

Premarital Cohabitation: Timing, Engagement, and Marital Outcomes

Scott M. Stanley & Galena K. Rhoades

University of Denver

Background

- Premarital cohabitation took off in 1970s and 80s.
- An estimated 70% of people who marry will cohabit beforehand.
Hemez & Manning (2017)
- 50 to 65% of Americans believe that doing so will improve their odds in marriage.
 - Thornton & Young-DeMarco (2001), Barna (2016), Pew (2019)
- Three decades of research have not supported that belief.
- **Why?**

Three Theories of Risk for Premarital Cohabitation

- Selection

- Characteristics of those who cohabit before marriage are characteristics associated with higher risk for divorce.

e.g., Lillard, Brien, & Waite (1995), Smock (2000)

- Experience changes attitudes and beliefs.

- Experience cohabiting changes attitudes to be more accepting of divorce.

e.g., Axinn & Barber (1997)

- Inertia (our theory)

- Cohabitation increases constraints on leaving.
- Constraints can build up before dedication has matured.
- Timing matters.

The Latest Findings on Premarital Cohabitation

IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022)

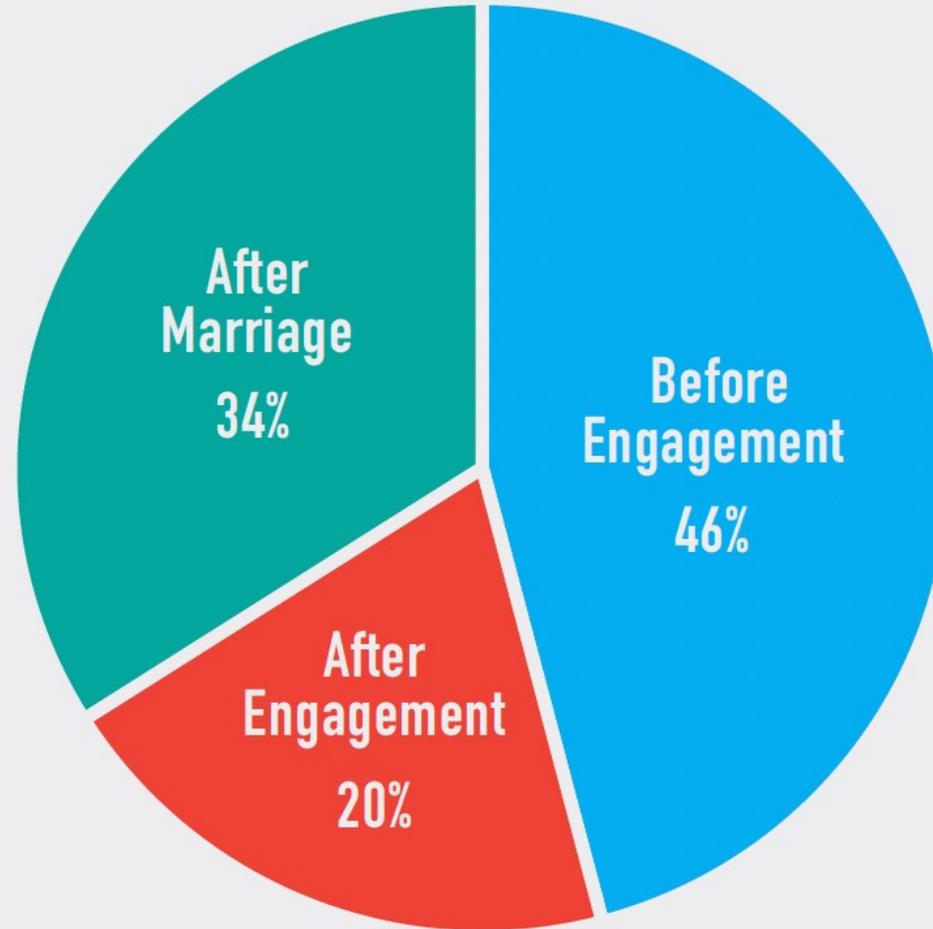
Study by Scott Stanley and Galena Rhoades

- **Report will be published by the Institute for Family Studies
Forthcoming this Spring**
- National (U.S.) sample collected by YouGov, Summer of 2022.
- $N = 1621$
- First marriages in years 2010 to 2019
- Respondents 50 and under at time of survey
- Sample weighted to match U.S. population on dimensions such as age, race, ethnicity, education, and geographic region

Primary Analytic Method

- Outcome = Marital dissolution
 - Marriage intact vs. divorced or likely to be permanently separated
- Primary analytic models: Logistic regression
 - We translate findings from odds ratios to estimated percentages for ease of understanding.
- Control variables
 - Cohabitation with prior partner(s)
 - Children with prior partner(s)
 - Duration of relationship before marriage
 - Couple had child together before marrying
 - Age at marriage
 - 4-year college degree at time of marriage
 - Full- or part-time employment at time of marriage
 - Gender
 - Lived with both biological parents at age 14
 - Race
 - Ethnicity

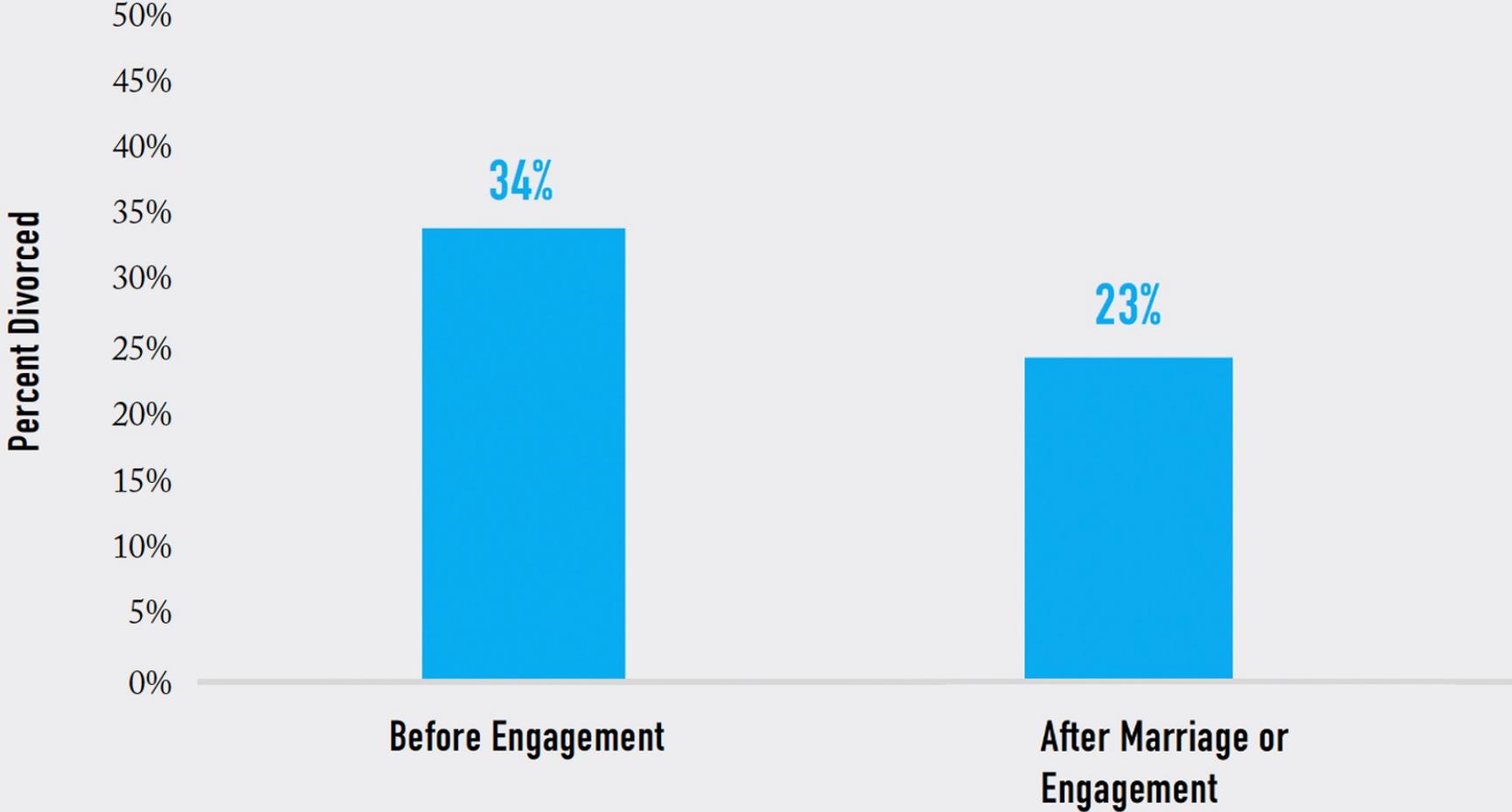
Timing of Cohabitation Among those Marrying in 2010 to 2019



Notes. Results are weighted.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov

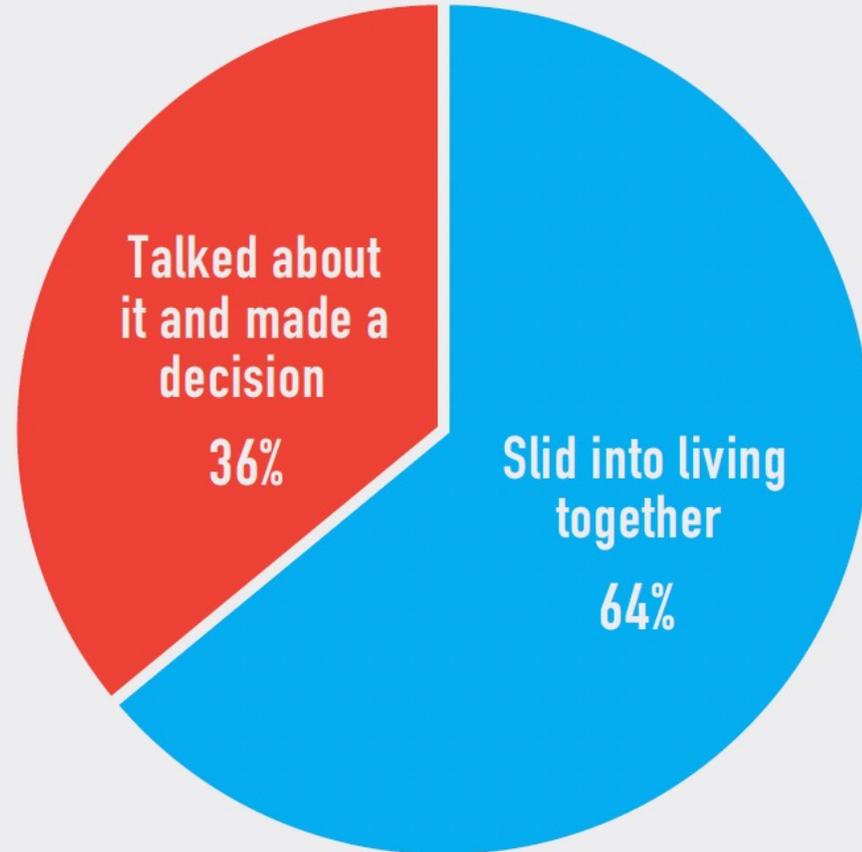
The Timing of Cohabitation and Marital Dissolution



Notes. Results are weighted and adjusted for covariates. Unadjusted, the percentages were 33% and 24%, respectively.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov

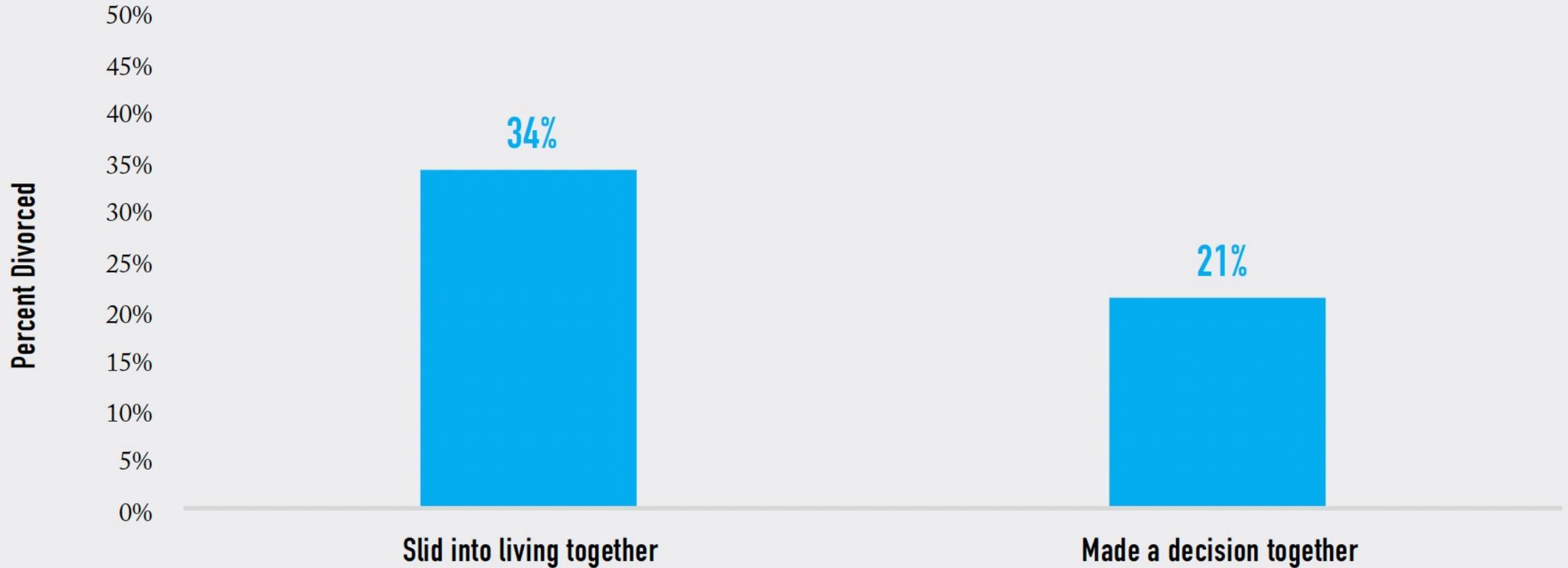
Sliding vs Deciding Into Cohabiting



Notes: Results are weighted but are not adjusted for covariates.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov

Sliding vs. Deciding Into Cohabitation and Marital Dissolution

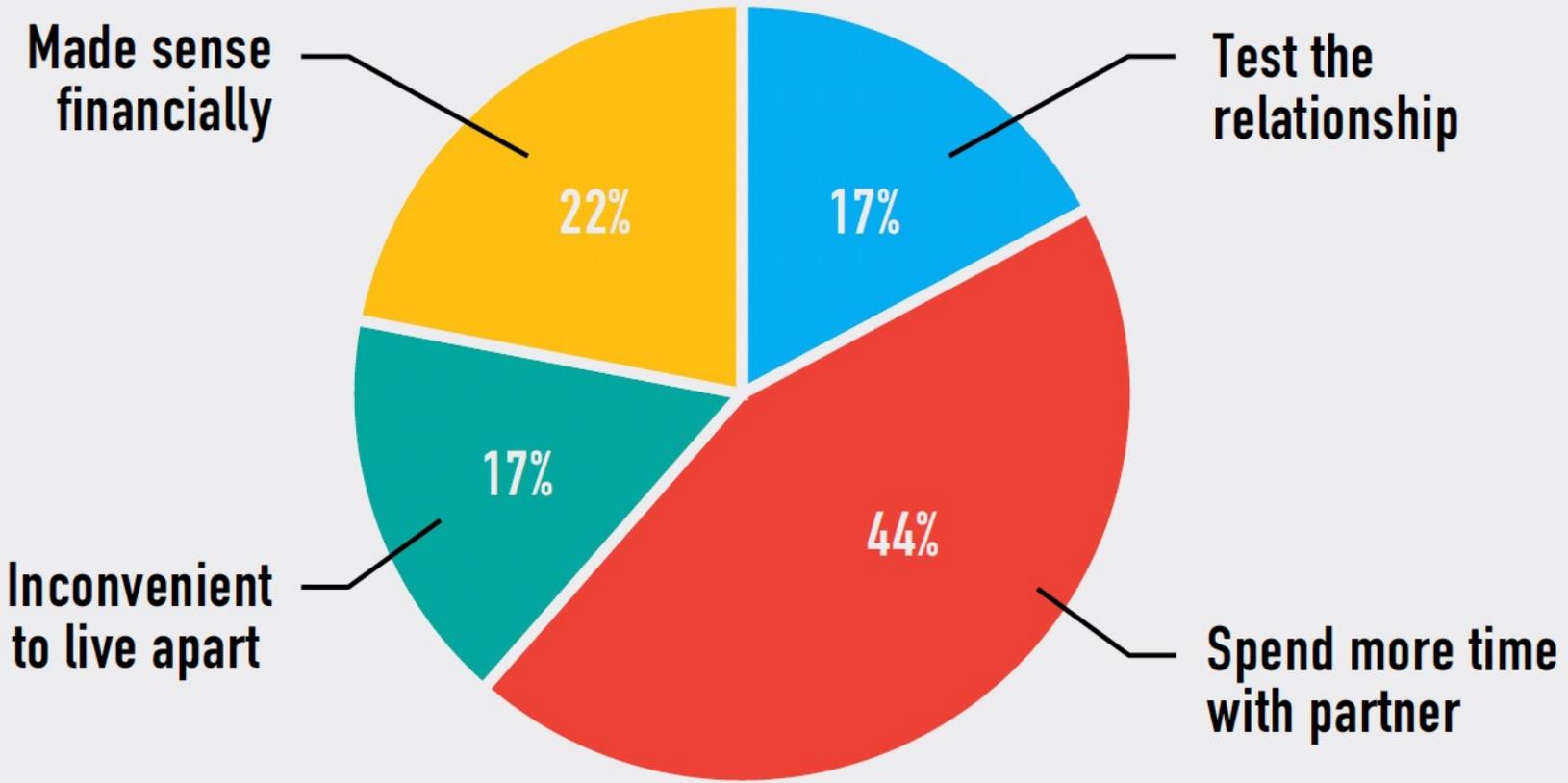


Notes: Results are weighted but are not adjusted for covariates.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov

Institute for Family Studies

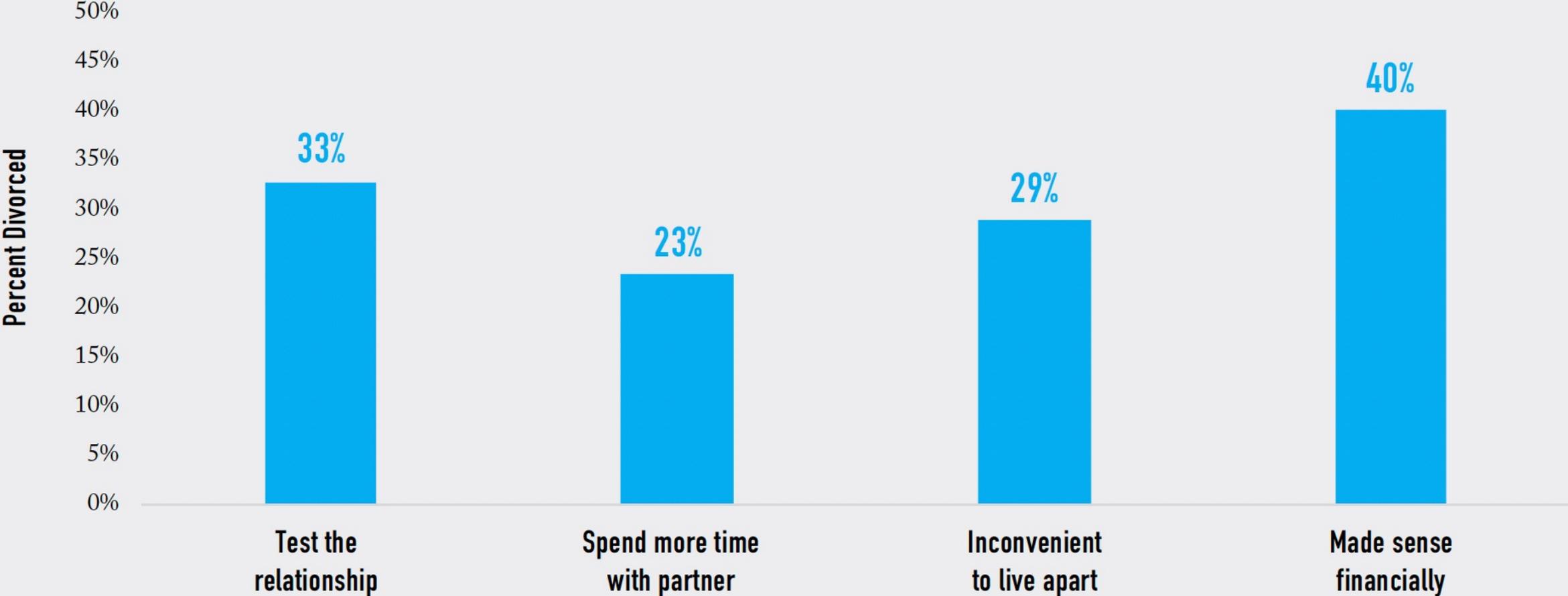
Top Reasons for Moving in Together Among Those Marrying in 2010 to 2019



Notes. Results are weighted.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov

Top Reasons for Moving in Together and Marital Dissolution



Notes. Results are weighted and adjusted for covariates. Unadjusted, the percentages were 31%, 24%, 29%, and 40%, respectively.

Source: IFS Marriage and Cohabitation Survey (2022), conducted by YouGov