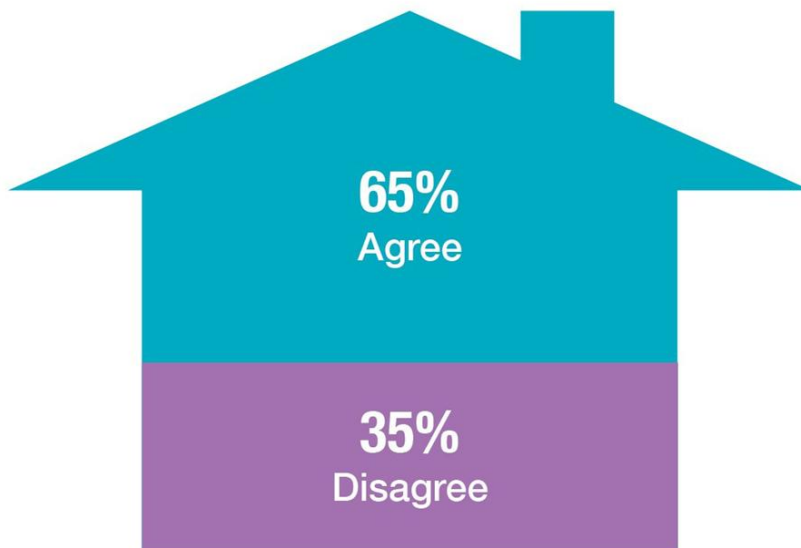


MAJORITY OF AMERICANS NOW BELIEVE IN COHABITATION

Cohabitation is the new norm. Shifting gender roles and expectations, the delay of marriage, and a secularizing culture are leading more American adults to believe that moving in together before tying the knot is a good idea. A recent Barna study asked Americans their views on cohabitation: the pros, cons, motivations, and effects of living together prior to marriage. Though its acceptance is widespread in American culture, there are still large pockets of resistance to this changing ethic among religious communities and those who adhere to more traditional values and premarital expectations.

Cohabitation: Good Idea?

(% among all adults)



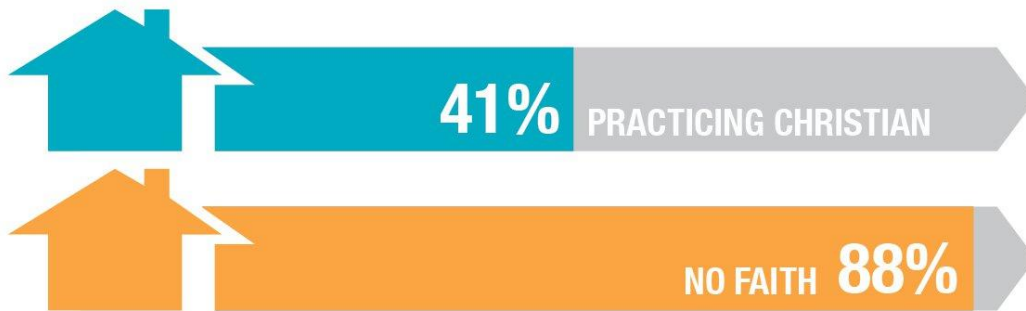
The majority of American adults believe cohabitation is generally a good idea. Two thirds of adults (65%) either strongly or somewhat agree that it's a good idea to live with one's significant other before getting married, compared to one-third (35%) who either strongly or somewhat disagree. Unsurprisingly, the most religious groups in America

Barna n=1,097 | April, 2016

are the least likely to think cohabitation is a good idea. Most Christian teaching on pre-marital relationships encourages abstinence and other boundaries that tend to exclude cohabitation, and the data reflects these beliefs. Practicing Christians (41%) are highly unlikely to believe cohabitation is a good idea, and the stark contrast with those who identify as having no faith (88%) further demonstrates the acute impact of religious belief on views regarding cohabitation.

Cohabitation: Good Idea? [Religion]

(% who strongly and somewhat agree)



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Some other contrasts become apparent when looking closely at generational and ideological differences. Millennials for instance have come of age in a more secular culture where gender norms, career trajectories and marriage expectations are rapidly changing. It is no surprise that Millennials (72%) are twice as likely as Elders (36%) to believe cohabitation is a good idea. These divides are equally as stark when looking at the conservative/liberal divide. Liberals, with a more progressive ideology, are more than twice as likely as conservatives, who value a more traditional view, to believe

cohabitation is a good idea.

Cohabitation: Good Idea? [Age + Ideology]

(% who strongly and somewhat agree)



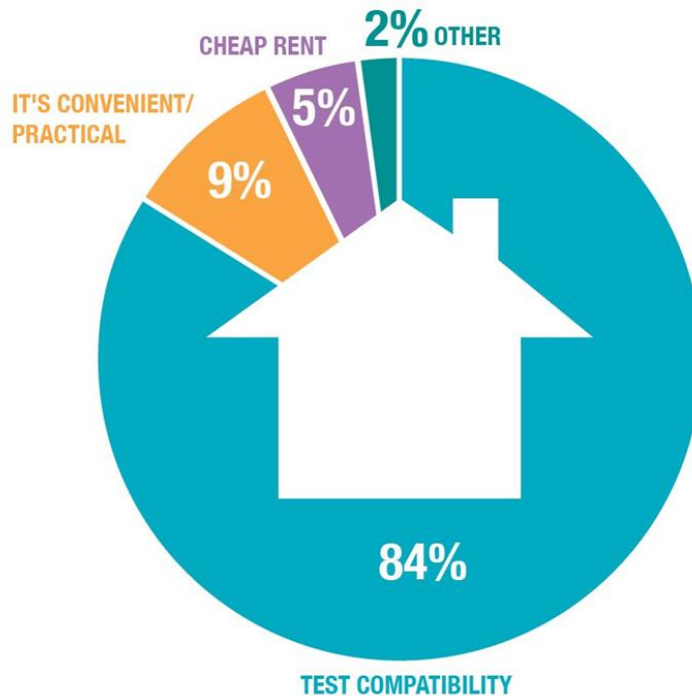
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Though it may seem as though cohabitation would be primarily a function of convenience and cost saving, almost all adults see it as a rite of passage in the path to marriage. The idea that living with one's significant other before getting married would be

convenient (9%), or that it would save rent (5%) pale in comparison to the value of testing compatibility (84%) by playing house before tying the knot. By far, the reason cohabiting couples are shacking up is in order to test the waters before taking the plunge.

Major Reasons for Cohabitation

(% among those who agree cohabitation is a good idea)



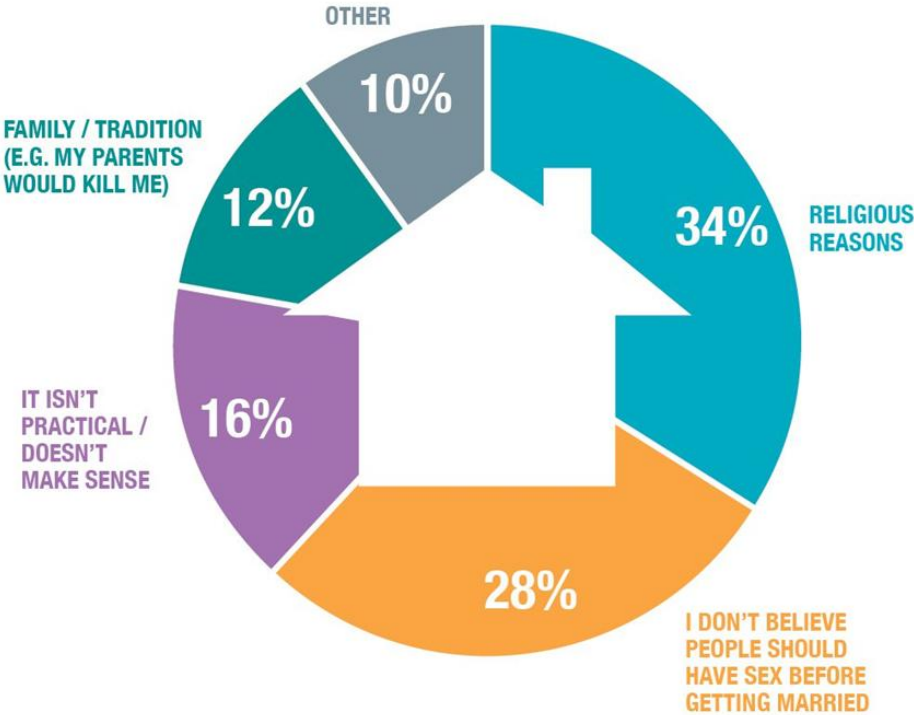
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As we've seen earlier, the most prominent cohabitation detractors are religious folks. So among those who believe living with one's significant other before getting married is not a good idea, the biggest reason is—unsurprisingly—religious reasons (34%). Again, the desire for abstinence prior to marriage is a major driver here: 28 percent chose "I don't believe people should have sex before getting married" as their biggest reason for believing cohabitation is a bad idea. Of lesser importance were issues of practicality (16%), the valuing of family and tradition (12%), and other reasons (10%).

It appears for the most part that Americans practice what they preach when it comes to cohabitation. Almost six in 10 (57%) either currently, or have previously lived with their boyfriend / girlfriend—a number very close to the 65 percent who believe it is a good idea (see above). When ranking the groups according to their past or present cohabitation (or lack thereof), we begin to see some themes. Older, conservative, and more religious (Christian or otherwise) Americans are the least likely to have ever cohabited. Interestingly, Millennials are one of the least likely of the groups measured to cohabit, though given their age and stage of this, this is somewhat unsurprising. On the other side, younger, less religious, and more liberal Americans are more likely to have lived with a significant other before marriage. Interestingly, we see church attenders on this side, a fact that might prove how pervasive this cultural shift has in fact been.

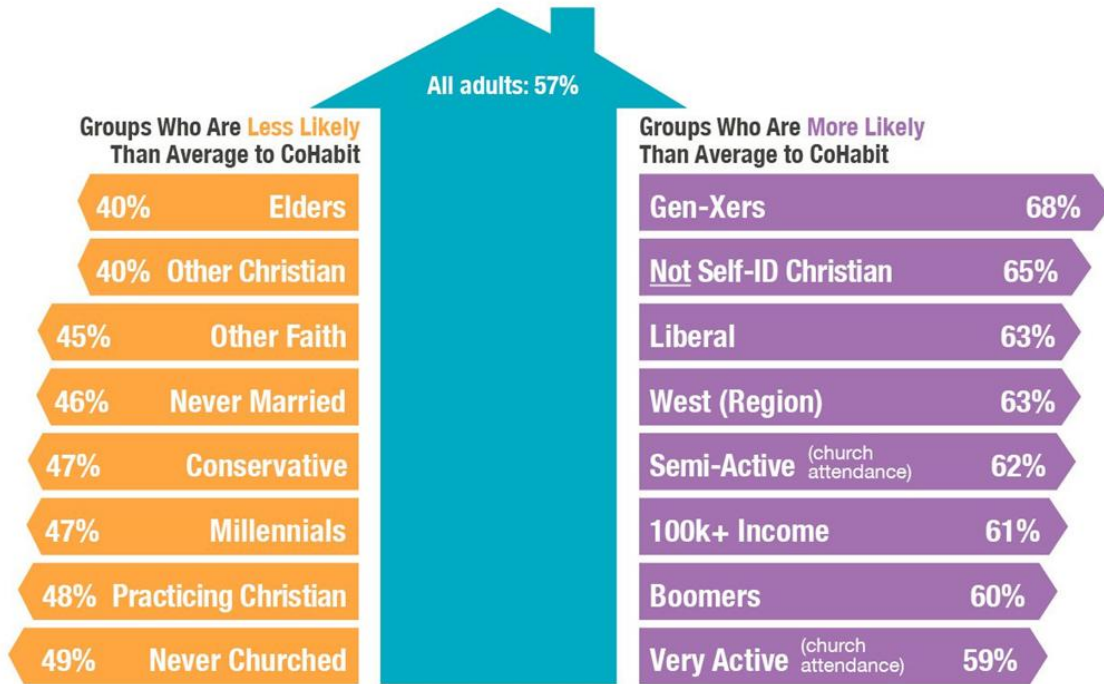
Major Reasons Against Cohabitation

(% among those who agree cohabitation is not a good idea)



Current or Previous Cohabitation

(% of those who either currently, or have previously lived with their boyfriend / girlfriend)

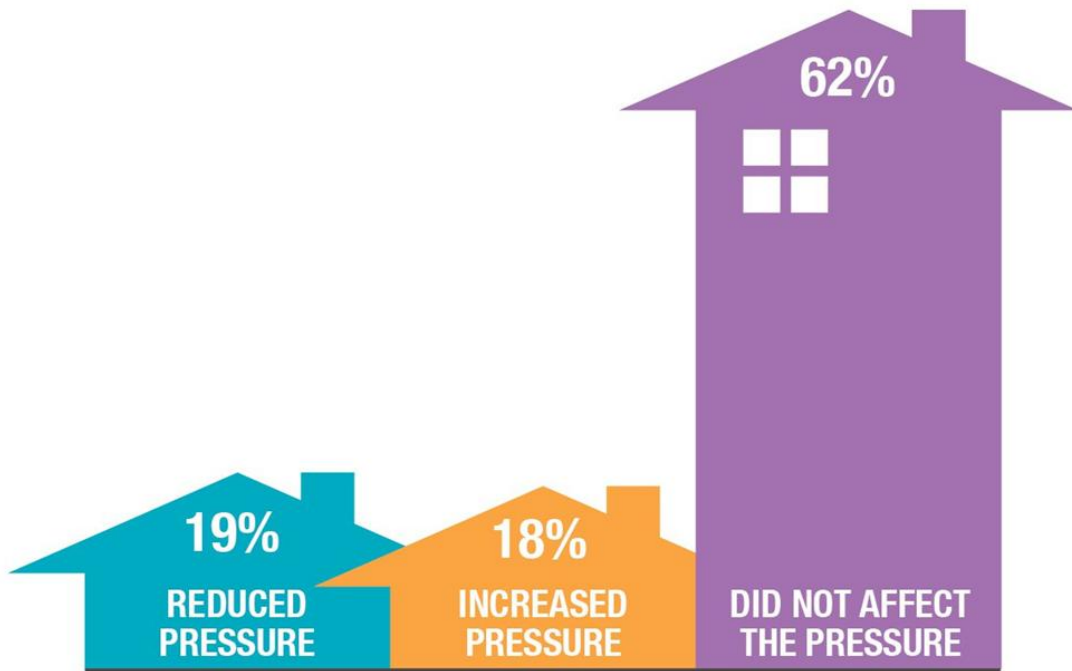


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Though the debate has raged over whether cohabitation reduces or increases the pressure of marriage, it appears that among those who have actually done it, there was no major effect either way. The majority (62%) believes that living together did not affect the pressure to get married at all, and those who say it reduced (19%) or increased (18%) the pressure to get married were pretty evenly split.

Cohabitation: Reduce or Increase Pressure for Marriage?

(% among those who either currently, or have previously lived with their boyfriend / girlfriend)

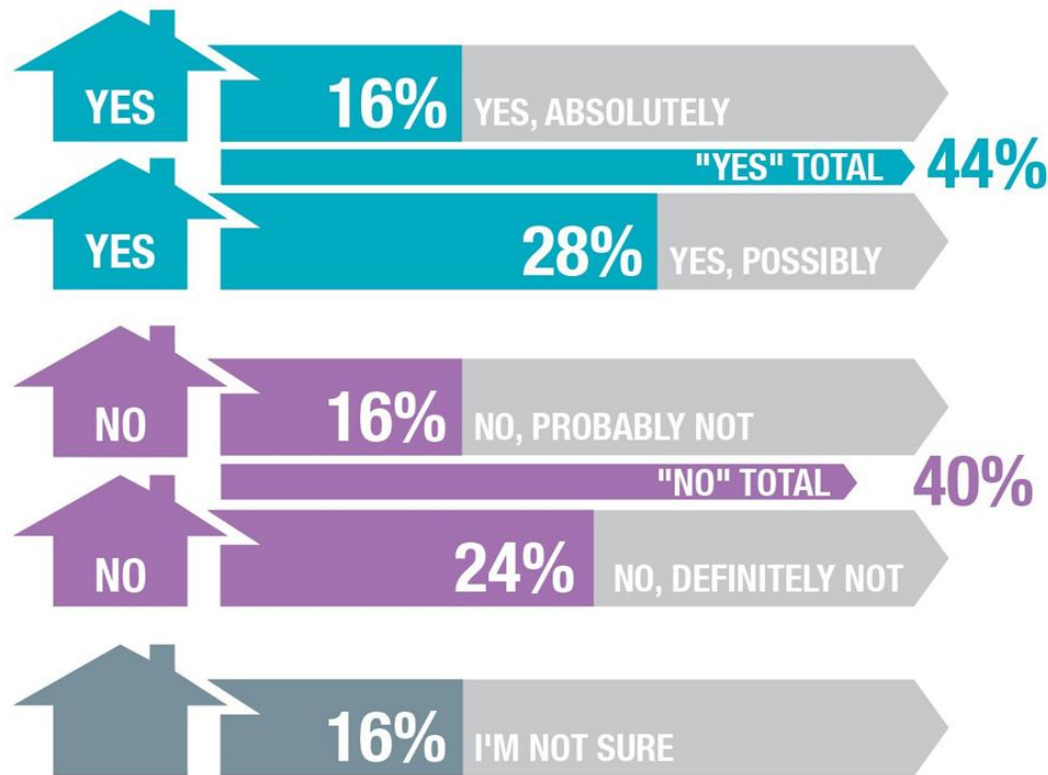


Barna n=629 | April, 2016

Though most Americans believe cohabitation is a good idea (65%), and are either currently or have previously lived with their boyfriend / girlfriend (57%), they are a little more torn when it comes to their own children. More than four in 10 (44%) of adults would be OK with their child cohabiting before marriage, and similarly, 40 percent would not be OK. Interestingly however, when it comes to the strongest views, respondents were more likely to say “no, definitely not” (24%) than “yes, absolutely” (16%).

Would You Want Your Child to Cohabit Before Marriage?

(% among those who have children)



Barna n=644 | April, 2016

What the Research Means

“America is well beyond the tipping point when it comes to cohabitation,” says Roxanne Stone, editor in chief at Barna Group. “Living together before marriage is no longer an exception, but instead has become an accepted and expected milestone of adulthood. Even a growing number of parents—nearly half of Gen-Xers and Boomers, and more than half of Millennials—want and expect their children to live with a significant other before getting married.

“The institution of marriage has undergone significant shifts in the last century,” continues Stone. “What was once seen as primarily an economic and procreational partnership, has become an exercise in finding your soulmate. Where once extended families lived within a handful of miles from each other, now the nuclear family often strikes out on its own. Such shifts placed a new emphasis on marriages as the core of family life and revealed fault lines in many marriages. These pressures, along with a number of other social phenomena—including women’s growing economic independence—led to unprecedented divorce rates in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, many of today’s young people who are currently contemplating marriage, see it as a risky endeavor. They want to make sure they get it right and to avoid the heartbreak they witnessed in the

lives of their parents or their friends' parents. Living together has become a de facto way of testing the relationship before making a final commitment.

“Religious Americans have been slower to adopt this perspective,” observes Stone. “As in most aspects of family life, religious people tend toward a more conservative or traditional viewpoint. American Christians—as well as those of other faiths—celebrate marriage as a key religious ritual and see it as a lifelong commitment. Importantly, that commitment is consummated by sex. The implicit presence of premarital sex in a cohabiting relationship precludes most religious Americans from endorsing it.

“However, religious leaders will be wise to notice that a growing number of their constituents—particularly in younger demographics—are accepting cohabitation as the norm,” concludes Stone. “As with premarital sex, the arguments against cohabitation will seem increasingly antiquated as the general culture accepts and promotes it. When everyone in their circles and everyone on television is living together, young people will begin to see it as benign. Religious leaders will need to promote the countercultural trend by celebrating the reasons to wait—rather than trying to find evidence for why it’s wrong (because such tangible, measurable evidence may not exist). What are the spiritual reasons for waiting? How does waiting promote better discipleship? Better marriages? A better family life? These are the questions that young people, in particular, will need answered in order to resist the cultural tide toward cohabitation.”

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About the Research

The study on which these findings are based was conducted via online survey from April 7 to April 14, 2016. A total of 1,097 interviews were conducted. The sample error is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points at 95-percent confidence level. The completion rate was 85%.

Practicing Christian: Those who attend a religious service at least once a month, who say their faith is very important in their lives and self-identify as a Christian

No faith: identify as agnostic or atheist, or as having no faith

Other faith: identify with a non-Christian faith, or identify as a Christian but report beliefs not aligned with historic, orthodox Christianity

Other-Christian: Christians who do not identify as Protestant or Catholic

Self-ID Christian: identity as Christian

Semi-Active (Church Attendance): attended a service within the past month (but not within the past week)

Very-Active (Church Attendance): attended a church service in the past seven days, not including a special event such as a wedding or a funeral

Millennials: Born between 1984 and 2002

Busters/Gen-Xers: Born between 1965 and 1983

Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964

Elders: Born between 1945 or earlier

Liberal: identify as mostly liberal when it comes to political issues.

Conservative: identify as mostly conservative when it comes to political issues.

About the Barna Group

The Barna Group is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984.

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