

Family Change and Diversity in Canada

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Introduction

Canada has experienced significant demographic and family change

Second Demographic Transition:

- Below replacement fertility
- Decline in marriage, rise in never-married and cohabitation
- Growing proportion of children being born and raised outside of marriage

Demographic Factors Shaping These Trends

Health and Mortality

- Life expectancy rose from 77.8 in 1991 to 81.9 in 2021
- Life expectancy fell by 0.4 years in 2020 due to COVID-19
- Longer lives increase proportion of elderly, intergenerational contact, and family complexity

International Migration

- 23% of Canada's population is foreign-born
- 62% of immigrants come from Asia
- Immigrants are disproportionately of working and reproductive age
- Impacts on age structure, fertility, mortality, and union formation

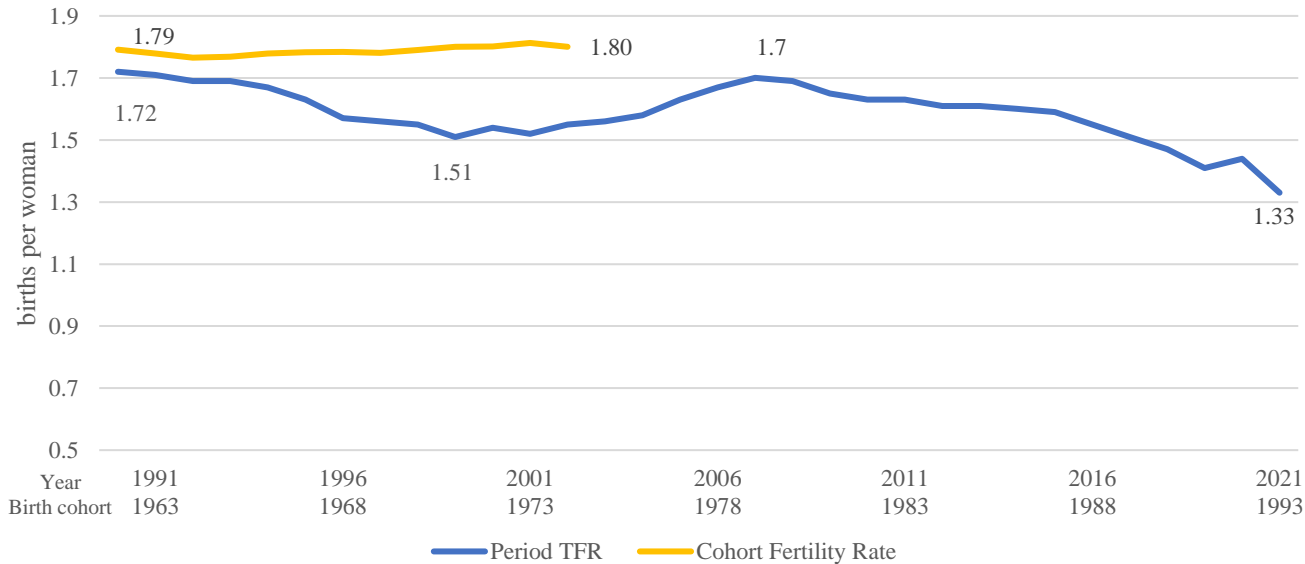
Main Questions

- 1) How have Canadian families **changed** over the past 30 years with respect to a) fertility, b) union status, and c) children's living arrangements?
- 2) How **diverse** are Canadian families across race/ethnicity, immigrant status, and geographic location?
- 3) What are the **implications** of family change and diversity on Canadian children and older adults?

Changes in Canadian Families

Canadian Period and Cohort Total Fertility Rates

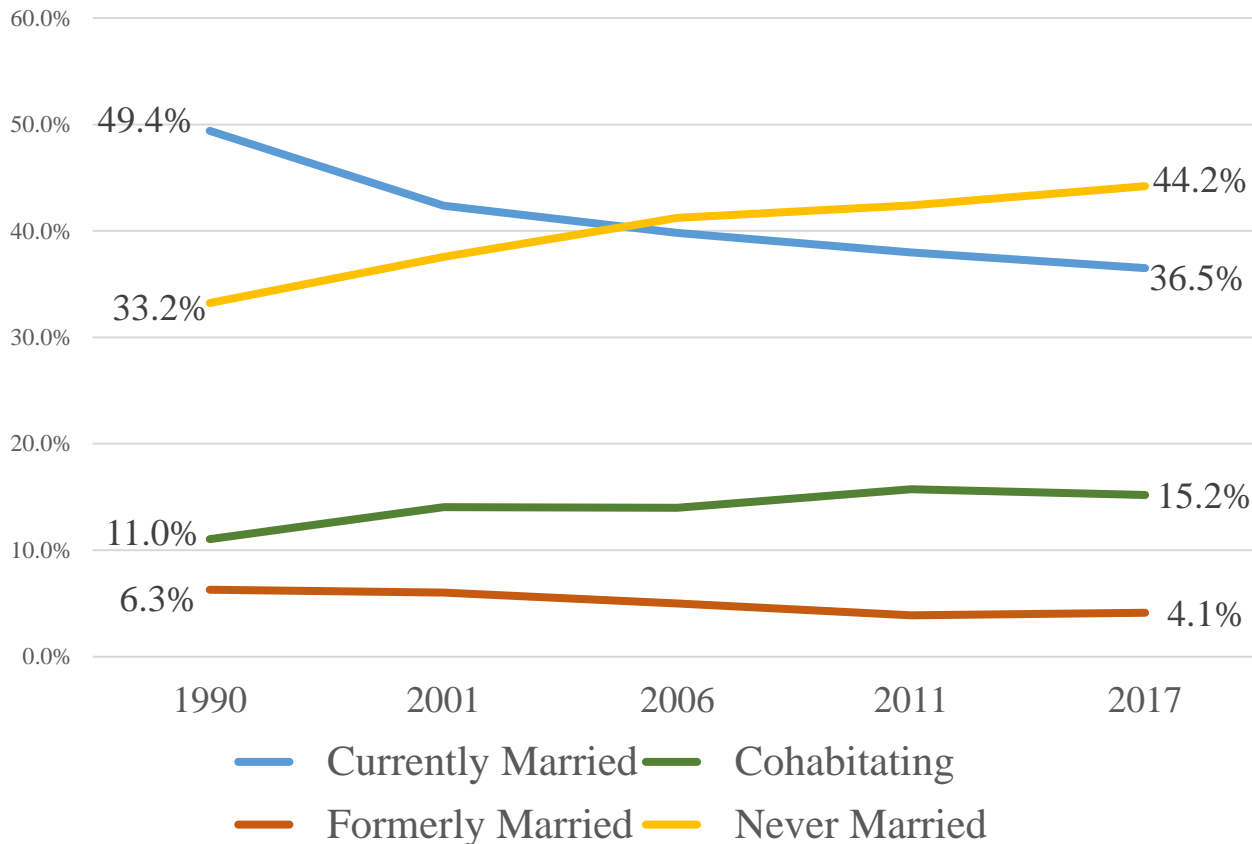
Figure 1. Canadian Period and Cohort Total Fertility Rates



Fertility

- Lowest recorded fertility
- Fall from a TFR of 1.7 to 1.3
- Previous completed cohort fertility relatively stable
- Desired number of children has declined and is lowest for 15 to 24 years olds (1.4 children)

Trends in Current Union Status (Women aged 15-44)



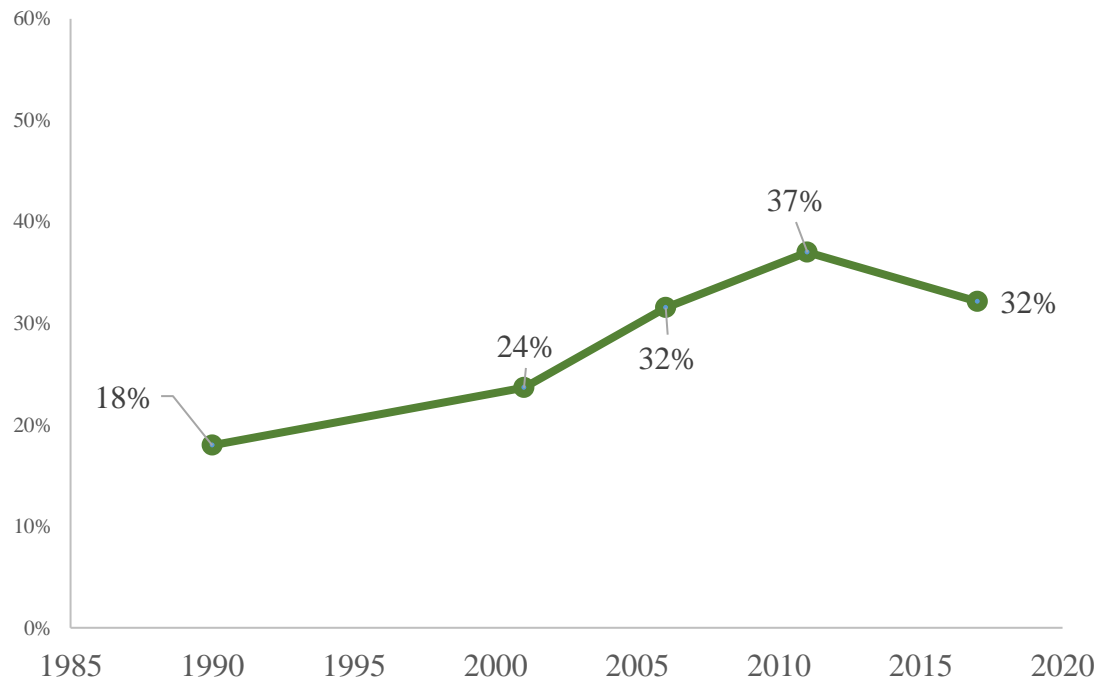
Union Status

- Women are now more likely to be never married than to be currently married
- The proportion of married women has declined by 13 percentage points
- Cohabitation has increased by 4 percentage
- Formerly married (mainly divorced) women have declined slightly

Other Changes in Union Status

- ❑ More than 2,300 Canadian children under 18 are in formal or common-law marriage
- ❑ There is some evidence of rising “grey divorce”
- ❑ Between 2006 and 2016, the number of same-sex couples increased by over 60%
- ❑ In 2021, 0.4% of couples in Canada included at least one transgender or non-binary person and 1.1% of couples identified as same-gender

Trends in Nonmarital Births (Children Aged 0-17)



Source: Canadian General Social Survey 1990 to 2017

Children's Living Arrangements

- Nonmarital births increased by 14 percentage points
- Most of these children are born to cohabiting couples
- One in five children lived with a single parent in 2021
- 12% of couples with children are step-families
- Same-gender couples are less likely to have children living at home than different-gender couples (15% versus 50%)

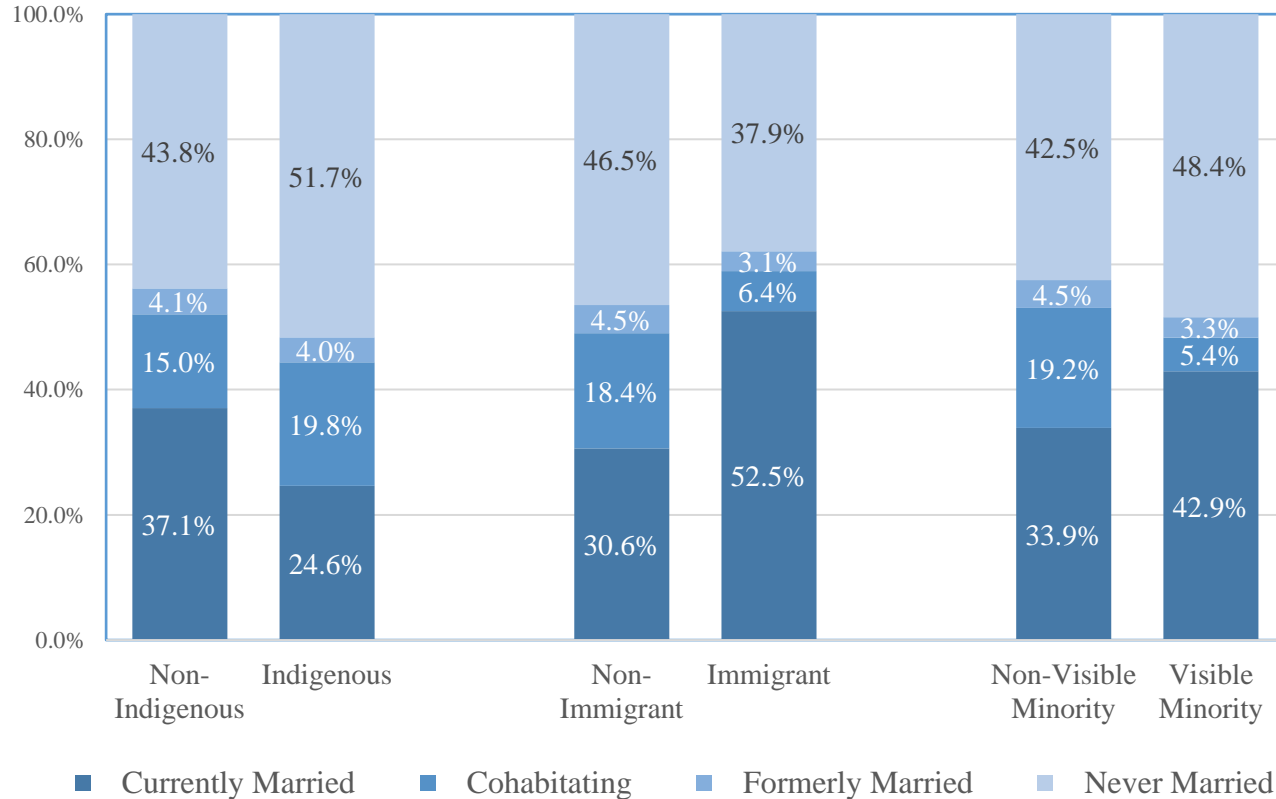


Diversity Among Canadian Families

Variation in Fertility by Indigenous, Visible Minority and Immigrant Status

- Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, have much higher fertility than non-Indigenous Canadians.
- In 2001, fertility was slightly higher among immigrants than among non-immigrants. Current estimates are not available.
- TFR was lower among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese women than among non-visible minority women.

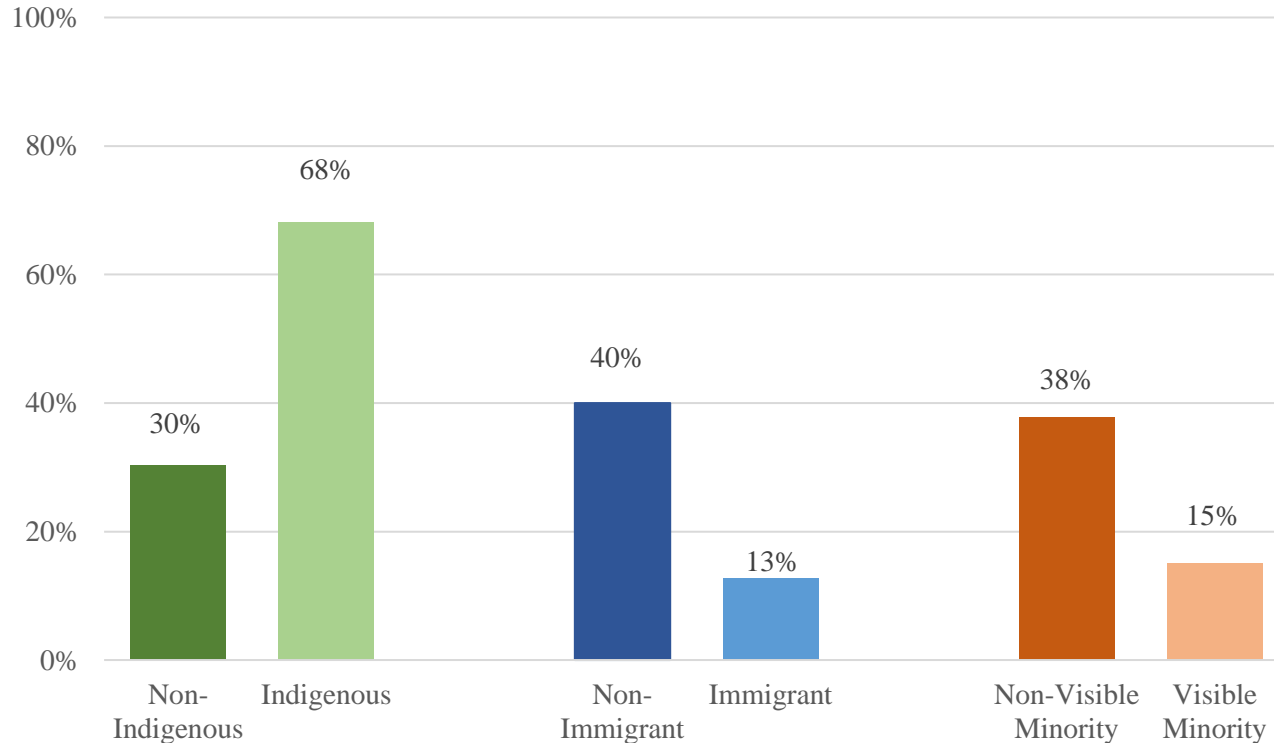
Current Union Status by Indigenous, Immigrant, and Visible Minority Status (Women aged 15-44)



Union Status

- Immigrant women are most likely to be in a formal marriage
- Cohabitation is common among Indigenous women, but uncommon among immigrant and visible minority groups
- Reflects differences in age structures, economic conditions, cultural norms, and immigration policies

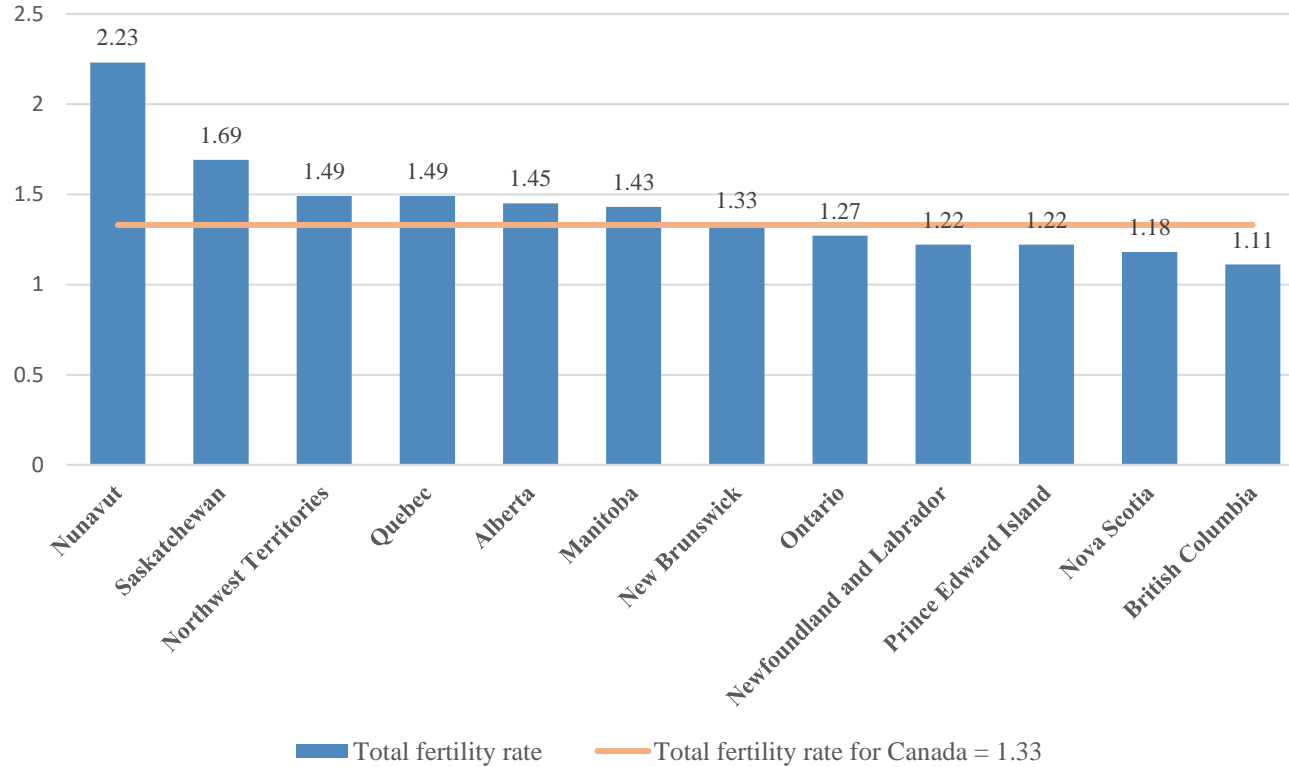
Proportion of Nonmarital Births (Children Aged 0 to 17)



Children's Living Arrangements

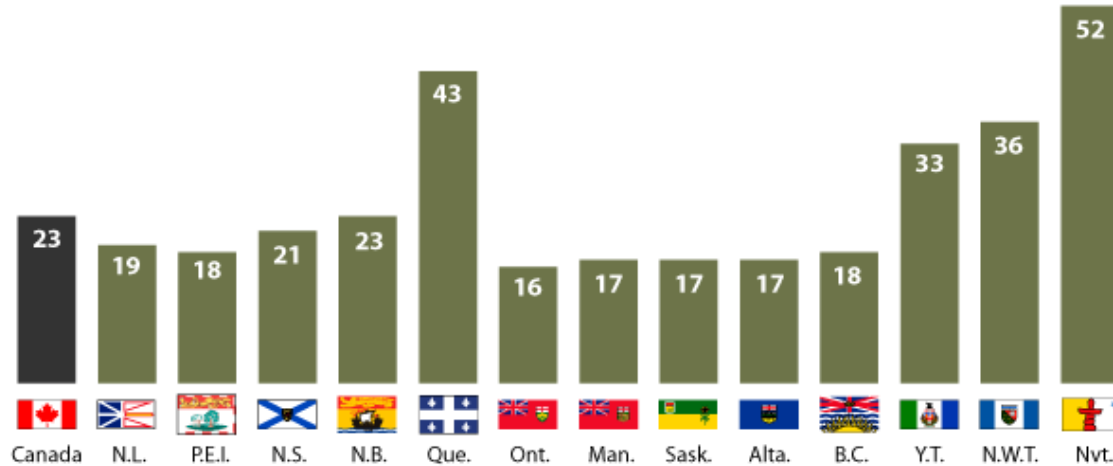
- Nearly 70% of Indigenous children are born outside of marriage, with a large fraction living with cohabiting parents
- Over a third of Indigenous children live in a single-parent household and 14% live with at least one grandparent
- Few immigrant or visible minority children are born outside of marriage, primarily because of low cohabitation

Total Fertility across Provinces in Canada (2022)



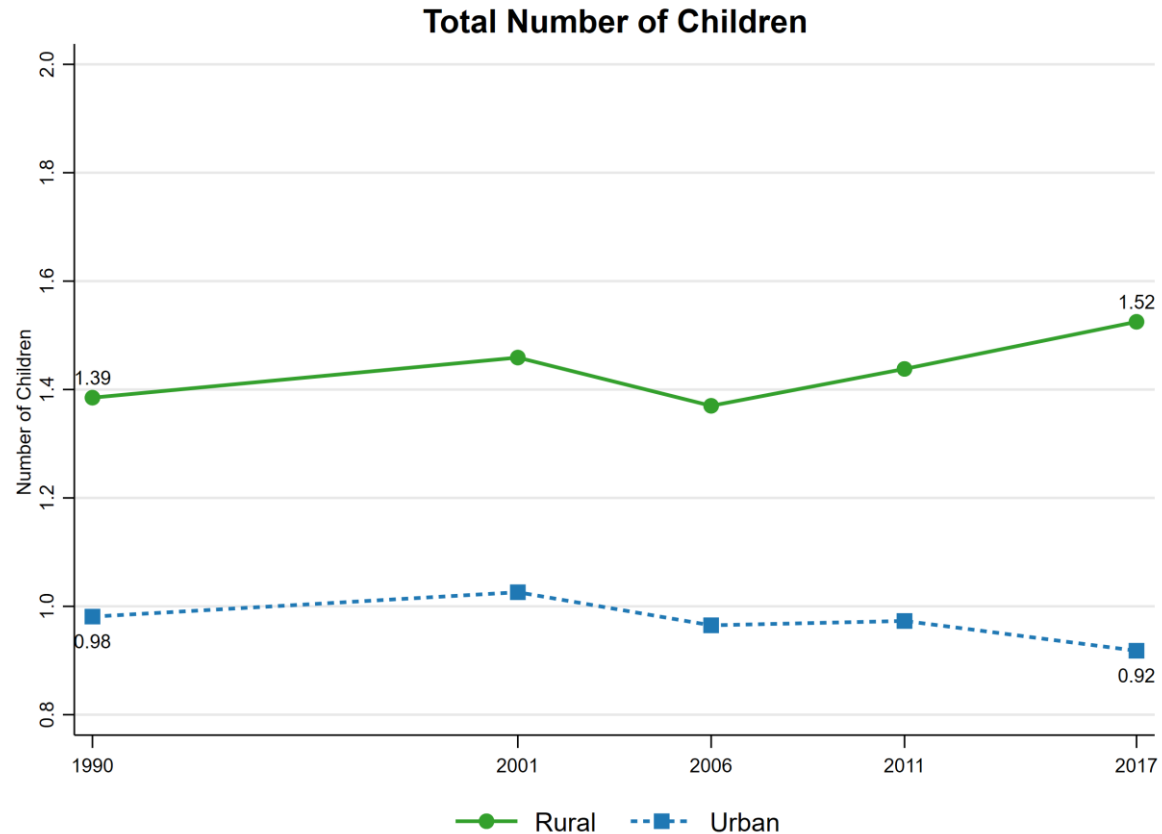
Cohabitation

Proportion (%) of couples that are living common law, 2021



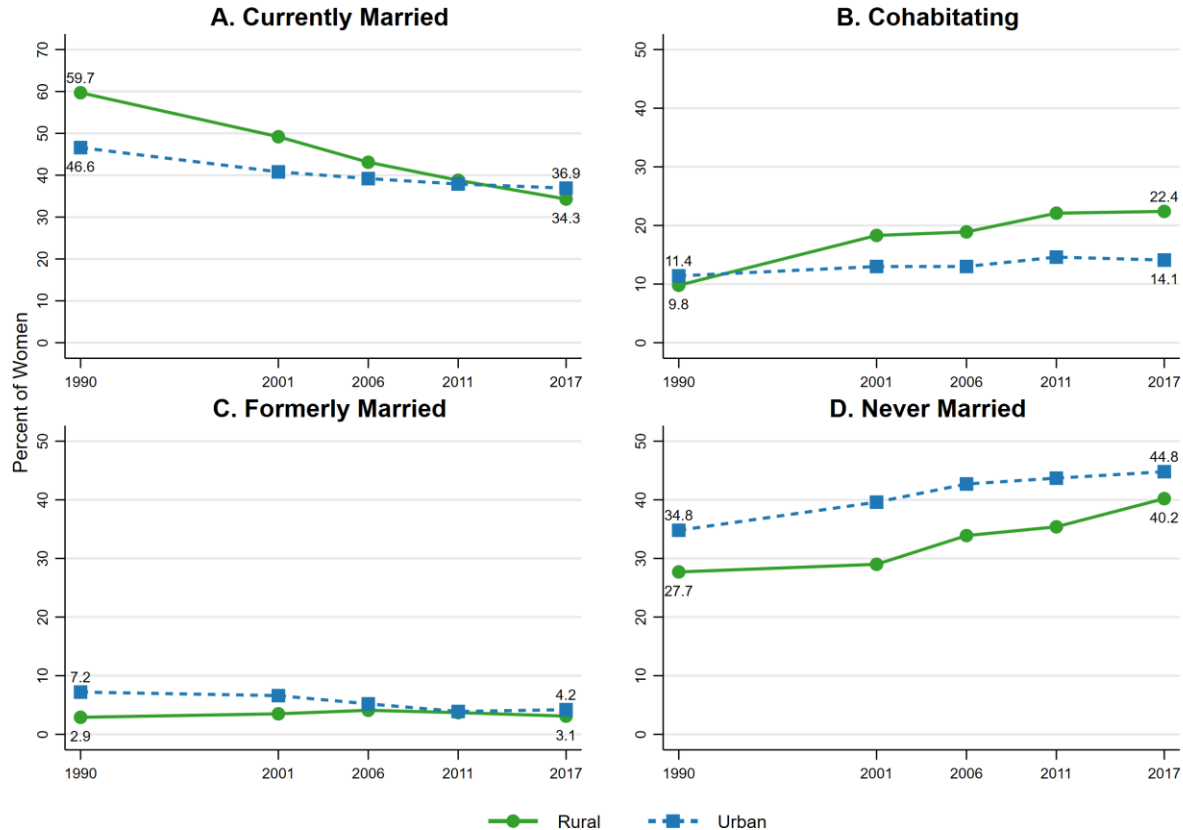
- Cohabitation is high in the territories and Québec.
- In these places, raising children within cohabiting unions has become the norm
- In other parts of Canada, marriage remains the most common context in which to raise children

Rural-Urban Trends in Number of Children

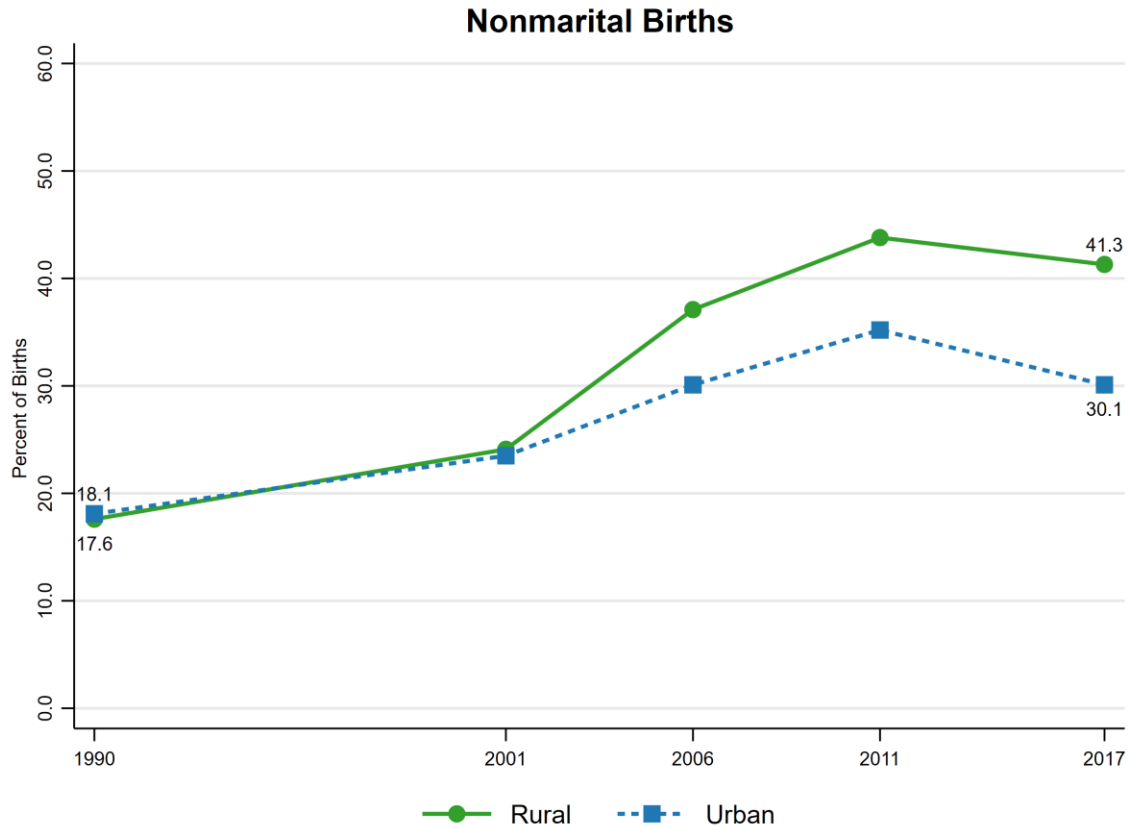


Rural-Urban Trends in Women's Union Status

Current Union Status



Rural-Urban Trends in Nonmarital Births



Implications of Family Change and Diversity

Implications for Children

- 29% of Canadians are engaged in unpaid childcare
- Why families matter:
 - Shape children's physical and mental health, social and emotional development, and educational and career trajectories
 - Transmission of intergenerational poverty or upward social mobility
- Children living with never-married, divorced, or cohabiting parents tend to have worse educational, health, and behavioral outcomes compared to children living in two-parent married households
- Lower household incomes, do not account for all these differences
- Understanding the different needs of different families, including but not limited to economic resources, is critical

Implications for Older Adults

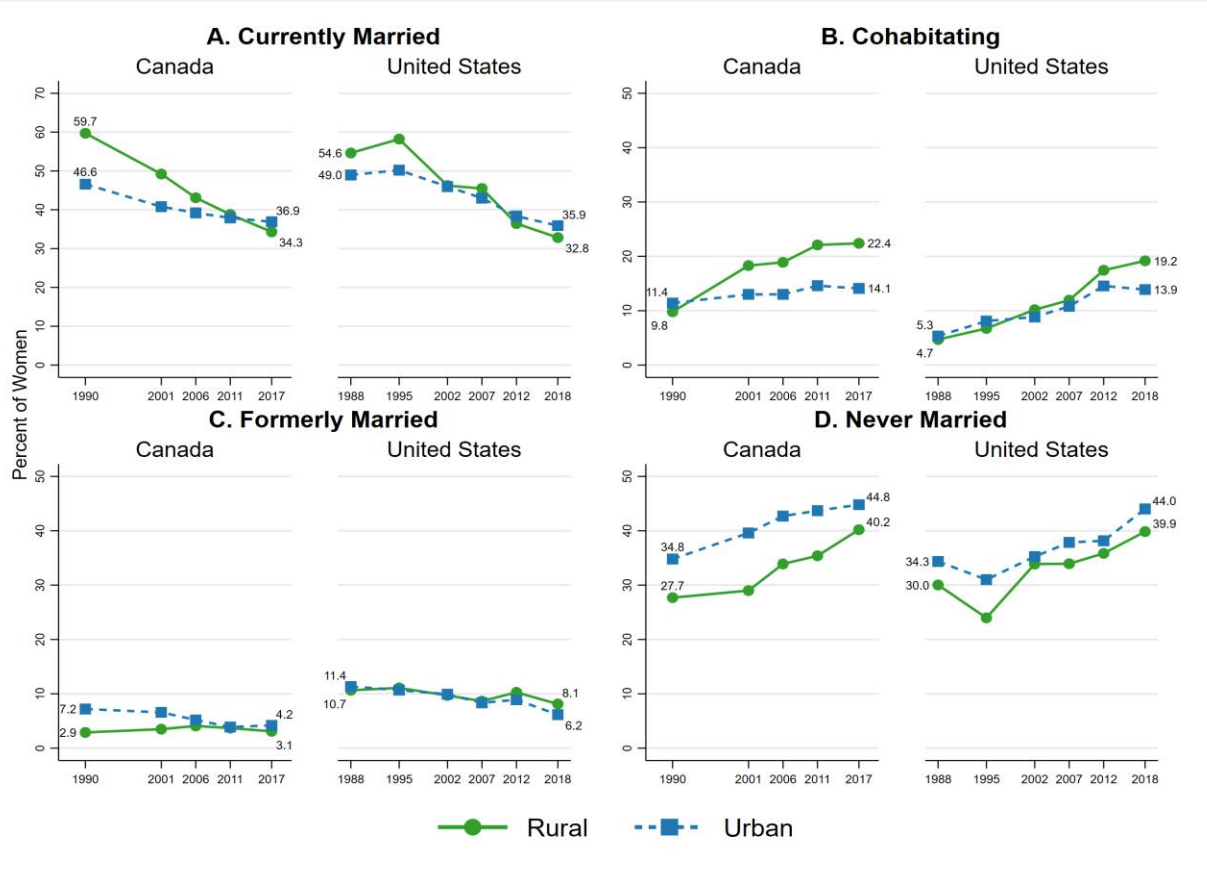
- 21% of Canadians provide unpaid care for adults
- Why families matter:
 - Influence older adults' physical health, financial well-being, happiness, risk of chronic illness, cognitive decline, experiences of social isolation, and dependence on nursing home facilities
- Older Canadians without partners experience more social isolation and loneliness and have worse physical and mental health than those with partners
- Increased life expectancy and smaller spousal age gaps has increased the proportion of seniors living with a spouse or partner, but “grey” divorce is a growing concern
- Low fertility and high internal migration reduces the availability of adult children living nearby

Recommendations

- Assess the needs and challenges of same-gender and gender diverse families
- Partnerships should be formed with Indigenous scholars and communities to better understand how their traditional family practices are changing in light of increased urban residence and climate change
- More work is needed to better understand Canadian rural families
- Develop better measures of family structures and support beyond the household
- Further analyses of the impact of COVID on fertility and families
- Improve infrastructure to support secure analysis of Canadian data by forming a partnership among Statistics Canada, the Vanier Institute, universities, and others

THANK YOU!

Women's Union Status



Nonmarital Births

