Transitions into first partnerships in the United Kingdom:
Comparing across cohorts and time

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Background

- Concerns about lone parenthood and relationship instability
- Relatively little academic interest in marriage, as a particular relationship status
- Retreat of young away from marriage – cohabitation filling that gap?
  - Why? Class factors, attitudes, views about marriage.
- Social stratification of marriage

# Single men marrying single women (number)

Median age at marriage [1851-2014]
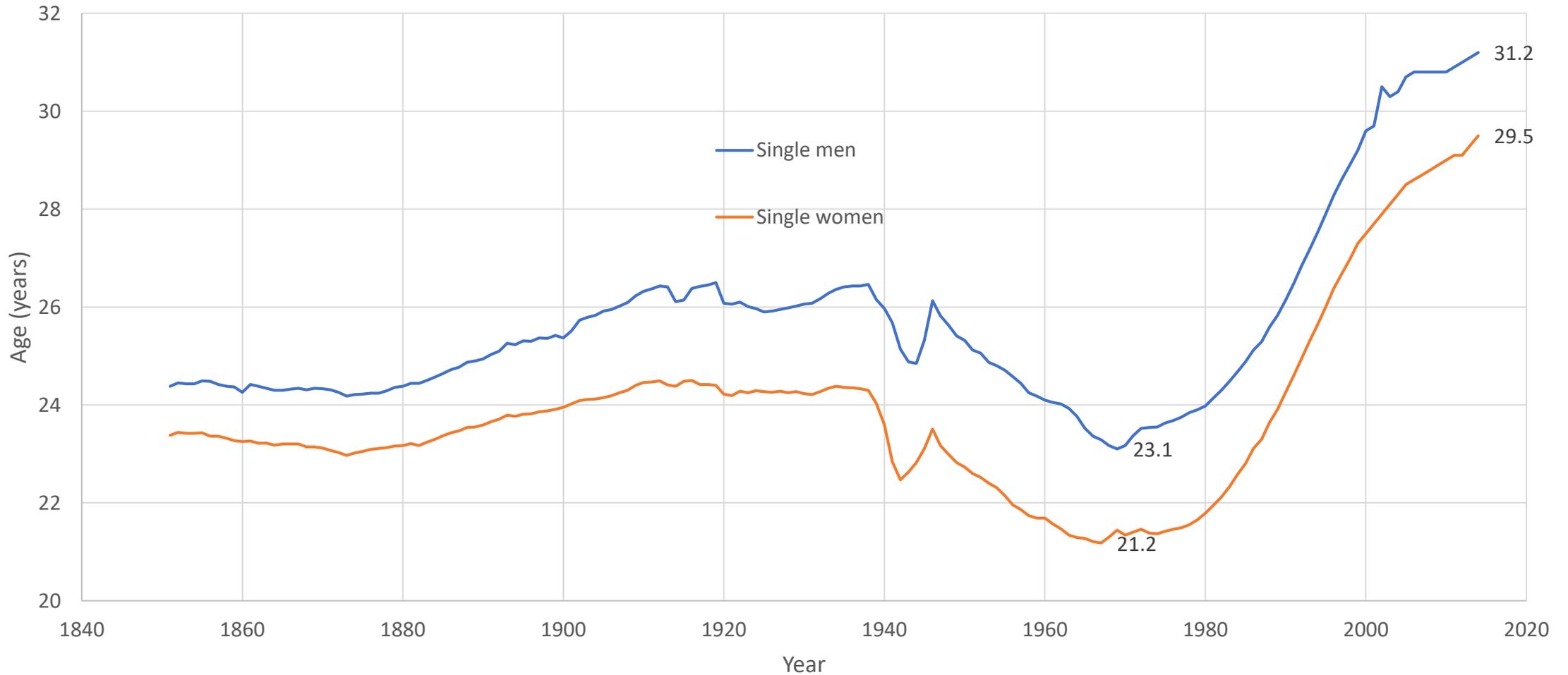
Women's age distribution at marriage (single)

Number/rate of marriages	Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	Total
2014	2,134	27,874	**72,782**	49,713	189,683
Per 1,000 single	1.6	16	54.5	60.9	20.9
2004	6,573	45,085	**68,544**	45,197	193,348
1994	10,784	**79,699**	76,621	27,326	206,332
1984	46,476	**144,313**	49,598	12,303	260,359
1974	98,066	**147,277**	39,501	9,207	304,626

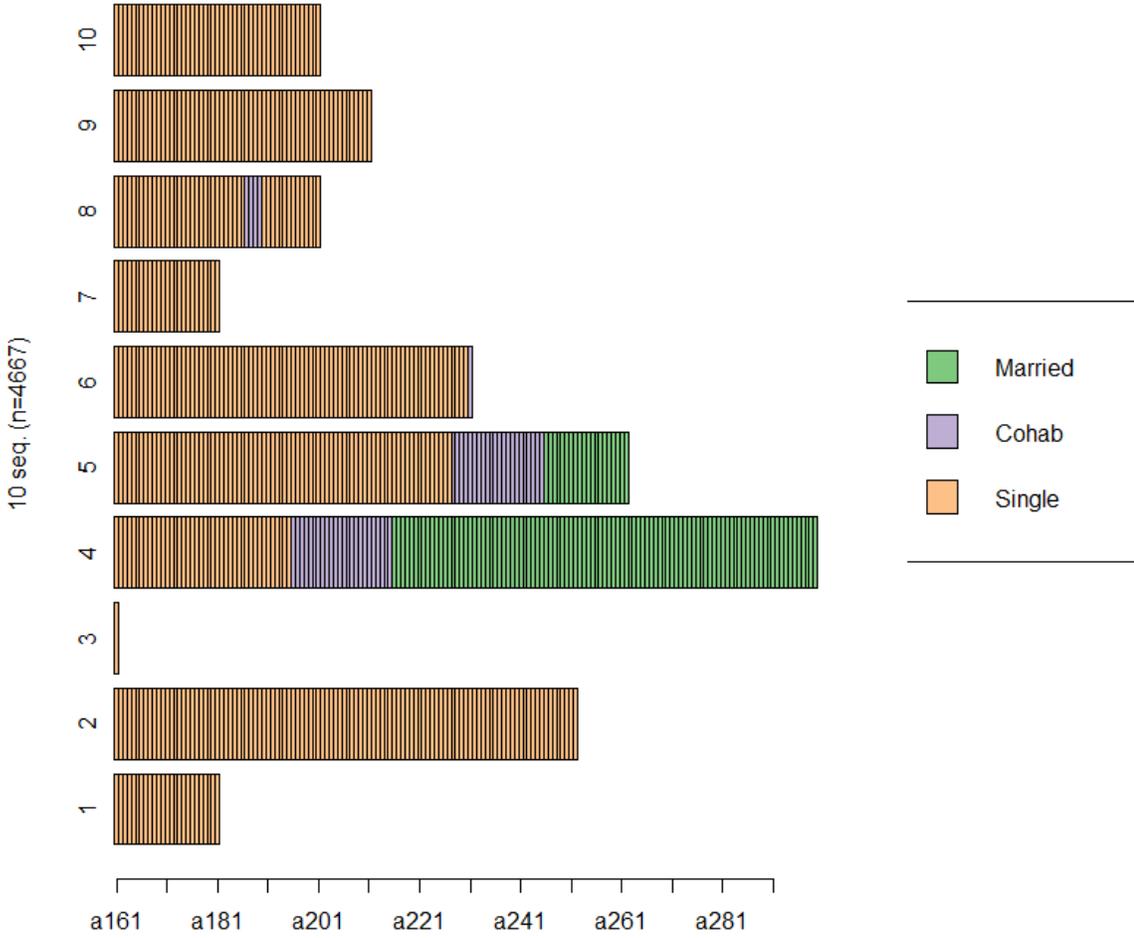Proportion/1000 of women ever-married by age and birth cohort
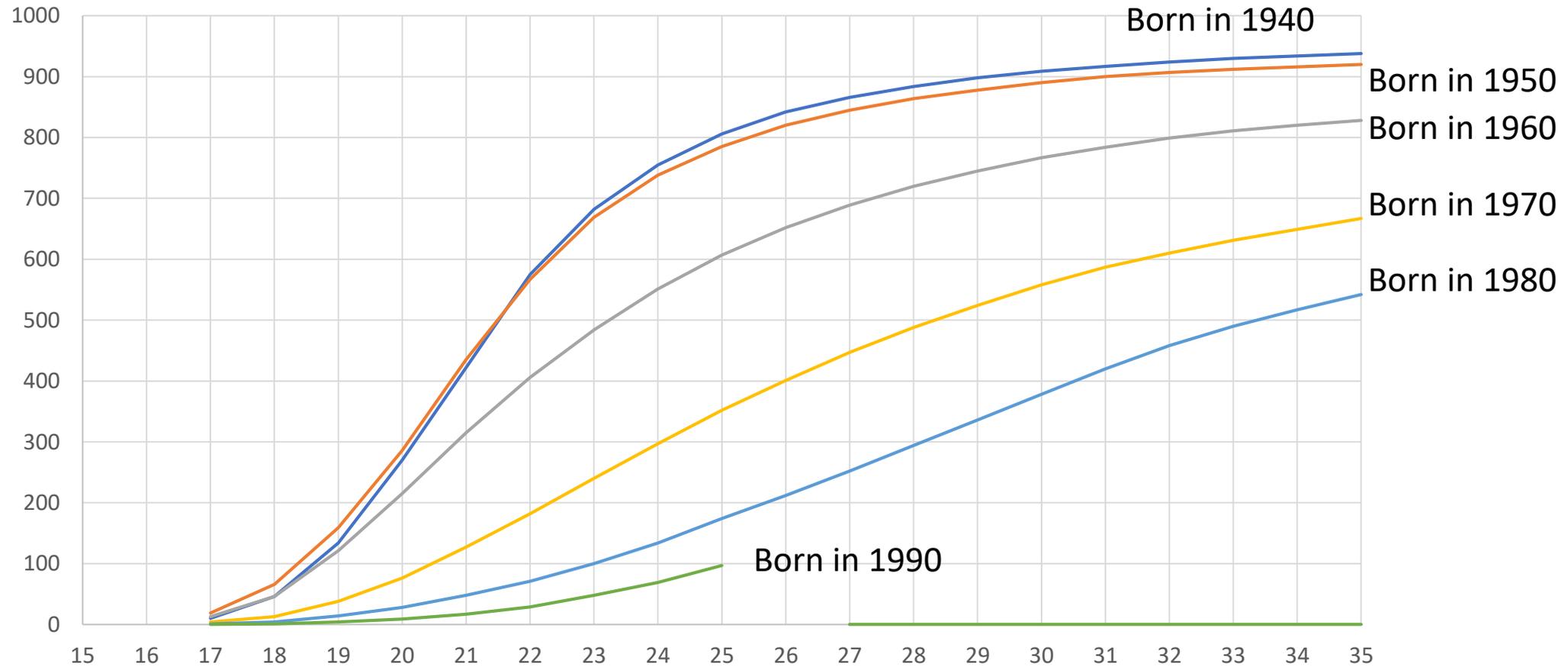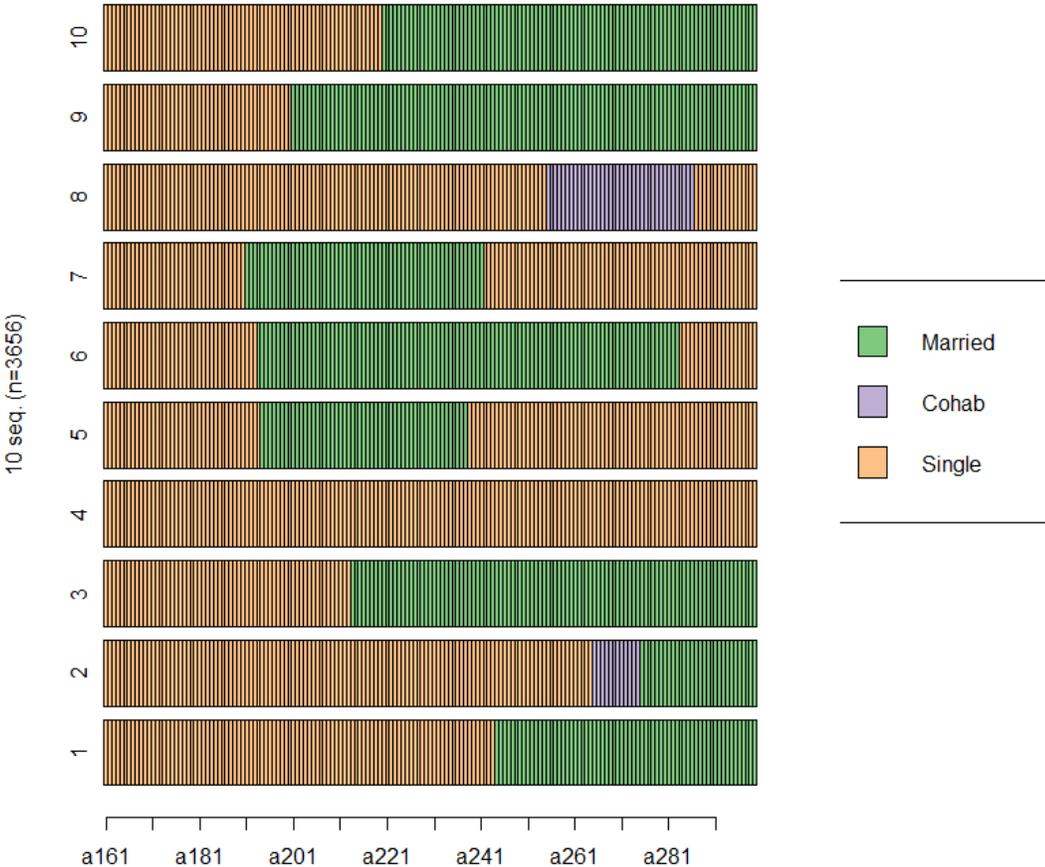
Data

- The UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) "Understanding Society".
  - 2009/10-> large household panel survey (about 50,000 people)
  - Details of life histories from first wave (2009/2010) retrospectively
  - Main population survey – plus ethnic minority booster sample
  - (today, analysis for women)
- Attitudinal data – British Social Attitudes Survey 1983-
  - Sampling 3,000 – 4,500 people most years
  - Relatively consistent questions over time
  - Face to face survey

Analysing sequences

Possible analytical approaches

- Event history analysis (survival analysis) of time until a transition made, or data ends

- Social sequence analysis looking at particular time period and all states
  - Somewhat derived from DNA analysis
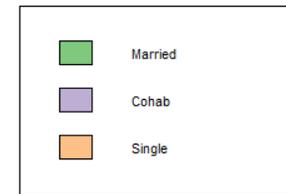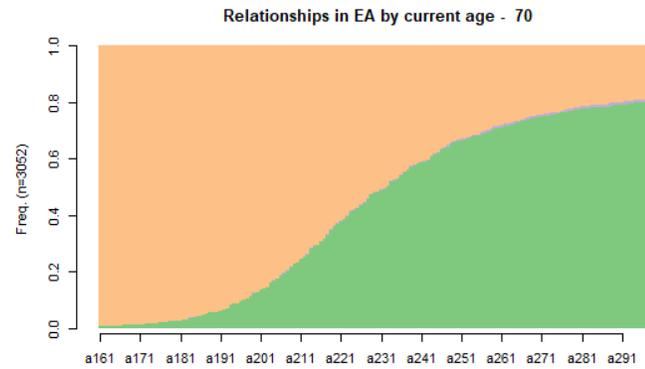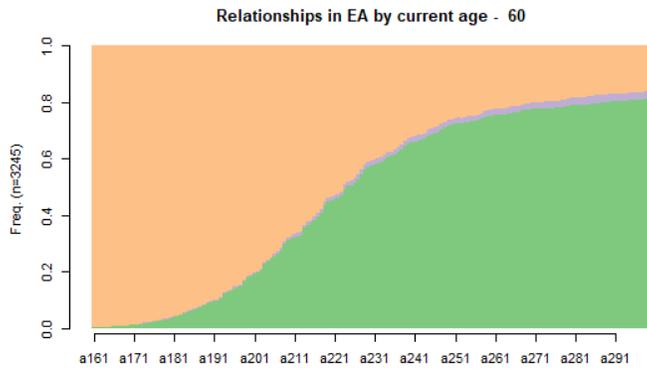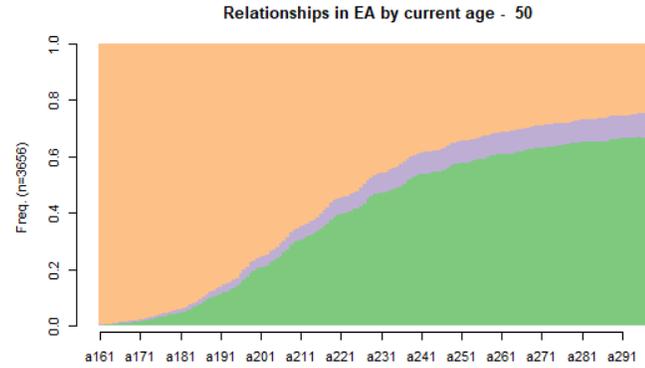
State distribution plot
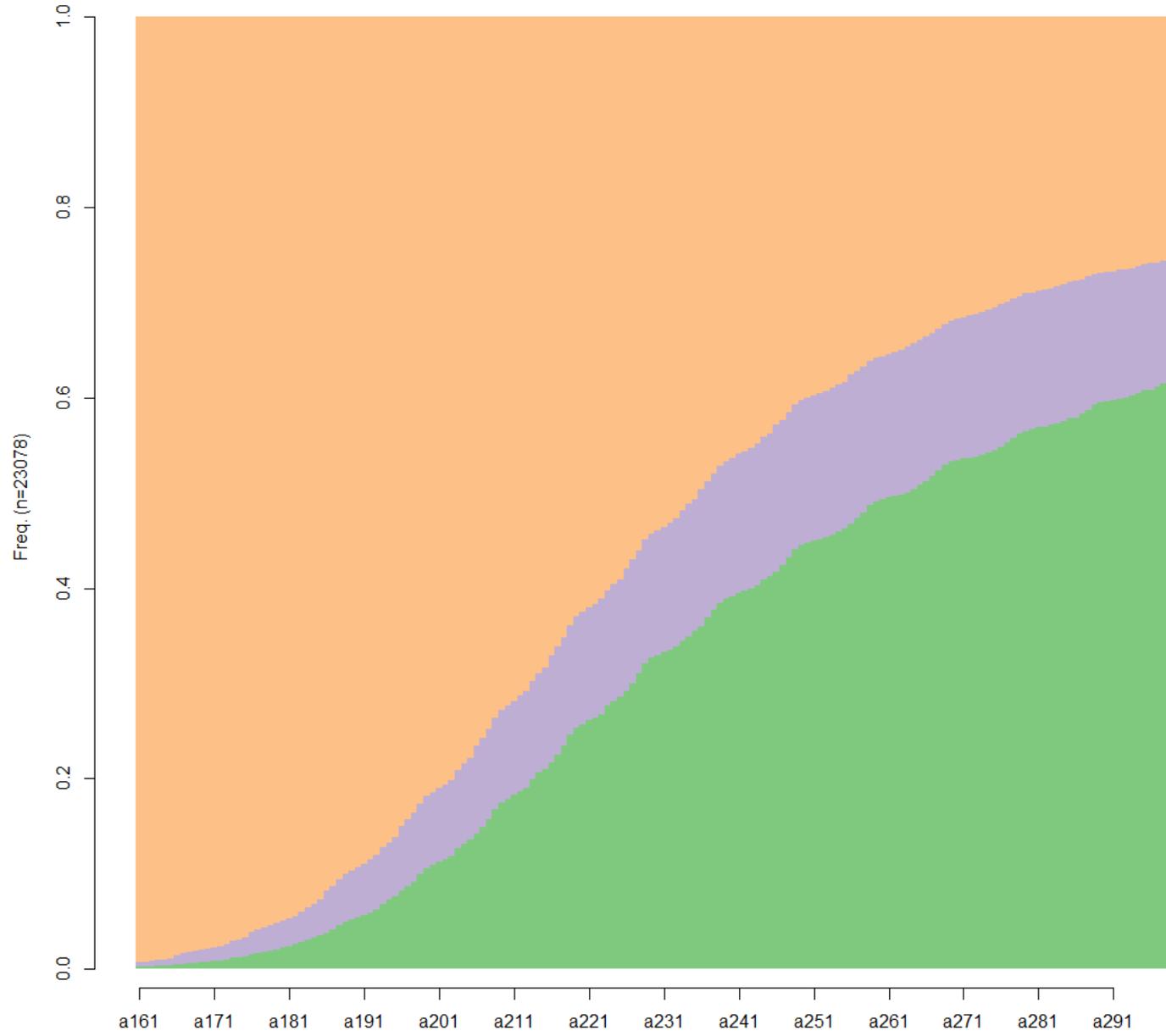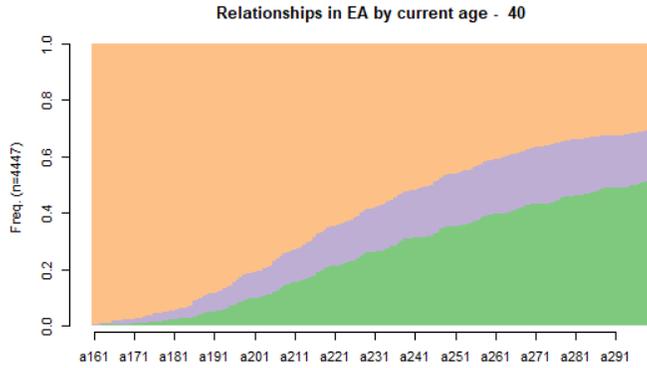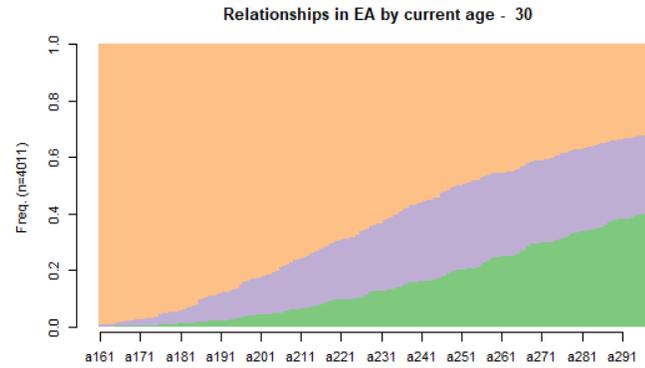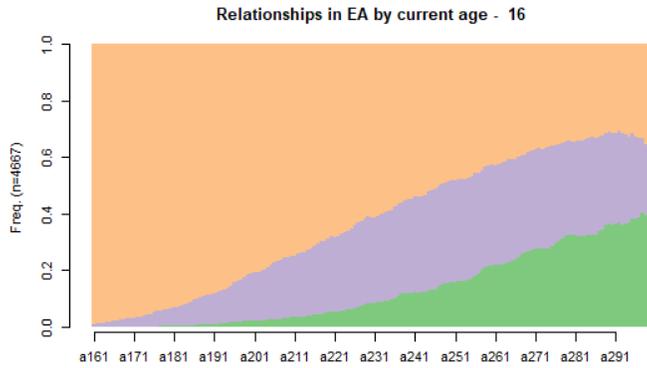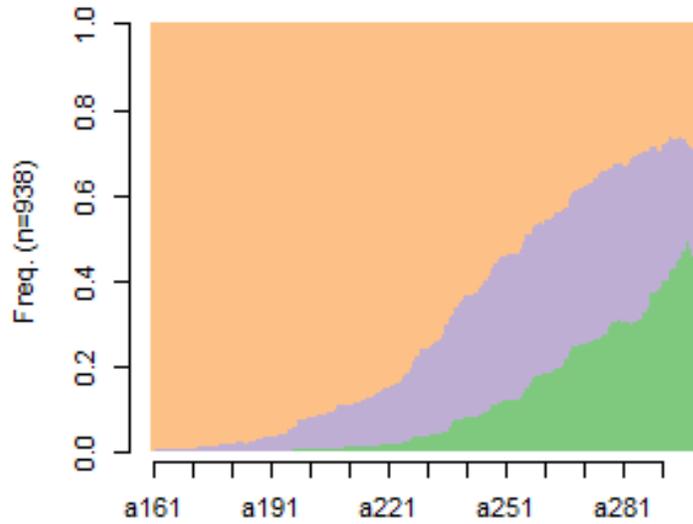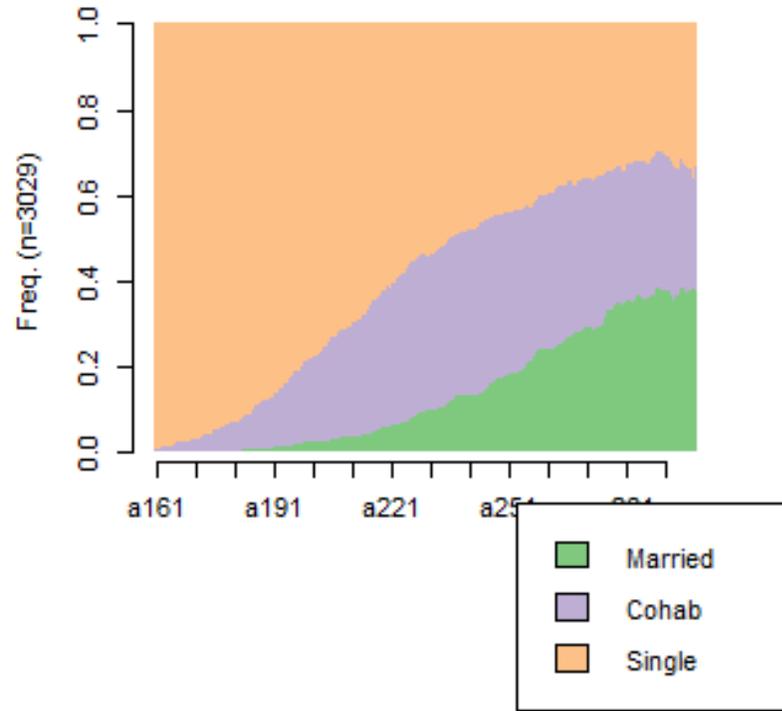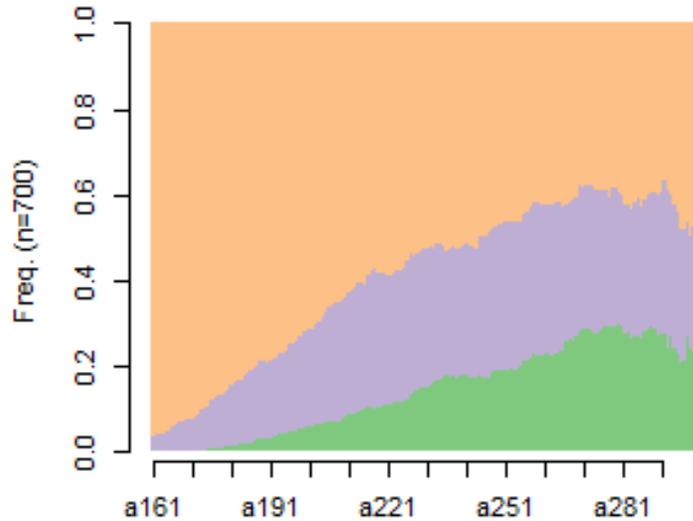
Cohabitation – new state, but not enough to replace marriage

16-29s, relationships, by qualifications - 1

16-29s, relationships, by qualifications - 2
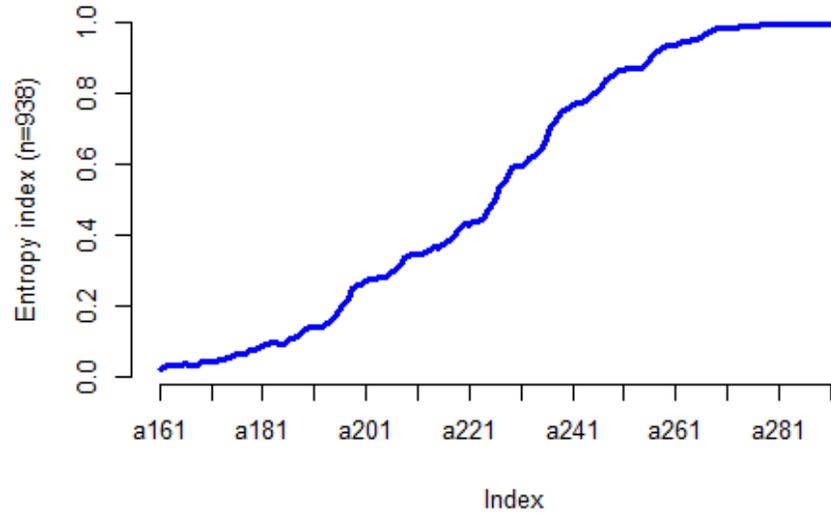
16-29s, relationships, by qualifications - 3
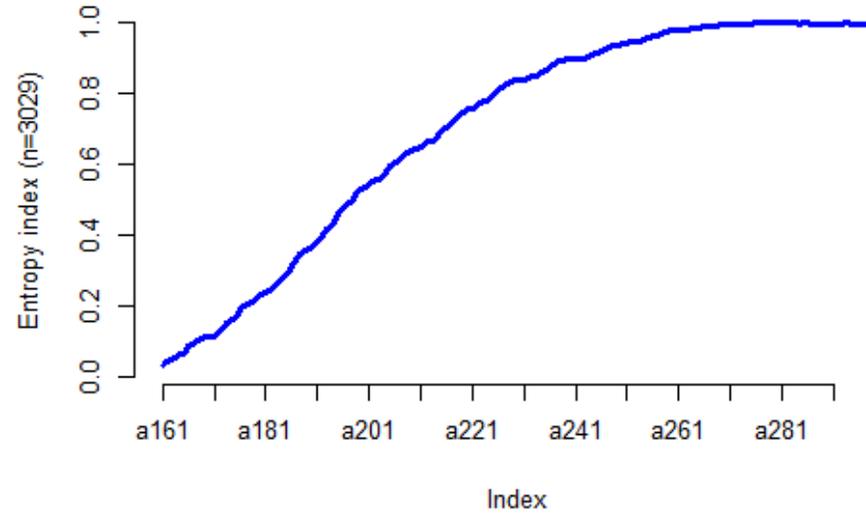
Legend:
- Married
- Cohab
- Single

Education matters
1 = College degree
2 = ~18y quals
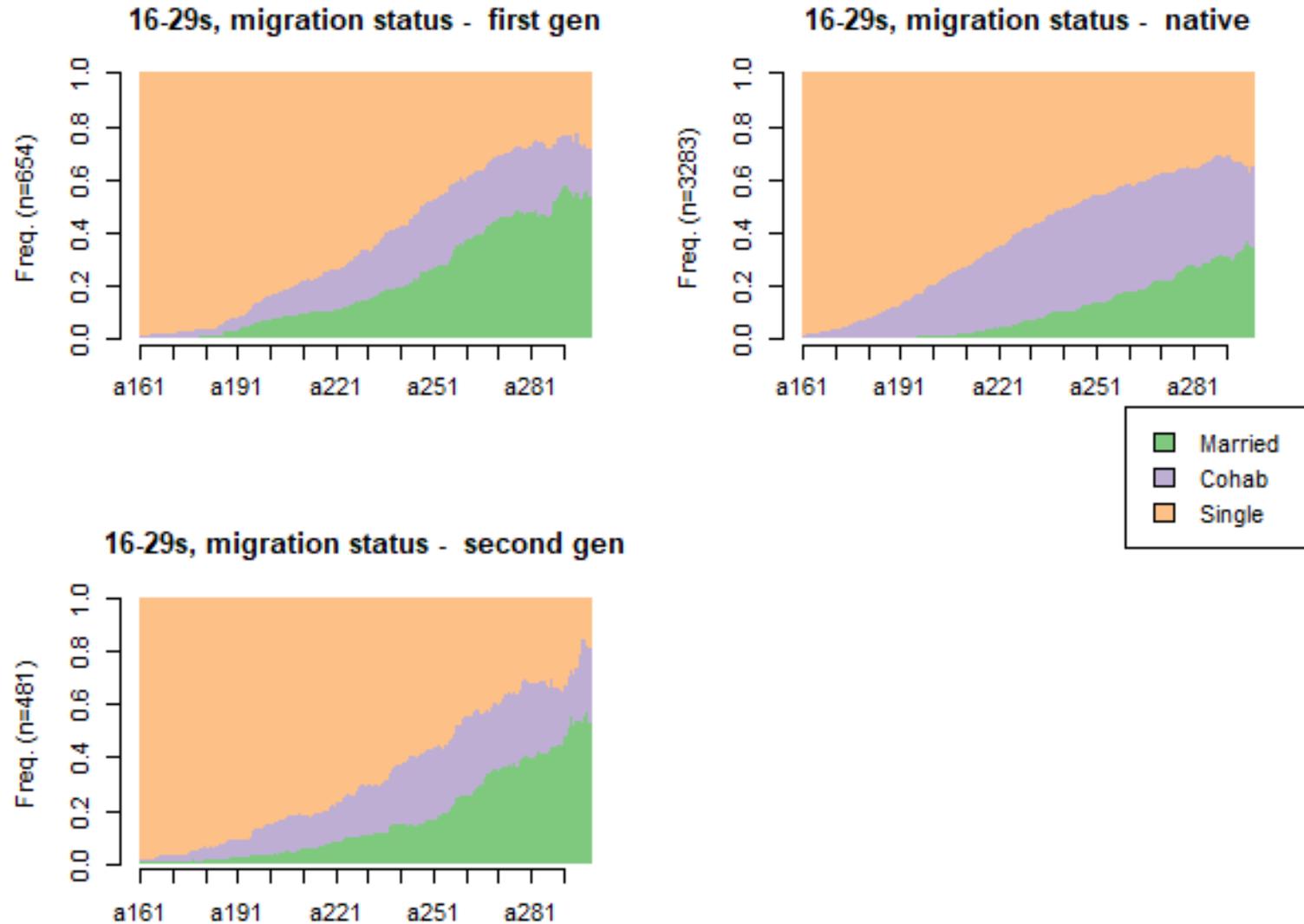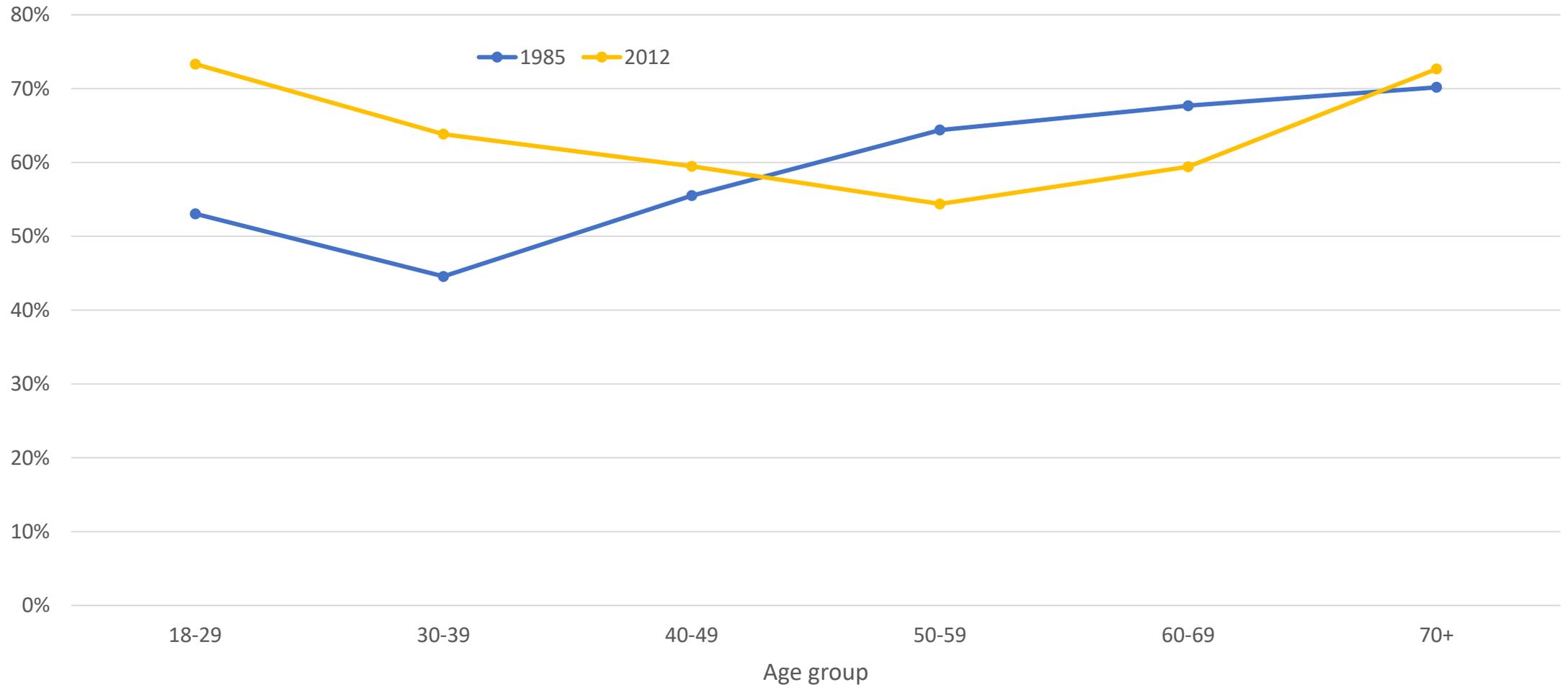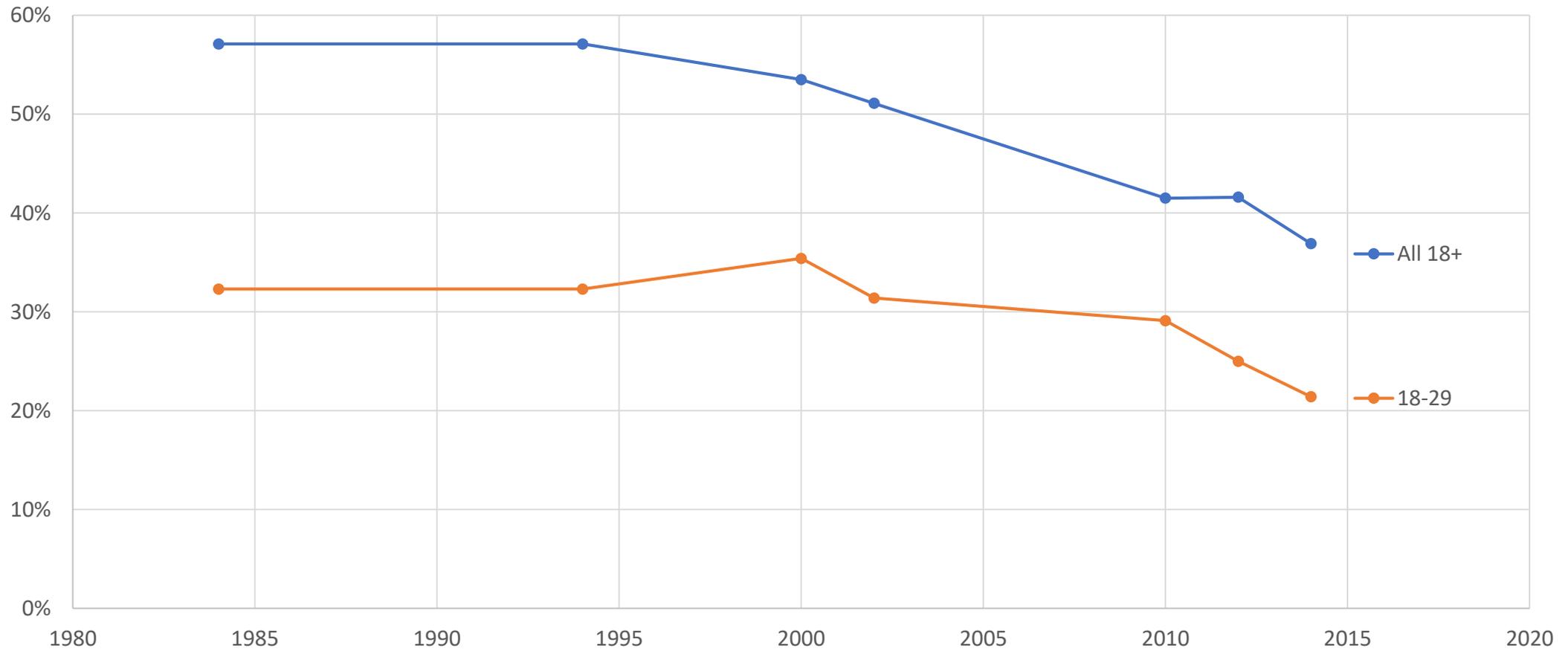3 = ~16y quals or less
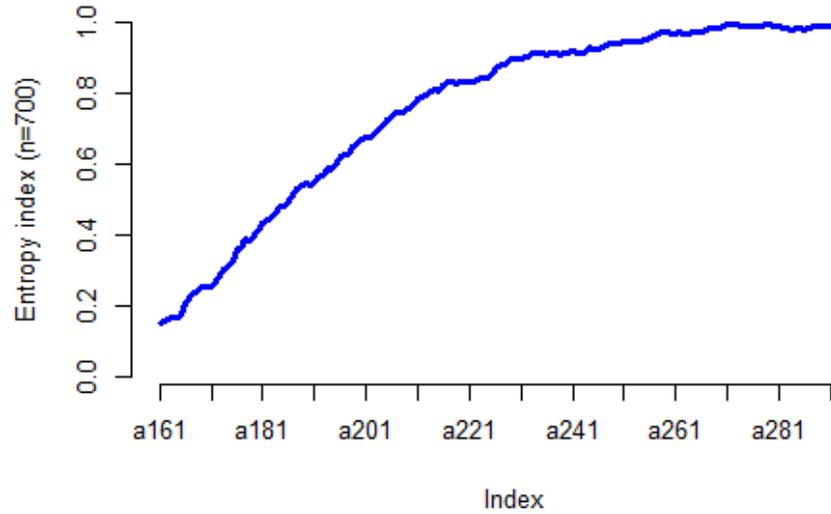
(rates of change of status)

Native population rather than newer arrivals

Believe that extra-marital sex is "always wrong"

"People who want children ought to get married" [agree + strongly agree]

Other relevant attitudes

- Pre-marital sex rarely a problem (only 70+s holding out – with ¼ thinking it always or usually wrong).

- Marriage not about having children, and not about financial security (true for all, especially younger people).

- Oddly (?) around ¾ of all ages think there is little difference between being married and staying together.

- Large proportions (~ ½) incorrect about 'rights' accruing to the unmarried in the UK.

Findings

- Cohabitation filling some of the reduction of married numbers, but more out of relationships

- Marriage (along with other evidence) becoming more concentrated among better-education (and likely enhancing advantage, assortative links)

- Attitudinal evidence – idealized view of marriage, special on some dimensions (fidelity) though not others (raising children); however, also seen as the same as cohabitation and (wrongly) as conveying rights.

Research tools

- R – free access to advanced visualization, works well with Stata and SPSS files.
  - Sequence plots with traMineR [life Trajectory Miner in R]
- RMarkdown – (relatively) easy integration of text and analysis.

ENDS … Questions