

Who gets married and who breaks up?

Tracking Relationship Transitions After the Introduction of Legal Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S. Using Linked Survey and Administrative Data

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Any opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the U.S. Census Bureau.

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Timing of same-sex marriage expansion

2004-2012

Beginning with Massachusetts, some states legalize same-sex marriage, but the federal government does not recognize those marriages.

2013-2014

Following *United States v. Windsor*, the federal government recognizes same-sex marriages performed in states where they are legal.

2015 and later

Following *Obergefell v. Hodges*, all states must recognize same-sex marriages.

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Meaning of marriage

Larger economic gains to relationship
(Delhomme and Hamermesh 2021)

Social and symbolic importance

Ambivalence due to unique social and historical context (Bosley-Smith and Reczek 2018)

Policy shocks

Evidence from the Netherlands (Chen and van Ours 2018) and Massachusetts (Carpenter 2020) shows many same-sex cohabitators married when it became available (though some split up)

Relationship trajectories

Limited research on the duration and trajectories of same-sex couples
(Umberson et al. 2015)

Most nationally-representative surveys collect marital duration, but not cohabiting duration

Research focus

We use linked survey and administrative data to explore the relationship transitions of same-sex couples when they gained access to legal marriage.

Data

American Community Survey

Survey years 2012-2014

Used to determine

- Sex composition of couple
- Relationship status in year before policy change
- Characteristics of each partner

Excluding

- Couples from D.C. and 8 states where same-sex marriage was already legal in 2013

Linked



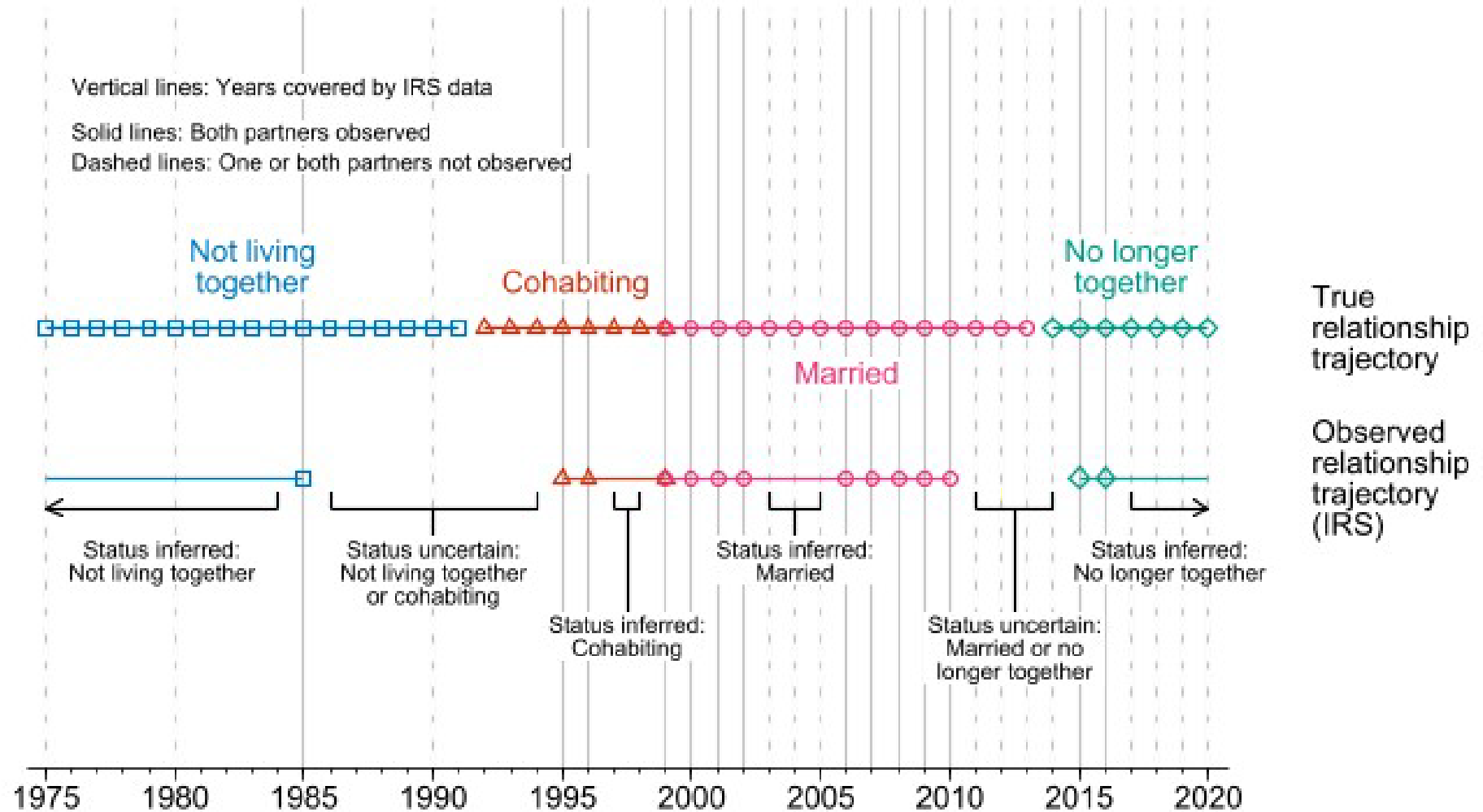
IRS Forms 1040

Tax years 1975-2019

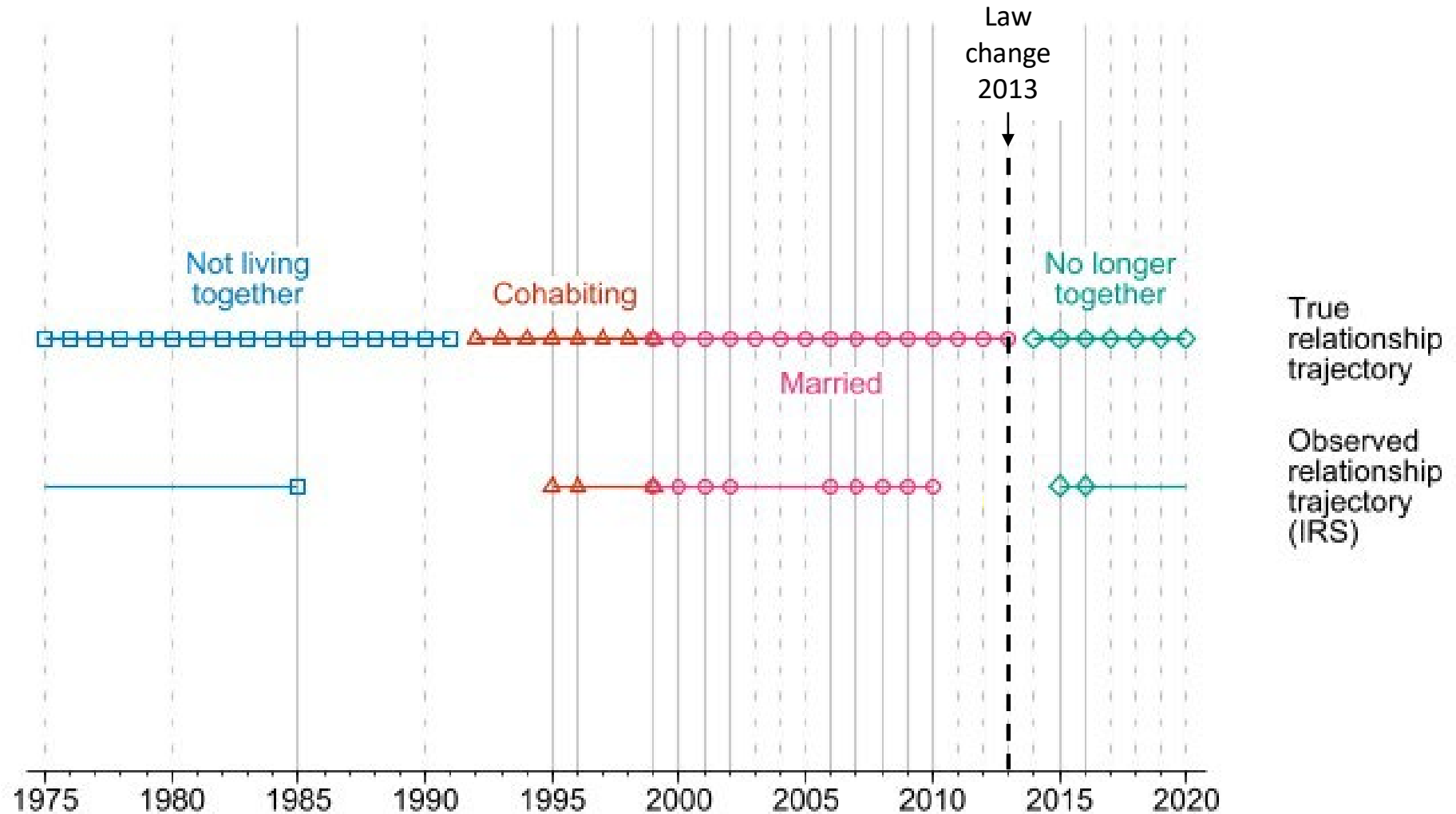
Used to determine

- Relationship status three years after policy change
- When coresidential relationship began

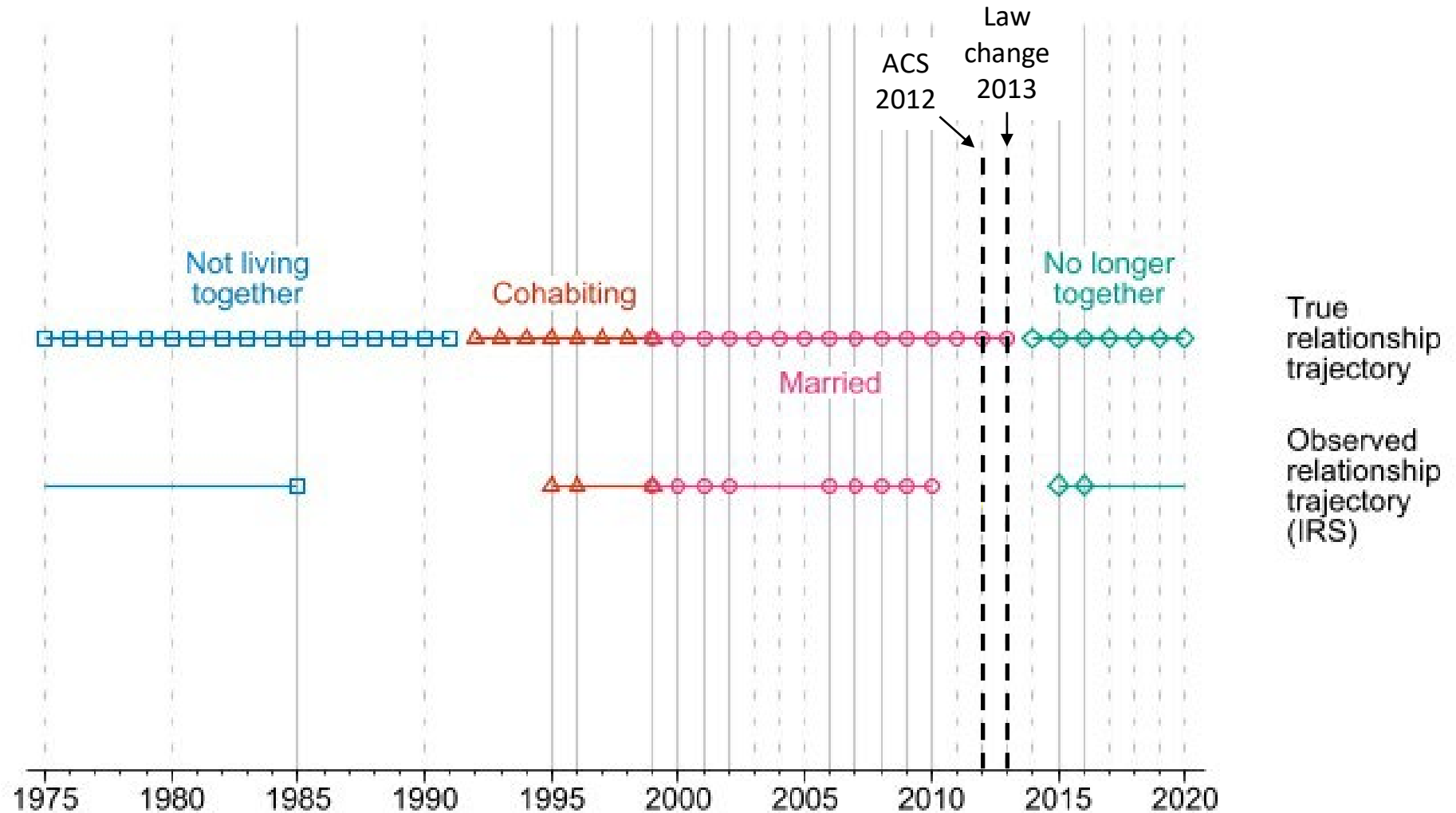
Hypothetical relationship trajectory



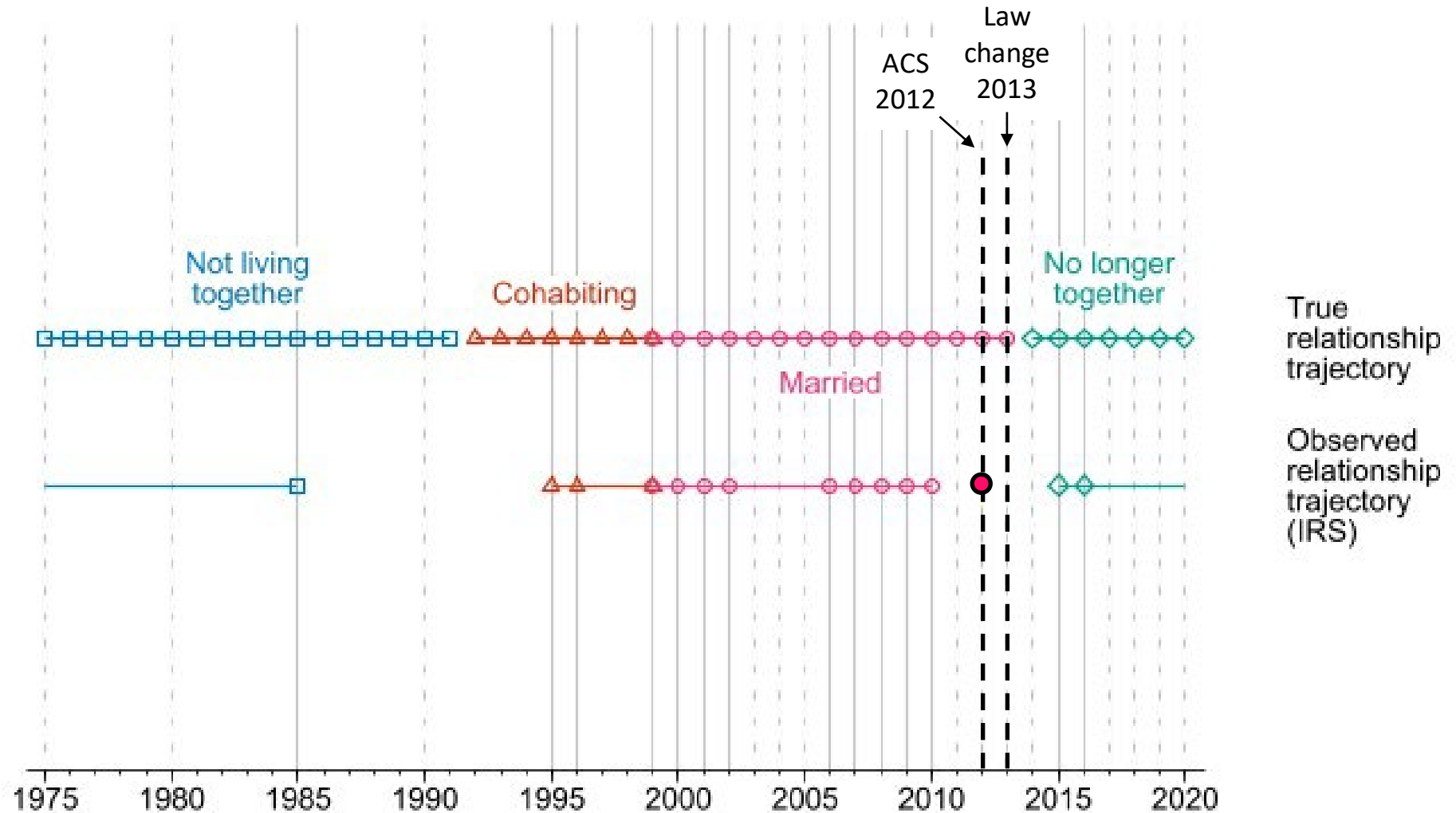
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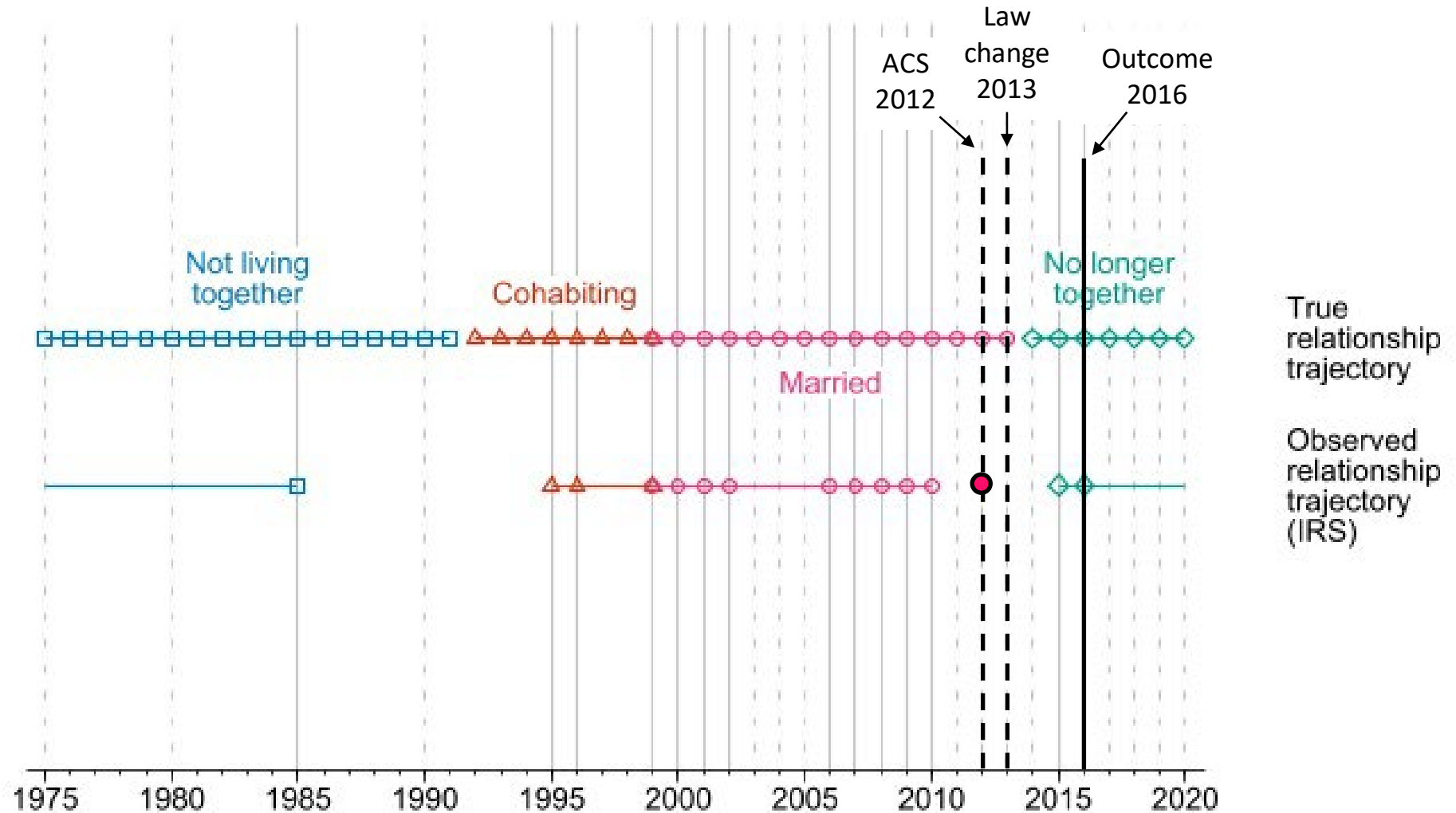
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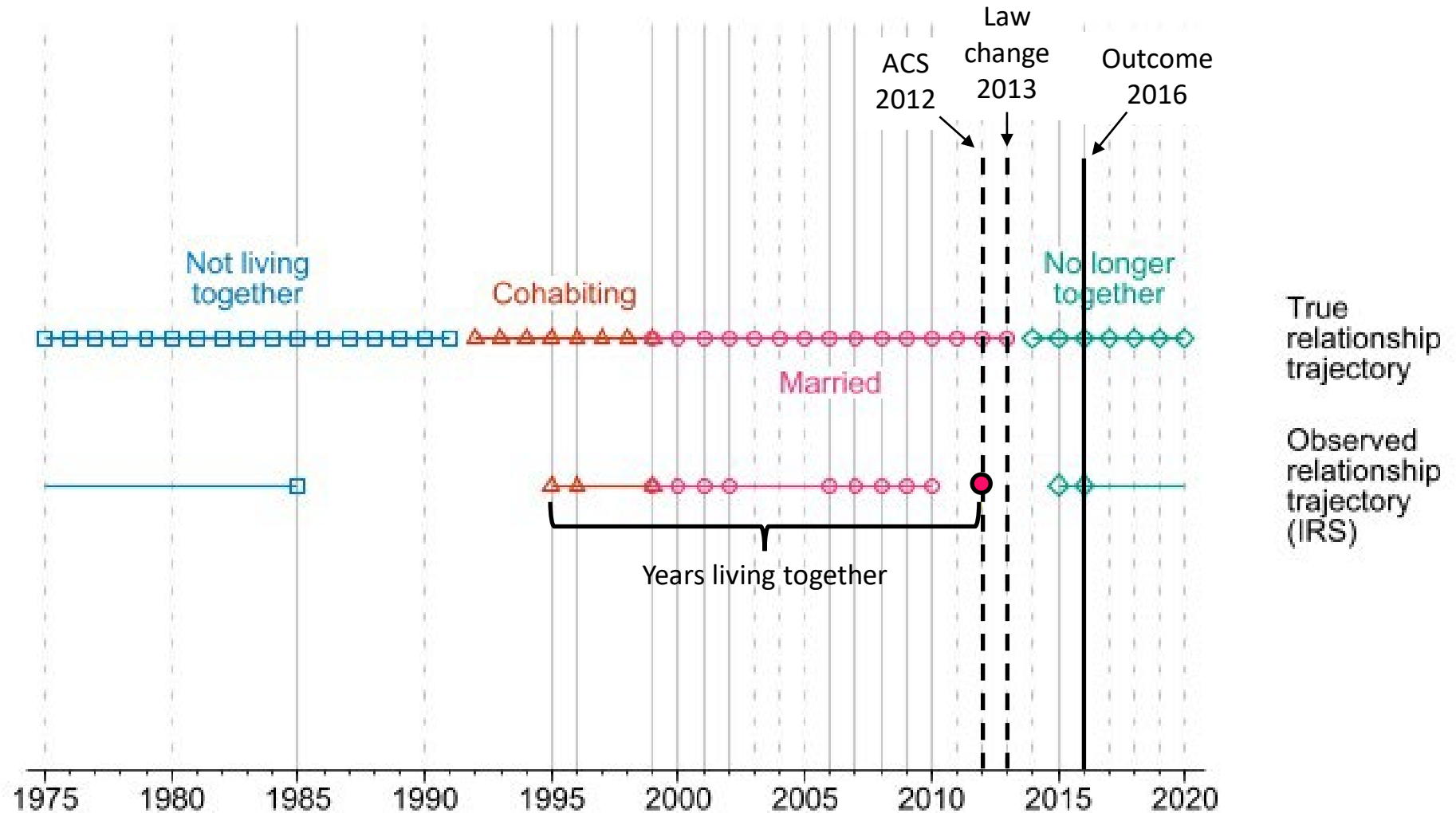
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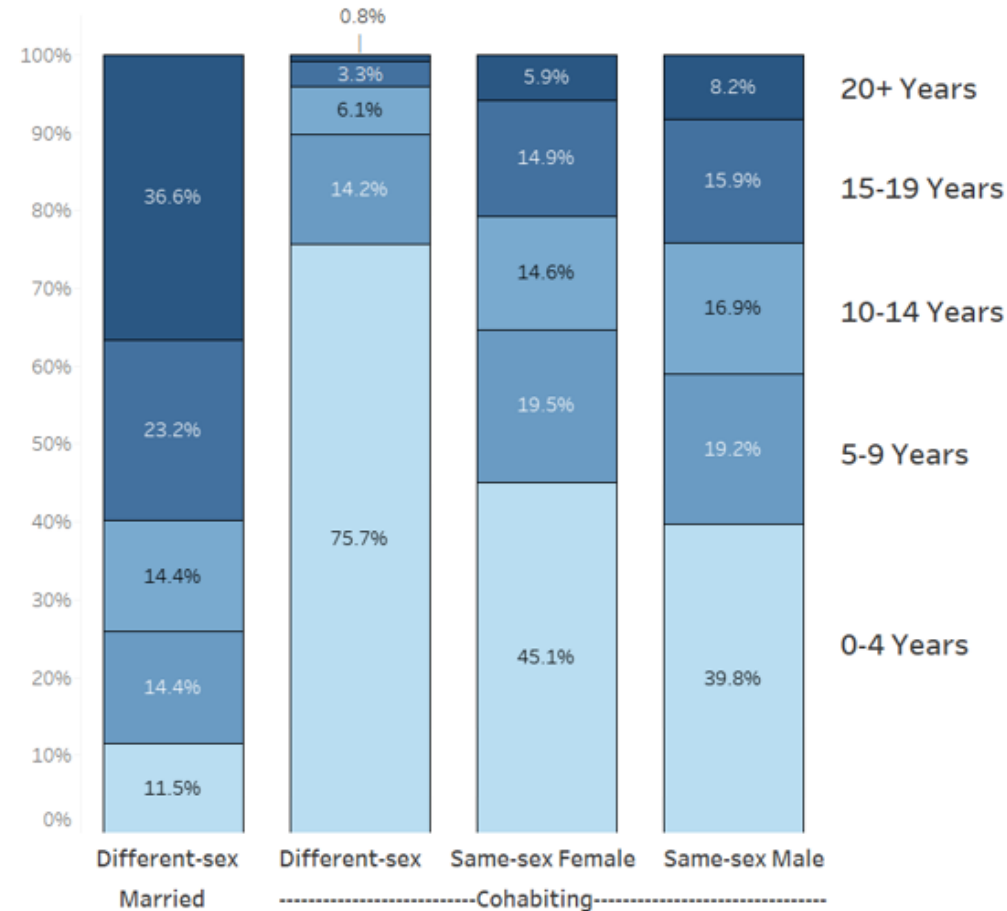


Sample exclusions

Reason for exclusion	Percentage of couples excluded			
	Same-sex female	Same-sex male	Different-sex cohabiting	Different-sex married
ACS couple sex composition not validated by Numident	38.1	35.9	14.6	8.4
ACS couple marital status contradicted by AR	8.1	7.2	17.6	2.4
AR relationship outcome missing	12.4	13.9	24.2	12.4
Same-sex married couple	2.1	2.8		
Not excluded: Retained in sample	40.5	40.0	43.7	76.8

Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

Years living together before survey participation

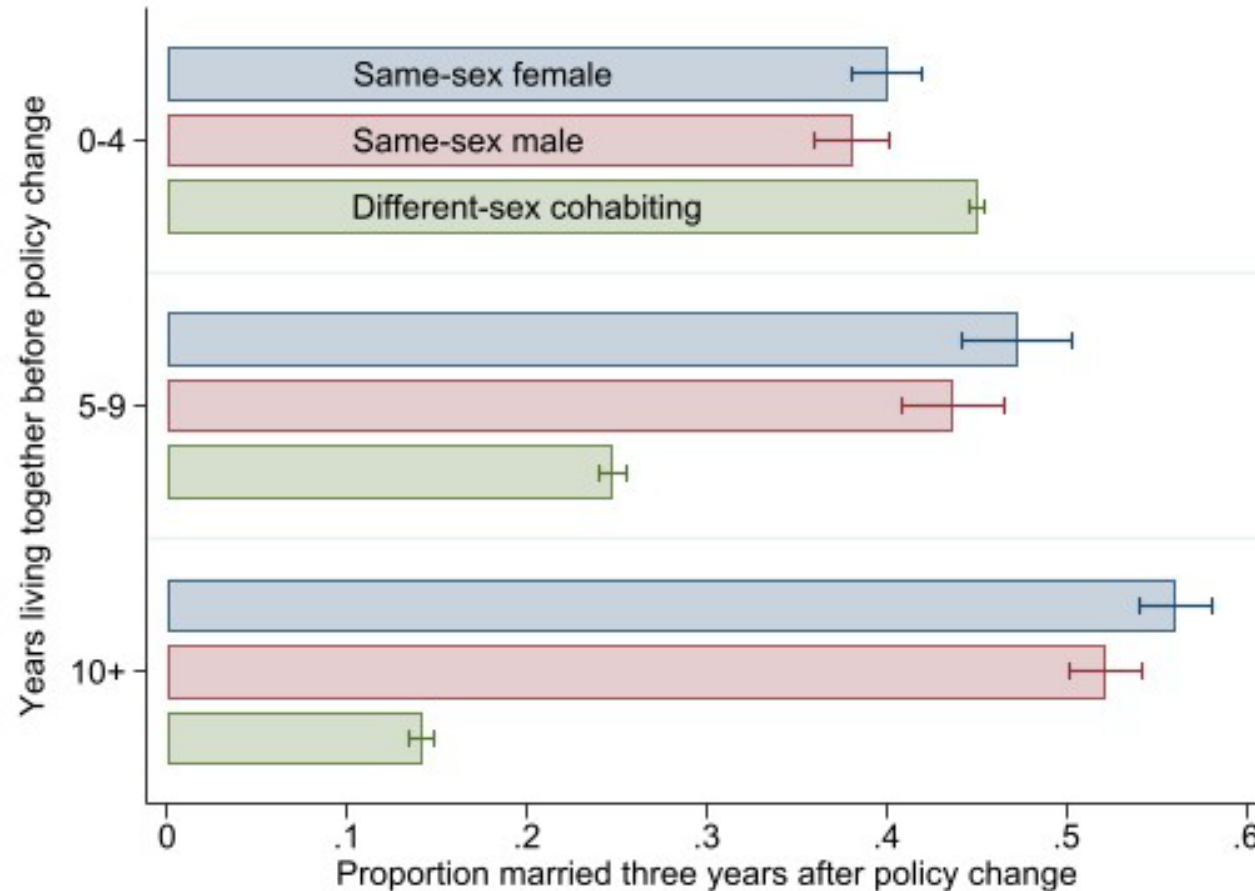


Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

What percentage of same-sex cohabiting couples got married when legal marriage became available?

Were long-term cohabitators more or less likely than new cohabitators to get married?

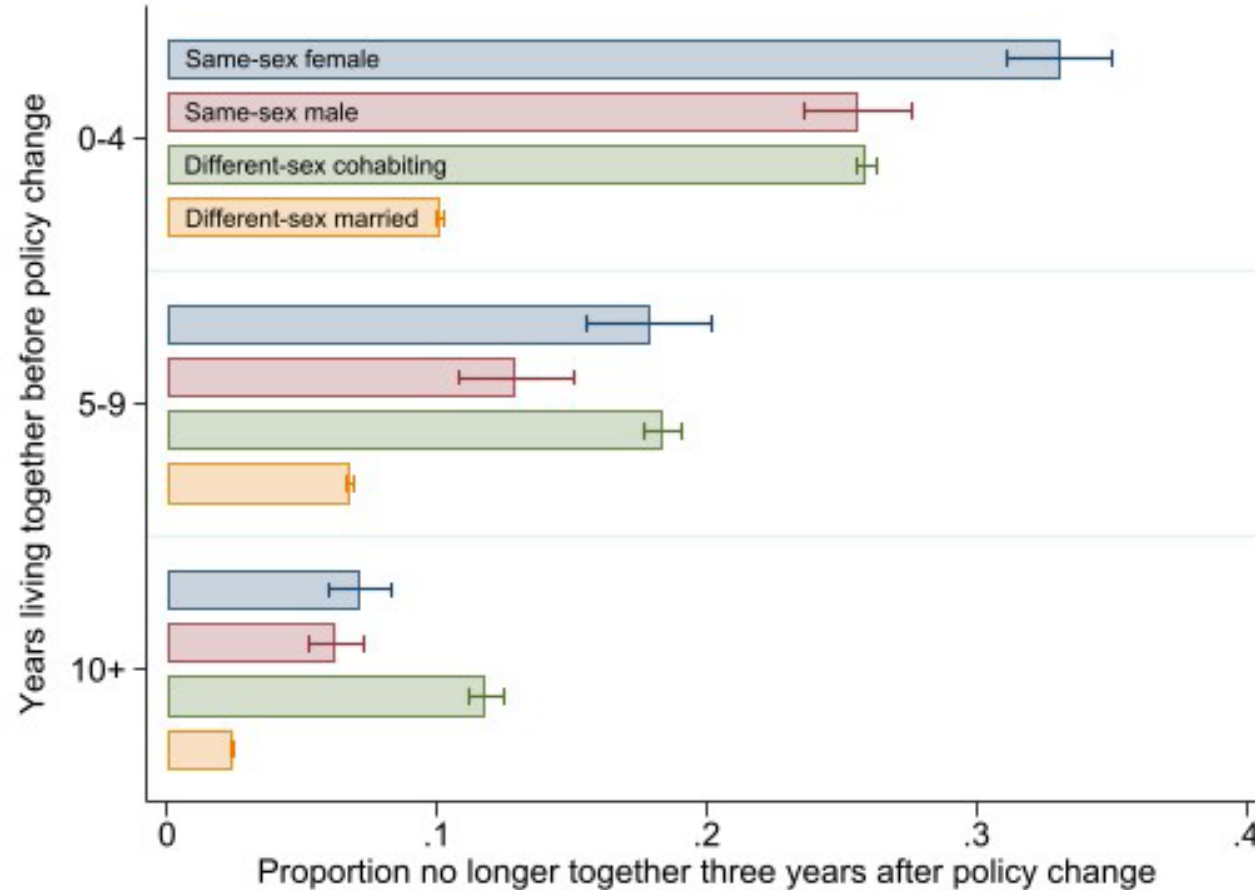
Marriage probabilities by years living together



Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

What about break-ups?

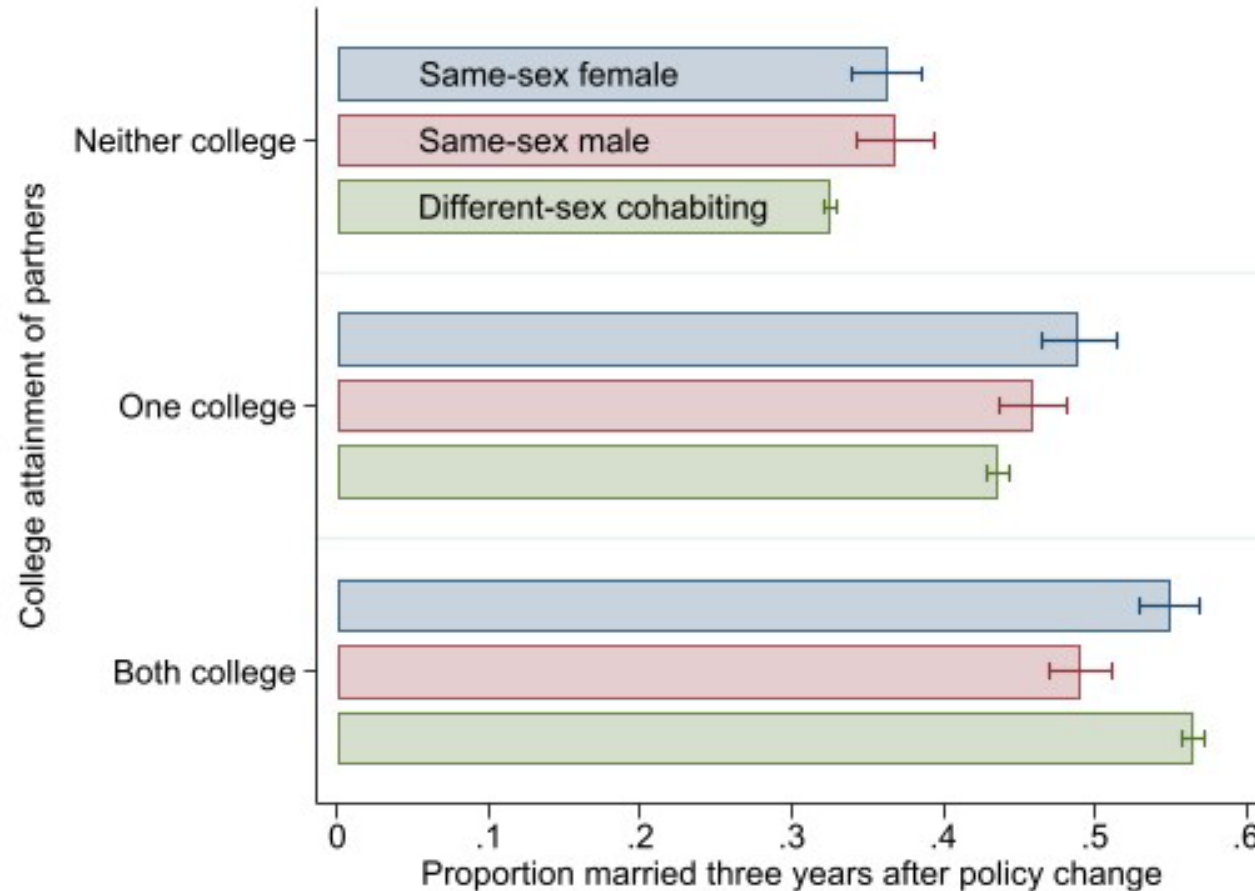
Break-up probabilities by years living together



Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

Are highly educated couples more or less likely to marry?

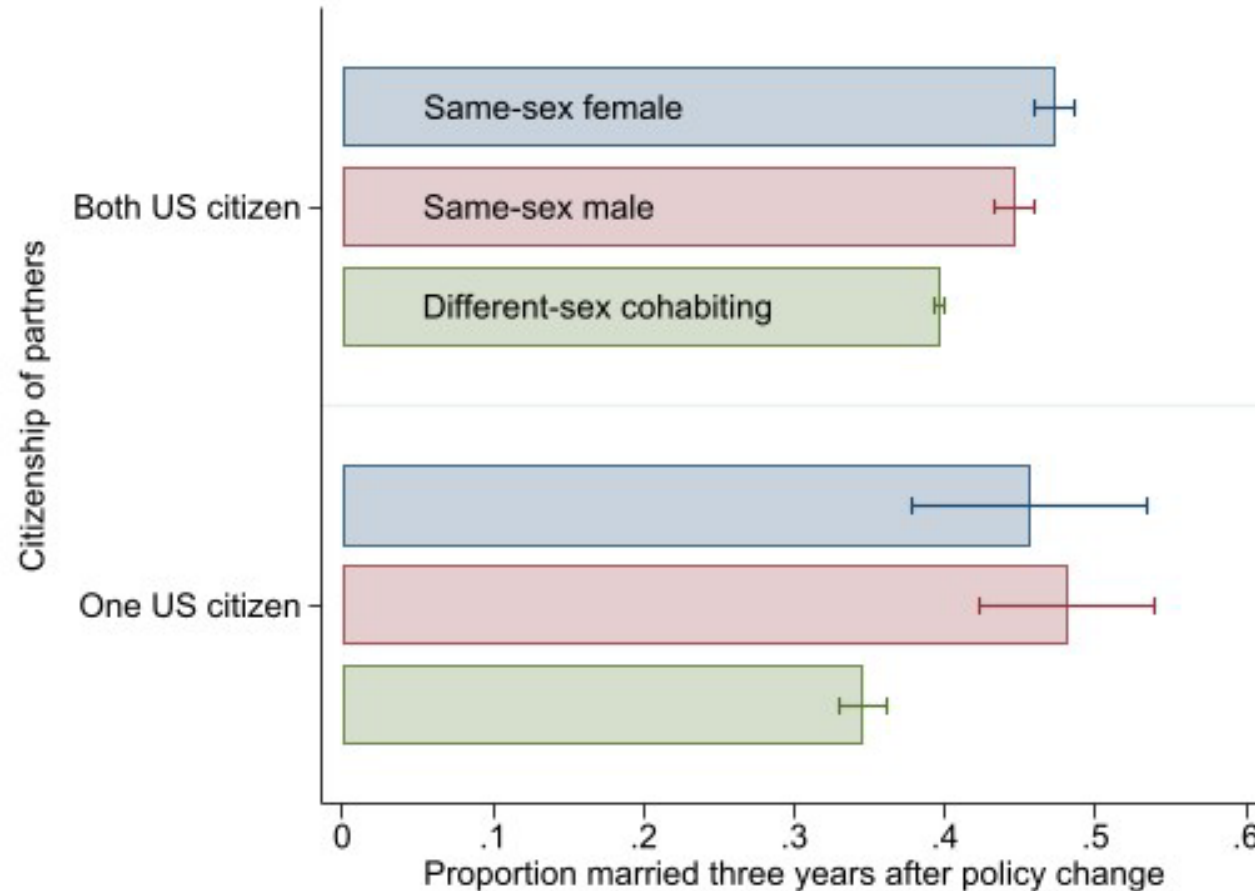
Marriage probabilities by college attainment



Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

Are couples with mixed citizenship more or less likely to marry?

Marriage probabilities by citizenship



Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2014 survey years, linked to IRS Forms 1040, 1975-2019 tax years.

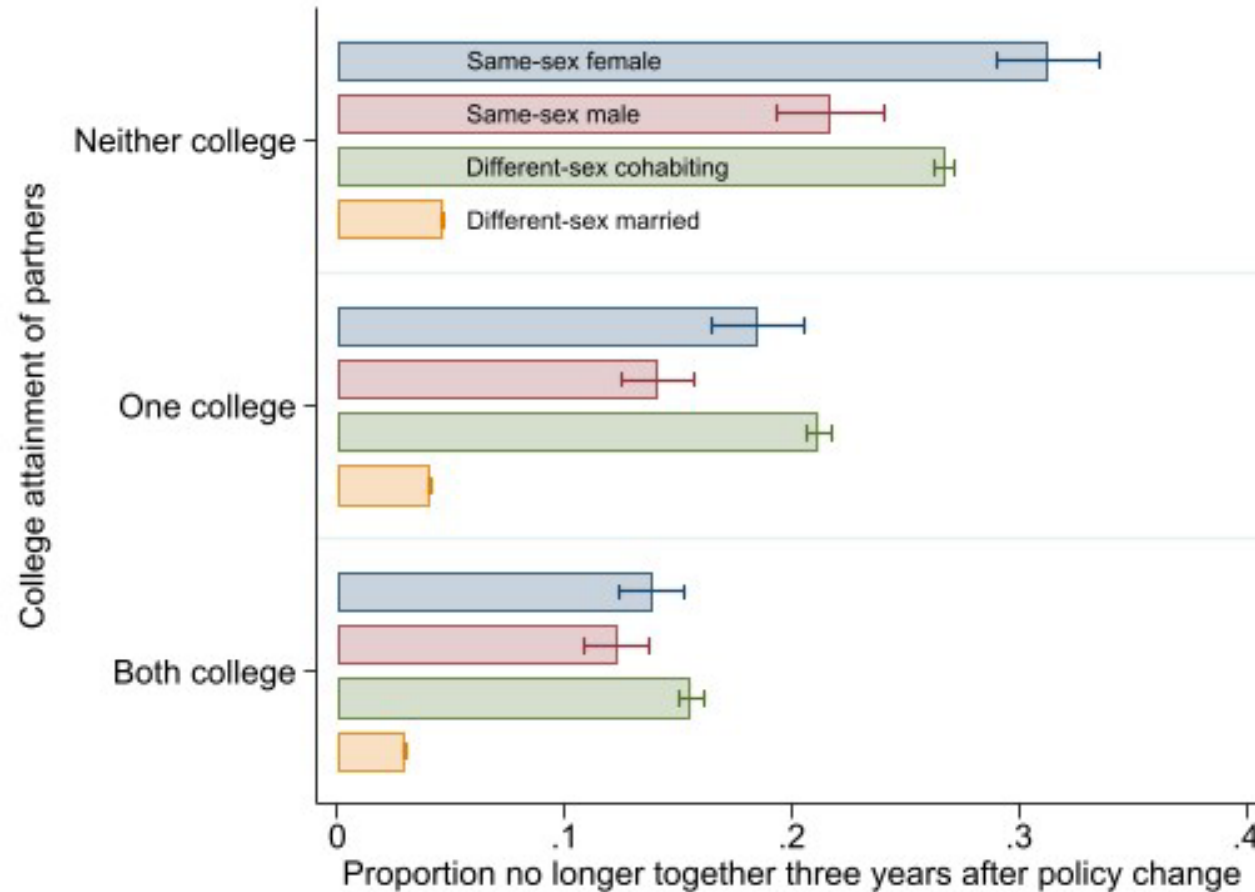
Conclusions

- By constructing longitudinal relationship trajectories from administrative data, we can identify short- versus long-term cohabitators and can track relationship transitions over time.
- About half of long-term same-sex couples in late-adopting states married within three years when legal marriage became available – but about half remained cohabiting.
- Among same-sex couples, longer-term and more-educated couples were more likely than others to marry. Mixed-citizenship couples were not.

Thank you!

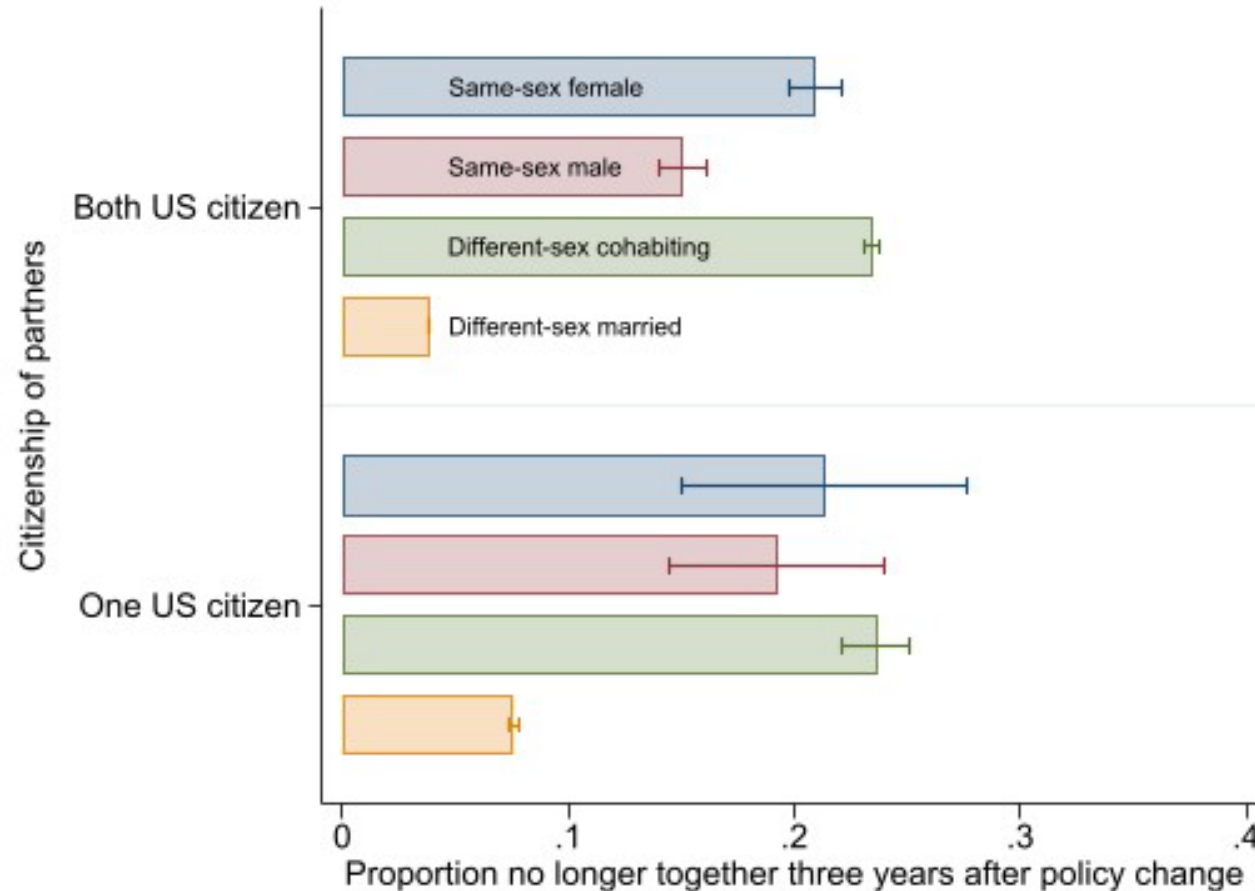
marta.murray.close@census.gov

Break-up probabilities by college attainment



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Break-up probabilities by citizenship



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