

The link between the divorce revolution and the cohabitation boom

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Over the past decades, divorce and cohabitation have increased dramatically throughout Europe. Divorce has fundamentally altered the institution of marriage; marriage is no longer a life-long union but one that may dissolve. Cohabitation allows couples to live together without undertaking the vows of marriage, but also allows couples to avoid the potentially higher costs of divorce. Thus, divorce and cohabitation seem to be intrinsically linked. While previous theories of family change have recognized the parallel increase in divorce and cohabitation, few have postulated that the relationship between the two may be direct. Here we investigate causal pathways on the macro-, meso-, and micro- levels. First, we use focus group data from 8 European countries to explore how divorce has changed attitudes and beliefs concerning marriage and cohabitation. This investigation provides insights into the way people discuss divorce and cohabitation throughout Europe. Then we use harmonized partnership histories from surveys in 14 countries in Europe to describe the link between divorce and cohabitation at the different analytical levels. Although trends and explanations may differ across countries, our investigation provides general insights into why cohabitation has increased.

Over the past few decades, divorce has increased dramatically throughout Europe and the United States. The increase in divorce has fundamentally altered the institution of marriage, changing it from a life-long union to one that now has the potential to dissolve. At the same time, cohabitation has emerged as a way for two people to live in an intimate relationship without having to marry. Cohabitation allows couples to live together without undertaking the serious vows of marriage, but also to avoid the potentially higher costs of divorce if the marriage does not last. Thus, divorce and cohabitation seem to be intrinsically linked.

Previous research has recognized that in most countries these two trends have been emerging simultaneously, as part of a package of behaviors often referred to as the Second Demographic Transition (Sobotka 2008, Lesthaeghe 2010). Current theories explaining the emergence of these new behaviors point to social, economic, and policy changes that lead to shifts in values and circumstances, and consequently new behavior (Lesthaeghe 2010, Perelli-Harris et al. 2010, Perelli-Harris and Sanchez-Gassen 2012). These theories are important for describing the underlying factors explaining demographic change; however, they have not specifically examined whether or how the increase in divorce may have been fundamental to the development of cohabitation.

In this paper, we investigate the link between cohabitation and divorce using a mixed-methods approach, which allows us to triangulate on the relationship between cohabitation and divorce and to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon. First, we use qualitative methods to elucidate potential mechanisms and the discourses surrounding cohabitation and marriage. The qualitative evidence comes from focus group data collected in 8 European countries and emerged from a broader project that studied the meaning of cohabitation and marriage (see Special Collection: Focus on Partnerships in Demographic Research). In the broader project, we found a range of reasons for the increase in cohabitation, for example, desire for freedom and independence (Perelli-Harris et al 2014, Mynarska et al 2014), an increase in individualization (Berghammer et al 2014 , Hiekel and Keizer 2015), lack of trust in society and relationships (Isupova 2015), and shifts in religious values (Vignoli and Salvini 2014). The issue of divorce arose in nearly every focus group, especially with respect to how cohabitation is useful as a “testing ground” to avoid divorce (Perelli-Harris et al 2014). Below we provide additional analysis of the focus group materials to better understand how people think about the link between divorce and cohabitation now and how the divorce revolution may have given rise to the cohabitation boom.

Second, we analyze quantitative data from harmonized partnership histories based on surveys conducted in 14 countries in Europe to see to what extent there is a relationship between divorce and cohabitation. Our descriptive analyses are an important first step to see how widespread this relationship is across Europe and whether divorce is a necessary precondition for increases in cohabitation. While we expect a general relationship between divorce and cohabitation in most countries, we acknowledge that the relationship will be more evident in some countries than others. Third, we also pay attention to the role of divorce legislation; divorce reform was introduced only recently in some European countries, and the changes in legal procedures may have resulted in different social contexts that would allow cohabitation to increase. Thus, we provide a short overview of important developments in divorce law in Europe to put the quantitative and qualitative data on divorce and cohabitation into historical legal perspective.

In our paper, we employ an explanatory framework that allows us to explore the relationship between divorce and cohabitation at different analytical levels: the macro-, meso-, and micro-. The link between divorce and cohabitation may be manifest on the macro-level, with the implementation of new divorce legislation, increases in the social acceptability of divorce, and shifts in social norms about the institution of marriage leading to the increase in cohabitation. The link may also occur at the meso-level, with the experience of parental divorce leading children to choose cohabitation, as found in studies in the UK and the US (e.g., Axinn and Thornton 1992; Axinn and Thornton 1996, Berrington and Diamond 2000, Amato 1996, Liefbroer and Elzinga 2012). In addition, the relationship may occur on the micro-level, with individuals' own experience of divorce leading to a preference for cohabitation in subsequent unions. Thus, the link between divorce and cohabitation could occur through a number of analytical levels, leading to the diffusion of cohabitation along several causal pathways.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the relationship between divorce and cohabitation is most likely not unidirectional, but instead could flow both ways and influence each trend through feedback loops (Bumpass 1990). The experience of cohabitation as a less permanent relationship may lead to greater union instability in general. Some studies have shown that premarital cohabitation is associated with greater divorce after marriage (e.g. in Sweden: Bennett, Blanc et al. 1988, in the UK: Berrington and Diamond 1999, in the US: Kamp Dush, Cohan et al. 2003, Stanley, Rhoades et al. 2006). However, this association is likely due in part to selection (e.g. Lillard et al 1995, Kuperberg 2014), may depend on the

level of cohabitation in a country (Liefbroer and Dourleijn 2006) and appears to have reversed more recently in some countries (in Australia: Hewitt and De Vaus 2009, in the US: Reinhold 2010). In addition, the emergence of cohabitation may have led to greater selection into marriage, resulting in a decline or stabilization of divorce, as appears to have occurred very recently in the US (Kennedy and Ruggles 2014) and possibly in the UK.

It is also important to keep in mind that the increase in divorce and cohabitation may have occurred due to exogenous factors. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, women entered work en masse (Davis 1984), reducing the degree of sex-role segregation within couples and potentially eroding men's position in the labor force. These changes may have led to increasing divorce rates: as spouses began to resemble each other and gains from specialization were reduced, the value of marriage deteriorated (e.g. Becker 1991). Women's increased autonomy, both within unions and in the spouse-search process, also allowed women to postpone marriage, leave low-quality unions and choose cohabitation as an attractive alternative (Oppenheimer 1997, Easterlin 1978, Oppenheimer, Kalmijn et al. 1997, Kalmijn 2011). The economic uncertainty and inequality that increased throughout the last decades of the 21st century due to globalization (Blossfield et al 2006) exacerbated these trends: individual-level economic precarity is associated with union instability (Amato and James 2010), as well as cohabitation and childbearing within cohabitation, particularly among the least educated (Perelli-Harris et al 2010, Hiekel et al 2014). More broadly, social and ideational liberalization, often associated with Second Demographic Transition theory (Lesthaeghe 2010), led to greater emphasis on individualization and personal fulfillment and reduced the influence of institutions such as religion (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988). The contraceptive revolution facilitated these developments by liberalizing sexual norms and supporting feminism (Westoff and Ryder 1977). Thus, ideational change coupled with changing economic conditions could have contributed to the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the rise of both divorce and cohabitation.

Nonetheless, while the full development of these trends may be complicated, an investigation into whether or how the increase in divorce may have led to the diffusion of cohabitation is warranted. The research on exogenous factors such as economic, social, and policy developments is essential for understanding overall changes in behavior, but it does not tell us how behavioral trends may be causally interrelated. Examining how people talk about divorce and cohabitation will help us to understand the motivation for choosing cohabitation and how cohabitation may have diffused throughout society. Analyzing the

development of these trends with quantitative data, while paying particular attention to the timing of divorce reform, will allow us to see how divorce and cohabitation are linked at the macro-, meso-, and/or micro-levels. Thus, our investigation will provide insights into why and how cohabitation has developed, but also how country-specific factors may have led to developments in different countries.

Data

The focus groups. The focus group project as a whole was motivated by an interest in better understanding the increase in cohabitation throughout Europe. Although quantitative research had explored the development of cohabitation cross-nationally, little was known about how people discussed cohabitation and marriage in different countries. Focus group research is intended to provide insights into collective social norms and perceptions (Morgan 1998). The goal of focus group research is not to provide representative data, but to understand general concepts and substantive explanations for social phenomena. Thus, focus group research allows the researcher to fill gaps in knowledge, generate research hypotheses, and propose avenues for new quantitative research (Morgan 1998), as we do below.

For the Focus Group project, collaborators conducted 7-8 focus groups in the following cities: Vienna, Austria (Berghammer et al 2014), Florence, Italy (Vignoli and Salvini 2014), Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Hiekel and Keizer 2015), Oslo, Norway (Lappegard and Noack 2015), Warsaw, Poland (Mynarska et al 2014), Moscow, Russia (Isupova 2015), Southampton, the United Kingdom (Berrington et al 2015), and Rostock and Lubeck, Germany (Klaerner 2015). The chosen countries represent a range of welfare-state regimes and historical family systems in Europe. Each focus group comprised 8-10 participants, with a total of 588 participants across Europe. The focus groups followed a standardized guideline ensuring that each group discussed the same topics. The researchers transcribed the results in the native language of their countries, coded the results according to a standard procedure and produced a country report in English that covered general topics. The collaborators then wrote an overview paper, which synthesized the main findings of the project and proposed a new understanding of cohabitation (Perelli-Harris et al 2014). For the analysis below, we use the overview paper, the country reports, and additional quotes on divorce provided by each country team.

Harmonized Histories. To assess whether there is a link between the diffusion of divorce and cohabitation with quantitative data, we describe trends based on survey data and official

statistics. The official registered data has been incorporated as the Total Divorce Rate (TDR), which is “the mean number of divorces per marriage in a given year, or the divorce rate of a hypothetical generation subjected at each marriage duration to current marriage conditions” (see Spijker for details; Divorce Atlas 2013). The survey data is based on female retrospective union and fertility histories from 14 surveys standardized in a dataset called the Harmonized Histories (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010, and see www.nonmarital.org). The data for Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Russia come from the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS), which interviewed nationally representative samples of the resident population in each country. Because the GGS is not available for all countries (or the retrospective histories were not adequate for our purposes), we also used other data sources. The Dutch data come from the 2003 Fertility and Family Survey (FFS). The UK data are from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The Spanish data come from the Survey of Fertility and Values conducted in 2006. The surveys that comprise the Harmonized Histories have been frequently used in other studies and are generally considered high quality. In particular, fertility and marriage trends from most of the Generations and Gender Surveys reflect trends found in vital registration statistics (e.g. Vergauwen, Wood, and Neels 2015).

Divorce legislation reform. In addition to analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, it is also important to understand how divorce laws developed in Europe over the past decades: in order for divorce to be a precondition for the increase in cohabitation, it must first be legal. Changes in the legal availability of divorce, as well as reforms of divorce requirements and procedures, facilitated the deinstitutionalization of marriage by allowing couples to dissolve a marriage if it no longer provides mutual benefits (Cherlin 2004). However, the timing and extent of divorce reforms has differed across countries. Therefore, a brief analysis of the historical development of divorce law allows us to better understand differences in family contexts, and how they relate to the increase in cohabitation.

To facilitate the analysis of divorce reform, we present Table 1 of the Annex, which provides an overview of the dates of important divorce reform in countries across Europe. We distinguish between dates at which divorce first became available; dates at which no-fault divorce procedures were enacted with simplified divorce; as well as the dates of other divorce law reforms that changed divorce procedures. These different types of reform – fault-based divorce, divorce in case of marriage breakdown, and divorce by mutual consent – are not

mutually exclusive. Generally, different types of divorce have been available within the same jurisdictions at different points in time (Martiny 2004).

Table 1 shows how most countries already allowed spouses to divorce in 1950, and a majority of countries had also introduced no-fault divorce procedures. The exact dates at which countries introduced these laws differ widely. In countries such as England, Scotland, Norway or Romania, written laws permitting divorce appeared in the 16th and 17th centuries. Four centuries later, Italy and Spain were the last countries in the table to (re-)introduce divorce legislation in 1970 and 1981. In Italy, the law had been the outcome of a long and contested political and societal debate, with strong opposition from the Catholic Church (Patti et al. 2002). In Spain, divorce legislation had been in force for a brief period from 1932 to 1939 during the times of the Spanish republic. It was revoked under the regime of Francisco Franco, which adhered to Catholic precepts, and only introduced again after Spain's transition to democracy forty years later (Martín-Casals et al. 2002). Hence, the introduction of divorce may not be about adapting laws to fit the development of new social attitudes, but instead occur only after substantial political wrangling.

In many countries, governments introduced divorce by mutual consent only after divorce procedures had become firmly established. In France, the Netherlands or Romania, decades or even centuries occurred between the first adoption of divorce legislation and the introduction of divorce by mutual consent. Italy and Spain, in contrast, introduced divorce by mutual consent in parallel or within a few years after fault-based divorce procedures had become possible. The introduction of mutual consent divorce in European jurisdictions was often motivated by changing attitudes and values regarding family behavior: Divorce rates were rising across countries in the after-war decades, and restrictive divorce legislation forced spouses to construct fault-based reasons for divorce in often time-consuming processes, even if the divorce was essentially uncontested. In some countries this disconnect between law and social realities led to collusion and perjury, in others it forced spouses to live in de-facto separation (Phillips 1988). Eventually, the rise in divorce numbers and the increasing perception that fault-based divorce legislation was not equipped to deal with many cases of marriage breakdown prompted reforms and the introduction of mutual consent divorce (Glendon 1989). Over the past few decades, many countries have gone further in simplifying divorce procedures, for instance by allowing divorce upon the insistence of one partner even without the consent of the other (e.g. Norway in 1993) or by substantially reducing the length of separation periods required before divorce (e.g. Belgium in 1982, 2000 and 2007).

Previous research has shown that the implementation of no-fault divorce in fact led to a short-term increase in crude divorce rates in European countries (González and Viitanen 2009, Kneip and Bauer 2009). Nonetheless, the short-term increase may have reflected pent-up demand due to changing attitudes towards marriage and gender roles. Alternatively, the pent-up demand for divorce may also have led to divorce law reform; in some countries such as Spain, governments were increasingly pressured to enact divorce reform, because so many couples were separated (Solsona, Houle and Simó 1999). Hence, while the increase in union dissolution may have happened even without the divorce reform, the increase in divorce would not have been possible without the introduction of divorce legislation. Legal differences in the availability of divorce are therefore important to keep in mind when comparing divorce trends across countries and over time.

Macro-level links: the diffusion of divorce and the increase in cohabitation

Explanations from qualitative research.

In nearly every country, the participants from the focus group study stated that the increase in divorce and partnership instability was one of the main reasons for the increase in cohabitation. In the Netherlands, this theme was so pervasive that Hiekel and Keizer (2015) used it as the main topic of their country article; they theorized how cohabitation was a strategic response to high marital instability. For example, this Dutch respondent states:

“Perhaps it is our generation that is brought up with the idea that [marriage] often goes wrong, that that is a catalyzing factor ...this is of course not the initial factor why people start living together unmarried. But if it [marriage] goes wrong more often, you might think “well, I’d better not risk a failure, because I will experience a lot of negative consequences.” (Netherlands, female)

Participants from the UK focus groups also articulated an awareness of how high divorce rates may discourage marriage, for example,

“I wonder if there’s something about the kind of way it’s portrayed in statistics...you’re kind of told about high levels of divorce and marriages which break down and things, so I wonder if there’s perhaps something about putting people off going through that process, if there’s a potential that there might not be a happy ending maybe.”

These types of responses indicate a general sense that marriage is no longer seen as a long-term, binding union; divorce has eroded the permanence of marriage. Cherlin (2004) calls this the deinstitutionalization of marriage; widespread divorce has made it more difficult to understand the role of marriage, because it is no longer a commitment for life. In our focus groups, some admitted a lack of confidence in marriage, as this British respondent said, “I don’t think people have got as much faith in marriage either anymore... It’s not a forever thing anymore, is it, whereas before it was more of a commitment than nowadays.” For some, the disillusionment with marriage led to a rejection of marriage altogether. In most countries, there were always respondents who saw marriage as little more than a piece of paper.

At the same time, however, participants in most countries did express the opinion that marriage was still a sign of a committed relationship. As discussed in Perelli-Harris et al (2014), in all of the countries examined, marriage was seen as valuable, with the exception of eastern Germany where marriage was seen as less relevant. The high value placed on marriage results in people wanting to test their relationship with cohabitation to ensure it is solid enough for marriage and to avoid divorce. Thus, the meaning of cohabitation as a “testing-ground” was one of the main findings of the comparative paper (Perelli-Harris et al 2014). Cohabitation allows couples to make sure they are compatible and to avoid the costs and consequences of divorce. In some countries, for example Norway, living together before marriage has become normative, with marriage reserved for later in the lifecourse, perhaps as a celebration of surviving the period with young children.

In all countries, focus groups participants perceived cohabitation as easier to dissolve than marriage, although in some cases children and mortgages could make a cohabiting partnership difficult to disentangle. Nonetheless, the costs of divorce were almost always perceived as higher than the costs of dissolving a cohabiting union. In Italy, one participant put it this way:

“Divorce is a complex, long, and expensive thing. So, although the couple is unhappy, you may be forced to remain together. By contrast, putting an end to a cohabiting union is much faster.” (Italy,)

Throughout the focus groups, participants discussed several types of costs: psychological, emotional, social, financial, and bureaucratic. In the Netherlands, one

participant expressed the opinion that divorce would be “some kind of failure in public,” in Poland, some felt that those who divorced were labeled as a “divorcee,” and in Italy “divorce essentially means many psychological costs.” However, the focus group participants agreed that divorce rarely incurred the same social stigma as it did in the past. Instead, participants were more likely to point out the financial and legal or bureaucratic costs of divorce. This ranged from muttering about the “fuss” involved in changing names and legal documents to complaining about the substantial expense and time to divorce. The magnitude of the costs seemed to depend on legal setting. In Italy, participants in several focus groups mentioned the economic fear of divorce as well as the extensive court trials and long waiting periods. In Germany, this man described his brother’s divorce:

“That was a real ordeal, it took forever, with all this red tape and not keeping appointments and who knows what. A break-up is mean and nasty already for everyone involved. But a divorce is way worse.”

In Austria, one man even expressed a fear of marriage, because of the high consequences of divorce:

“This is maybe not the most important point but everyone that has witnessed a divorce that took some years, that is a bit scary. It is scary to risk the step towards marriage.”

In some countries, the participants pointed out that the men had to disproportionately bear the costs of divorce and in the process lose much of what they owned. As one Austrian man stated,

“for men, with respect to the law, it is not very advantageous to marry...The women and children get the flat plus maintenance...From the man’s point of view, it does not pay off to marry.”

As one eastern German man put it,

“People have become more cautious, it is not for nothing that one says: marry in haste, and repent at leisure. And then you can see what men sometimes have to endure and how much money they have to pay in a divorce. One should not get married before having the money for the divorce.”

In Italy, one participant even said, “[the woman could] use the law to her advantage, in order to get revenge toward the man.”

To summarize, this analysis has shown how the general awareness and wariness of divorce has permeated throughout society and is one of the main factors leading to an increase in cohabitation. Divorce has eroded some peoples’ faith in marriage, leading them to eschew marriage altogether. At the same time, however, most people still value marriage and want to avoid the high costs and consequences of divorce. Thus, cohabitation, which is usually easier to dissolve, plays an important role as a testing ground before marriage in order to avoid divorce. Similar results have been found in the U.S., where in-depth interview research found that individuals refer to a “fear of divorce” that leads them to be wary of the institution of marriage or to have doubts about marrying a particular individual (Miller et al. 2011). Qualitative evidence from the early 1990s in the UK has also suggested that cohabitation emerged as a testing ground in response to divorce (McRae 1993). Thus, qualitative evidence suggests that people have a general perception of the link between the increase in divorce and the increase in cohabitation, which provides motivation for investigating this link on the macro-level with quantitative data.

Macro-level analyses from quantitative data.

In order to trace the development of divorce and cohabitation on the macro-level in 14 countries, we present figures 1-3. First, we show the year in which divorce law reforms were enacted (see also Annex 1).¹ The year of divorce reform/legislation is essential for understanding the link between the increase in divorce and increase in cohabitation, because without divorce being legal, divorce could not become more prevalent. Second, we present the Total Divorce Rate (the red line) intended to capture period “shocks” in divorce, for example due to changes in divorce law or economic conditions which may have curtailed divorce. The TDR decreases bias due to changes in marriage timing or increases in non-marriage, although it assumes that all marriage cohorts are the same size. In most countries, the TDR steadily increases throughout the period of observation, but it also reflects strong responses to divorce reform and socio-economic change, for example in Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Spain.

¹ Note that other types of reforms, such as changes in the waiting period for divorce, may have led to a strong increase in the Total Divorce Rate. For example, the steep increase in the Total Divorce Rate in Spain was due to a 2005 reform (see Annex 1) which eliminated the period of de facto separation.

Figures 1-3 about here

Third, we present data from the Harmonized Histories to indicate how the prevalence of divorce² may lead to changes in levels of cohabitation on the macro-level. The blue line shows women who ever divorced, while the green line indicates women in a cohabiting relationship among those in partnership in January of a given year³. Note that we are specifically interested in the decision to cohabit or marry for those in a partnership; while the increase in divorce may have led to the delay or avoidance of co-residential unions, we are less interested in the decision to remain single and more interested in whether people choose cohabitation over marriage. The trend lines start in different years in each country, because each survey interviewed different age ranges and may not have interviewed sufficient numbers of older women to make meaningful estimates for earlier years. To ensure sufficient numbers of women, each line starts in the year in which each age group includes at least 50 women. We only show women up to age 50; while we would have liked to have included older women who may have experienced divorce later in life, we chose age 50 as our cut-off in order to go further back in time. Even with this age constraint, some countries still had only relatively short trend lines (e.g. in Belgium the trend line only starts in 1994, because insufficient women at older ages were interviewed).⁴ In addition, the lower age limit of the blue and green trend lines differ. The blue divorce line includes women aged 30-49, because women must have had enough time to enter into marriage and divorce in each country, while the green line includes women aged 20-49, in order to show whether younger women are in a cohabiting union. Taken together, these trend lines indicate whether the increase in divorce started to increase earlier than cohabitation.

Although the exact pattern of the trend line differs in each country, the countries can be roughly clustered into several general patterns. Figures 1 and 2 show the countries that provide the best evidence in support of our focus group findings: the increase in divorce preceded the increase in cohabitation. For example, the graph for the United Kingdom (Figure 1) shows two trend lines for the TDR: a longer line for England and Wales and a short line for the UK as a whole, with grey dots representing the TDR for earlier years in the

² Divorce is defined by separation or divorce, whichever comes first. Because no information is provided on divorce in Norway and Spain, the date of separation is considered the date of divorce. Marriages which ended with spouse's death were omitted in this analysis.

³ Weights have been applied if available.

⁴ We will try to use earlier data from the Fertility and Family Survey to show earlier years in Belgium, Norway, and the Netherlands.

UK. Both show an increase in the Total Divorce Rate over time, and the dots for UK in 1970 and 1975 suggest that divorce increased rapidly throughout the 1970s. The blue line also shows that the percent of ever married women who ever experienced divorce started to increase earlier than the percent of partnered women living in cohabitation (green line), which supports the argument that divorce preceded the increase in cohabitation. Nonetheless, the percent ever divorced women levelled off in the late 1980s, while the percent cohabiting continued to increase throughout the 1990s, indicating that cohabitation became more prevalent than divorce. The stabilization of divorce coupled with the increase in cohabitation may indicate that marriage is becoming more selective of stable relationships that are less likely to end in divorce. People who are less sure of their relationships opt for cohabitation, perhaps because they fear the difficulties of divorce.

Russia, Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania also represent a situation in which divorce increased before cohabitation (Figure 1). In these countries, the Total Divorce Rate was already relatively high – above 0.2 – before the beginning of the observation period. In Russia, the TDR was above 0.3 in 1970, while in Lithuania it was closer to 0.5. In all four countries, the TDR stayed relatively high or increased, although in Lithuania the TDR decreased substantially, albeit with some very short-term peaks throughout the 1990s. The percent ever experiencing divorce also remained substantially higher than the percent cohabiting in most countries; the development of the two behaviors occurred in parallel. However, in 2000-05 the slope of the cohabitation line became steeper, indicating that cohabitation became more prevalent. All in all, the evidence is consistent with the expectation that the increase in divorce facilitated the increase in cohabitation.

The next set of countries in Eastern (Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania) and Southern Europe (Spain and Italy) has had a low prevalence of both divorce and cohabitation throughout most of the observation period (Figure 2). The TDR hardly increased above 0.2, except for a slight increase to about 0.3 in the most recent years in Bulgaria and Poland and a sharp increase to nearly 0.6 in Spain in 2005 after a reform in the divorce law, which allowed divorce without a period of previous separation. Cohabitation has also remained low; the green line remained below the blue line with a few exceptions in the 2000s, again especially in Spain, which also experienced a steep increase in cohabitation after the mid-1990s. Thus, even though these countries had less of an increase in these two behaviors until recently, divorce does seem to have become more common before the rise in cohabitation.

Figure 3, on the other hand, shows more mixed results; Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and France show different patterns of family change. In all four countries, the TDR was below 0.2 in 1970 and sharply increased to above 0.4 in the late 1990s and early 2000s, indicating that these countries have high levels of divorce relative to parts of Southern and Eastern Europe. At the same time, however, cohabitation was increasing rapidly, and the steep slope of the green line in all four countries in the 1990s indicates that cohabitation may have developed more rapidly than divorce. In all four countries, the percent ever divorced and percent ever cohabiting are at the same level around the beginning of the observation period, but cohabitation quickly outpaced divorce. In France, the data shows how cohabitation and divorced developed in the mid-1970s, but unlike the countries shown in figures 1 and 2, the increase in divorce was less pronounced, with cohabitation becoming much more prevalent. The French results suggest that cohabitation increased at a faster rate than divorce and may indicate that cohabitation developed for different reasons⁵. The data for Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway, on the other hand, can only show the prevalence of cohabitation and divorce throughout the 1990s, and it is difficult to tell whether the increase in the percent who ever divorced increased earlier than the percent in a cohabiting union. In these countries, earlier data is needed to determine whether the increase in divorce preceded the increase in cohabitation.

Despite the differences in union formation behaviour across our study countries, these results suggest that the increase in divorce preceded the increase in cohabitation in all countries for which we have data for a sufficiently long period. The increase in the TDR always occurred before the increase in the percent currently cohabiting among those in a couple. More precisely, the TDR increased to above 0.2 before the percent currently in cohabitation among those in a couple reached 10%, although both increases seemed to have occurred simultaneously in Spain. Nonetheless, the indicator for the percent ever divorced does not always seem to have a clear relationship to the percent currently cohabiting. In some cases cohabitation increased at a faster rate than divorce, as in France, more recently in Spain, and potentially Norway and the Netherlands. These differences in union formation patterns suggest that divorce may not have been as much of an influence in these countries and that other social and economic processes may have been more important. For example, the increase in cohabitation in France may have been due to the rejection of the institution of

⁵ Unfortunately, we did not conduct focus group research in France, so we do not know if the French would have been less likely to talk about divorce as a reason for the diffusion of cohabitation.

marriage associated with the Catholic Church, as happened in Quebec (Laplante 2006), and may not have been as dependent on the deinstitutionalization of marriage through divorce. Thus, while our macro-level results suggest that divorce appears to be a necessary condition for the increase in cohabitation, it may not be sufficient for explaining the increase in cohabitation behaviour in all countries.

Meso-level links: The intergenerational transmission of divorce to cohabitation

Quantitative research in the U.S. and UK has provided strong evidence for the intergenerational transmission of parental divorce to children's divorce (e.g. Amato 1996; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Berrington and Diamond 1999), as well as parental divorce and children's cohabitation (e.g., Amato 1996; Bumpass, Sweet and Cherlin 1991; Thornton 1991; Berrington and Diamond 2000). The experience of the divorce of their parents may lead children to be more accepting of alternatives to life-long marriage, decrease the perceived rewards of marriage, and make children more reluctant to enter long-term relationships (Amato 1996; Axinn and Thornton 1992; Axinn and Thornton 1996). In addition, previous research has shown that parental experience of cohabitation is positively associated with adult children's own cohabitation in the US (Sassler et al 2009; Smock, Manning and Dorius 2013), and the UK (Berrington and Diamond 2000). Alternatively, parents' experience of cohabitation after marital breakdown may be leading to children's preference for cohabitation, since they would have seen their parents choose this arrangement (Sassler et al 2009).

Meso-level evidence in qualitative research.

The intergenerational transmission of divorce to cohabitation emerged repeatedly throughout the focus groups. Individuals who experienced the divorce of their parents stated that they were unlikely to marry and would choose cohabitation instead. In eastern Germany, for example, one respondent bluntly stated, "I am a child of divorce, and that's the reason I don't want to marry." Participants in the other countries repeated this sentiment, acutely aware of the fragility of marriage because they had lived through their parents' divorce. In Poland, one woman said,

"I think it matters what children experienced at their own homes. I saw my parents getting divorced and I think that I won't get married, because what for? To get a divorce? I prefer to live the way I do now."

This participant in Austria summarized how the intergenerational transmission of divorce may have led to a skepticism of marriage, thereby facilitating the diffusion of cohabitation:

“...maybe our parents’ generation was the first generation where getting divorced was accepted and an option and our generation is the first generation with many children of divorce. And maybe because of that, you have experienced it first hand or through your friends or acquaintances, and there is some reluctance to marry quickly.”

Thus, participants seemed to be aware that breakdown of parental marriage tends to lead individuals to reject the institution of marriage, or at the very least cohabit first to see whether their relationship will last. Both cross-national qualitative research and studies in individual countries suggest a strong link between parent’s divorce and children’s cohabitation. Yet, we do not know to what extent this link is universal and present in most countries. Below, using quantitative data, we investigate to what extent this relationship holds across countries.

Meso-level analyses with quantitative data.

We again use the Harmonized Histories to ask whether people whose parents divorced are more likely to enter cohabitation for their first relationship than people whose parents remained married in childhood. In figure 4, we present the proportion of ever partnered women aged 20-49 in 2005⁶ who started their first union with cohabitation by whether the parents lived together at age 15. This measure was obtained from a survey question that is relatively consistent across all the countries.⁷

Figure 4 about here.

In all countries shown, the proportion of women who began their first union with cohabitation was higher for those whose parents separated than those whose parents did not separate. The solid bars indicate that the difference in the two groups is significant (confidence intervals do not overlap) in all countries except France (the shaded bars indicate

⁶ The date of observation was 2005 in all countries, except it was 2004 in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, and Russia, and 2003 in Italy and Spain. Note that we examined this relationship at previous points in time to see whether the relationship was consistent over time, but the numbers of women whose parents had separated were too small in most countries to provide a robust analysis.

⁷ In Poland and the UK there were fewer categories, but this did not change the substantive categories. In the UK, the question referred to age 16. Note that this question was not asked in the Netherlands.

an insignificant difference). In most countries, about 10% more women started their unions with cohabitation among those whose parents separated compared to those whose parents did not separate. The bars also indicate that direct marriage has remained more common among those whose parents stay married. Nonetheless, note that in some countries direct marriage is much less common; for example in France and Norway less than a quarter of those ever partnered directly married.⁸ Nonetheless, these results suggest that the intergenerational transmission of parent's divorce to children's cohabitation is nearly universal across countries, and that intergenerational transmission can be considered a causal pathway helping to explain the link between divorce and cohabitation.

Micro-level links: Personal reasons for choosing cohabitation after divorce

Cross-national quantitative research shows that in many countries of Europe, second unions are more likely to start with cohabitation than marriage, even in countries with a low prevalence of cohabitation (Galezewska et al 2014). This finding raises questions about whether the sharp increase in cohabitation began first among the previously married rather than younger, never married individuals. People who had a bad experience with their first marriages would be more likely to live together without marrying than those who were still being influenced by the traditional norms of their families (i.e. not liberal, university students rejecting conservative values). This could especially be the case in countries with high divorce rates, but also in strong early marriage regimes, for example the countries to the east of Hajnal's line (Coale) - former socialist countries in Eastern Europe. In Hungary, Speder (2005) found that post-divorce cohabitation drove the spread of cohabitation, with pre-marital cohabitation only emerging since the 1980s. Besides eastern Europe, researchers in other countries also speculated that the sharp rise in cohabitation began with the previously married, for example in France (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1991), and the UK: (Haskey 1994, Estauth and Kiernan 1993, and Burgoyne 1991).

Micro-level explanations from qualitative research.

⁸ Note that these results do not control for any potential covariates. However, we have examined to what extent the pattern is similar for smaller age groups, in order to ensure that the age pattern has not unduly affected the analysis.

In all countries, the focus groups discussed how personal experience of divorce led to skepticism about marriage and a preference for cohabitation in second unions. People who had divorced recounted their difficult experiences in the court systems, the expense, and bureaucratic frustrations. Their experiences often soured their opinion of marriage, as this Austrian woman stated,

“For me it [marriage] has become worthless. It has become like a piece of paper as I already had a divorce. I was expecting more, but in reality a credit agreement is worth more than the marriage certificate. Because it binds for a longer time than marriage.”

This Russian woman also expressed her reluctance to remarry and preference for cohabitation:

“My husband was the initiator of divorce. I wish him to be happy. I have a second union, too. I am happy. I am satisfied. I have been with this second man for two years; I like him. But I am not in a hurry to marry him, because my first marriage ended in divorce.”

And this Dutch woman recounted her experience with divorce:

“I have just learned that a lot of things can go wrong by getting married. Because then it is no longer your things, but your joint things. And when he does something wrong, you automatically do something wrong. Debts, for instance, that will then also be your responsibility, and may stay your responsibility even when you are divorced.”

Hence, previous experience of divorce does seem to produce a dislike of marriage and choice of cohabitation for second unions, and it raises the question of whether cohabitation may have emerged first among those who experienced divorce. Below we will investigate to what extent the increase in cohabitation is more common among those who previously divorced than those who never married, and whether this has changed over time.

Micro-level analyses with quantitative data

To assess the link between an individual's personal experience with divorce and current cohabitation across our study countries, we show the percentage of never married, divorced, and widowed women aged 20-49 among all those who are currently cohabiting for each

country.⁹ (Figures 5-8). To see whether cohabitation emerged first among the never married or previously divorced, we show percentages for five-year time periods ranging backwards in time as far as the data will allow. We present these figures to assess whether the percent cohabiting in a given time period is predominantly composed of those who were divorced or never married. Because the figures show the absolute numbers of those cohabiting, rather than the propensity to cohabit among those at risk (i.e. those who are single or divorced), the estimates do not take into account differences in the level of divorce across countries, which may differ substantially depending on the age at marriage and divorce (Galezewska et al 2014). Nonetheless, the focus on current cohabitation trends shows to what extent divorce drove the initial increase in cohabitation, as suggested by the Focus Groups and previous research (Speder 2005, Villeneuve-Golkap 1991, Haskey 1994).

Figures 5-8 about here.

Immediately, Figures 5-8 show that a relatively small percent of those who are currently cohabiting were divorced compared to those who have never been married. In most countries, less than a quarter of currently cohabiting women had previously divorced. Hence, for the most part, post-marital cohabitation does not appear to be as widespread as cohabitation among the never married. Only in Russia, Estonia, and Hungary did at least a third of women who are currently cohabiting ever experience divorce in some of the periods of observation shown (Figure 5). As discussed above, these former socialist countries have a relatively young age at first marriage, high levels of divorce, and, until recently, low levels of cohabitation. The early pattern of divorce would have provided women with greater exposure to the risk of cohabitation after divorce than in the other countries, and coupled with a strong tradition of direct marriage, the divorced may have been the ones to break with tradition and cohabit rather than marry. Hence, post-marital cohabitation may have played a substantial role in the increase in cohabitation in these countries.

Other countries may have experienced a higher proportion of previously married when cohabitation was just starting to become widespread. The UK, for example, had a greater proportion of cohabitators who had divorced when cohabitation was just starting to increase (Figure 5). In 1978-82, 25% of women cohabiting had previously divorced, suggesting that

⁹ The results are based on union status in January of each year. The calculations have been centered around the mid-year (i.e. 1980) by averaging the 5 year information. Percentage of widows was calculated by subtracting the number of never married and divorced currently cohabiting women from 100. Belgium was not included as sufficient data is only available starting in 1994.

the initial increase in cohabitation may have been led by the newly divorced. Subsequently, the relative percent who had divorced declined, with those who had never married a much greater proportion of those currently cohabiting. This decline seems to have occurred in most other countries as well, or more commonly, the percent of the divorced relative to the never married stayed relatively stable, around 15%. Partially this may be due to the age range analyzed; our analyses only capture women up to age 49, and cohabitation among the previously married may have initially increased more at older ages. Note also that we do not have early estimates in Norway and the Netherlands, when cohabitation was just starting to increase from very low levels. In general, however, with the exception of the UK, Hungary, Russia, and Estonia (Speder 2005), these figures suggest that the divorced were not the primary forerunners of cohabitation, although they may have played a small role in the increase as cohabitation took off.

Conclusions

The substantial increase in both divorce and cohabitation in most European countries leads to the question of whether the two are directly linked. In this paper, we employed mixed methods to approach this question from a number of analytical perspectives. Both the qualitative and quantitative evidence suggest that the increase in divorce may have facilitated the increase in cohabitation in most of our studied countries. Our analyses are descriptive and cannot establish causality; however, they provide an important first step for investigating this issue in cross-national perspective. Taken together, our analyses suggest several important findings that help us to better understand the increase in cohabitation and the role that divorce played on the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.

First, the focus group research suggests that many Europeans are aware of the high levels of divorce in their country and that divorce may discourage people from marrying, or at least marrying quickly and without ensuring that the relationship is solid. Participants mentioned that cohabitation is a way to test the relationship in order to avoid the costs of divorce, which were described as higher than the costs of marriage unless the couple had children or a mortgage (Perelli-Harris et al 2014). In fact, some participants bitterly complained about the high costs of divorce, saying that they refused to marry and recommending that others not marry, especially men, who could suffer negative economic consequences. For these participants, cohabitation was seen as a favorable alternative to marriage. However, most participants did not eschew marriage altogether and planned to

marry; for them, cohabitation was seen as a way to be certain that the couples' relationship was strong enough for marriage. While the focus groups reflect today's discourses and cannot directly describe the opinions of several generations ago when cohabitation was first emerging in most countries, they still provide a way of understanding the role of divorce in the spread of cohabitation. It is also important to keep in mind that the focus group research revealed additional reasons why cohabitation may have increased, for example a greater focus on the individual, the need for freedom in relationships, and the prioritization of owning a home or paying for children over a wedding (see Special Collection in Demographic Research, forthcoming).

Second, the data on divorce legislation and the trends in divorce and cohabitation showed that in all countries observed, divorce reform preceded the increase in cohabitation. The analysis suggests that divorce law reform fundamentally altered the institution of marriage from a union in which couples were legally bound together "until death do us part" to a partnership with greater flexibility if all goes wrong. The introduction of divorce laws facilitated the shift from companionate marriage with a focus on the stability of the union but distinct gender roles, to individualized marriage, which allows each spouse to focus on him or herself, potentially at the expense of the marriage (Cherlin 2004). Divorce has made it acceptable for an individual to leave a marriage if it no longer meets an individual's need for self-development (Cherlin 2009). The ease at which individuals can now exit a relationship is key to the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Cherlin 2004) and the extent of the deinstitutionalization of marriage would not have been possible without divorce reform. Thus, because divorce law reform helped divorce to become more common, it changed the perception of the permanence of marriage, and possibly encouraged couples to choose cohabitation instead.

Third, our quantitative macro-analyses showed that the increase in divorce behavior occurred before or simultaneously with the increase in cohabitation in all countries. However, the magnitude of the increase differed across countries. In some countries, such as the UK, Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Hungary, divorce was widespread before cohabitation, suggesting that the high levels of divorce may have contributed to post-marital cohabitation or changing social norms. In France, on the other hand, divorce increased relatively slowly, while cohabitation expanded rapidly suggesting that other important factors led to the diffusion of cohabitation. In other countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Norway), divorce has increased, but it is difficult to know to what extent the increase in divorce preceded the

increase in cohabitation. (Earlier data is needed). Thus, in most of our countries, divorce seems like it is a necessary but not sufficient cause of cohabitation increase, and the explanations for the increase in cohabitation may be context specific.

Fourth, our meso-level analyses show that the intergenerational transmission of divorce to cohabitation appears to be a nearly universal phenomenon. This topic emerged repeatedly throughout the focus groups, with the children of divorced couples sometimes very blunt in their rejection of marriage. In all countries for which we have quantitative data, the respondents whose parents separated during their childhood were significantly more likely to choose cohabitation for their first union than those whose parents stayed together, with the exception of France, where the difference was not significant. Unfortunately, our data does not provide further detail about the parents' partnerships, including the experience of cohabitation or the formation of step-families. Also, our basic analyses did not include controls, such as age or education, which may help to explain this relationship or identify selection effects. It is also important to keep in mind the timing of divorce reform, which affects when the parents would have been able to divorce; in some countries, parents would not have been allowed to divorce and cohabitation is a very new reform. Nonetheless, our findings suggest that the intergenerational transmission of behavior seems to be an important pathway for the diffusion of cohabitation throughout society.

While the tendency to choose cohabitation after a bad marital experience was a widespread theme in our focus group research, our quantitative analyses did not show that those who experienced divorce were the forerunners of cohabitation in most countries. A group of countries with relatively high divorce rates – Russia, Hungary, and Estonia - shows a higher percent of divorced women among those cohabiting, but the percent is never greater than 36%, suggesting that even in these countries the increase in cohabitation increased primarily among the never married. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that second and higher-order unions are more likely to start with cohabitation than direct marriage and the propensity to cohabit is greater among the previously married than the never married (Galezewska et al 2014). Our analysis, which presents how the absolute number that has experienced cohabitation changes over time, does not take exposure to risk into account. Thus, while the overall increase in cohabitation may have been driven by the never married rather than the divorced, the role of cohabitation for those who did divorce could still have been very important: individual experiences of divorce may have influenced others' perspectives on marriage and revealed the advantage of cohabitation before marriage.

Taken together, this study provides important clues as to how the divorce revolution and the cohabitation boom are linked. Facilitated by changes in divorce legislation, the increase in divorce on the macro-level appears to have preceded the increase in cohabitation in all countries in Europe, although this is more evident in some countries than others. Pervasive attitudes and norms throughout Europe now reflect the perception that high divorce rates have eroded the institution of marriage and made cohabitation more appealing either as an alternative or as a testing ground. One of the key ways in which cohabitation diffused is through the intergenerational transmission of behavior: parental divorce seems to have encouraged cohabitation rather than direct marriage. However, for the most part, the increase in cohabitation seems to have occurred more among the never married than the divorced, suggesting that other factors, such as increasing women's autonomy, changing gender norms, ideational change, and economic uncertainty may have been just as essential for the increase in cohabitation. Nonetheless, the rise in divorce seems to have been a crucial piece of the puzzle for changes in partnership formation; further research is needed to see just how crucial this piece is.

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Table 1: Important divorce law reforms in 14 European countries

	Introduction of divorce	Introduction of non-fault divorce	Introduction of divorce by mutual consent	Dates of other divorce law reforms
Belgium	before 1950	before 1950	before 1950	1975, 1982, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2007
Bulgaria	before 1950	before 1950	until 1952 and since 1968	1985
Estonia	before 1950	before 1950	1969	1995
France	before 1950	1976	1976	2005
Hungary	before 1950	before 1950	until 1953 and since 1974	1987, 1995
Italy	1970	1975	1975	1978, 1987
Lithuania	before 1950	before 1950	1970	2001
Netherlands	before 1950	1971	1971	1993
Norway	before 1950	before 1950	before 1950	1993
Poland	before 1950	before 1950	before 1950	1975
Romania	before 1950	before 1950	1993	2010
Russia	before 1950	before 1950	1965	1996
Spain	1981	1981	1981	2005
United Kingdom				
England and Wales	before 1950	1971	1971	
Scotland	before 1950	1977	1977	

Source: Own analyses of legal documents and secondary literature. For a list of sources and more information on reforms, please contact the authors.

Figure 1. Total Divorce Rate, % Ever divorced women among ever married women (age 30-49), Currently cohabiting women among all couples (age 20-49), and Year of implementation of divorce reforms, in Group 1: Divorce initially high and steadily increasing - Cohabitation initially low, then increasing at faster pace than divorce

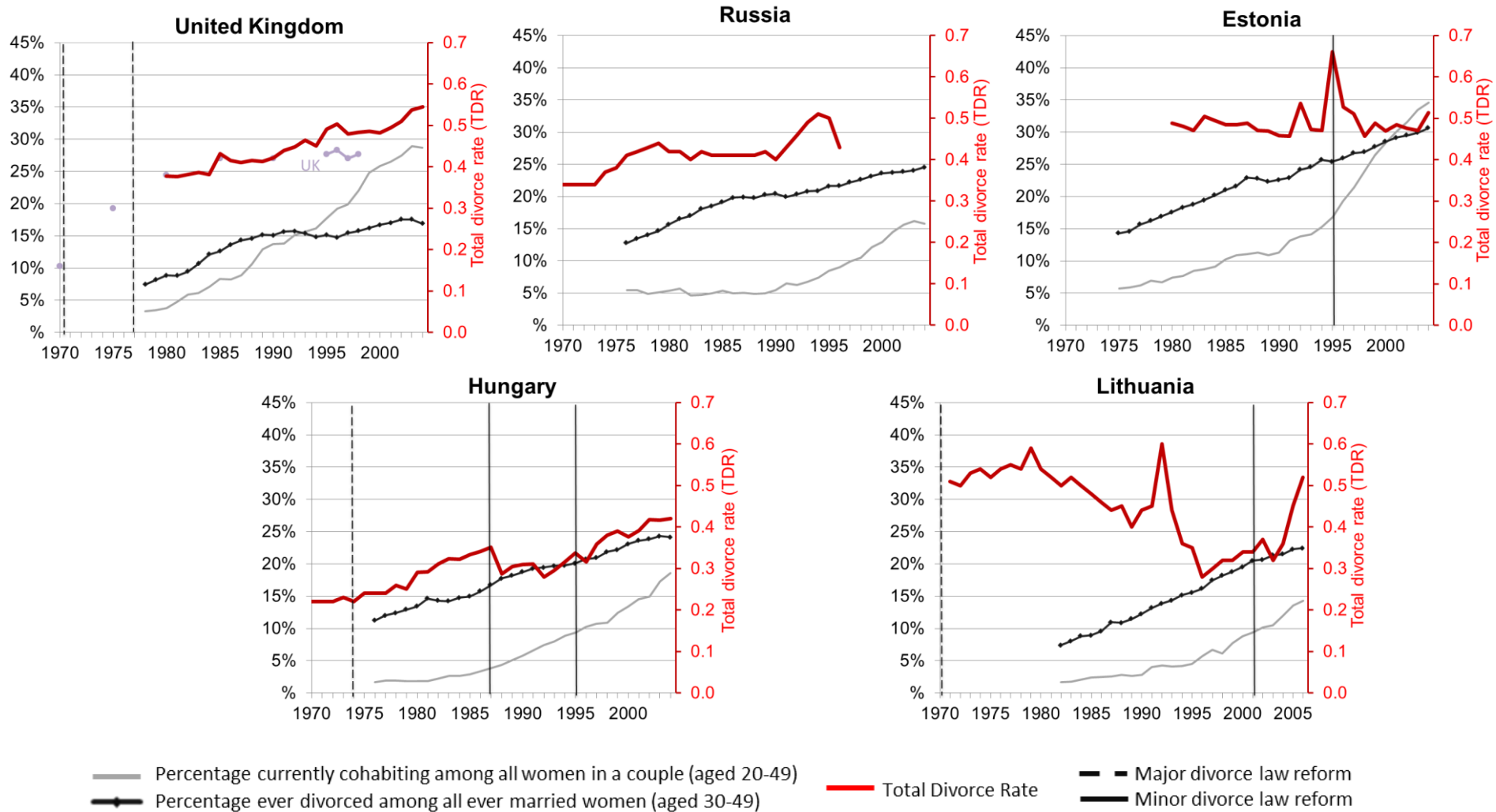


Figure 2. Total Divorce Rate, % Ever divorced women among ever married women (age 30-49), Currently cohabiting women among all couples (age 20-49), and Year of implementation of divorce reforms, in Group 2: Divorce initially low, then slowly increasing – Cohabitation initially low, increasing since 1990s/2000s

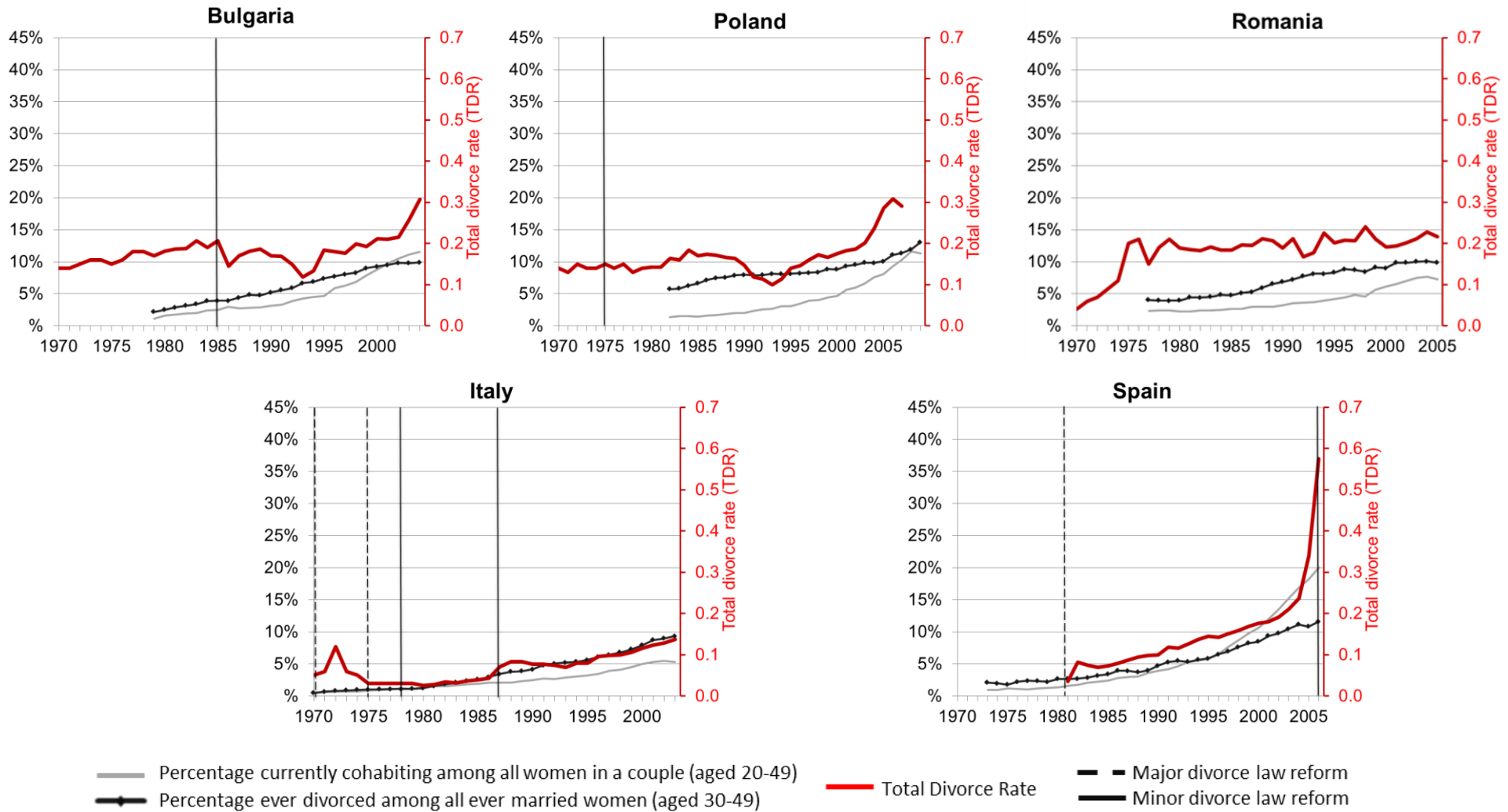


Figure 3. Total Divorce Rate, % Ever divorced women among ever married women (age 30-49), Currently cohabiting women among all couples (age 20-49), and Year of implementation of divorce reforms, in Group 3: Divorce and cohabitation initially as similar levels – Cohabitation then outpacing divorce

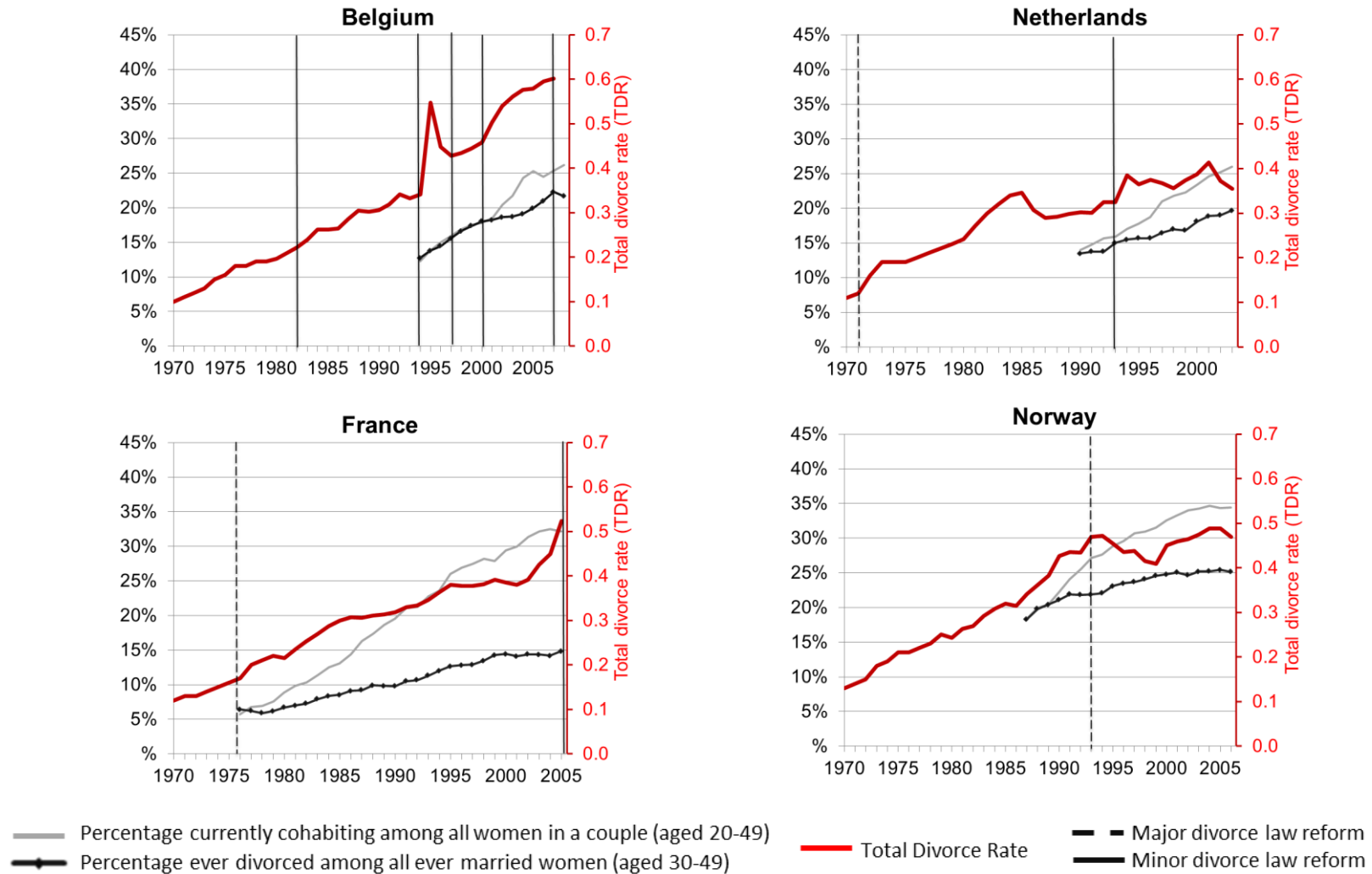
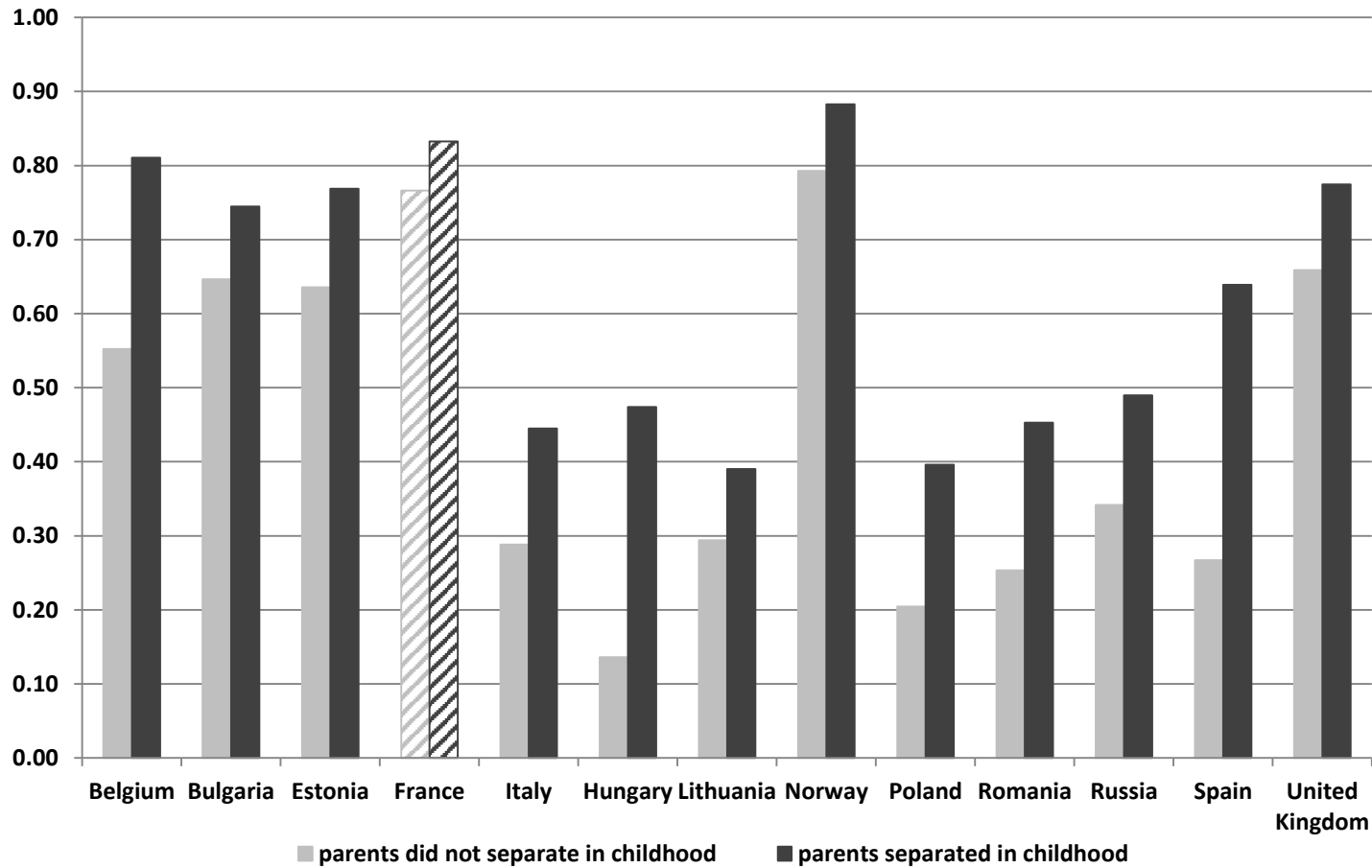
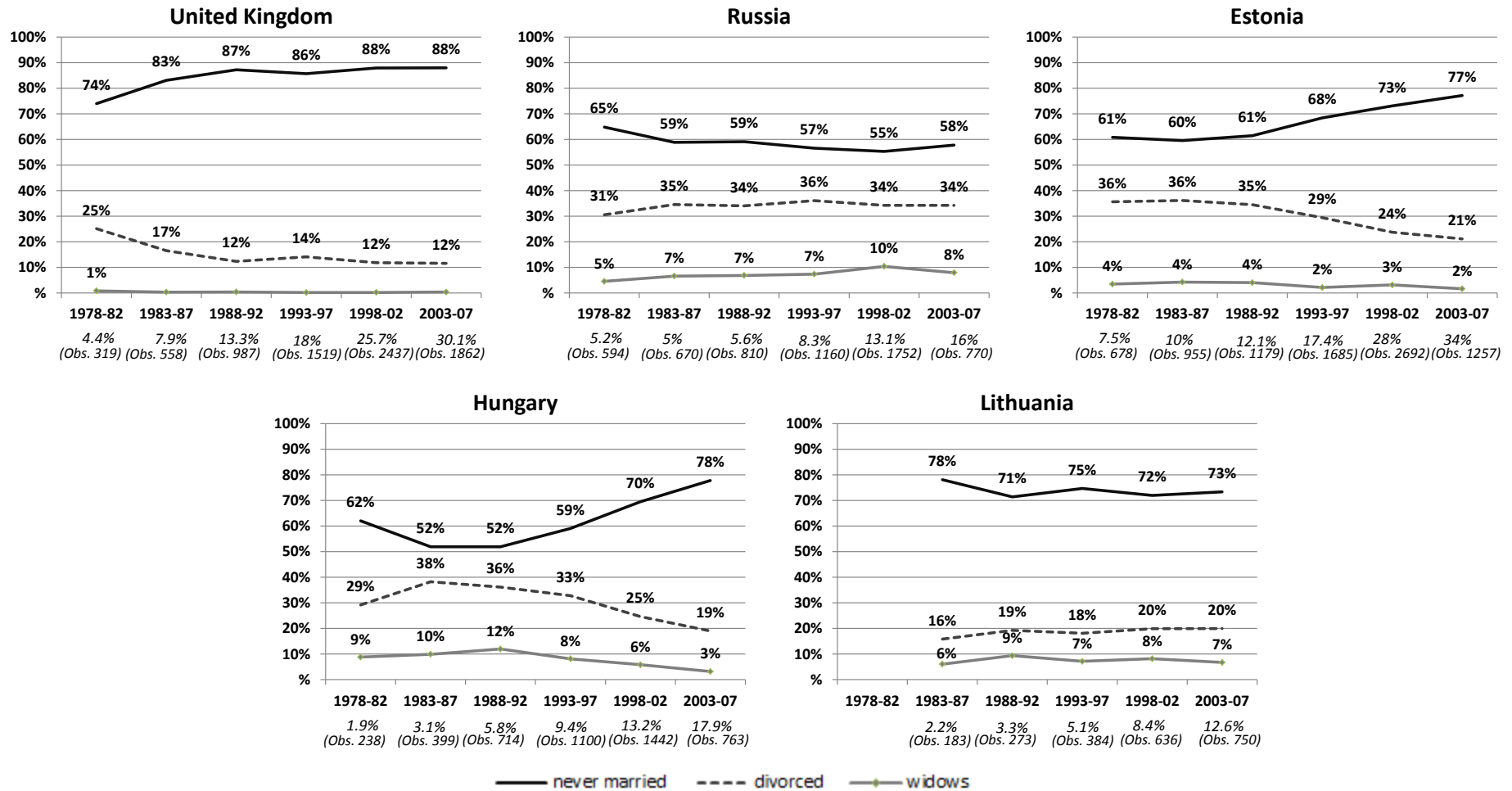


Figure 4. Proportion of ever partnered women aged 20-49, who started their first union with cohabitation, by parental union status at age 15 in 2005.



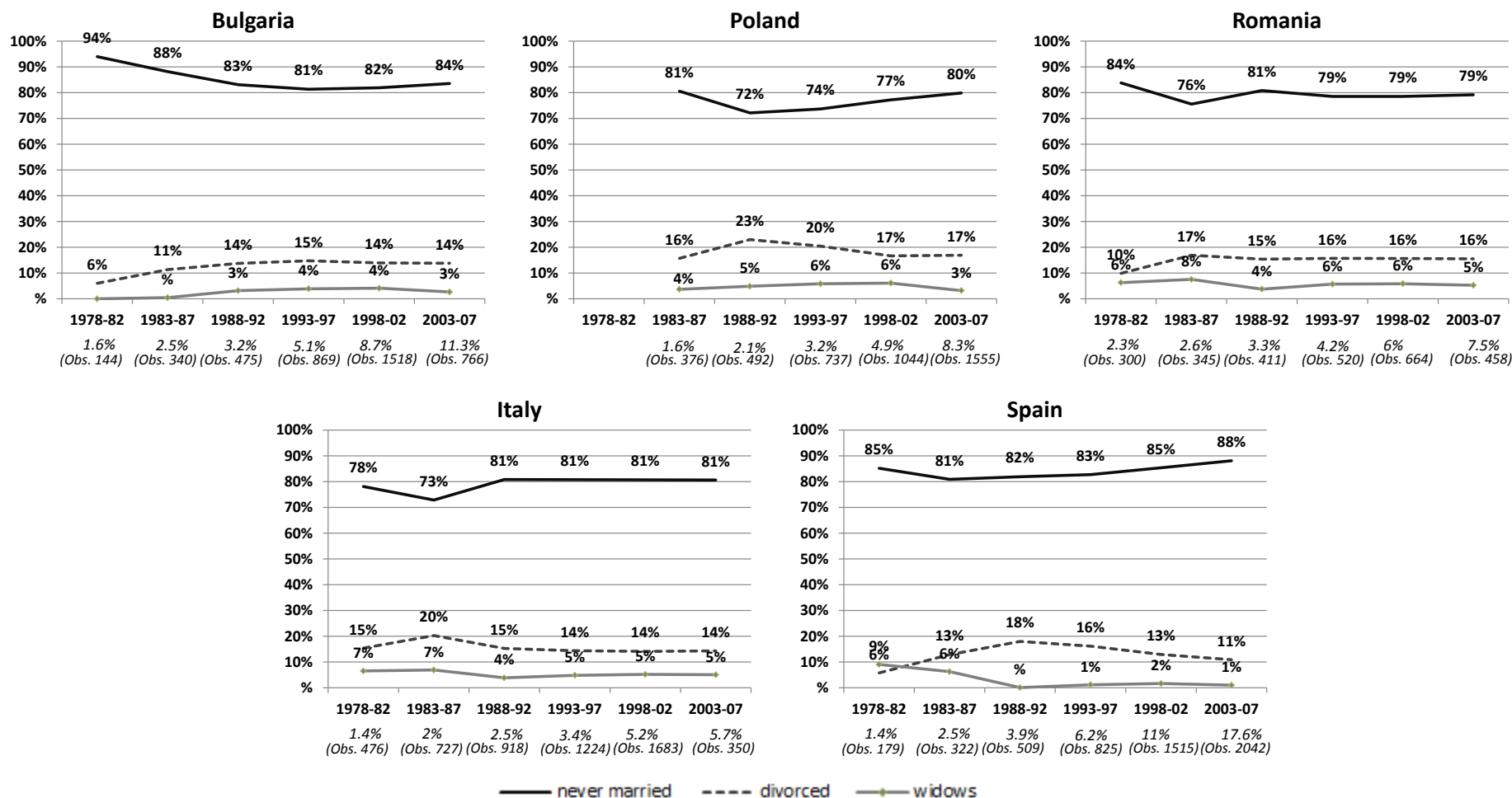
Notes: Solid bars indicate significant differences (non-overlapping confidence intervals) between parents' union status at age 15 for those whose first union type is cohabitation. Striped indicates no significant difference. Light transparent bars indicate a small (<50 obs.) number of women with divorced parents at age 15. Weights applied if available. Years may differ depending on survey.

Figure 5. Percentage of never married, divorced and widowed currently cohabiting women among all currently cohabiting women aged 20-49. The results are based on 5-year information from January of each year, in Group 1: Divorce initially high and steadily increasing - Cohabitation initially low, then increasing at faster pace than divorce



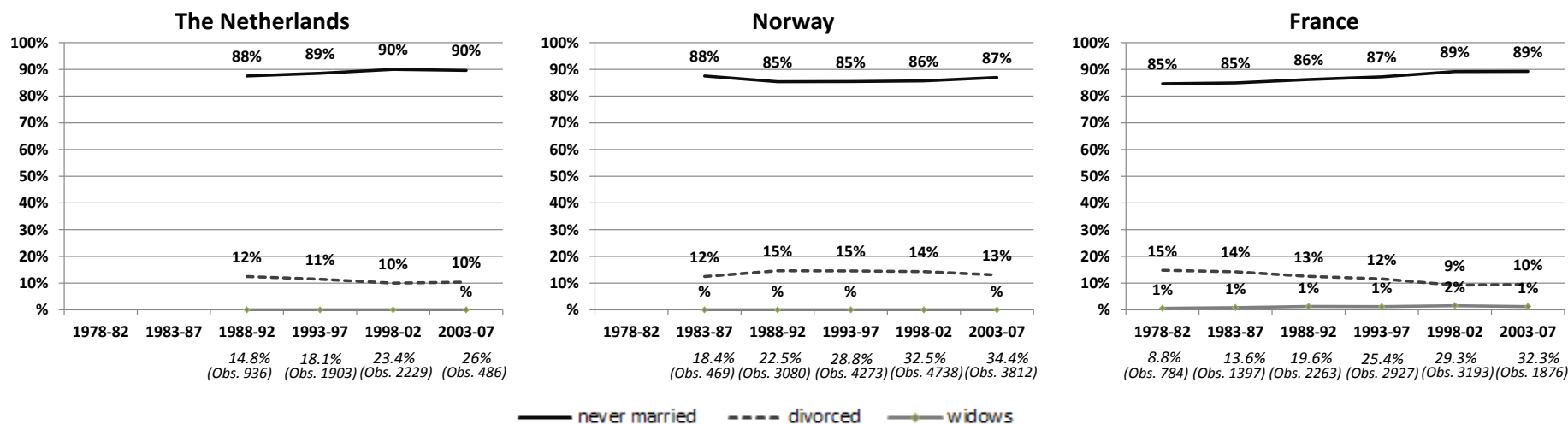
Note: Unweighted number of observations in parentheses; below the X-axis, weighted percentage of currently cohabiting women among women in a couple based on 5-years information.

Figure 6. Percentage of never married, divorced and widowed currently cohabiting women among all currently cohabiting women aged 20-49. The results are based on 5-year information from January of each year, in Group 2: Divorce initially low, then slowly increasing – Cohabitation initially low, increasing since 1990s/2000s



Note: Unweighted number of observations in parentheses; below the X-axis, weighted percentage of currently cohabiting women among women in a couple based on 5-years information.

Figure 7. Percentage of never married, divorced and widowed currently cohabiting women among all currently cohabiting women aged 20-49. The results are based on 5-year information from January of each year, in Group 3: Divorce and cohabitation initially as similar levels – Cohabitation then outpacing divorce



Note: Unweighted number of observations in parentheses; below the X-axis, weighted percentage of currently cohabiting women among women in a couple based on 5-years information.