

UNMARRIED PARENTHOOD AND REDISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS

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Abstract

Political survey data for nine West European countries show that women have become increasingly left-wing compared to men, and that this trend is positively correlated with the rise of nonmarriage in these countries. This pattern is mirrored in German longitudinal data (GSOEP), where transitions out of marriage make women, but not men, significantly more left-leaning. Analysis of public spending data for high-income OECD countries (1980–1998) suggests that the political impact of nonmarriage extends to the allocation of State resources with increases in nonmarriage first reducing, and then increasing, State redistribution towards children. (JEL: H31, H42, J12, J13)

1. Introduction

In the last three decades, relative to men, women have become more left-wing. Indeed, the female vote is believed to have swung the outcome in favor of the political left in a number of recent elections in both the United States and Europe.¹ An array of explanations ranging from the left party's stance on social issues to the good looks of its candidates has been proffered by the popular press. However, the fact that a near identical political gender gap has emerged in both the United States and Europe (Figure 1) suggests that the explanation lies in a left–right divide common to all countries—leaving State redistribution as a likely candidate.

Edlund and Pande (2002; henceforth EP), linked the rise of the political gender gap in the United States to the decline in marriage as measured by divorce

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1. Edlund and Pande (2002) provide a literature review. For Europe, see Duverger (1955) and Inglehart and Norris (2000).

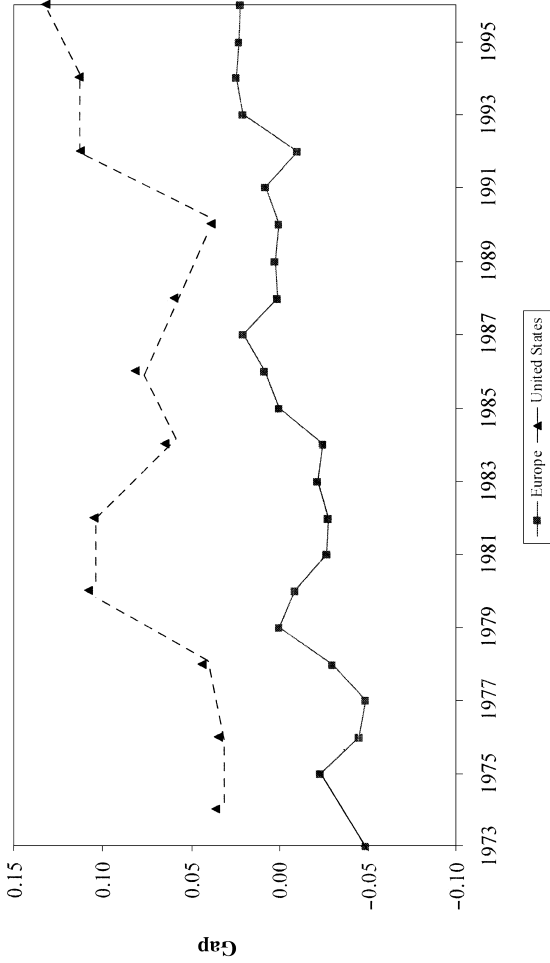


FIGURE 1. Political gender gap in Europe and the United States. *Notes and Sources:* The gap is defined as the difference between the proportion of women who favor the left and the proportion of men who favor the left. The data sources for Europe include the Eurobarometer surveys and the Swedish Election Studies. For the United States we use the National Election Studies.

incidence. Nonmarriage, they argued, has reduced the private transfers women receive from men and thus causes women to favor State redistribution.

However, divorce is only one form of nonmarriage, and one that is premised on marriage. Increasingly, marriage is delayed or skirted entirely as witnessed by rising levels of nonmarital fertility and cohabitation. This development is particularly pronounced in Western Europe, where it is often contended that the rise in the nonmarital family only reflects changing social norms and is void of economic consequences (see for instance, “Europeans Opting Against Marriage,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2002). Still, differences in the legal rights of married versus unmarried partners and gender asymmetries in reproduction are reasons to question this contention (further discussed in Section 2). Ultimately, whether changing social norms have rendered marriage immaterial remains an empirical question and one we pursue in this paper.

We provide two kinds of evidence. First, we extend the analysis of EP using data from a number of West European countries and alternative measures of nonmarriage. Second, we investigate whether the rise in nonmarriage has affected the size and scope of public social spending in these and other high-income OECD countries.

For the first part, we use Eurobarometer survey data (1973–1996) and German longitudinal data (1984–2001). Consistent with EP, we find that nonmarriage is linked to a widening political gender gap in a number of West European countries and for alternative measures of nonmarriage: divorce incidence, out-of-wedlock fertility, and female age at first marriage.² A natural interpretation is that State-led redistribution benefits unmarried women more than men. Of course, women earn less than men. But even absent a gender wage or income gap, the fact that legal and physical custody of children to unmarried parents is predominantly vested in the mother may lead men and women to diverge in their preferences for redistribution to children, and possibly increasingly so with the rise in unmarried parenthood.

The second part of our paper investigates the relationship between nonmarriage and the scope and size of public social spending for high-income OECD countries over the period 1980–1999.³ If the observed political gender gap is driven by the rise in nonmarriage, we expect the relationship between nonmarriage and aggregate support for the type of redistribution men and women diverge in their preference over to be U-shaped. To see this, take the example of public

2. Today, out-of-wedlock fertility, which may or may not be accompanied by cohabitation, accounts for more than one-third of births in a number of Western countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

3. Lott and Kenny (1999) showed that between 1870–1940 in the United States, female voter turnout increased the size of government. We focus on a markedly later period, and argue that the growth of the political gender gap reflects a change in the economic realities of men and women, rather than women being inherently more left-wing.

spending on children, for simplicity, a per-child cash transfer financed by a proportional income tax. Let us make the extreme assumption that only custodian parents care about their children, and that married parents have joint custody while custody is mother-only if parents are not married. Furthermore, assume that marriage is positively assortative on income, spouses pool income, wives earn no more than their husbands, and that individuals vote in line with their economic interests.⁴ To start with, consider a couple that when married supported the child cash transfer and let us divorce them. Upon divorce, the woman is no less in favor of the cash transfer, but the man opposes it (he no longer has custody, thus does not want to contribute to spending on children). Hence, support for the cash transfer declines with greater nonmarriage among relatively poor parents. Next, consider a relatively better-off married couple who paid more in taxes than they received in child benefits. On divorce, the woman may no longer be a net contributor and thus may favor of the cash transfer. Thus, nonmarriage among the relatively well-off may raise support for public spending on children. Since nonmarriage increasingly has involved higher income groups, while remaining more prevalent at the lower end of the income distribution, we would expect a U-shaped relationship between nonmarriage and aggregate support for the redistributive policy unmarried men and women differ in their views on.

In line with this, we find that public social spending towards children first declines and then rises with increasing nonmarriage. This suggests that redistribution is determined by political salience (rather than, for instance, need) and therefore raises important questions regarding the ability of the State to provide for children and suggests that the political gender gap may continue to widen in the face of closing gender wage and income gaps. These findings relate our paper to the empirical public finance literature linking the scope of public spending to the demographic composition of the electorate (for instance, Cutler, Elmendorf, and Zeckhauser 1993; Poterba 1997; and Mulligan and Sala-i-Martin 1999).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the legal framework governing marital and nonmarital families in Western Europe. Section 3 investigates the relationship between the gender gap and nonmarriage and Section 4 that between public spending and the gender gap. Section 5 concludes.

2. Marriage and Private Transfers—Legal Background

Our analysis of how marriage affects transfers within a family is based on two observations. First, men transfer more resources to women within marriage than

4. It is well-established that nonmarital child bearing is linked to single-motherhood and a feminization of poverty. For a literature review, see Akerlof, Yellen, and Katz (1996). The assumption that individuals vote in line with their economic interests is standard (Downs 1957; and Persson and Tabellini 2000 for a literature review).

outside. Second, paternal links to children are weaker outside marriage than within. Although biological asymmetries in reproduction between men and women may provide the ultimate rationale for these stylized facts (for a discussion, see Edlund 2001), family law delineates these rights and responsibilities. In this section we review the legal differences in Western Europe between marital and nonmarital families in the following relationships: the rights of children vis-à-vis their parents, parents vis-à-vis children, and partners vis-à-vis each other. Throughout, we consider families to consist of adults and their dependent children.

Marriage is not the only way for men to obtain parental rights, although until as late as 1969, West German law held that “an illegitimate child and its father are not deemed to be related,” Glendon (1996). The overall trend in the Western world has been towards equalizing the status of children born in and out-of-wedlock and allowing fathers to obtain parental rights without marriage. Still, the legal rights and obligations stemming from marriage cannot be replicated through private contracting, and this is particularly true in the realm of parental and custodial rights.

Today, the rights of children born out-of-wedlock, to the extent possible, equal those of children born in-wedlock as outlined in the European Convention on the Legal Rights of Children Born Out of Wedlock. The convention was opened for signature in 1975 and has to date been signed by the following countries in our Eurobarometer sample: France, Italy, Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, and Sweden.

Turning to the rights of parents vis-à-vis their children, mothers are default custodians of their children irrespective of marital status. If unmarried, they are sole custodians, while if married, they share custodial rights with their husbands (and the child’s presumed father). Unmarried mothers and fathers can, if mutually agreed upon, reallocate custodial rights so as to mimic the marital situation (with the exception of Germany, which did not allow unmarried fathers custodial rights until December 1997). Marriage is still the only way in which men obtain default parental rights to a woman’s children.⁵ Private contracting of parental rights is severely restricted since such contracts could amount to the selling of children, which is barred in all countries.

Regarding the rights of unmarried partners vis-à-vis each other, Napoleon famously concluded that “Concubines put themselves outside the law and the law has no interest in them” (quoted in Glendon 1996). Still today, cohabitation does not imply financial obligations between partners in most countries. For instance, “German Law accepts the proposition that people living together are free not to marry and thereby to avoid the responsibilities and restrictions imposed

5. Iceland, not in sample, is an exception. There, cohabitation may establish paternity.

upon married persons,” Graue (1995, P. 193).⁶ Contracts need not be entered into explicitly but can be “implied-in-fact.” In France, since the mid-20th century, cohabitation may give rise to a joint claim to the lease of the marital home, and a couple who live maritally (certified by two witnesses) can obtain a “certificate of marital life.” In Sweden, the “Joint Homes Act” of 1987 established the “matrimonial” home as community property to cohabitants. However, in neither country do the rights arising from cohabitation amount to those following marriage.

Marriage typically establishes joint ownership of property acquired in marriage and in Europe, unless otherwise specified, of assets brought into the marriage, the legal framework for which has not changed much during the sample period. However, along other dimensions, marriage has arguably become more cohabitation-like. It is well known that divorce became easier. No-fault divorce was in place or introduced during the sample period in all countries save Ireland. In addition, since the 1970s, wives are no longer legally subordinated to their husbands, and the obligation to provide for the family no longer rests solely on the husband. Also, since the 1990s, a wife can deny her husband marital relations.

3. Nonmarriage and the Political Gender Gap

We examine the relationship between nonmarriage and the political gender gap in multiple ways. First, we combine political survey data for nine West European countries with data on the incidence of nonmarriage to check whether nonmarriage has a gender differential effect on political preferences. We also use these data to check for gender differences in redistributive preferences. Second, we use German longitudinal data to identify how actual changes in an individual’s marital status affect his or her political leaning.

3.1. Evidence from Nine West European Countries

Our political survey data are from the Eurobarometer and the Swedish Election Studies (SES) surveys (1973–1996).⁷ The Eurobarometer covers member countries of the EU. We exclude countries with less than three years of either political survey data (Austria and Finland) or nonmarriage data (Greece, Luxembourg, Spain, and Portugal). Our final sample includes Belgium, Denmark,

6. In the United States, until recently, private contracts securing maintenance to the financially weaker partner (often the woman) were not upheld in courts on the ground that such contracts amounted to contracts for prostitution, Folberg (1980).

7. For SES (“Svenska Valundersökningar 1956–1998”), Bo Särilvik, Olof Petersson, and Sören Holmberg were primary researchers (“primärforskare”), and the data were made available by Swedish Social Science Data Service (SSD), Gothenburg University.

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics: Western Europe.

	All	Men	Women
Panel A			
Female	49.7		
Left	50.5	50.3	50.7
Unmarried	32.4	33.0	31.9
Age [years]	39.5	39.7	39.3
	(13.0)	(13.1)	(12.9)
Born 1959–78	19.0	19.0	19.1
Born 1943–58	38.9	38.5	39.3
Born 1921–42	37.2	37.5	36.8
Born before 1920	4.9	5.1	4.8
Less than high school	36.5	35.7	37.3
High school	39.4	37.2	41.7
More than high school	24.1	27.0	21.1
Family income			
<50 percentile	42.7	40.0	45.4
>50 percentile	57.3	60.0	54.6
Panel B			
Single	20.0	23.5	16.6
Cohabiting	4.8	5.0	4.6
Divorced/separated	4.6	3.4	5.8
Widow(er)	3.4	1.4	5.5

Notes: Means in % except for age. Standard deviation for age in parentheses. Variable descriptions are in the Appendix. The individual data are from the Eurobarometer survey and the Swedish Election Studies. Respondent information by type of marital status (Panel B) is missing for Sweden. The number of observations are 96,734 and 95,438 for men and women, respectively, in Panel A and 86,311 and 86,278 in Panel B. Data span 1973–1996.

France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, and West Germany. We restrict attention to respondents aged 18–64. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, and the Appendix describes variable construction.

An individual's political preference is obtained from the question: "If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?" We use the Eurobarometer classification of political party ideology to identify whether a respondent favored the left.⁸ Figures 2A and 2B document the country-wise evolution of the political gender gap, where the gap is defined as the difference between the fraction of women and men who favor the left. In 1973, more women than men favored the political right in all sample countries, save Denmark. However, by 1996, the gender gap had reversed in all but two countries (Belgium and the United Kingdom). Overall, the political gender gap increased by 7 percentage points, from -0.05 to 0.02 .

Concurrently, marriage fell as individuals postponed or opted out of marriage. Between 1973 and 1996, the mean female age of first marriage rose from 23 to

8. The classification of a party as belonging to the political left is unchanged over the sample period.

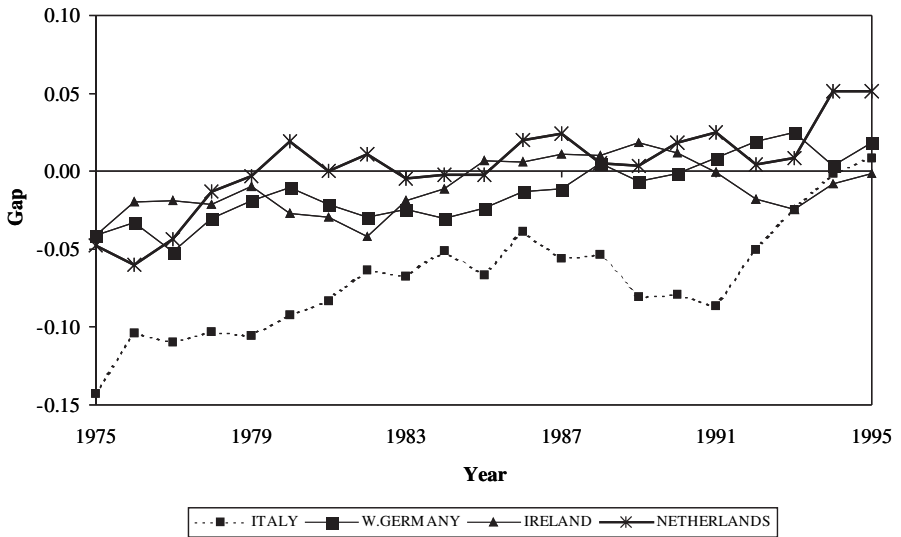


FIGURE 2A. Political gender gap, by country.

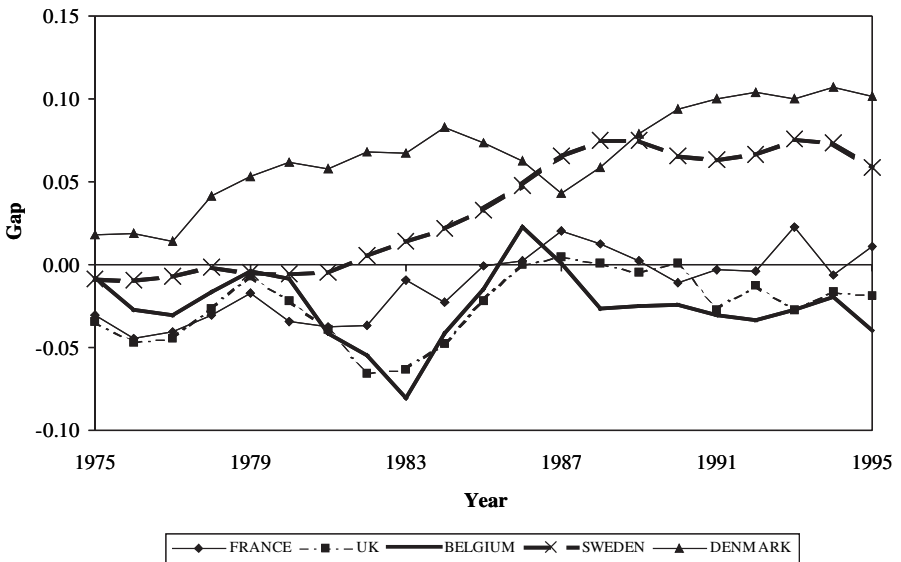


FIGURE 2B. Political gender gap, by country. *Notes and Sources:* The gap is defined as the difference between the proportion of women who favor the left and the proportion of men who favor the left. Three year moving averages reported. The data source is the Eurobarometer surveys for all countries except Sweden. For Sweden we use the Swedish Election Studies.

27 years while the incidence of divorce doubled from 21 to 56 per thousand adults in our sample countries. These statistics, however, underestimate the decline in marriage—both cohabitation and out-of-wedlock fertility also rose. Lack of data on cohabitation restricts our analysis to out-of-wedlock fertility, a statistic that tripled from 9% to 28%.⁹

We begin by estimating a linear regression of the form:

$$l_{ikt} = c_k + \tau_t + (c_k \times \tilde{t}) + \alpha_1 f_{ikt} + \alpha_2 (f_{ikt} \times \tilde{t}) + \varepsilon_{ikt}$$

where l_{ikt} is a “left” dummy variable that equals 1 if individual i , in country k and year t supports the left, and 0 otherwise. c_k and τ_t are country and year dummies, respectively. We also control for a linear country-specific time trend, $c_k \times \tilde{t}$. f_{ikt} is a female dummy (“female” in text). The coefficients α_1 and α_2 measure the unexplained initial level and the trend of the gender gap, respectively.

The results are in Table 2, column 1. Every year, relative to men, women become 0.3% more likely to favor the political left. Overall, between 1973 and 1996, women shifted from being 4.3% less likely than men to favor the left to being 2.6% more likely.

This period witnessed marked changes in the educational, income, and marital profiles. To examine whether these changes can explain the trend in the political gender gap we estimate the following regression:

$$l_{ikt} = c_k + \tau_t + (c_k \times \tilde{t}) + \alpha_1 f_{ikt} + \alpha_2 (f_{ikt} \times \tilde{t}) + \alpha_3 X_{ikt} \\ + \alpha_4 \mu_{ikt} + \alpha_5 (f_{ikt} \times \mu_{ikt}) + \varepsilon_{ikt}$$

where μ_{ikt} indicates marital status and X_{ikt} is a vector of individual demographic and economic controls.

Table 2, column 2 reports our findings. Older respondents are less likely to favor the left, while the 1943–1958 cohort is more left-wing. Other individual characteristics predict partisan preferences in a manner consistent with an economic model of voting—better educated and/or richer individuals are less likely to favor left-wing parties. Unmarried individuals are more left-wing, especially women.¹⁰

The economic consequences of nonmarriage may vary by type of nonmarriage. In column 3 we control for type of nonmarriage. Single, cohabiting, and divorced or separated women are significantly more left-leaning than their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with the claim that, relative to cohabitation or divorce, marriage increases resource-sharing between men and women and therefore aligns their political preferences. However, it is also consistent with a

9. Country-wise summary statistics for nonmarriage data are available from authors.

10. Unfortunately, lack of consistent survey data on number of children per respondent prevents us from examining the effect of having a child on political preferences.

TABLE 2. Individual characteristics and the political gender gap—dependent variable: left.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	-0.043*** (0.004)	-0.053*** (0.005)	-0.048*** (0.005)
Female × Time-trend	0.003*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Age		-0.003*** (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.000)
Born 1959–1978		-0.299 (1.192)	-0.498 (1.262)
Born 1943–1958		4.969*** (0.921)	4.205*** (0.985)
Born 1921–1942		0.74 (0.646)	0.388 (0.700)
High school		-9.020*** (0.282)	-8.101*** (0.298)
More than high school		-10.452*** (0.330)	-8.826*** (0.350)
Family income >50%-ile		-5.500*** (0.243)	-6.078*** (0.253)
Unmarried		0.012*** (0.004)	
Female × unmarried		0.018*** (0.005)	
Single			-0.010** (0.004)
Female × single			0.013** (0.006)
Cohabit			0.049*** (0.008)
Female × Cohabit			0.048*** (0.011)
Div-sep			0.047*** (0.009)
Female × Div-sep			0.021* (0.012)
widow(er)			0.049*** (0.014)
Female × widow(er)			-0.050*** (0.016)
<i>N</i>	235, 734	192, 172	172, 589
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.03	0.05	0.05

Notes: OLS regression results are reported, with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions also include (not reported) (i) country and year dummies, (ii) a country specific linear trend, (iii) income variable interacted with Sweden dummy (as, for Sweden, income refers to individual, not household). Age, cohort, education, and income variables are divided by 100.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

selection-based story. That is, more left-leaning women may be less inclined to be married. The trend in the gender gap persists after the inclusion of these controls.

To address the concern of self-selection and to further explore the relationship between nonmarriage and political preferences, we add country-level measures of nonmarriage as covariates. We consider three measures of nonmarriage—proportion of adults currently divorced (*Divorce*), fraction of births to unmarried mothers (*Out-of-Wedlock*), and mean female age of first marriage (*Marriage Age*). Our identifying assumption is that these measures are informative of an individual's marriage market expectations but are exogenous to any single individual's marital decision.

For each nonmarriage measure, we report two specifications. First, we include it alone, and then interacted with the female dummy. Increases in *Divorce* make individuals more left-wing but do not affect the trend in the gender gap; see Table 3, column 1. Column 2 shows that this variable has a significant gender differential effect—a 1 percentage-point rise in *Divorce* is associated with a gender gap of 1.3 percentage points. Moreover, the unexplained trend in the gender gap becomes statistically insignificant. Over this period, *Divorce* increased by 3.6 percentage points and the average gender gap went from -0.05 to 0.02 , suggesting that the rise in divorce can account for a gender gap of 4.68 percentage points (3.6×1.3), or 67% of the actual increase in the gap.

In columns 3 and 4 we consider *Out-of-Wedlock*. On average, increases in *Out-of-Wedlock* do not affect an individual's support for the left or the trend in

TABLE 3. Aggregate nonmarriage and the gender gap—dependent variable: left.

	Nonmarriage variable (<i>NM</i>)					
	Divorce		Out-of-wedlock		Marriage age	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	-0.053*** (0.005)	-0.075*** (0.005)	-0.053*** (0.005)	-0.065*** (0.005)	-0.054*** (0.005)	-0.583*** (0.051)
Female \times trend	0.003*** (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	0 (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	-0.002*** (0.001)
<i>NM</i>	2.437** (0.967)	1.748* (0.968)	0.068 (0.075)	-0.062 (0.075)	-0.029*** (0.004)	-0.041*** (0.004)
Female \times <i>NM</i>		1.323*** (0.106)		0.258*** (0.018)		0.024*** (0.002)
<i>F</i> -stat.		10.07 (0.001)		6.84 (0.008)		17.31 (0.00)
<i>N</i>	192,172	192,172	192,172	192,172	191,642	191,642
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05

Notes: OLS regression results are reported, with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions include as additional controls the covariates listed in Table 2, column 2.

The *F*-statistic tests the joint significance of *NM* and female \times *NM*.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

the gender gap; see column 3. This, however, masks significant gender differences. Increases in *Out-of-Wedlock* increase the number of women, but not men, who favor the left—a 1 percentage point rise in *Out-of-Wedlock* is associated with a gender gap of 0.26 percentage points; see column 4. Thus, the rise in out-of-wedlock fertility can account for a gender gap of 4.9 percentage points (19×0.258), or 70% of the actual increase in the gender gap. Controlling for the gender-differential effect of *Out-of-Wedlock* renders the trend in the gender gap insignificant.¹¹

Finally, we consider *Marriage Age*. Increases in *Marriage Age* make both genders more right-wing; see column 5. The effect is, however, significantly weaker for women; see column 6. We conjecture that increases in *Marriage Age* affect men and women's income in two ways. First, delays in marriage are associated with higher human capital investment and greater earnings potential for both genders. Second, delays in marriage reduce the (expected) transfers from men to women, for instance by postponing income pooling.

Various robustness checks, including specifications which control for individual and aggregate labor market participation, are in Edlund, Haider, and Pande (2004).

3.2. *Gender and Redistributive Preferences*

We have argued that women favor the left because of its more generous redistributive policies, rather than its stance on other issues that divide the left and the right (for instance, immigration, abortion, law enforcement or the military). We now use data from the 1992 Eurobarometer supplement survey on redistributive preferences to investigate this thesis directly. We focus on redistributive preferences over general social protection, child-related benefits, and pensions (for details on variable construction see the Appendix).¹² Unlike previous regressions, we can control for the presence of a child under 15 in the household, but not family income.¹³ Since some redistribution predominantly benefits the elderly, we include as an additional covariate an “old” dummy that equals one if the respondent is aged 55 or above.

11. In Edlund, Haider, and Pande (2004) we report country-wise regressions. In every country, except the United Kingdom, the nonmarriage variables have a gender differential effect on political preferences. This effect is the most pronounced in Italy and West Germany. One interpretation is that countries where social acceptance of nonmarriage is low and/or men face fewer legal requirements outside marriage to provide child support, nonmarriage has a more divisive effect on the political preferences of men and women.

12. On average, respondents who support these redistributive policies are 8–16% more likely to favor the political left.

13. Our sample includes all respondents aged 18 and above. The income information is missing for a quarter of our sample and therefore omitted.

TABLE 4. Gender gap in redistributive preferences.

	Social protection (1)	Aid single parents (2)	Maternity-leave length (3)	Maternity-leave wage (4)	Pensions (5)
Female	0.012 (0.022)	0.051** (0.020)	0.077*** (0.021)	0.061** (0.024)	-0.005 (0.016)
Unmarried	0.003 (0.018)	0.011 (0.017)	-0.029* (0.018)	-0.031 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.013)
Female × unmarried	0.012 (0.024)	0.019 (0.021)	0.043* (0.023)	0.019 (0.026)	-0.001 (0.017)
Child	0.058*** (0.020)	0.037** (0.018)	0.108*** (0.020)	0.032 (0.022)	0.018 (0.014)
Female × child	-0.044 (0.027)	-0.029 (0.023)	0.002 (0.027)	0.007 (0.029)	-0.024 (0.020)
Old	-0.032 (0.026)	0.026 (0.024)	0.060*** (0.022)	-0.028 (0.029)	-0.014 (0.019)
Female × old	0.018 (0.027)	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.043* (0.024)	-0.022 (0.029)	0.013 (0.019)
Adj. R^2	0.03	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.02
Mean	0.667	0.787	0.243	0.558	0.867
N	7, 284	6, 925	6, 361	6, 924	7, 263

Notes: OLS regression results are reported, with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions include as additional covariates individual age, dummies for whether completed high school or more than high school and country dummies. The dummy old = 1 if the respondent is 55 years of age or more, and the dummy child = 1 if at least one child under the age of 15 is living in the household. Mean refers to the sample mean for the dependent variable.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

Women are no more in favor of government provision of a “broad range of social security benefits” than men; see Table 4, column 1. However, this is not true for public policies which benefit those with children. Women and respondents with children agree that “more special help should be available to single-parent families who raise their children alone;” see column 2. This group is also more likely to consider the length of maternity leave too short; see column 3. Finally, women are significantly more likely to believe that the fair wage for a woman on maternity leave is her full wage; see column 4. In column 5 the dependent variable is support for pensions. Women are not more likely than men to believe that those working should “ensure, through the contribution of taxes they pay, that elderly people have a decent standard of living.” In sum, those more likely to have child custody—women, and those with a child living at home—favor greater redistribution towards children and child custodians but not other forms of redistribution.

3.3. Longitudinal Evidence: German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP)

So far, our evidence suggests that faced with lower marriage expectations, women have increasingly chosen to favor the political left. If changes in an individual’s

TABLE 5. Descriptive statistics, German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP).

		1984	2001
Female		48.5	45.9
Age	Men	32.1	49.1
	Women	32.4	49.0
Married	Men	60.0	80.4
	Women	68.8	80.6
Divorced	Men	1.3	0.6
	Women	3.5	2.4
Cohabiting	Men	6.0	6.6
	Women	6.2	8.2
Single	Men	31.5	5.7
	Women	20.1	3.9
Child	Men	54.1	37.0
	Women	60.2	40.9
Working	Men	84.2	82.8
	Women	56.6	67.6
Left	Men	55.6	54.0
	Women	57.3	53.9

Notes: Values reported are means (%) for 2,405 respondents in 1984 and 1,058 respondents in 2001. The sample excludes widowed. The dummy child = 1 if there is a child under the age of 16 living in the household, and the dummy working = 1 if the respondent is currently employed.

marital status are not fully anticipated then we should see a similar pattern in longitudinal data—that is, transitions from marriage to nonmarriage should presage women's, but not men's, switching to the political left.

In this section we use longitudinal data from the German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP), waves 1–22, to examine this possibility. Respondents were re-interviewed annually between 1984 and 2001. We restrict attention to West German respondents aged 18–45 in 1984 who have since been interviewed at least twice; see Table 5 for summary statistics.¹⁴ Among individuals who entered in 1984, sample attrition is, on average, 6.2% per year.

The survey collects annual information on changes in respondents' marital/cohabiting status (on a monthly basis) during the last year. We use information on the respondent's marital/cohabiting status during the survey month.¹⁵ Between 1984 and 2001, the number of married respondents rose from 60% for men and 69% for women to 80% for both sexes. Cohabitation increased from 6 to 7% for men and 6 to 8% for women. Respondents were also asked which political party they support. We used the Eurobarometer classification of parties to create a dummy that takes the value 1 if the respondent favored the political left.

14. This corresponds to Sample A and Sample B of the survey. East Germans were included in the survey after 1990. Households were chosen through a multistage random sampling process in West Germany. Surveys were conducted in face-to-face interviews when possible.

15. We code the marital status of a respondent as missing in a year if he or she does not answer the question in a given year.

To examine how cohabitation, marriage and divorce affect an individual's political preferences, we estimate for each event a separate regression of the form:

$$l_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_t + \phi_1 e_{it} + \phi_2 (f_i \times e_{it}) + \phi_3 (c_{it} \times e_{it}) \\ + \phi_4 (f_i \times c_{it} \times e_{it}) + \epsilon_{it}$$

where l_{it} is a dummy variable that equals 1 if individual i in year t favors a left-wing party, and 0 otherwise. α_i is an individual fixed effect, and β_t denotes year dummies. e_{it} is an event dummy. If, for instance, the event being considered is cohabitation then e_{it} equals 1 in years when the respondent is cohabiting. c_{it} is a dummy for whether the respondent had a child under 16 living with him or her when he or she experienced the above event. f_i is a female dummy.

Table 6 report the results. In columns 1 and 2 we restrict the sample to single and cohabiting respondents and examine the effect of cohabitation on political preferences. Relative to being single, cohabitation reduces a woman's support for the left by almost 8 percentage points; see column 1. The same transition leaves men's political preferences unaffected. The presence of a child at the time of cohabitation does not affect individual political preferences. The results are robust to controlling for labor force participation; see column 2.

In columns 3 and 4 we restrict the sample to cohabiting and married respondents and examine how marriage affects political preferences. Marriage makes a female cohabitant 6 percentage points less likely to support the political left; see column 3. Once again, the effect does not vary with child presence and is robust to controlling for labor force participation; see column 4.

Finally, in columns 5 and 6 we consider divorce. Our sample now excludes single and widowed respondents. Divorce makes a woman 15 percentage points more likely to favor the political left; see column 5. This is robust to child presence and labor force participation; see column 6. Again, working makes the respondent less likely to favor the political left, although the effect is muted for women.

Evidence on timing is informative of how quickly respondents alter their political preferences in response to changes in their marital status. We re-estimated the above regressions where we decomposed the event dummy into three lag dummies for whether the event occurred 1–2 years ago, 3–4 years ago, or 5 or more years ago. We also included the corresponding lead dummies with the year the event occurred being the omitted category. Figure 3, Panels A–C, graphs the coefficients from these regressions. For all three events we observe a significant change in female, but not male, political preferences in the years after the event.

In sum, the patterns in German longitudinal data mirror those found in the Eurobarometer data. Transitions out of marriage make women, relative to men, more left-leaning. The opposite is true of transitions into marriage. The observed changes are consistent with the thesis that the resources women have access to increase as they move from being single to cohabitation to marriage. In contrast,

TABLE 6. Marital status and support for the left: longitudinal evidence (GSOEP).

Sample	Marital status (event)					
	Cohabitation		Marriage		Divorce	
	Singles and cohabitants (1)	Cohabitants and married (2)	Cohabitants and married (3)	Cohabitants and married (4)	All (5)	All (6)
Event	0.006 (0.021)	0.002 (0.022)	0.016 (0.018)	0.014 (0.018)	-0.019 (0.023)	-0.020 (0.024)
Female × event	-0.076** (0.038)	-0.082** (0.038)	-0.065** (0.029)	-0.061** (0.029)	0.150** (0.046)	0.140*** (0.046)
Event × child	0.092 (0.135)	0.079 (0.136)	0.075 (0.05)	0.072 (0.051)	0.010 (0.056)	0.015 (0.056)
Female × event × child	0.077 (0.142)	0.087 (0.143)	-0.072 (0.076)	-0.079 (0.078)	-0.227 (0.201)	-0.148 (0.236)
Working		-0.031* (0.016)		-0.039*** (0.012)		-0.036*** (0.011)
Female × working		-0.015 (0.025)		0.026* (0.014)		0.022* (0.013)
N	6,208	5,992	23,914	22,789	25,353	24,182
Adj. R ²	0.76	0.77	0.81	0.82	0.81	0.81

Notes: OLS regression results are reported, with robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions include individual and year fixed effects. The sample "All" in columns 5 and 6 excludes widowed.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

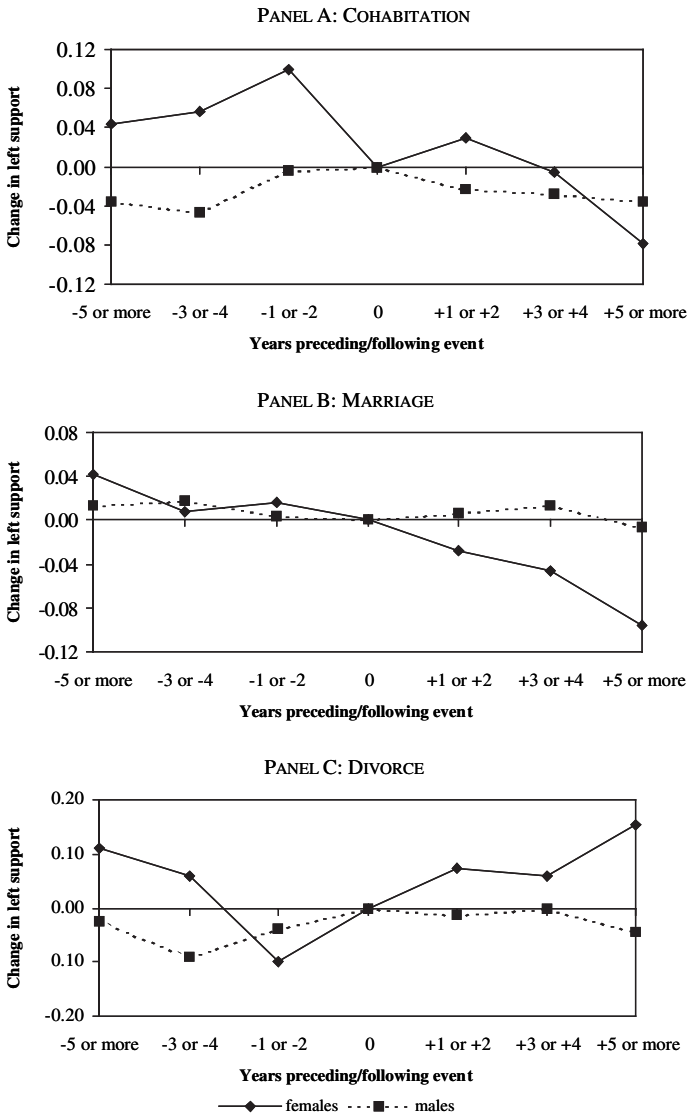


FIGURE 3. Effect of cohabitation/marital status on support for the political left. *Notes and Sources:* Figures 3-A, B, and C show the estimated coefficients from regressing the left dummy on whether the respondent has cohabited/married/divorced for 1–2 years, 3–4 years, etc.; as shown, dummies are also included for similar leads. Year 0 is the year of the event. Individual and year fixed effects are included. The data source is GSOEP.

child presence at the time of change in marital status does not affect political preferences.

4. Nonmarriage and Public Social Spending

We have provided evidence linking the divergence in male and female political preferences to the rise of nonmarriage in Western Europe (for the United States, see EP). We now turn to examining whether nonmarriage can plausibly be linked to the size and scope of public social spending.

A “naïve” theory of public spending predicts a mechanical link between single-parenthood and redistribution towards children. The argument being that public spending responds to need and thus compensates for shortfalls in parental spending. Such a theory, however, fails to consider the political economy of nonmarriage.

In this section we briefly outline why political economy considerations would lead us to expect the relationship between nonmarriage and redistribution towards children to be U-shaped and provide corroborative evidence from high-income OECD countries, 1980–1998.

4.1. Motivation

Our discussion draws heavily on the theoretical example presented in EP. Consider a three-generation population: children, working-age men and women, and elderly. All working-age women have a dependent child fathered by working-age men. We assume assortative matching in marriage, income pooling, and that a woman earns less than the man she marries. For simplicity, we assume the elderly have no earned income. Each demographic group may receive targeted transfers financed by a proportional income tax. Adults vote in line with their economic interests.

We start by examining popular demand for redistribution towards children, such as subsidized child care or cash allowances for children. Assume that an adult only benefits from such transfers if a custodian. The mother has sole custody unless married, in which case she and her husband share custody. The elderly do not have dependent children and therefore oppose redistribution towards children.

Analogous to the elderly, unmarried working-age men never favor redistribution towards children. Thus nonmarriage among low-income parents reduces overall support for redistribution towards children. Conversely, nonmarriage among richer parents increases support for redistribution towards children as long as the woman is a net beneficiary outside, but not within, marriage. If nonmarriage first occurs among the poor, and over time increasingly involves the richer, then we would expect nonmarriage to first reduce and then increase overall

support; that is, a U-shaped relationship between the incidence of nonmarriage and support for redistribution towards children.

We would expect a similar pattern between nonmarriage and redistribution towards poor working-age adults. However, the absence of a clear gender-differential component in such transfers (other than women's being poorer) suggests that this relationship would be weaker than that observed for redistribution towards children.

The elderly are politically homogenous in that they all favor transfers targeted to them as a group (e.g., pensions or health care). To the extent that they compete with the working-age and their (nonvoting) children for State resources, the fractionalizing impact of nonmarriage on the working-age population is likely to benefit the elderly. If so, a decline in support for redistribution towards children could be mirrored in an increase in transfers to the elderly.

This would lead us to expect a U-shaped relationship between nonmarriage and redistribution towards children and, potentially, transfers towards the working-age population. Furthermore, we would expect the opposite to hold for transfers towards the elderly.

4.2. Empirical Analysis

Our empirical analysis closely follows the preceding discussion. We analyze public spending data for high-income OECD countries for the period 1980–1998.¹⁶ We group public spending into *Child*, *Working-Age*, and *Elderly* spending (in each case normalized by country GDP). *Child* spending includes parent cash benefits, family allowances for children, maternal and paternal leave, formal day care, and other in-kind benefits. *Working-Age* spending includes public expenditures on occupational injury, labor market programs, disability benefits, unemployment benefits, and housing. Finally, *Elderly* spending includes old-age transfers, services for the elderly, and health expenditures.¹⁷ Table 7 provides descriptive statistics by country.

For transfer p_{kt} in country k in year t we estimate the following regression:

$$p_{kt} = c_k + \tau_t + \beta_1 v_{kt} + \beta_2 v_{kt}^2 + \gamma X_{kt} + \varepsilon_{kt}$$

where v_{kt} denotes the aggregate nonmarriage variable. X_{kt} is a vector that includes the proportion of the population between 0–14, between 15–64, and log GDP in U.S. \$ 1995.

16. We follow the World Bank's definition of high-income countries.

17. We include health in this category as the elderly are important consumers of health care (however, our results are robust to its exclusion).

TABLE 7. Country-level descriptives.

country	Nonmarriage			Public social spending		
	Divorce (1)	Out-of- Wedlock (2)	Marriage Age (3)	Child (4)	Working-age (5)	Elderly (6)
Australia	0.05	0.2	—	1.69	3.73	8.94
Belgium	0.04	0.1	23.89	2.52	9.68	13.18
Canada	0.04	0.26	25.98	0.71	3.57	10.66
Denmark	0.08	0.44	27.26	3.26	9.31	16.46
Finland	0.07	0.24	25.89	3.1	8.53	13.72
France	0.04	0.27	25.17	2.64	6.91	16.56
Germany	0.09	0.12	25.31	1.95	4.33	16.46
Ireland	0	0.15	26.24	1.58	7.18	9.73
Italy	0.01	0.06	25.24	0.95	5.36	16.39
Japan	—	—	25.67	0.43	2.04	9.16
Netherlands	0.05	0.11	25.45	1.79	11.36	13.26
New Zealand	0.04	—	—	2.33	4.83	12.8
Sweden	0.09	0.48	27.69	4.13	9.33	17.49
Switzerland	0.05	0.06	26.54	1.14	4.31	14.11
United Kingdom	0.06	0.25	25.5	2.26	6.31	13.33
United States	0.08	0.26	24.11	0.58	2.76	10.16
All	0.05	0.21	25.71	1.94	6.22	13.27

Note: Sample means are reported for 1980–1998. See the Appendix for variable and sample description.

As before, we report results for three nonmarriage variables—*Divorce*, *Out-of-Wedlock*, and *Marriage Age* (Table 8; Panels A, B, and C respectively). For each category of spending we report results for two samples. First, the countries for which a positive relationship between non-marriage and the gender gap is known to exist, i.e., our Eurobarometer countries and the United States (EB+US sample). Second, an expanded sample that includes the additional six high-income OECD countries for which consistent data are available (OECD sample).

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 8 consider *Child* spending as the dependent variable. We observe a U-shaped relationship for all three nonmarriage variables, except *Out-of-Wedlock* for the OECD sample (Panels A, B, and C respectively). For the OECD sample, the point estimates imply a turning point at $6.4 (22.89/(2 \times 177.8))\%$ for the fraction of adults divorced (Panel A, column 2), and at $28 (2.78/(2 \times 0.05))$ years for *Marriage Age* (Panel C, column 2). While the turning point for *Divorce* lies well within the range of the variable, the turning point for *Marriage Age* implies a negative relationship for nearly the entire range.¹⁸ In contrast, the estimates for *Elderly* spending imply an inverted U-shaped relationship; see columns 5 and 6.

18. This is consistent with our previous finding that increases in *Marriage Age* turn both genders right, albeit women at a lower rate than men.

TABLE 8. Aggregate nonmarriage and public social expenditures, high-income OECD countries 1980–1998.

Sample	Dependent variable					
	Child spending		Working-age spending		Elderly spending	
	EB+US (1)	OECD (2)	EB+US (3)	OECD (4)	EB+US (5)	OECD (6)
Panel A	Nonmarriage (NM): Divorce					
NM	-47.38*** (8.33)	-22.89** (10.56)	-99.00*** (31.12)	-65.41** (28.01)	196.48*** (33.13)	141.24*** (32.63)
NM ²	233.17*** (50.42)	177.80** (75.07)	457.40*** (143.87)	397.94*** (150.01)	-820.62*** (173.19)	-706.11*** (159.42)
Adj. R ²	0.94	0.89	0.92	0.89	0.94	0.88
Panel B	Nonmarriage (NM): Out-of-Wedlock					
NM	-4.28** (1.70)	0.8 (2.00)	11.86*** (4.47)	16.68*** (4.88)	18.79*** (5.06)	4.68 (6.12)
NM ²	7.94*** (2.56)	2.05 (3.08)	-14.65* (7.51)	-24.71*** (8.19)	-22.70*** (8.14)	-24.96** (9.76)
Adj. R ²	0.93	0.87	0.92	0.89	0.93	0.89
Panel C	Nonmarriage (NM): Marriage Age					
NM	-2.06*** (0.41)	-2.79*** (0.50)	-0.05 (1.31)	-3.66*** (1.11)	7.15*** (1.68)	1.3 (1.71)
NM ²	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Adj. R ²	0.94	0.93	0.92	0.90	0.93	0.89

Notes: The EB+US sample includes the nine Eurobarometer countries and the United States. The OECD includes an additional six high-income OECD countries for which data were available. Variable construction and sample are described in the Appendix. OLS regression results are reported, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions in Panels A, B, and C have 180 (272), 182 (239), and 180 (249) observations in odd (even) columns. All regressions include as additional covariates country dummies, log GDP in U.S. 1995 dollars, the proportion of the population aged 0–14 and the proportion aged 15–64.

* Significant at 10%.

** Significant at 5%.

*** Significant at 1%.

We have argued that the pattern for *Working-Age* spending is likely to mimic redistribution towards children. However, the gender-differential impact of nonmarriage is also less clear. In columns 3 and 4 we find mixed evidence. For *Divorce* and *Marriage Age*, nonmarriage first reduces and then increases *Working-Age* spending. The turning points are later than those for *Child* spending. However, the opposite pattern holds for *Out-of-Wedlock*. A possible explanation may be that higher rates of out-of-wedlock fertility are associated with a greater demand for income support among those of working-age.

These findings lend further support to the hypothesis that the gender differential implications of nonmarriage turn on the provision for children, and that this has contributed to the rise of the political gender gap.

5. Discussion

This paper provides evidence on the political salience of marriage. Our analysis of political survey data makes a strong case for the decline in marriage having

turned women left. Moreover, the gender gap is particularly pronounced in the case of support for State transfers towards children. Public spending data provide further evidence that provisions for children are an important mechanism linking nonmarriage and the political gender gap.

Our findings strengthen the claim in EP that differences in redistributive preferences, not social attitudes, lie behind the gender gap. Relative to the right, the left in every country in Western Europe is associated with greater preference for redistribution. In contrast, it is difficult to think of a salient social issue on which the left and right consistently diverge across these countries. For instance, abortion rights are not nearly as divisive (or salient) in Europe as in the United States. These findings also belie the contention that unmarried parenthood is functionally equivalent to married parenthood, a common perception in Europe where nonmarital cohabitation has been more mainstream than in the United States.

We have also presented evidence suggesting that the political economy of nonmarriage affects the composition of public social spending. This is important not least because it points to the possibility that public provisions for children are not only need-driven, but determined by the willingness of the electorate to internalize these needs.

We end with two speculations. First, our findings suggest a potential explanation to a seeming anomaly: the ability of the European extreme right to attract low-skilled men. Second, it points to a connection between the decline in marriage and the decline in fertility. Total fertility rates are well below replacement level, and falling, in the Western World. On the face of it, the link may appear tenuous. Some of the countries with the highest out-of-wedlock fertility rates also have the highest total fertility rates. However, it may be that in all countries, male private provision for children has fallen, as reflected by lower marriage rates. Still, in some countries public provision for children is high enough to make single-motherhood economically viable, thus creating a positive correlation between out-of-wedlock and total fertility.

Appendix

A.1. Individual Data

We used 45 Eurobarometer Surveys (EB), twice-yearly 1973–1996, and 11 Swedish Election Studies surveys (SES).¹⁹ “No answer,” “do not know,” and “not applicable” are coded as missing values.²⁰ Variables without self-explanatory names are described next.

19. SES surveys were conducted during election or referendum years: 1973, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994 (twice), and 1995.

20. The SES does not distinguish between married and cohabiting couples. Dummy variables for type of marital status are created for EB, 1975 onwards.

Left. Dummy equals 1 if respondent supports a left party. The respondent was asked “If there were a General Election tomorrow which party would you support?”(EB), and “Which party do you like best?”(SES). For EB we follow survey classification of parties as left-wing, and for Sweden the left includes the Social Democratic party and all parties to its left.

Education. (EB) “How old were you when you finished your full-time education?” For “still studying” respondent education was imputed from his or her age. (SES) Respondents stated educational attainment. The education dummies are: (i) less than high school (or 0–15 years old); (ii) high school (or 16–19 years); (iii) more than high school (or 20 or older).

Income. (EB) gives quartile position of respondent’s family income in own country’s income distribution. (SES) gives respondent’s income (1976 and 1979 surveys give family income). When respondent income is reported, we place individuals according to position in own gender income distribution (obtained in sample). We use income dummies for family income in lower and upper half of income distribution.

Redistributive Preferences. (EB 1992) Dummy equals 1 in the three cases below if the respondent answered “Yes” to the question.

Social protection. “The government must continue to provide everyone with a broad range of social security benefits even if this means increasing taxes or contributions.”

Aid single parents. “Do you think that more special help should be available to single-parent families who raise their children alone?”

Pension. “Those who are now working have a duty to ensure, through the contributions or taxes they pay, that elderly people have a decent standard of living.”

Maternity-leave length. Dummy equals 1 if the respondent answered “Too short” to question “Do you consider maternity leave to be too long, about right or too short?”

Maternity-leave wage. Dummy equals 1 if the respondent answered “Her full wages or salary” to question “What do you consider to be a fair wage for a young mother on maternity leave?”

Relevant notes on variable construction from the German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP), 1984–2001, are in Table 5.

A.2. Aggregate Data

Nonmarriage. Country-wise measures of nonmarriage are obtained from World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI), UN Demographic Yearbook, Eurostat, United Nations Unified Database and country statistical offices.²¹ Variable

21. We linearly interpolated divorce data in the case of Belgium and Italy, for most of the 1970s and 1980s.

definitions are in main text. Divorce was legalized in Ireland in 1997. Therefore, we code *Divorce* as 0 for Ireland 1980–1997 and do not include the last year, 1998, since this year is unlikely to be representative. In the social spending regressions, for each nonmarriage measure, we exclude countries with less than three years of data. Also in social spending regressions, unlike those using individual data, we (i) use data for unified Germany from 1990 onwards; and (ii) use data for entire United Kingdom (individual regressions use proportion of adults divorced in England and Wales).

Social Spending. We use data on three categories of public social expenditure spending, obtained from the OECD Social Expenditure Database. Our sample is high-income OECD countries (WDI definition) for which annual data are available for the years 1980–1998 (see Table 7 for list of countries). All spending data enter regressions as a percentage of GDP.

Child spending. Groups family allowances for children, parental leave, lone parent cash benefits, family support benefits and other family cash benefits, formal day care, personal services, household services, and other in-kind family benefits.

Working-age spending. Groups disability benefits, occupational injury and disease, sickness benefits, survivors, labor market programs, unemployment, and housing.

Elderly spending. Groups old-age transfers, services for the elderly, and health expenditures.

GDP in 1995 U.S. dollars are from the OECD Social Expenditure Database. □

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