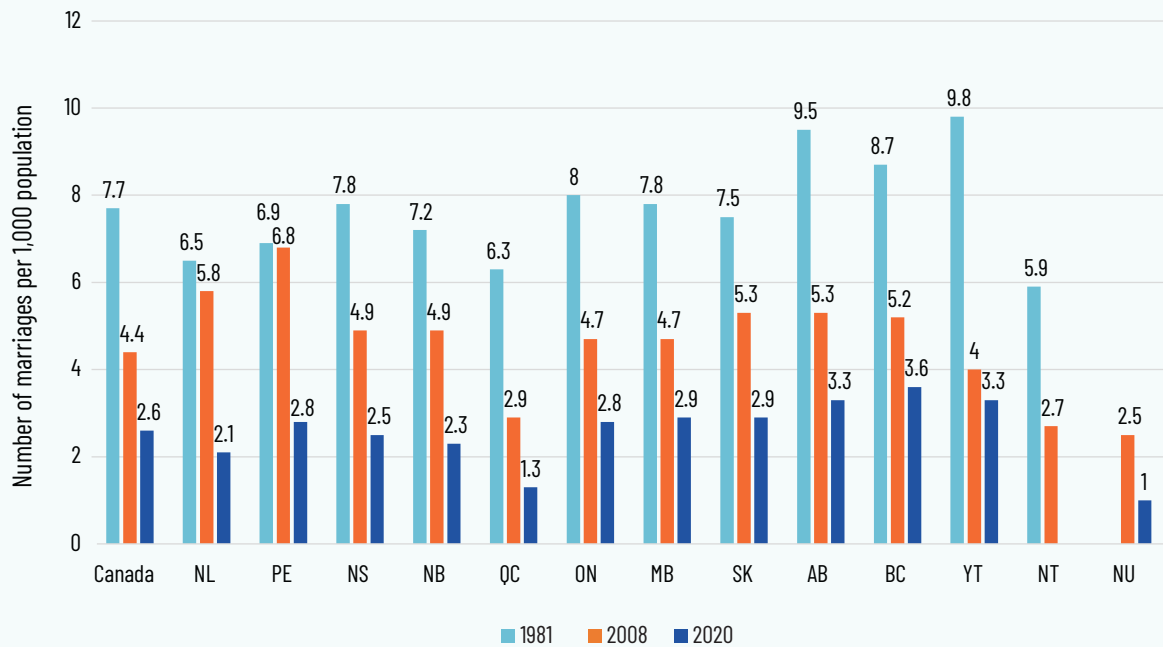
Number of Marriages and Divorces, Canada, 1926-2020



Note: Revised data from Table 39-10-0051-01 & Table 39-10-0055-01 for years prior to 2009 not shown here.

Sources: A. Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011" (July 2013), Statistics Canada; Statistics Canada, *Canadian Vital Statistics - Divorce Database* (3235) (March 9, 2022); Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0055-01, *Number of marriages and nuptiality indicators* (Nov. 14, 2022).

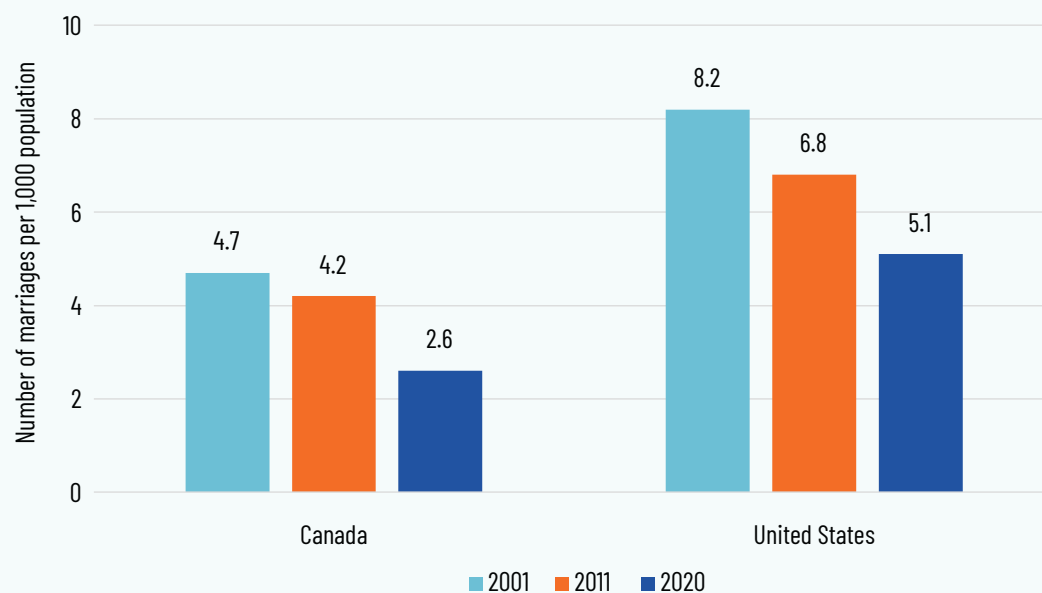
Crude Marriage Rate per 1000 Population, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981, 2008, 2020



Note: NT data in 1981 include what is now NU. No data collected for NT in 2020.

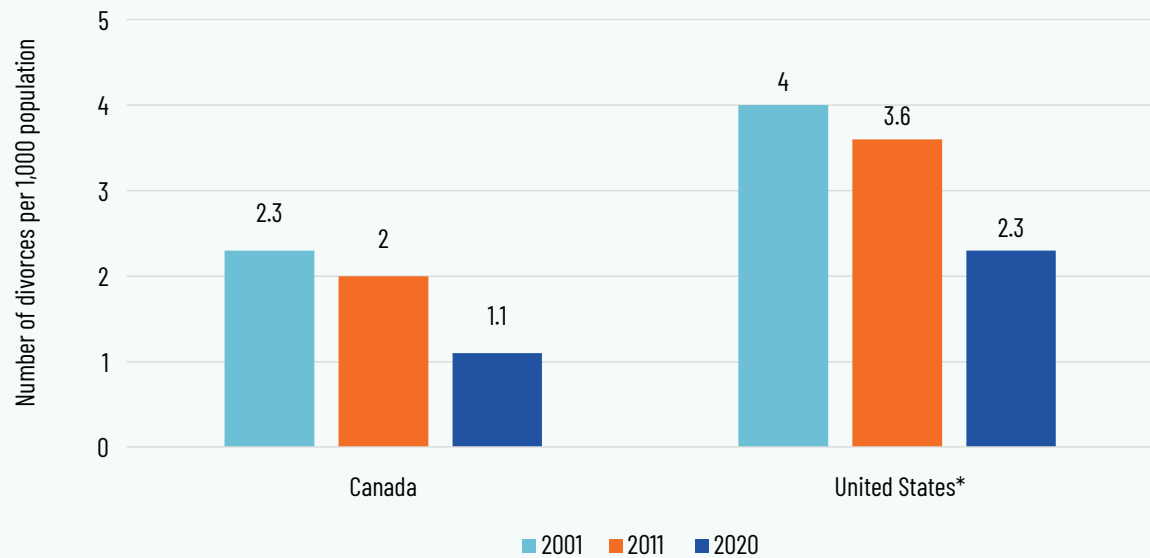
Sources: A. Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011" (July 2013), Statistics Canada; Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0055-01, *Number of marriages and nuptiality indicators* (Nov. 14, 2022).

Crude Marriage Rate Per 1,000 Population, Canada and the United States, 2001, 2011, 2020



Sources: CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System, *Provisional number of marriages and marriage rate: United States, 2000-2021*; Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0055-01, *Number of marriages and nuptiality indicators* (Nov. 14, 2022).

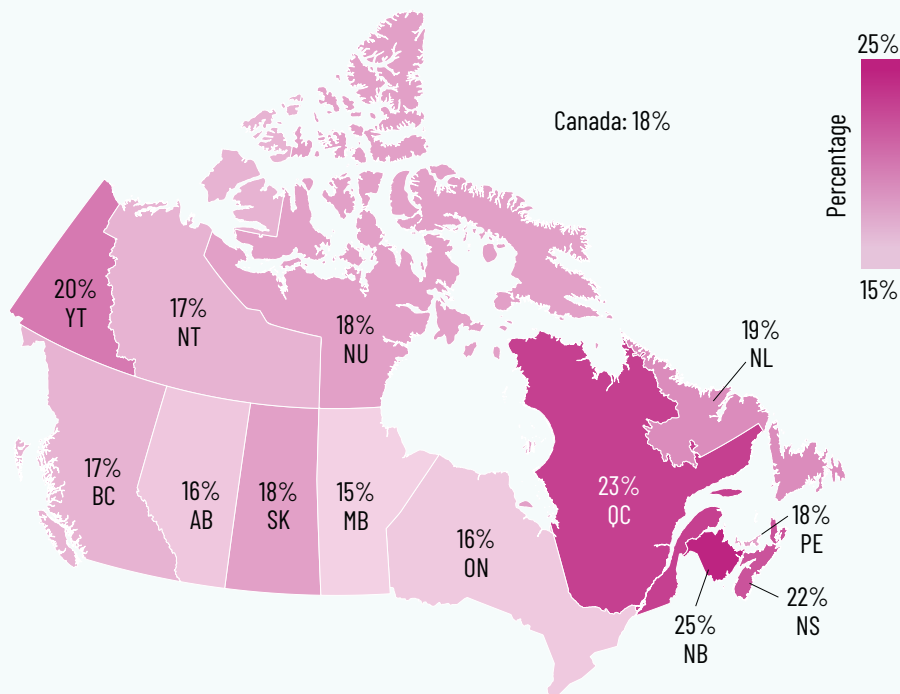
Crude Divorce Rate per 1,000 Population, Canada and the United States, 2001, 2011, 2020



Note: US data exclude some states.

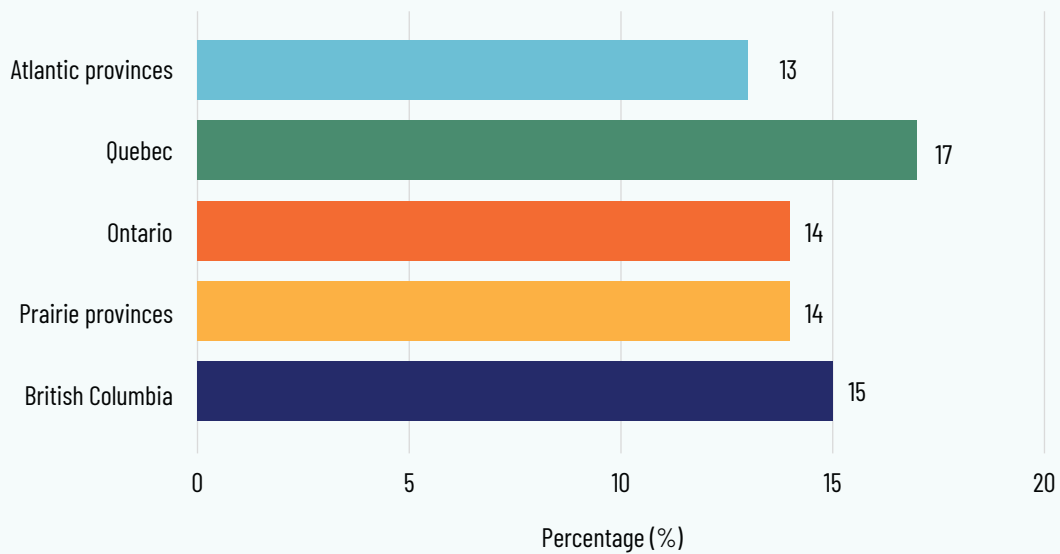
Sources: CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System, *Provisional number of marriages and marriage rate: United States, 2000-2021*; Statistics Canada, Table 39-10-0051-01, *Number of divorces and divorce indicators* (Nov. 14, 2022).

Percentage of Children Aged 1-17 Who Have Experienced the Divorce or Separation of Their Parents, 2019



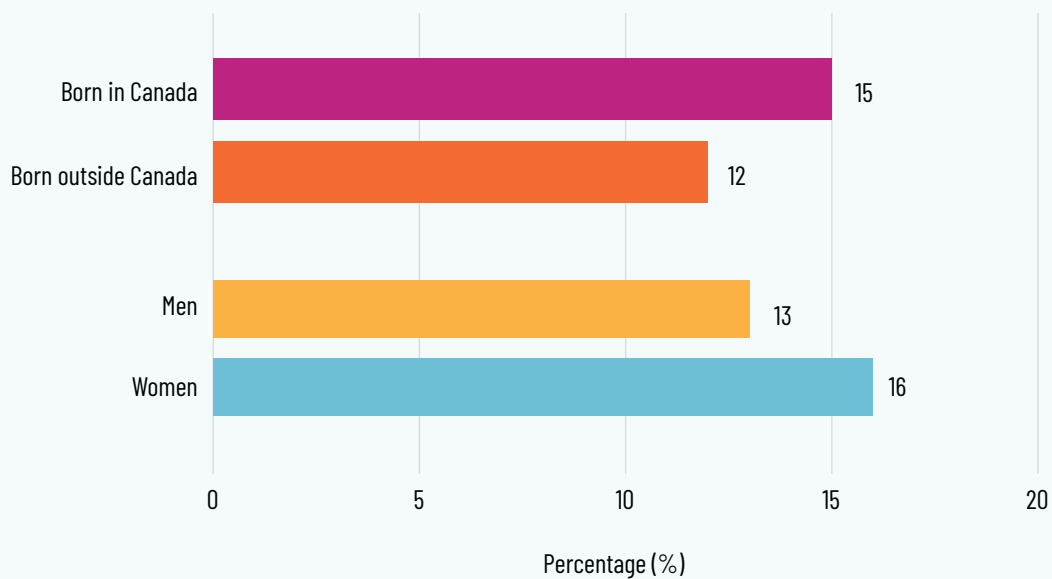
Source: Statistics Canada, 2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth.

Percentage of Adults Aged 55 and Over, Separated or Divorced, by Region, 2017



Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey (Families)* (2017).

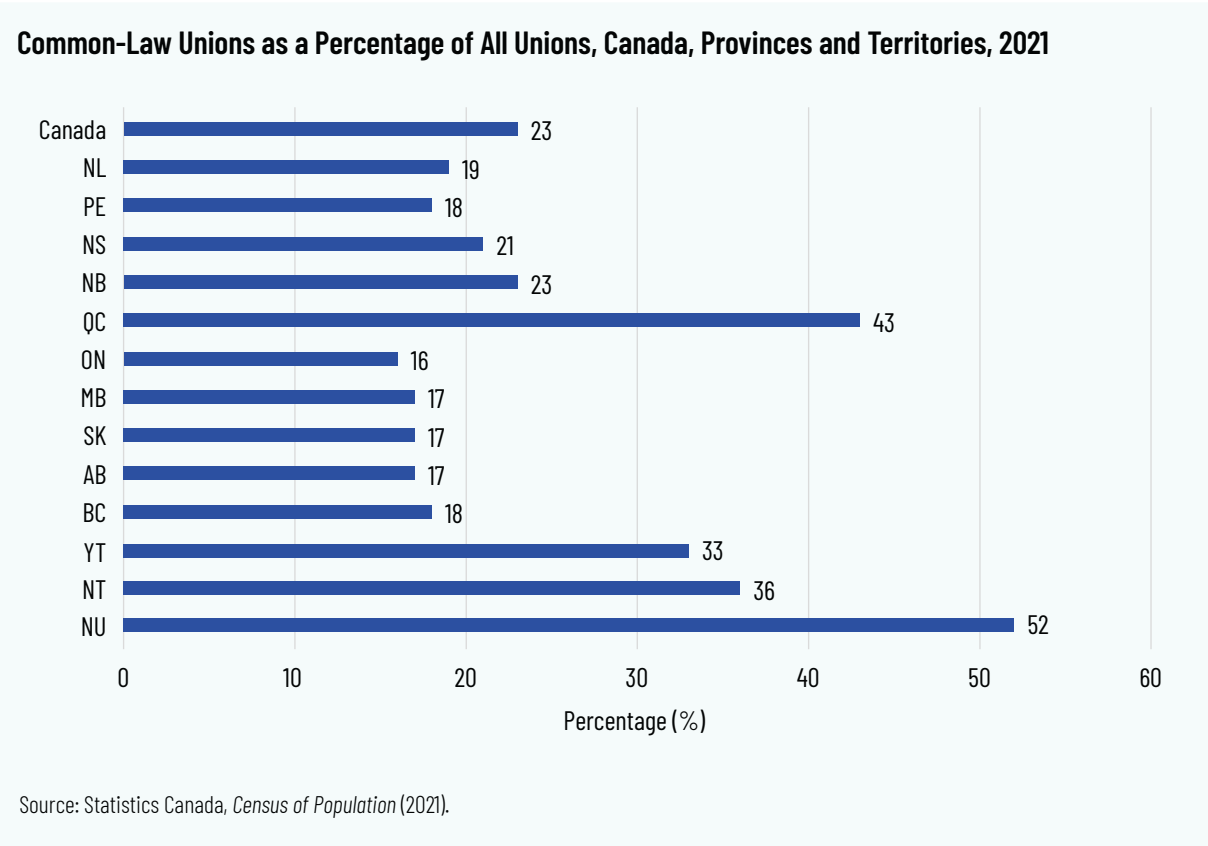
Percentage of Adults Aged 55 and Over, Separated or Divorced, Men and Women, Place of Birth, 2017



Source: Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey (Families)* (2017).

Common-law couples account for 19 percent of all census families in Canada or 23 percent of all couples. About 43 percent of all couples living common-law in Canada reside in Quebec.

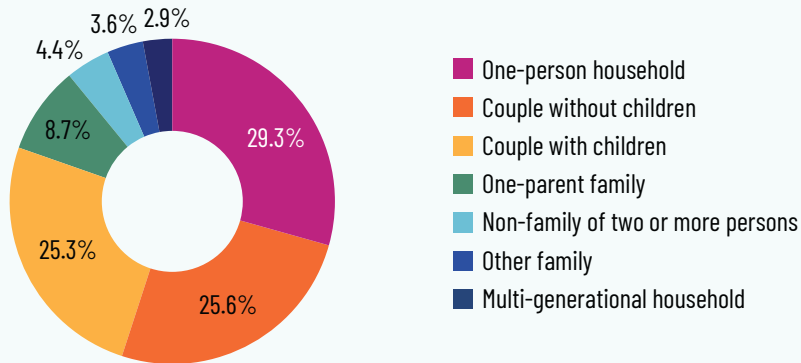
Some common-law partnerships are a prelude to marriage, while others are an alternative to marriage. Common-law relationships are more prone to dissolution compared to marriage, and couples have varying legal rights from region to region across Canada.



Marital Status and Children's Living Arrangements

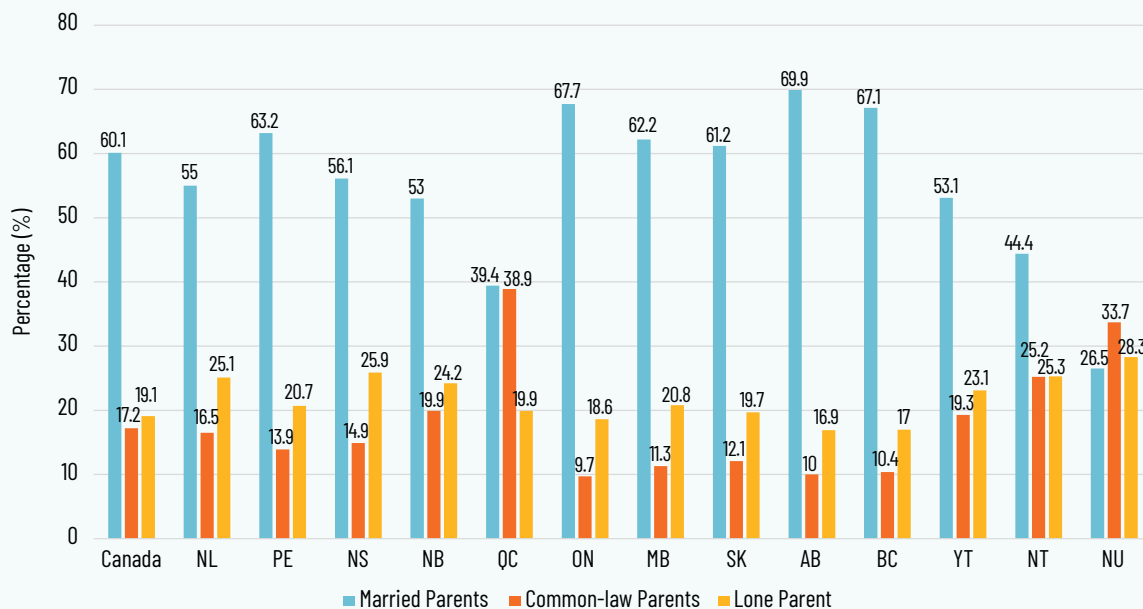
Marriage is linked to positive outcomes for children. The following graphs examine the presence of children in couple families, and the prevalence of children in various family structures across the country and over time.

Percentage of Private Households, by Type, 2021



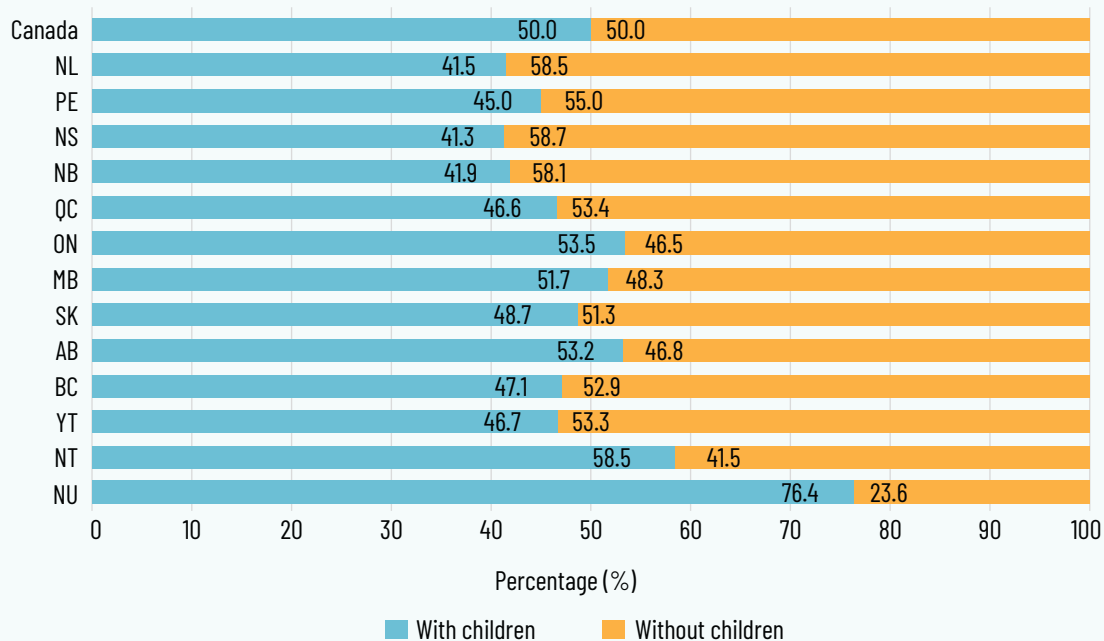
Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population (2021)*.

Portion of Children Aged 0 to 14 Living in Married, Common-law, and Lone-Parent Families, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2021



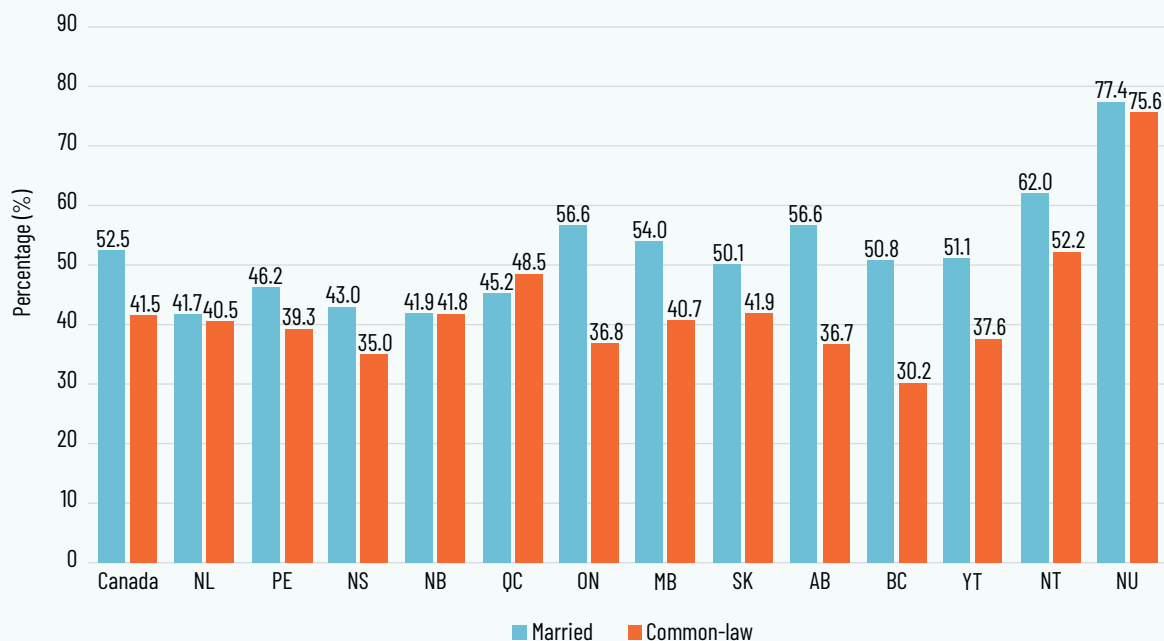
Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding and the exclusion of children living outside of married, common-law, and lone-parent families.
Source: Statistics Canada, *Customized Census Family Structure (2021)*.

Portion of Couples With and Without Children, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2021



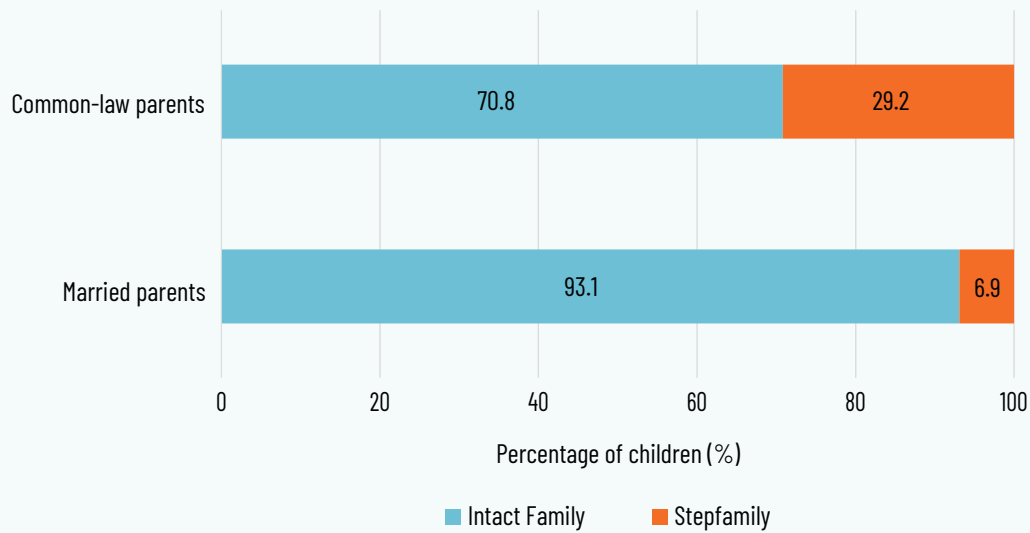
Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (2021).

Percentage of Married and Common-Law Couples with Children at Home, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (2021).

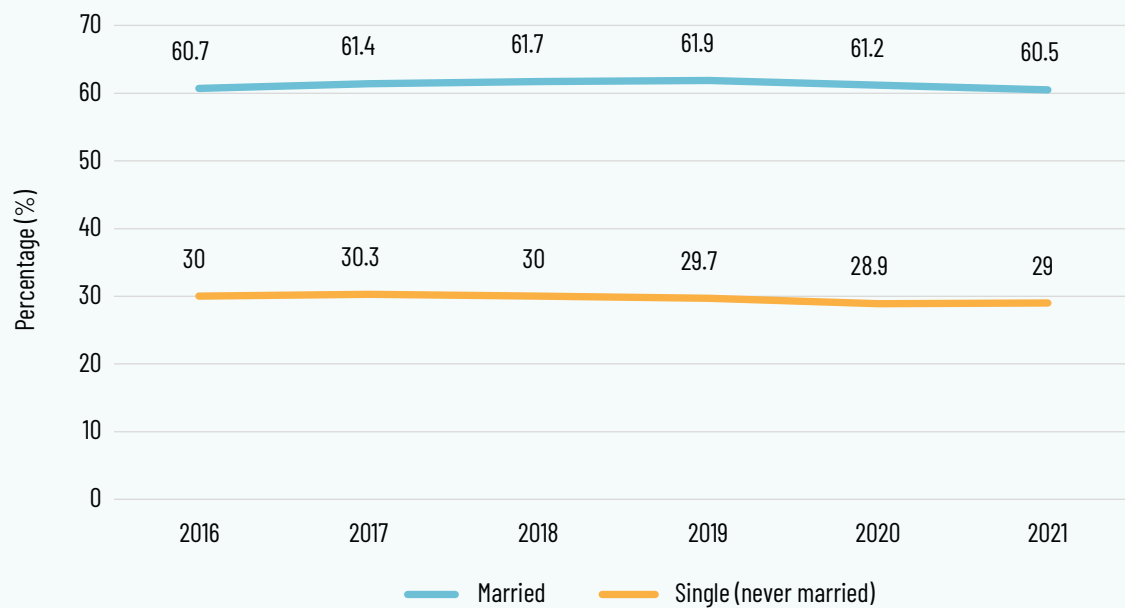
Portion of Children Aged 0 to 14 in Intact Families and Stepfamilies, by Marital Status, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, *Customized Census Family Structure* (2021).

Parenting without a partner can present many challenges. Although lone parents are overrepresented among low-income families, Canadian policies have made significant strides in helping lone-parent families over the last several decades.

Percentage of Live Births, by Marital Status of Mother, 2016–2021



Note: Figure excludes divorced, separated, widowed, and not stated, and therefore does not round to 100.

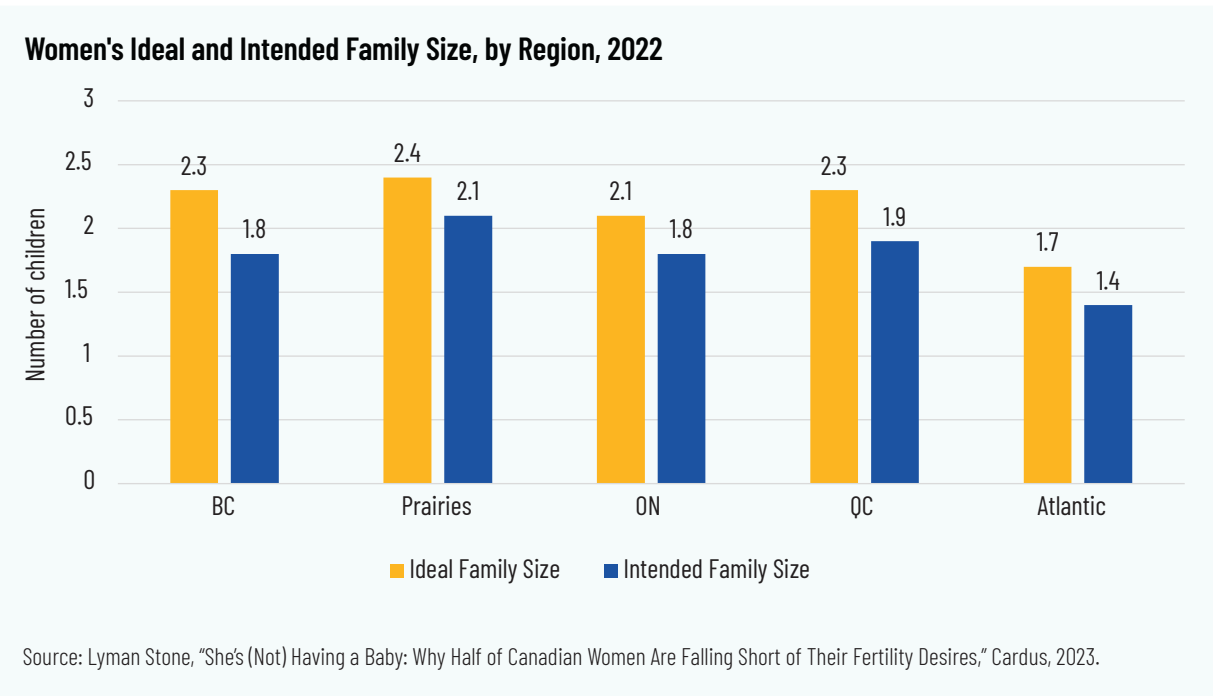
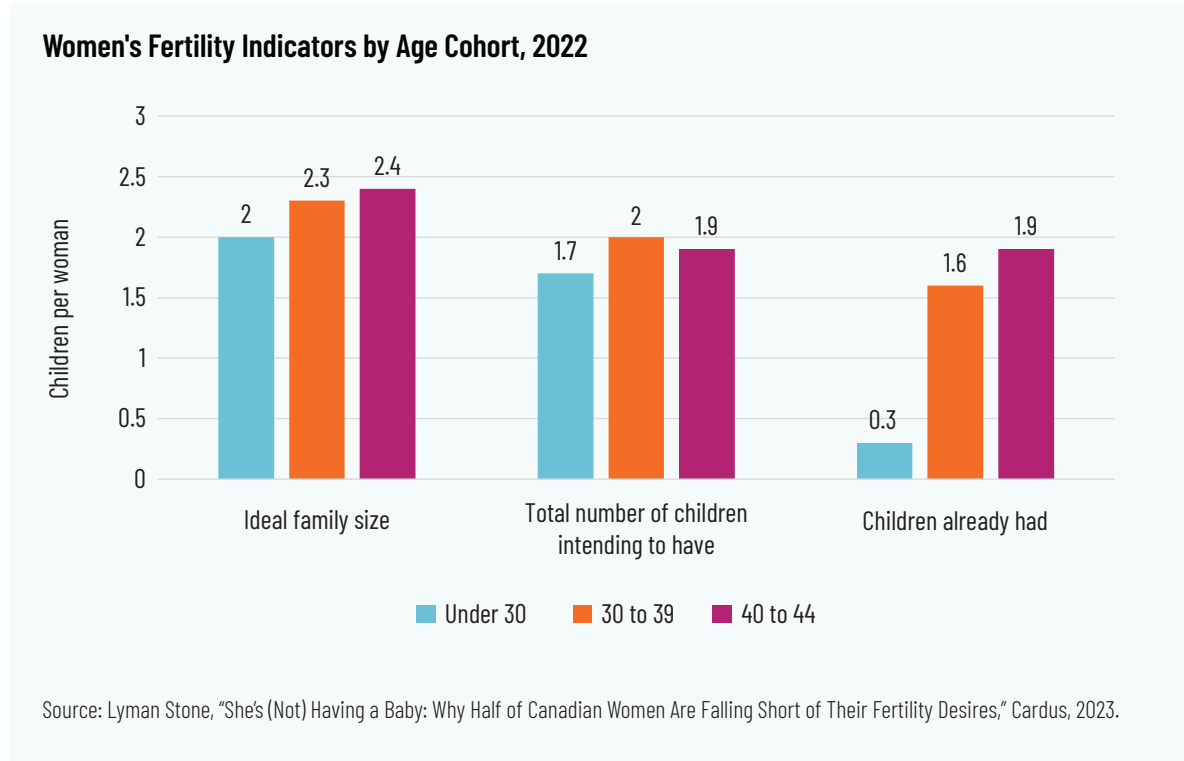
Source: Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0419-01, *Live births, by marital status of mother* (Sept. 25, 2024).

Average Age of Childbearing, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2021



Note: Yukon data are unavailable for 2021.
Source: Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0417-01, *Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live births)* (Sept. 25, 2024).

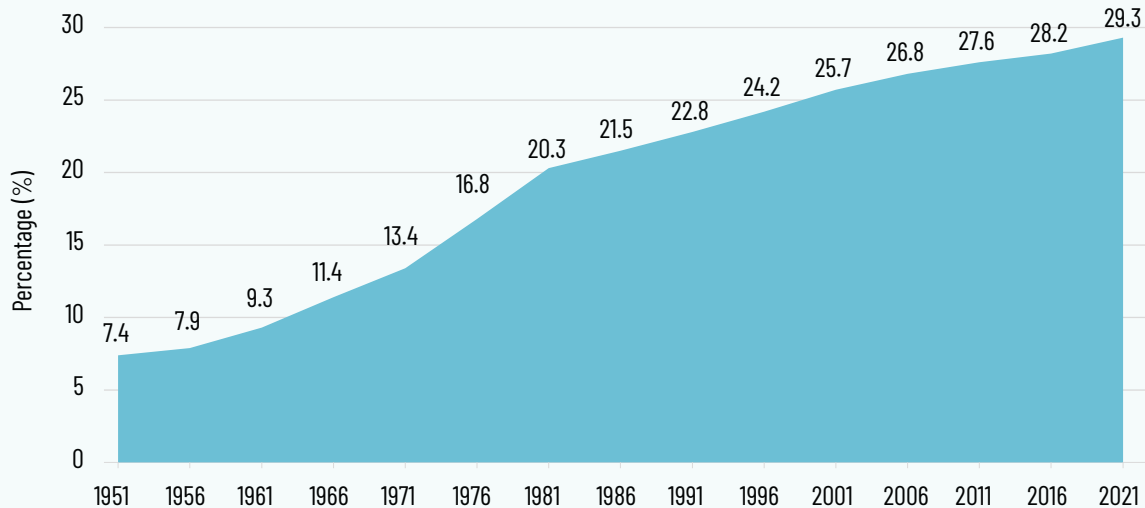
The total fertility rate required to replace a population without the aid of immigration is 2.1 births per woman. Canada’s total fertility rate has been below replacement since the early 1970s. The following figures illustrate the average family size that Canadian women say would be ideal for them, and the average family size that they say they intend. Ideal family size is larger than intended family size.



Household Size

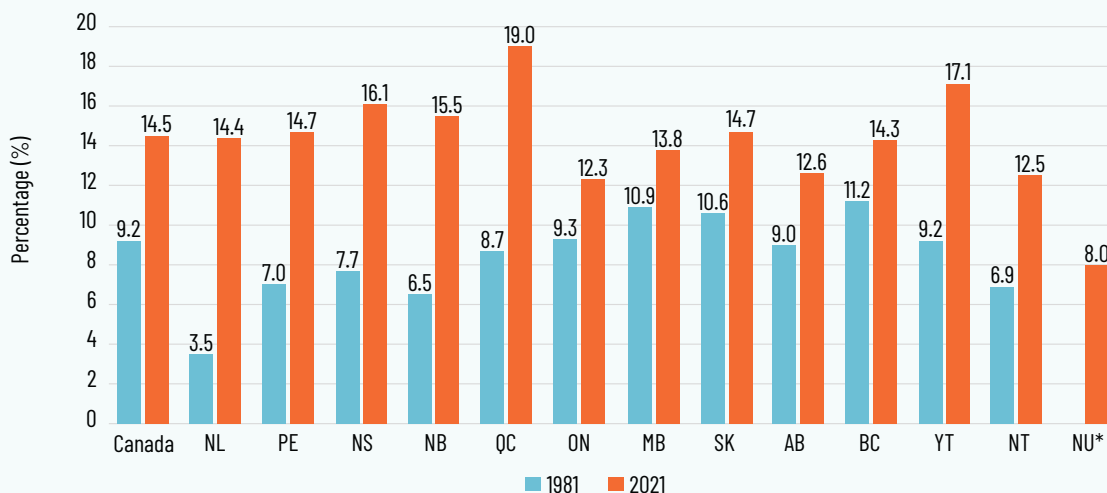
Household size has decreased as the portion of married Canadians has decreased. Statistics Canada reports that in 2006 unmarried Canadians living in private households outnumbered married Canadians for the first time. The following graphs show the growth in one-person households as the size of family households decreased.

Percentage of One-Person Households, Canada, 1951-2021



Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (1951-2021).

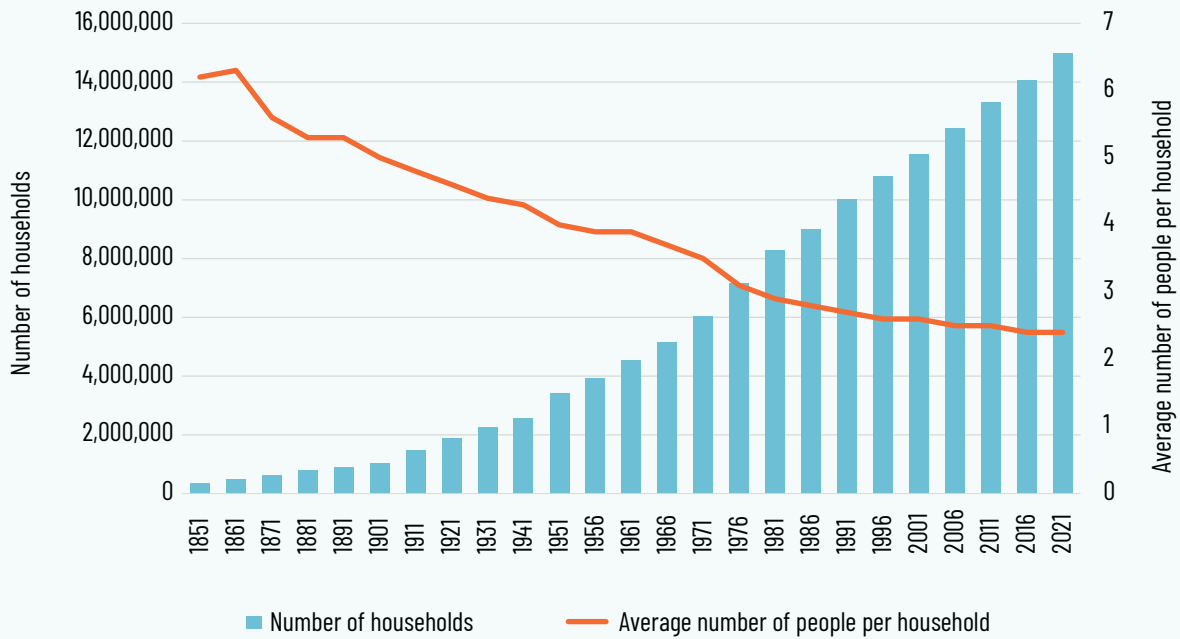
Percentage of People Aged 15 and Older, in Private Households Who Are Living Alone, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981 and 2021



Note: *1981 data are unavailable.

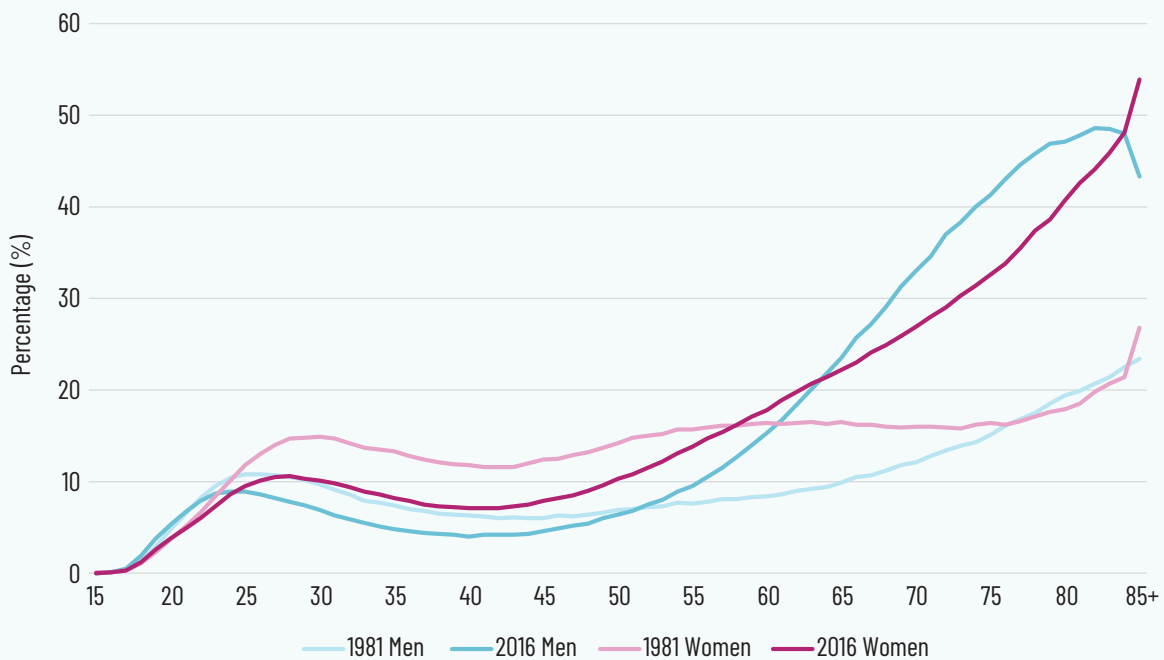
Source: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population* (1951-2021).

Number of Households and Average Number of People Per Household, Canada, 1851-2021



Source: Statistics Canada, *The Shift to Smaller Households Over the Past Century* (2018); Statistics Canada, *Census of the Population* (2016 and 2021).

Portion of Men and Women Living Alone, by Age, 1981 and 2016

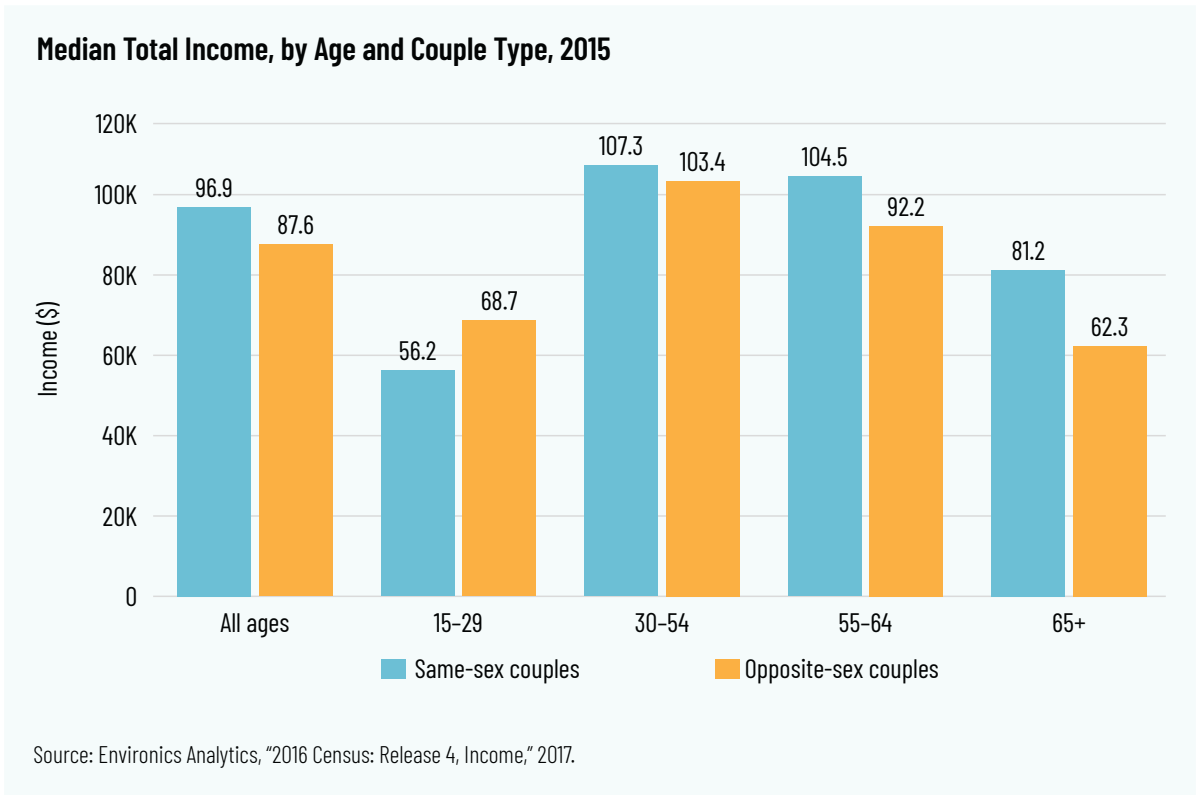
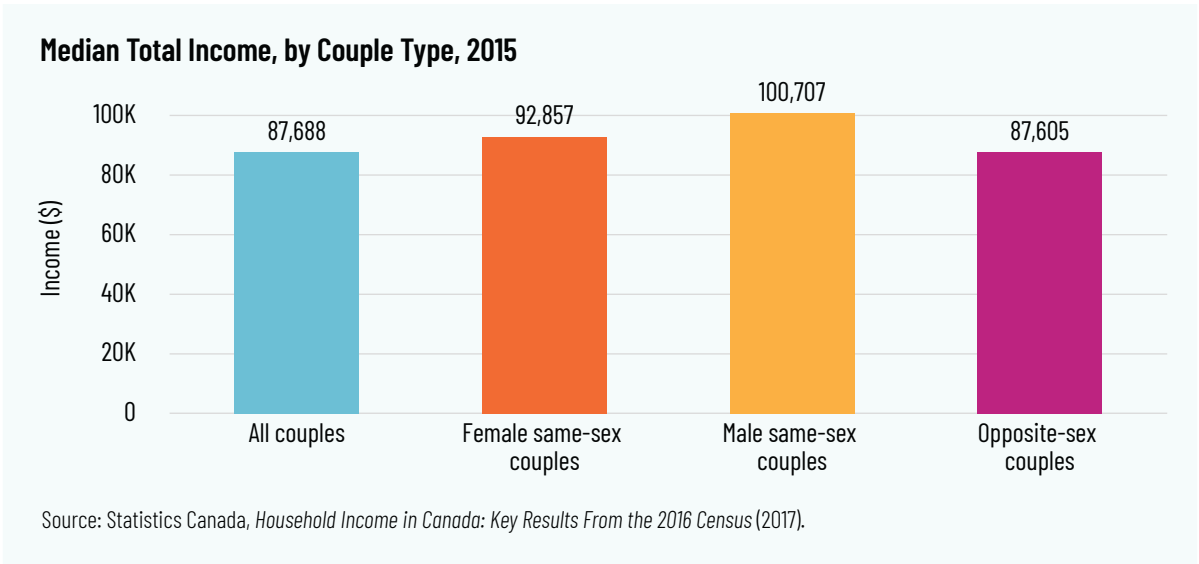


Source: Statistics Canada, *Insights on Canadian Society: Living Alone in Canada* (2019).

Marital Status and Income

In Canada as in the United Kingdom and United States, marriage is associated with a growing income divide. Wealthier families are more likely to be married. Economic and cultural forces have contributed to the decline of marriage among lower-income Canadians.

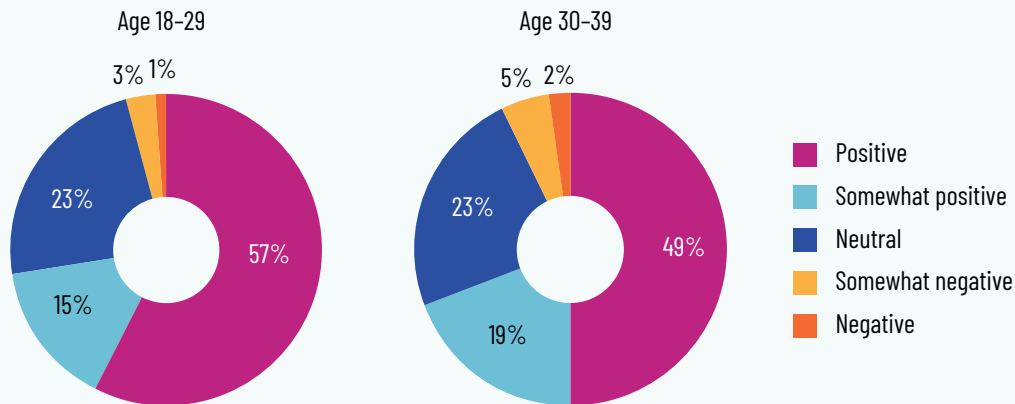
Increasing labour-force participation among women over the last few decades has resulted in changes in the portion of household income that each partner receives.



Attitudes on Marriage

Attitudes toward marriage are an important cultural indicator. While most Canadians remain positive about marriage and the level of commitment it signifies, they are less likely to consider marriage as a necessary part of family life.

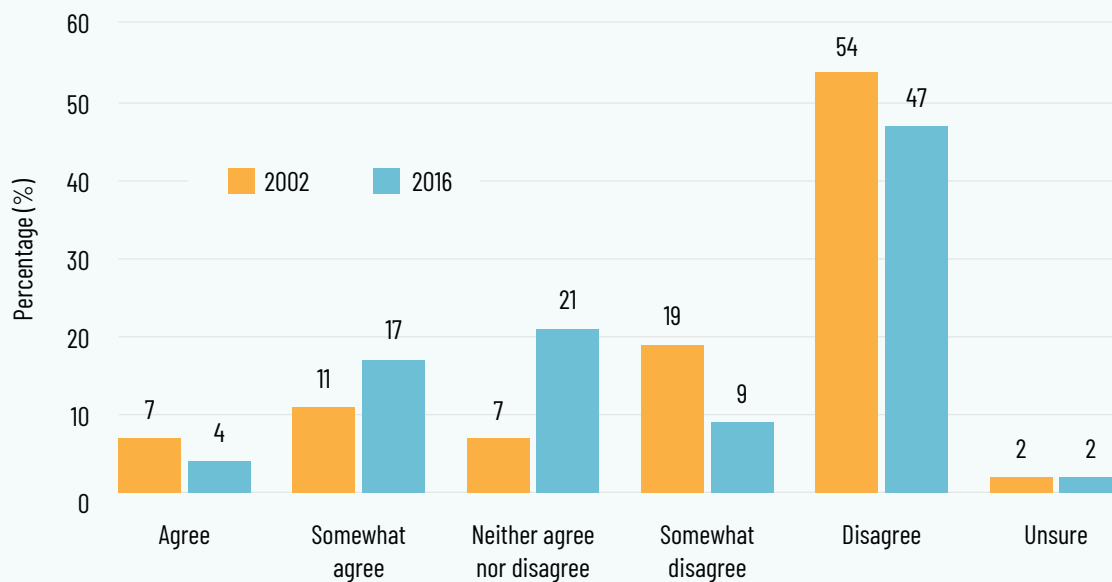
Is the Concept of Being Married a Positive Contributor to Family Life, Aged 18-29 and 30-39, 2016



Note: Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

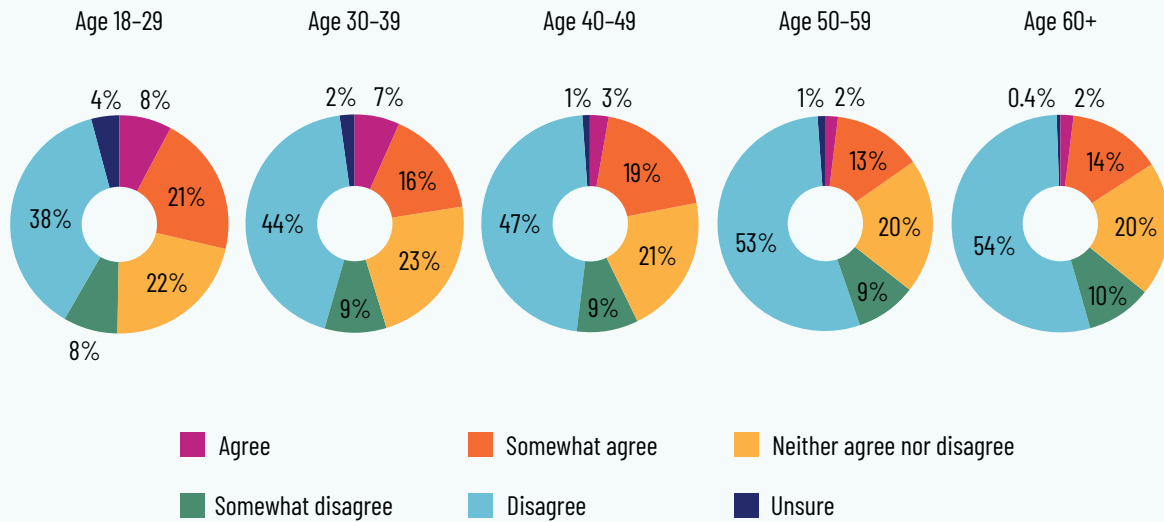
Source: Nanos Research, "How Canadians Feel About Family Life," Cardus Family Life Summary, 2016.

Is Marriage an Outdated Institution in Canada, 2002 and 2016



Sources: 2002 data from Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, "Canadian Attitudes on the Family, 2002"; 2016 data from Nanos Research, "How Canadians Feel About Family Life," Cardus Family Life Summary, 2016.

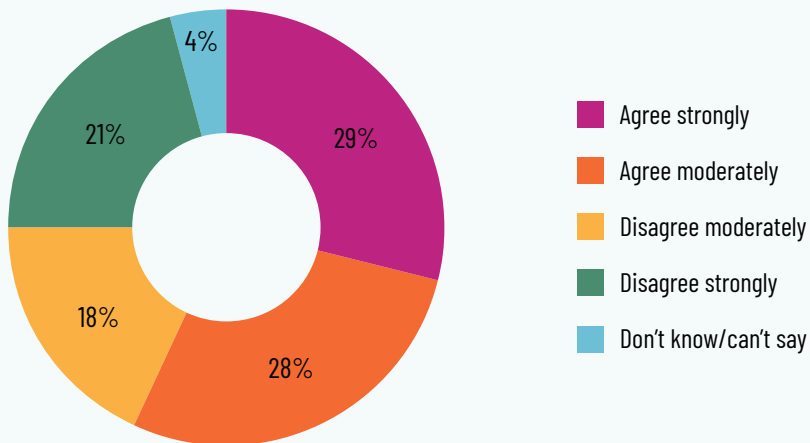
Is Marriage an Outdated Institution in Canada, by Age Group, 2016



Note: Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

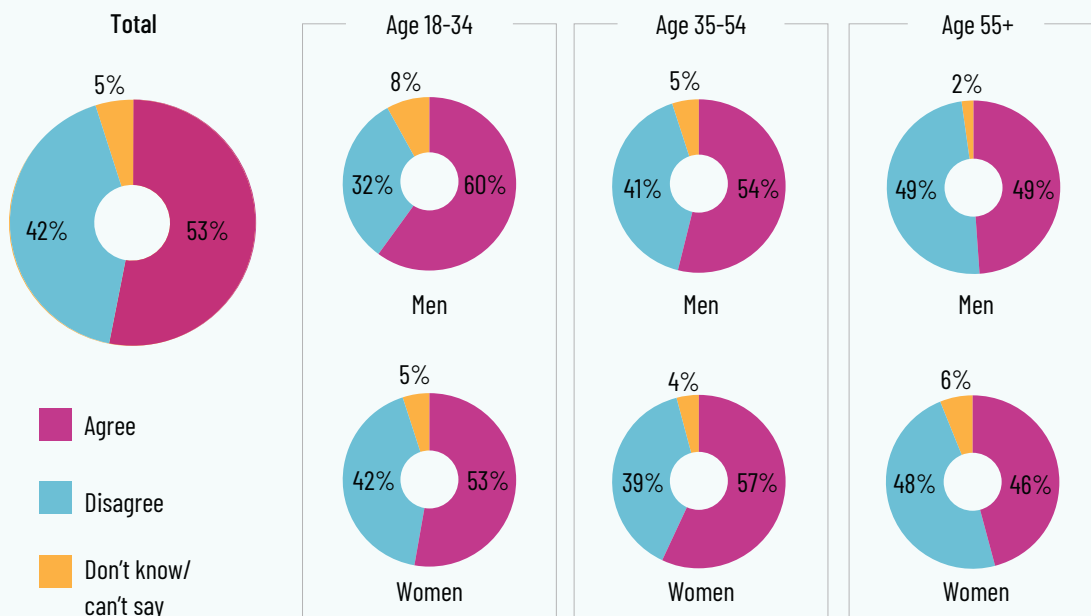
Sources: 2002 data from Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, "Canadian Attitudes on the Family, 2002"; 2016 data from Nanos Research, "How Canadians Feel About Family Life," Cardus Family Life Summary, 2016.

Marriage is a More Genuine Form of Commitment Than a Common-law Relationship, 2018



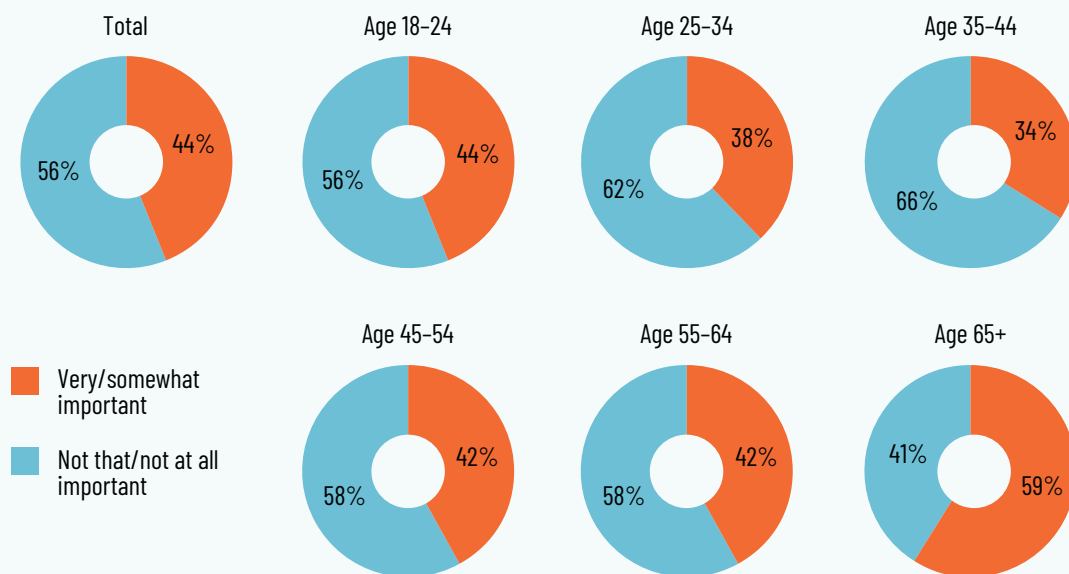
Source: Angus Reid Institute, "I Don't: Four-in-Ten Canadian Adults Have Never Married, and Aren't Sure They Want to," 2018.

Marriage is Simply Not Necessary, 2018



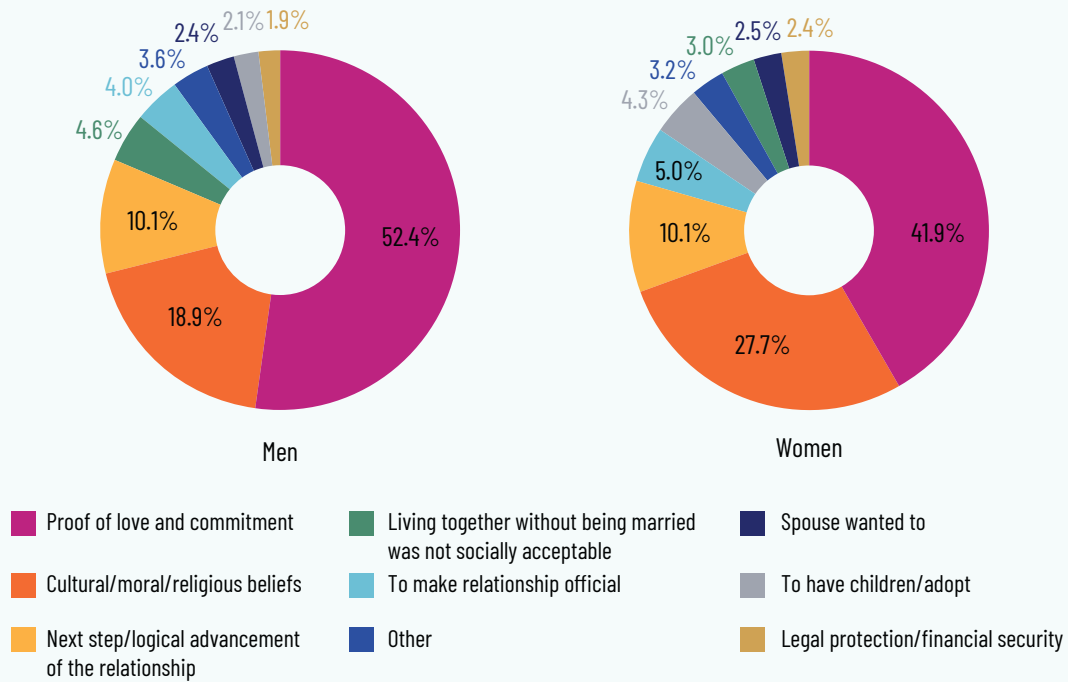
Source: Angus Reid Institute, "I Don't: Four-in-Ten Canadian Adults Have Never Married, and Aren't Sure They Want to," 2018.

When an Unmarried Man and Woman Have a Child Together, How Important Is It to You That They Legally Marry, 2018



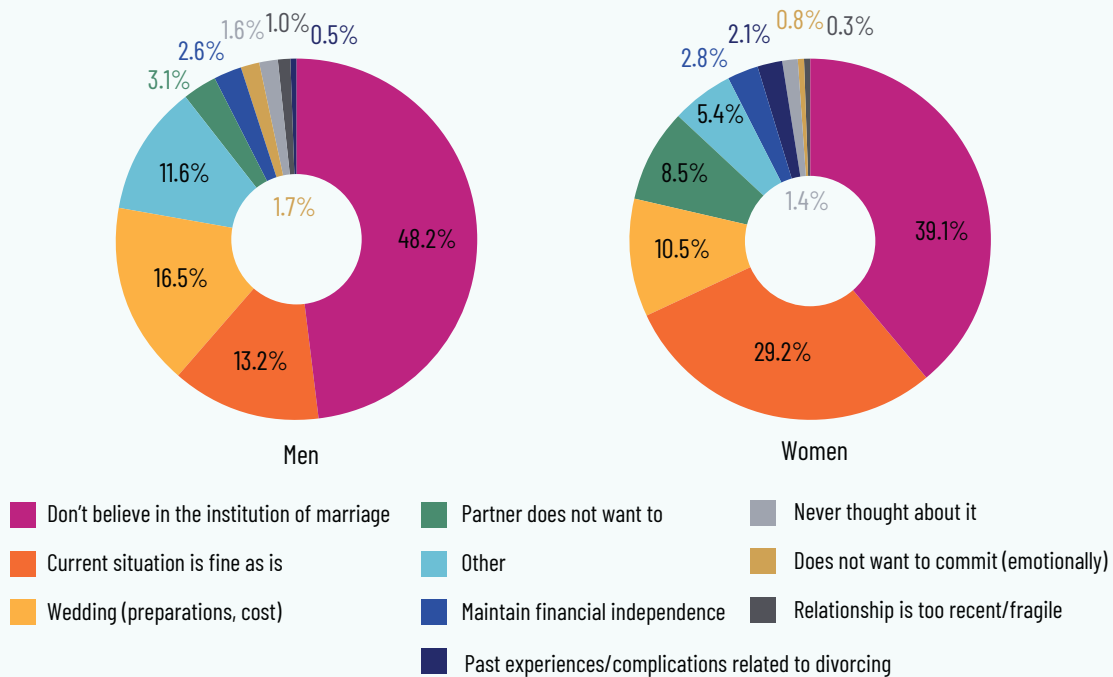
Source: Angus Reid Institute, "I Don't: Four-in-Ten Canadian Adults Have Never Married, and Aren't Sure They Want to," 2018.

Main Reason That Married Men and Women Aged 25–34 Chose to Marry, 2017



Source: Peter Jon Mitchell and Lita L. Day, "Why Canadian Young Adults Marry...or Don't," Cardus, 2021.

Main Reason That Partnered Men and Women Aged 25–34 Do Not Intend to Marry, 2017



Source: Peter Jon Mitchell and Lita L. Day, "Why Canadian Young Adults Marry...or Don't," Cardus, 2021.