

# The best age to get married if you don't want to get divorced

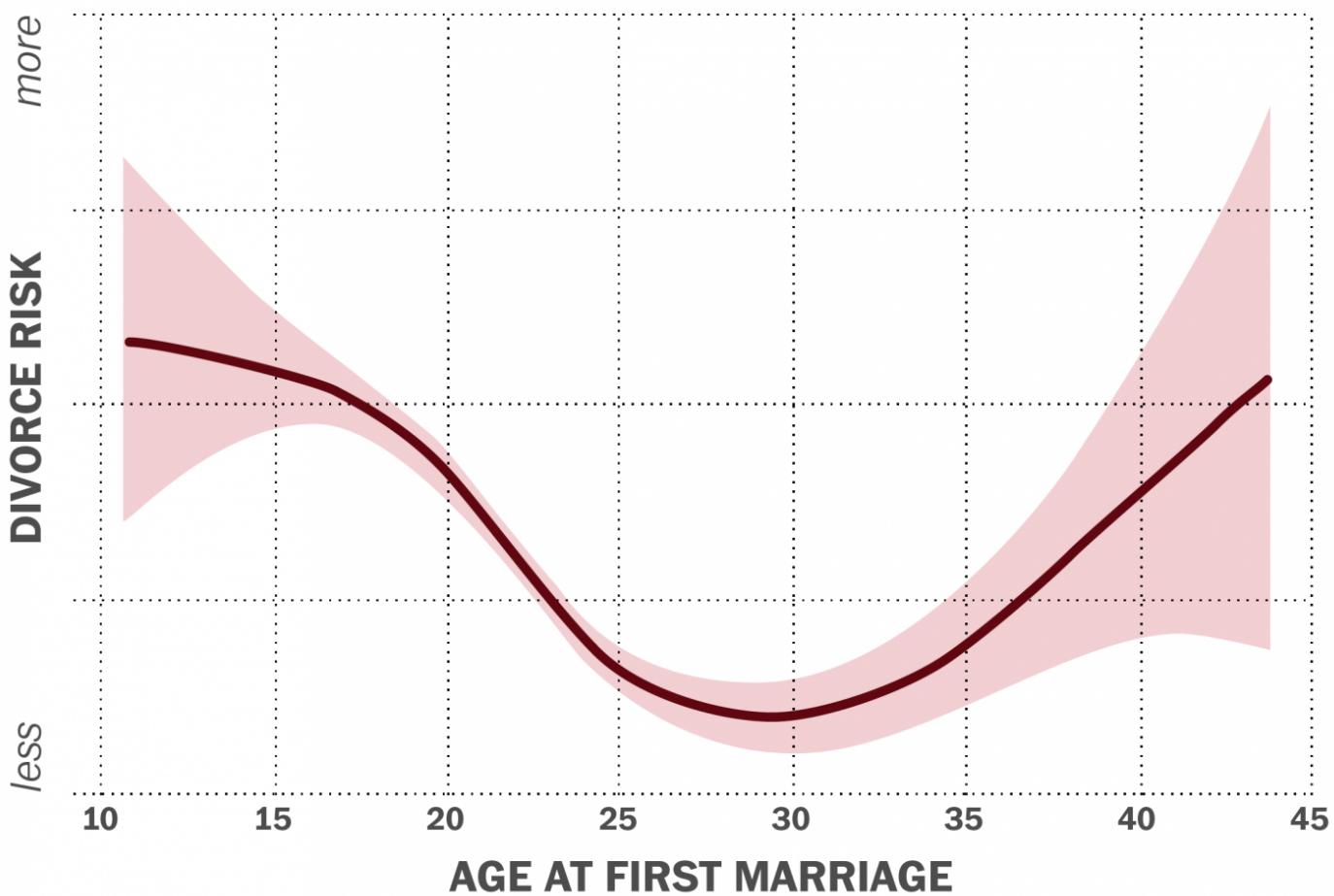


#thiscouldbeusbut we waited too long to get married (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

Conventional wisdom has it that the older you are when you get married, the lower your chances for divorce. But a [fascinating new analysis](#) of family data by Nicholas H. Wolfinger, a sociologist at the University of Utah, suggests that after a certain point, the risk of divorce starts to rise again as you get older. Here's what that looks like in chart form:

# When (not) to get married.

Age at first marriage and divorce risk as of 2006–2010. Shaded areas represent confidence intervals.



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Source: Nicholas H. Wolfinger analysis of National Survey of Family Growth Data

As you can see, the risk of divorce declines steadily from your teens into your late 20s, but somewhere in the early 30s it starts to creep back up again. As Wolfinger puts it: "Those who tie the knot after their early thirties are now *more* likely to divorce than those who marry in their late twenties." The chart is based on a statistical analysis of data from the [National Survey of Family Growth](#), a nationally-representative survey administered by the CDC every few years.

The greater divorce risk of younger couples makes some intuitive sense -- in your teens and early 20s, you're still figuring out who you are and what you want out of life. That person who was perfect for you at 19 may seem a lot less perfect by the time you're 30.

But what about older couples? Let's say you wait until 40 to get married -- shouldn't you have a pretty good idea of what you want by then, making your risk of divorce lower? Wolfinger thinks there's a selection effect happening here -- some people who wait a long time to get married simply may not be the marrying type, for instance. "Perhaps people who marry later face a pool of potential spouses that has been winnowed down to exclude the individuals most predisposed to succeed at matrimony," Wolfinger writes.

It's important to remember that we're just talking about statistical risk here. If you wait until your 40s to get married, your relationship is by no means doomed. And waiting until later in life is still a much wiser option than marrying early. Looking at the raw divorce rates, for instance, Wolfinger found that people who married at age 35 or greater had a 19 percent risk of divorce, compared to a 20 percent risk for those aged 20 to 24, and a 32 percent risk for those who married before they were 20.

Another key point of context to note is that overall divorce rates are still on a [30-year decline](#) from their peak in the early 1980s.

But the important thing, for Wolfinger, is that "we do know beyond a shadow of a doubt that people who marry in their thirties are now at greater risk of divorce than are people who wed in their late twenties. This is a new development." And it will take some further research to suss out what this means for the demographics of marriage going forward.