

Texas Cities Lead U.S. In the Rate of Divorces

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DALLAS, Nov. 9 — Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, economic magnets for restless, uprooted young opportunity-seekers from everywhere, have become the divorce co-capitals of metropolitan America.

Marriages are being dissolved in Texas's two biggest metropolitan areas at a rate higher than in any other of the country's 25 largest such areas, according to calculations recently completed by the National Center for Health Statistics. In both places in 1979, the latest year for which the rate has been computed, there were 8.2 divorces for every 1,000 people. That is more than double New York's rate of 3.7 and nearly triple Boston's 2.8.

The statistics disclose another facet of love and marriage in the United States today: Residents of the South and West are more likely to get divorced than those of the Northeast and Middle West, and in some places much more likely.

This has long been at least partly true for a variety of reasons, demographers say, but the contrast between the regions now is perhaps more dramatic than ever. A comparison of divorce rates among the 25 largest standard metropolitan statistical areas shows that, without exception, the areas with the 12 highest rates are all in Southern or Western states. The 13 lowest rates, also without exception, are found in the Northeast and Middle West.

Youth and Mobility Cited

For the most part, authorities on divorce can offer only speculation on the reasons for this, but two probable causes seem to have the most currency. First, the divorce rate generally is highest among people in their 20's and 30's, and there are high concentrations of such people in places like Dallas and Houston. Many of them migrate to Texas in search of jobs and money, and that leads to perhaps the second biggest factor: mobility. Pulling up roots and moving, it is said, involves a number of stresses and dislocations and shifts in perspective that can touch off the downfall of a relationship.

James McCarthy, a demographer in

the department of population dynamics at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Md., who has studied such matters, said about Southern and Western cities: "Clearly one thing we know about many is that they have received considerable numbers of migrants, and they are likely to be people who are married or around the age of marriage."

"It may be," added Andrew Cherlin, a colleague of Dr. McCarthy's at Johns Hopkins, "that the great recent migration to such cities may be adding to the level of marital disruption. Any kind of major change can be traumatic, can be difficult for some families."

Divorce rates have been going up all over the country in the last decade, of course, as traditional attitudes toward marriage have been altered and as women, in particular, have sought greater independence and freedom. And there have always been regional differences in patterns of marriage and divorce.

The Influence of Religion

"We've known for a long time that divorce rates tend to be lower in the Northeast and higher in the West," said Dr. Cherlin. Part of this, he said, is because the Northeast has been home to a higher proportion of Roman Catholics, who have generally shunned divorce.

But the South has also had a strong tradition of Bible Belt monogamy, and yet such metropolitan areas as Tampa-St. Petersburg, Miami and Atlanta, in addition to Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, are among those today with the highest divorce rates.

At the same time, California cities that might once have been considered divorce leaders, while still more divorce-prone than those in the Northeast, have seen their rates of marital breakup stabilize somewhat as their economies mature and their rate of in-migration tails off.

From 1970 to 1979, for example, the divorce rate in the Los Angeles-Long Beach area actually declined, from 5.8 divorces per 1,000 people to 5.4. In San Diego, it rose from 5.9 in 1970 to 6.8 in

Divorces in the U.S.

Number per 1,000 population in the Census Bureau's 25 largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas

	1979	'76	'70
Dallas-Ft. Worth	8.2	7.7	6.5
Houston	8.2	7.4	5.5
Tampa-St. Petersburg	8.1	7.2	5.0
Miami	7.3	7.3	5.6
Seattle	6.9	7.4	5.6
Atlanta	6.9	6.9	4.5
Anaheim	6.8	6.8	6.1
San Francisco	6.2	6.3	5.6
Denver	6.1	7.1	5.3
Riverside-San Bernardino	6.1	6.0	5.1
San Diego	6.0	6.8	5.9
Los Angeles-Long Beach	5.4	5.8	5.8
St. Louis	5.1	4.9	3.5
Cleveland	4.9	5.0	3.6
District of Columbia	4.7	4.1	2.3
Detroit	4.6	4.6	3.4
Minneapolis-St. Paul	4.4	N.A.	2.8
Baltimore	4.3	4.1	2.6
Chicago	4.1	4.2	3.0
New York	3.7	2.8	1.3
Philadelphia	3.4	2.9	1.8
Pittsburgh	3.2	3.2	1.9
Nassau-Suffolk	3.0	2.3	0.5
Newark	3.0	2.8	1.4
Boston	2.8	2.8	1.7

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

1976, but then dropped back down to 6 in 1979. Similarly, San Francisco's rate went from 5.6 to 6.3 to 6.2 over the decade.

Soaring Rates in Texas

The rate in Dallas-Fort Worth, by contrast, soared from 6.5 in 1970 to 8.2 in 1979. And Houston's rose even more, from 5.5 to 8.2. The difference between the Texas and California cities, it is speculated, may be attributed at least partly to the fact that Texas has begun attracting young adults as California did in the 1950's and 1960's.

Marriage statistics, perhaps, tend to support such a view. Though the pattern is not quite as sharp so in the case of divorce, Southern and Western cities also tend to have higher marriage rates than those in the Northeast and Middle West. Dallas-Fort Worth was No. 1 in marriages for 1979, with a rate of 12.7 per 1,000. Formal relationships apparently are being broken up and recombined here at higher rate than in any other large metropolitan area.

Among the largest standard metropolitan statistical areas, Dallas-Fort Worth is followed in marriages, in order, by Miami, with 12.2 per 1,000; Atlanta and Denver, 11.8 each; Houston, 11.7; Tampa-St. Petersburg, 11.5; San Diego, 10.8; Seattle, 10.7; St. Louis, 10.1; and Anaheim, Calif., 9.5. Los Angeles's rate is 9.0, New York's 8.1.

Lee Russell of the Family Institute of Dallas, a counseling agency, is convinced that career pressure has something to do with the high divorce rate here. Houston and Dallas are notable for their devotion to the work ethic, and Mr. Russell said that many of the marriage counseling cases he sees involve a husband and wife who are each consumed by their jobs. "Their businesses are like mistresses," he said.

Then, too, said Gay Jurgens, another Dallas marriage counselor, "There is in the Southwest psychology this sort of code of the West, this independence, that may be a very small contributor to people taking their lives in their own hands and going against tradition."

Who killed the girls? The questions, he said, focused on why he began digging at the grave before any judicial authority arrived.

Father Schindler also said that he had been told by United States Embassy officials in January that there were military witnesses who saw National Guardsmen get into the van with the women at the airport. Judge Rivera says he has not interrogated any military soldiers will ever be prosecuted.

Privately, United States officials are divided in their opinions about whether the six soldiers will ever be prosecuted.

tion last month. An embassy spokesman said this week that the United States was "pushing the Government to continue the investigation."