

Top Ten States With Highest Divorce Rate

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There's no question that in past 50 years the divorce rate in the U.S. has increased. But what really affects divorce rates? 24/7 Wall St. analyzed a report just released by the Census Bureau that tracks marital events of Americans in 2009. What stood out was the high correlation between poverty and divorce.

Overall, the report shows that people living in northeastern states have lower marriage and divorce rates. And while those in the southern states are more likely to get married, they also have higher divorce rates.

Our analysis suggests that the difficult economic conditions of many southern states drives the divorce rate higher because residents tend to be poorer. The states with particularly high divorce rates have below median household income as well as a high proportion of the population living below the poverty line. In the other states where divorce rates are high and poverty is not a predominant factor, such as Nevada, the reason may have to do with liberal divorce laws.

24/7 Wall St. reviewed the Census report, "Marital Events of Americans: 2009," to identify the states with the highest divorce rates, ranking the states with the worst divorce rates overall for both men and women. The divorce rates count the number of divorces reported per 1,000 men and 1,000 women 15 years and older for the 12 months leading up to 2009. The primary reason for the difference in rates between genders is the varying populations of each. In order to reflect economic conditions that appear to impact divorce rates, we reviewed median income and poverty levels for each state.

These are the ten states with the highest divorce rates.

10. Arizona

Divorce rate for men: 10.8 (16th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 11.9 (8th highest)

Median household income: \$45,739 (16th lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 16.5 percent (12th highest)

In 1998, Arizona was one of the first states to adopt a "covenant marriage" law, which gives couples access to premarital training on how to maintain a healthy marriage. Covenant marriage also gives soon-to-be-newlyweds the option to limit the conditions under which they would be able to get divorced. Although covenant marriage has been an option for nearly 15 years, less than 1 percent of couples applying for a license opt for it. The state also has one of the tenth highest divorce rates in the country averaged between men and women.

9. Tennessee

Divorce rate for men: 11.4 (10th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 11.6 (12th highest)

Median household income: \$40,517 (6th lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 17.1 percent (10th highest)

Tennessee is the first of a long list of poor, southern states that make up the majority of this list. It falls within the top ten states for lowest median household income, highest percentage of people below the poverty line and, for 2009, highest unemployment rate. Starting Sept. 1, getting a divorce in the state will become easier. According to Tennessee news site The Commercial Appeal, "Tennesseans without minor children or pension plans will be able to file for divorce without lawyers, using 'plain-language' forms" for uncontested divorces.

8. Georgia

Divorce rate for men: 11.5 (9th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 11.7 (11th highest)

Median household income: \$43,340 (10th lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 16.5 percent (12th highest)

Georgia's economy is one of the worst in a region that is already in bad shape. The state has one of the lowest median household incomes, and among the highest poverty and unemployment rates. The state also has a high divorce rate — 11.5 out of every 1000 men, and 11.7 out of every 1000 women were divorced in 2009.

7. Mississippi

Divorce rate for men: 11.1 (11th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 12.5 (6th highest)

Median household income: \$35,078 (lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 21.9 percent (the highest)

Mississippi is an extremely poor state. It has both the lowest median household income in the country and the highest share of residents living below the poverty line — over one in five. The state has extremely high rates of divorce, especially among women. It is one of the few states in which alimony is awarded only for marriages that last 10 years or longer.

6. Nevada

Divorce rate for men: 12.3 (7th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 12.3 (7th highest)

Median household income: \$51,434 (20th highest)

Percent below poverty line: 12.4 percent (20th lowest)

Roughly 1 out of every 100 couples were divorced in the state of Nevada in 2009. Just a decade ago, Nevada was one of the country's fastest-growing economies, but that is no longer the case. The housing crisis has hit the state particularly hard, and unemployment jumped from 3.8 percent at the beginning of 2000 to 14.9 percent by the end of the decade. These job losses may very well have contributed to a higher-than-average rate of failing marriages. Reno and Las Vegas have been casually referred to as the "divorce capitals of the world," due to the state's liberal divorce laws.

5. Kentucky

Divorce rate for men: 12.6 (5th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 13.5 (4th highest)

Median household income: \$42,664 (9th lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 10.5 percent (tied for 9th highest)

Kentucky falls within the top ten states for worst-off in the three main economic indicators looked at in this list: unemployment, median household income and percentage of people living below the poverty line. It is also in the top five for divorce rates among both men and women. A growing trend in the state is now is to become unmarried partner households. According to Census [data](#), unmarried households have increased 54 percent in Kentucky since 2000, while married households have decreased slightly.

4. Alabama

Divorce rate for men: 12.7 (4th highest)

Divorce rate for women: 13.9 (3rd highest)

Median household income: \$39,980 (3rd lowest)

Percent below poverty line: 17.5 percent (6th highest)

Alabama has some of the worst economic conditions for families in the country. In 2009, it was among the worst in poverty, income and unemployment. Possibly as a consequence of these poor conditions, the state has the fourth highest incidence of divorce in the country. Alabama is also one of just nine states to still legally recognize common-law marriage. This means that a couple can be considered legally married and must obtain a legal divorce, if they consummate the marriage, live together and publicly acknowledge their marriage.

