



Changing Patterns of Family Life in Ireland

Presentation to Law Reform Commission Annual Conference

Cohabitation: Models for Legal Reform

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Objectives

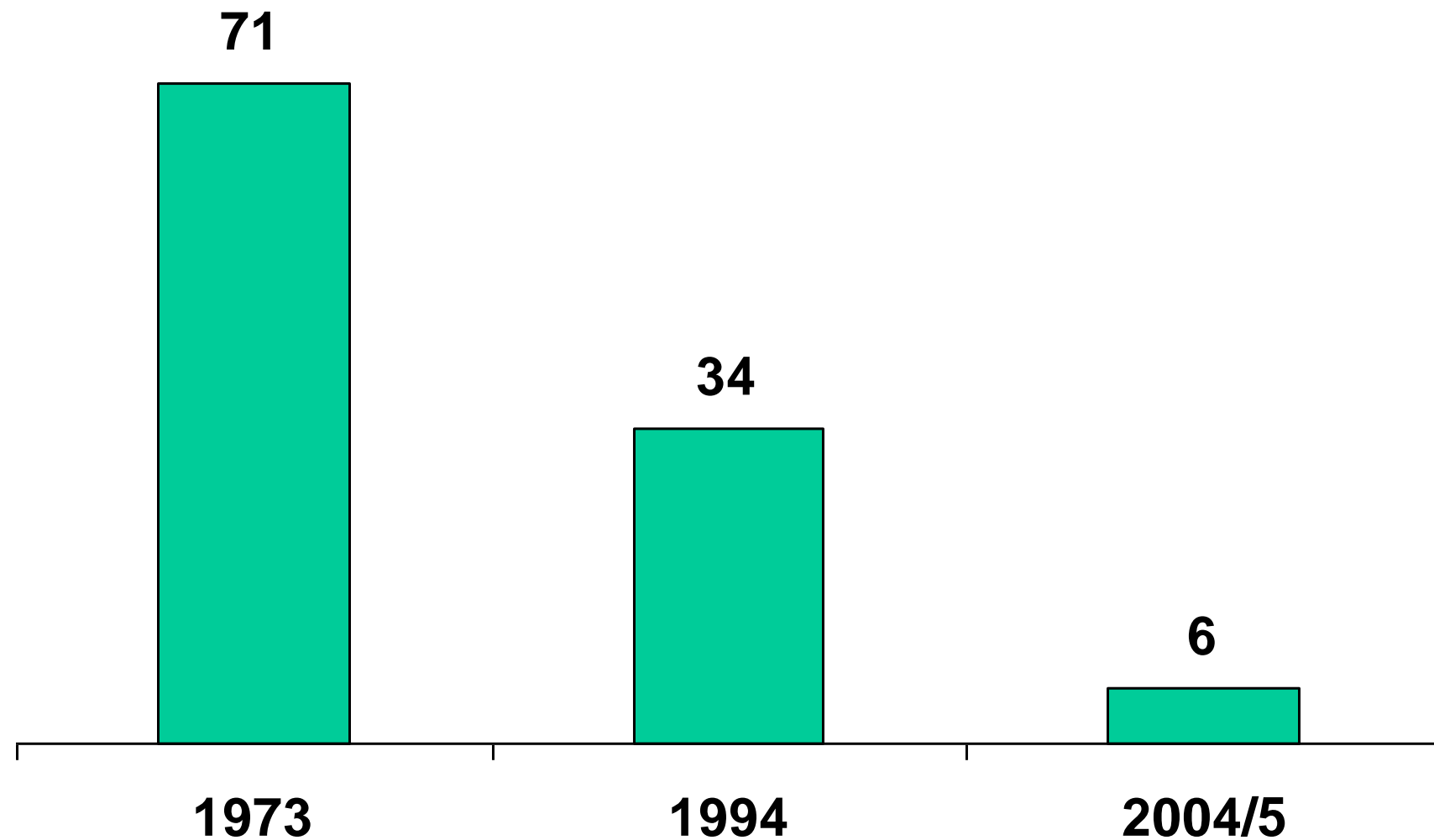
- Highlight some family trends relevant to debate on law on cohabitation
- Main focus: the couple relationship
 - historical background (pre-1960)
 - recent trends
 - attitudes & values
 - behaviour

Historical background

- **Pre-1960s: Marriage as gateway to sex and reproduction**
 - strong social sanctions against sex before marriage
 - ... and against child-bearing outside marriage
 - no cohabitation
- **Very low marriage rate**
 - 1930s: almost one-third of adults never married
 - late average age of marriage
 - low cultural valuation of adult intimacy
 - mal-distribution of child-bearing: high among the married, but large non-married population with no children
- **The post-1960s revolution**
 - break-up of the marriage-sex-reproduction sequence
 - sex as normal, universal part of adult life
 - high valuation on adult intimacy
- **The era of 'moral politics'**
 - began in early 1970s: the contraception debate
 - divorce and abortion emerged in 1980s
 - ended with divorce referendum in November 1995
 - little controversy on family/sexual issues since 1995

Attitudes to sex before marriage

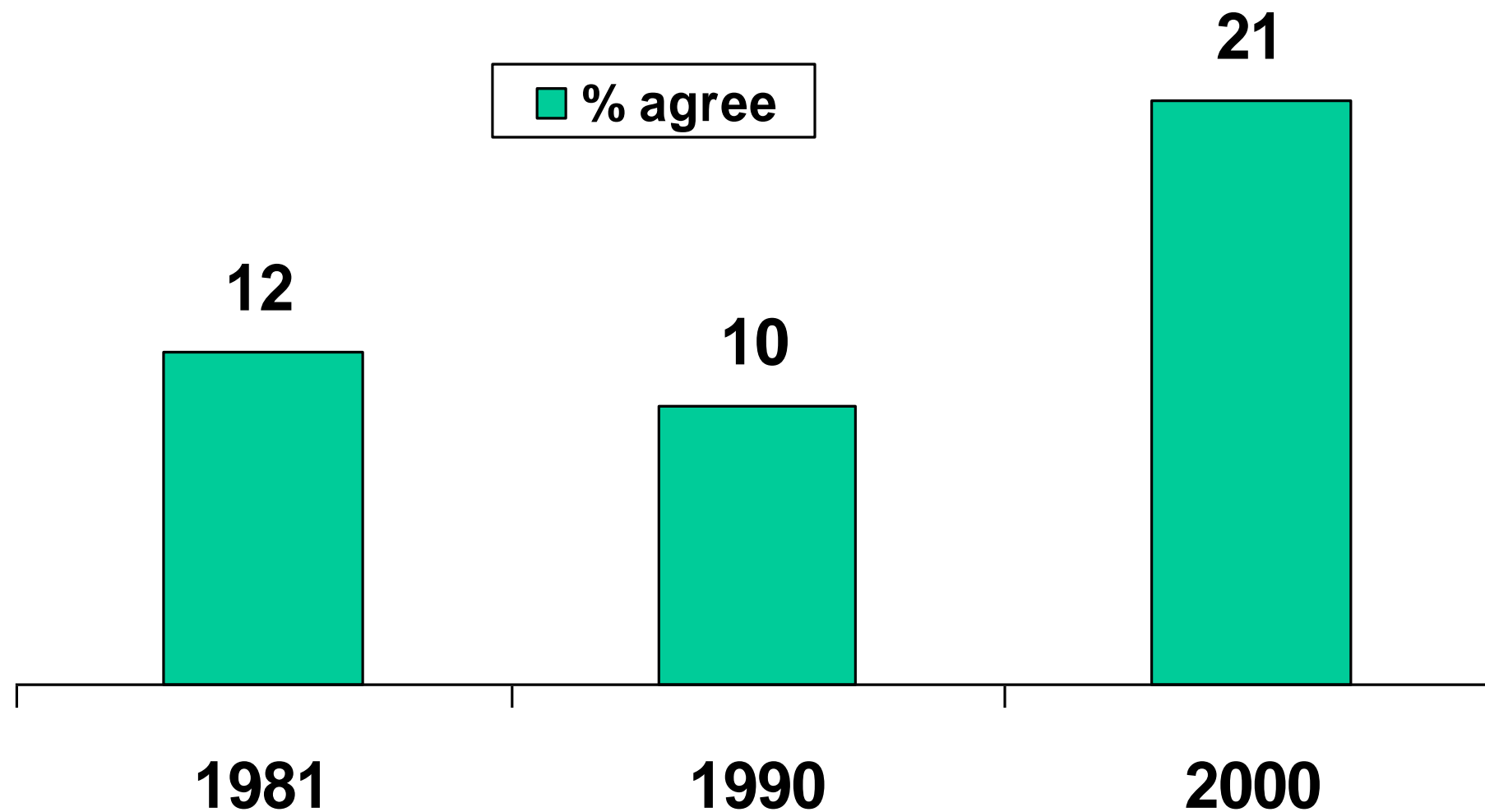
% who think that sex before marriage is 'always wrong'



Sources: Irish Episcopal Commission Survey on Religious Belief and Practice 1973, International Social Survey Project 1994, Sexual Behaviour Survey 2004/5

Attitudes to marriage (1)

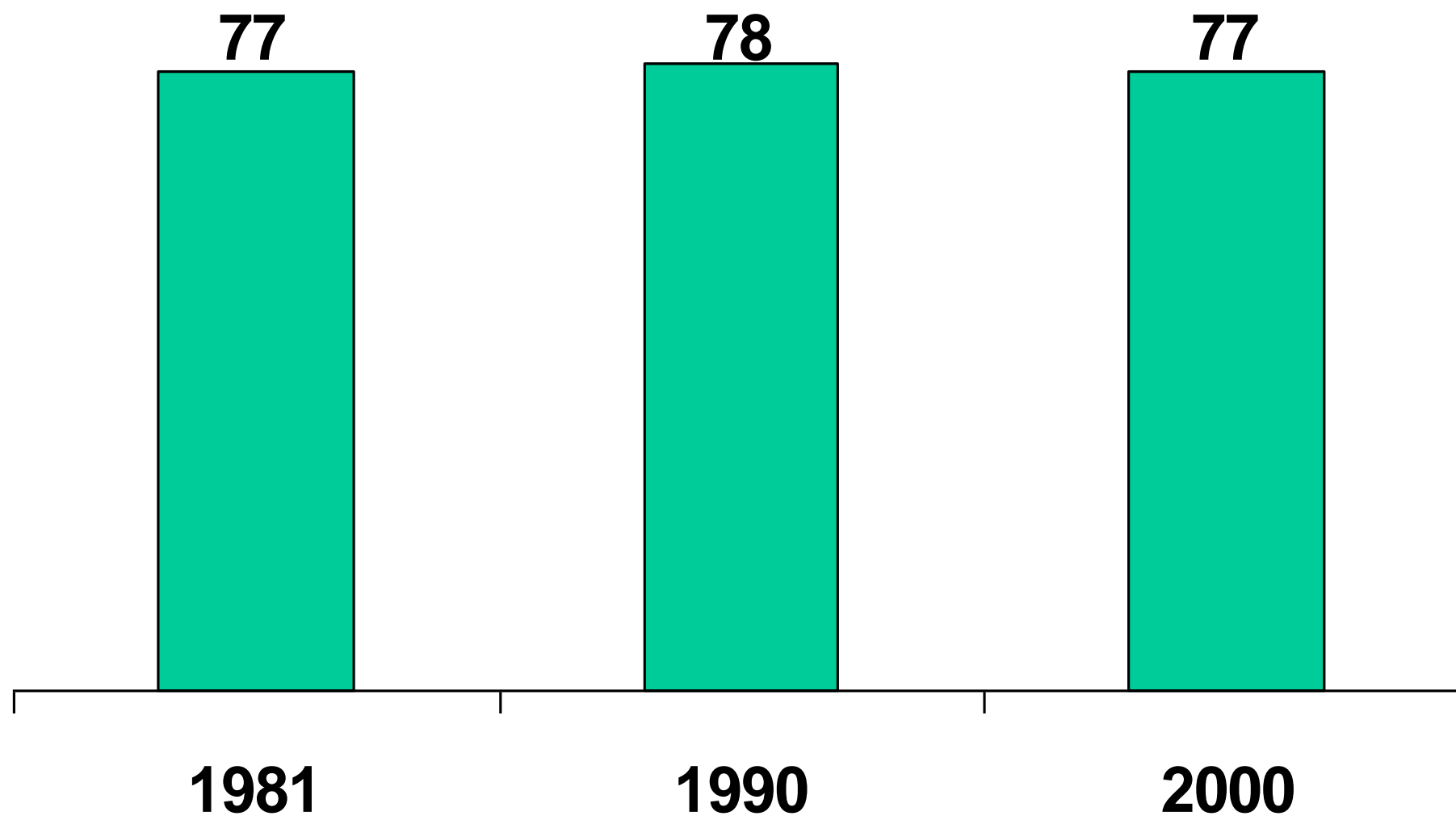
Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Marriage is an outdated institution' ?*



Source: European Values Study 1981, 1990, 1999-2000

Attitudes to marriage (2)

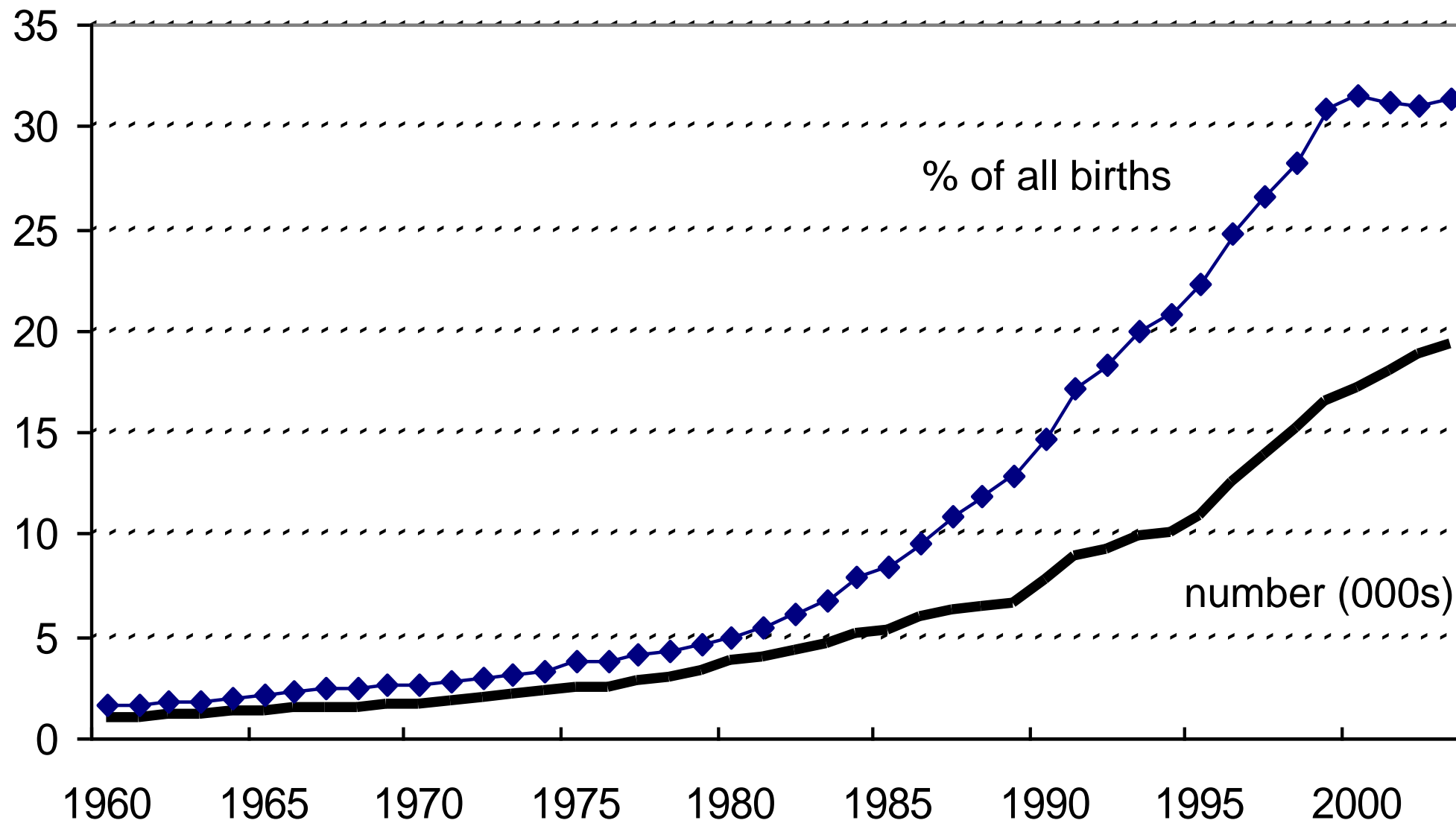
% feel that men and women having an affair is never justified



Source: European Values Study 1981, 1990, 1999-2000

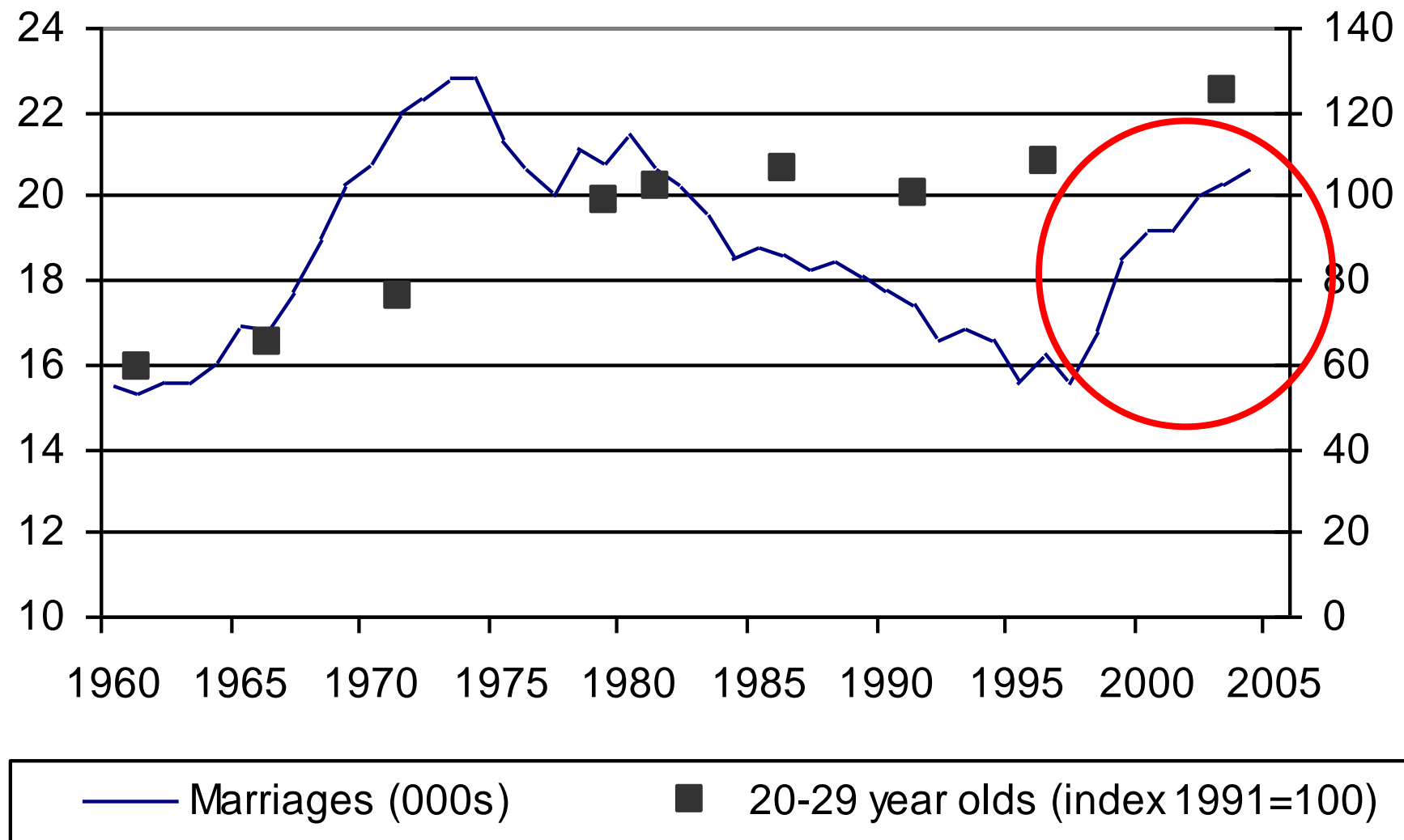
Births outside marriage:

sharp rise from late 1970s, levelled off since 1999



One-third of all births take place outside marriage but only 11% of 0-4 year-olds recorded as living with lone parents in Census 2002

Annual number of marriages and size of 20-29 year-old cohort, 1960-2005



Cohabitation, 1996 & 2002

	1996	2002
	000s	
Number of cohabiting couples	31.3	77.6
Number without children	18.6	47.9
Number with children aged < 15	12.7	29.7
<i>Of which:</i>		
1 child	6.6	15.7
2 children	3.5	8.8
3 or more children	2.6	5.2
Total children	23	51.7

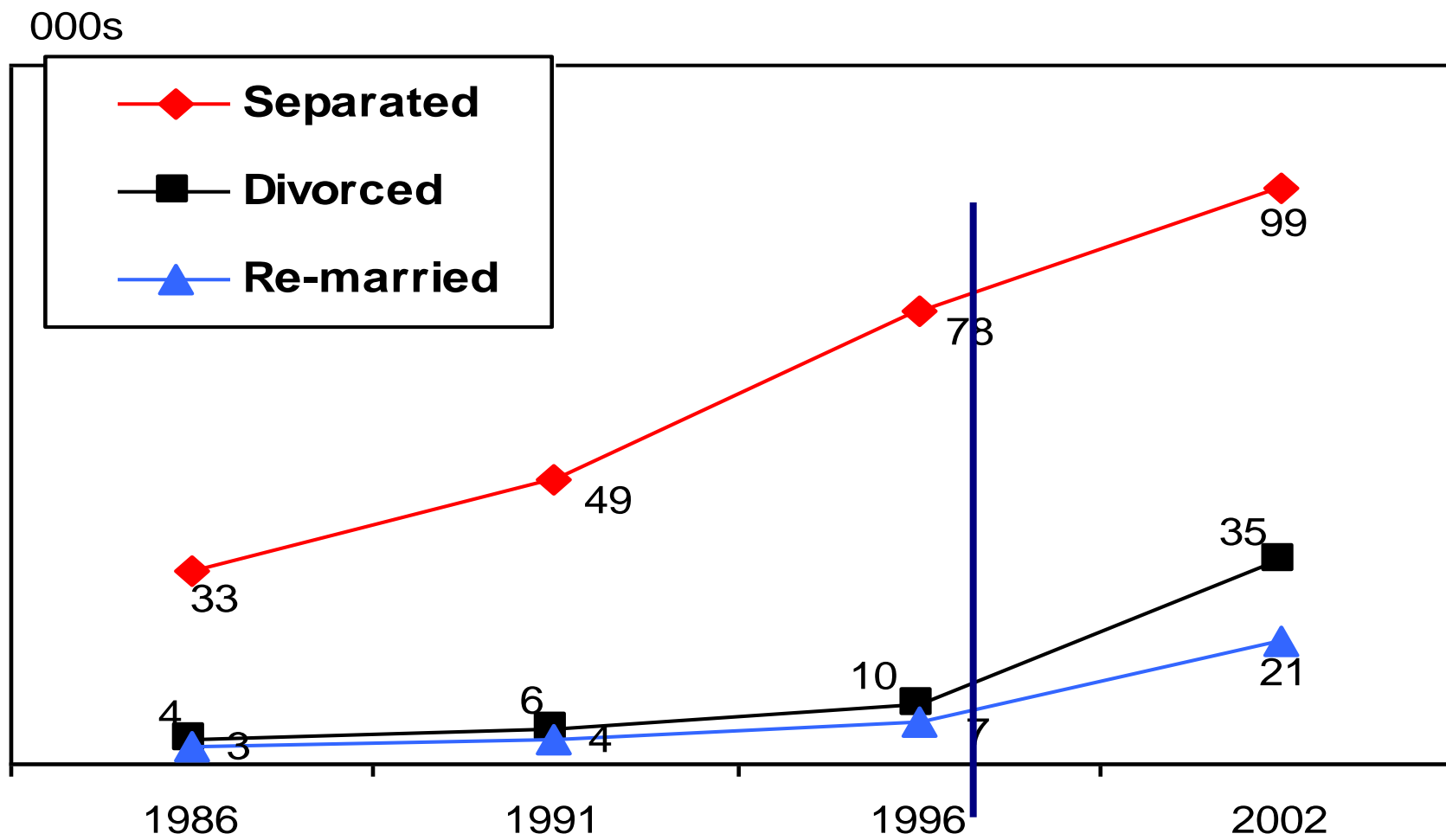
Cohabitation

	1996	2002
Cohabiting couples as per cent of all family units	3.90%	8.40%
Cohabiting couples with children <15 as % of all family units with children < 15		6.50%
% of children <15 living with cohabiting couples		4.80%
Number of same sex cohabiting couples*	150	1300
Same-sex cohabiting couples as % of all cohabiting couples*	0.40%	1.68%

*Sources: Census of Population. *Communication from CSO*

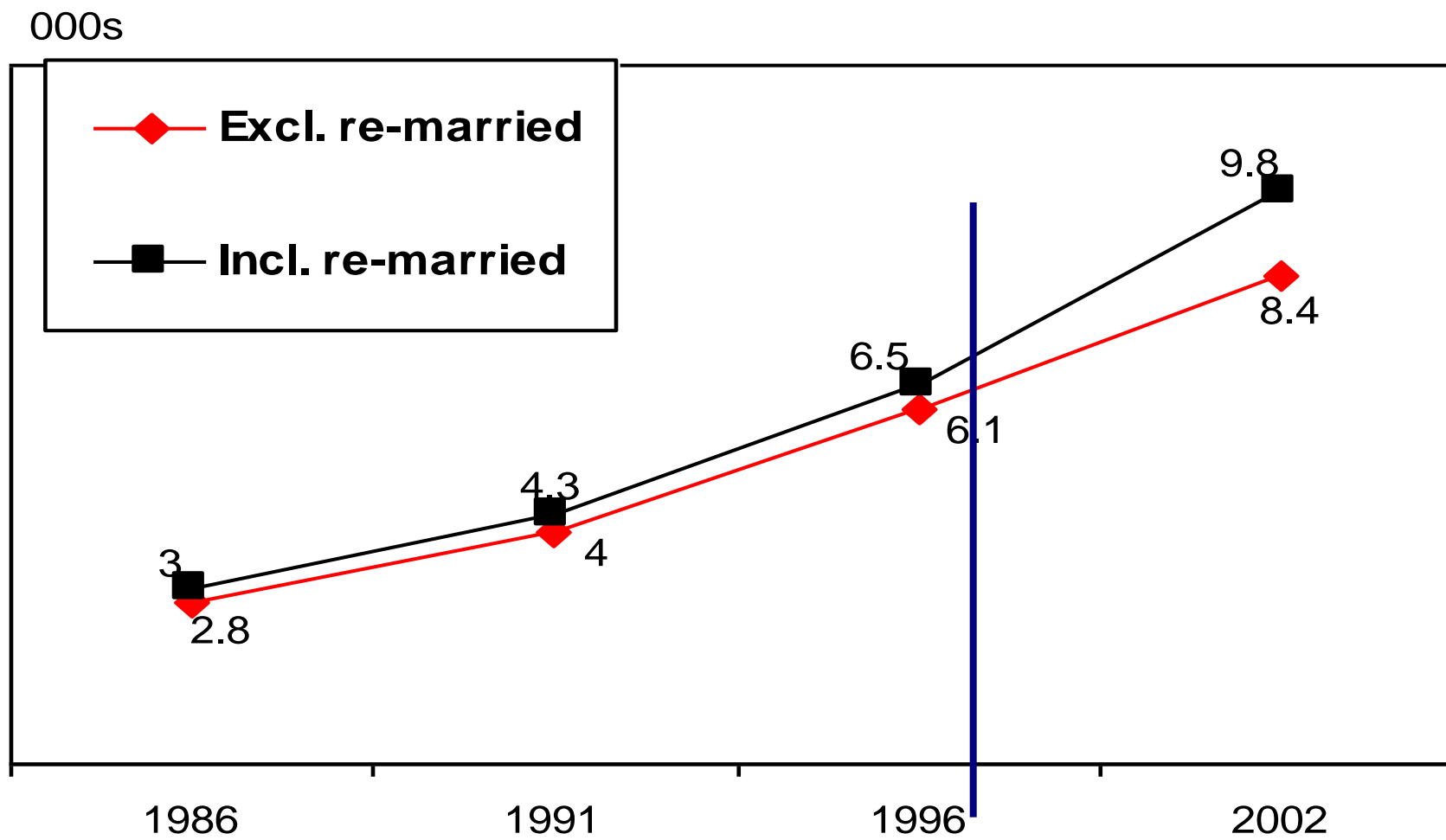
Marital breakdown

Numbers of divorced, separated and re-married following dissolution of marriage, 1986-2002



Marital breakdown

Separated/divorced as per cent of ever-married, 1986-2002



Family law applications in District and Circuit courts, 1994 & 2003

	1994	2003
District Court	14,274 (84%)	23,316 (81%)
<i>Domestic violence**</i>	7,548	9,881
Circuit Court	2,806 (16%)	5,535 (19%)
<i>Judicial separation</i>	2,806	1,802
<i>Divorce</i>		3,733
Total	17,080	28,851

Some conclusions

- Cultural context for family law reform less fraught now than up to mid-1990s
- Marriage still a central institution
- But less strictly bounded
 - many informal arrangements at fringes of marriage
 - sexual activity begins with adulthood, not marriage
 - one-third of births outside marriage ...
 - ... but many of these lead into marriage
- Cohabitation in some cases an alternative to marriage
- But little good information on the extent and nature of cohabitation
- Often a stage on way into first or second marriage
- Cohabitation as life-time alternative to marriage seems to be rare