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Living Arrangements and Social Inheritance among Second-Generation Immigrants in the United States

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Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE Children of immigrants share the same socioeconomic and institutional context as the majority of the population. They grow up and navigate similar educational systems, labor markets, and legal frameworks. At the same time, they are potentially exposed to a different cultural influence within their family, shaped by the values and norms inherited from their parents' country of origin. Following this perspective, research has established that the living arrangements of children of immigrants are often influenced by the dominant norms of mainstream society and that the role of long-term cultural factors acquired in the country of origin and passed down by immigrant parents to their children is not negligible. In other words, even though children of immigrants were born and raised in the country where their parents migrated, they may exhibit typical behaviors of their country of origin. Therefore, comparing the experiences of children of immigrants from different countries and contexts to individuals with native-born parents can provide insight into the influence of specific cultural factors transmitted from parents to their children.

This study examines whether the norms that guide young people in achieving autonomy or starting their own families are still rooted in the cultural values assimilated and preserved from the countries of origin, which may be linked to the strength of family ties. Does the historical trajectory of living arrangements differ among ethnic groups, and if so, how? Do second-generation immigrants in the United States follow the patterns of transition to adulthood prevailing in their parents' countries of origin?

The case of the United States is particularly relevant in this context. Between the late nineteenth century and the implementation of strict immigration laws based on quotas in the 1920s, over 30 million individuals migrated to the United States from various regions of Europe. These regions had different family formation models, parental home leaving timings, and co-

residence patterns. Initially, immigrants mainly came from northwestern European countries, but later there was a significant influx of southern and eastern Europeans. As the demographic transition began to impact these regions in the second half of the nineteenth century, the population growth rates in the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Greece, the Ottoman areas of the Middle East in the Mediterranean region, and regions of the Russian Empire and Poland in eastern Europe started to outpace the capacity of their existing cities to accommodate this population.¹

When considering the second-generation immigrants born in the United States between 1870 and 1970, Perlmann estimated that approximately one-third had southern, central, or eastern European backgrounds, and the rest had parents from northwestern Europe or Canada. Because immigration from southern, central, or eastern Europe was predominantly concentrated between 1900 and 1914, most second-generation immigrants in this group were born in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Existing studies examined the extent to which immigrants in the United States adhered to the norms of the western European-style family formation. In general, European-derived groups considerably resemble the native white population in terms of the typicalities of the family structures, recalling not only similar economic opportunities but also a typical western European background in a context of dynamic modernization.²

The literature has consistently emphasized geographical variations in European family formation. Within this framework, family ties may play a pivotal role in determining the timing of family formation and leaving the parental home. Reher suggests that the “strong” family is characterized by children staying with their family of origin for an extended period and providing care for their parents throughout their lives. In contrast, central and northern Europe have seen the prevalence of “weak” ties due to the influence of the Reformation. Consequently,

the parents' country of origin may significantly impact the timing of leaving the parental home, with a traditionally faster transition in continental European countries and a delayed transition in eastern and Mediterranean areas. These divergent patterns of transitioning to adulthood remind us of the persistence of specific anthropological structures and practices regarding family formation and residence customs in the countries of origin of the immigrants. Less is known about leaving household customs in eastern Europe in the past, even though more recent literature shows a significant variability about the transition-to-adulthood models and a relatively mixed situation between the other two blocks.³

By comparing the living arrangements of white American-born persons with American-born parents with second-generation immigrants through multivariate regression analysis, we aim to gain insights into the interplay between cultural inheritance and assimilation. All else being equal, the differential patterns observed among children of immigrants may be interpreted mainly in two ways: adaptation, which refers to the process by which immigrants and their descendants adjust their behaviors and practices to conform to the norms of the receiving country, and socialization, emphasizing the role of cultural values and norms transmitted within the family environment. The more the behavior of second generations differ from that of the native white Americans but align with that of the population of origin, the stronger the evidence supporting a socialization process (rather than adaptation) in which individuals uphold the values and norms of their ancestral culture.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND SOCIAL INHERITANCE: A RESEARCH QUESTION Interest in second-generation immigrant children—who navigate a sociocultural middle ground between the mainstream culture of their residence and that of their country of origin—has been explored by

research from many perspectives. The transmission and preservation of cultural norms and practices among immigrant families and friends from the same origin play a significant role in the process. In this sense, immigrants' country of origin is often seen as a proxy for their values and norms, which can continue to be maintained even after migration. Consequently, individuals from different geographical origins may exhibit different household behavior within the same destination country. On the other hand, there is also the issue of adaptation, whereby similarities in family and living arrangements can be observed between the second-generation of immigrants, natives, and various ethnic groups within the same destination area.⁴

The behaviors of children of immigrants can primarily be interpreted through two mechanisms: adaptation and socialization. The adaptation mechanism suggests that children of immigrants adjust their household behaviors to the norms and values dominant in the destination context because of the social, political, cultural, and labor market conditions. Adaptation occurs when similar patterns emerge among natives and various ethnic groups within the same destination area.⁵

Yet, the socialization mechanism suggests that cultural traits acquired by parents in their native country and transmitted to their children significantly influence future living arrangement behaviors. This process assumes that exposure to certain norms and values during childhood can have long-lasting effects on shaping individual behaviors, especially in the timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood and in partnership dynamics. From this perspective, migrants and their children may exhibit household behaviors more like those of their country of origin than those of natives in the destination country—especially when significant differences exist in between family patterns in the two countries. Furthermore, individuals from different geographical backgrounds may display different behaviors in the destination country,

and the portability of cultural and ideational factors outside the original geographical context may lead to overemphasizing ethnically connotated values among immigrant parents.⁶

However, differences between natives and second generations can be linked to other compositional factors. Economic fluctuations and the labor market positions strongly influence family formation decisions—a pattern also observed in other countries. The parents' socioeconomic status and the occupational position of young people affect their ability to establish independent households and can play a role in the timing of family formation. Consequently, socioeconomic and occupational status emerge as two relevant confounding factors in analyzing adaptation and socialization arguments.⁷

Considering the variation in behavior across immigrants' countries of origin, which we will discuss in the following sections, and focusing on European second-generation immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States, our research question is: After controlling for socioeconomic and occupational status, do the living arrangements of second generations resemble those of native-born individuals, supporting the adaptation mechanism, or do they more closely reflect the patterns observed in their country of origin, as suggested by the socialization paradigm?

EUROPEAN SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES There were significant differences between the first wave of immigration in the United States before the 1870s and the second wave in 1890–1920. Immigrants of the first period, predominantly from northwestern Europe, dispersed widely across the country, including the western United States, but the second wave, coming mainly from southern, central, and eastern Europe, settled predominantly in the eastern part of the United States. Southern and eastern European migrants alone made up 63

percent of the total arrivals during this period, with Poles, Italians, and Jews accounting for 42 percent. These “new immigrants,” often arriving with limited resources, few industrial skills and little English proficiency, lived in poor, culturally distinct neighborhoods. Indeed, they mainly took up low-skill work in industry, construction, and mining, entering the American economy and class structure near the bottom, far below the average family position of natives.

Low literacy levels also distinguished these groups from natives and late nineteenth-century European immigrants; fewer than half reported being able to read, and most Italians were unable to speak English. Furthermore, the race divisions worked against the immigrants of the second wave more than previously. Although the new immigration was “uniformly white,” thinking along racial lines remained the norm, especially against the Irish and then the Italians. Over time, racial perceptions changed as some groups, the Irish, Poles, and Italians, improved their socioeconomic positions.⁸

This historical context was profoundly shaped by immigration legislation, which was typically designed to adapt to economic demand—becoming restrictive during downturns and relaxed during labor shortages—but also responded to social pressure and public perception. Immigration policies regulated both migratory flows and the characteristics of migrants, thereby shaping the composition of the American population in terms of origin and skills. For instance, during the period of mass migration (1850–1913), permissive policies facilitated occupational mobility among immigrants, enabling many of them to achieve outcomes comparable to natives, as noted by Abramitzky and colleagues. Conversely, the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s led to a significant decline in new arrivals from more restricted countries (e.g. those in southern and eastern Europe) weakening the size and formation of ethnic enclaves. This process,

on the one hand, contributed to a relative decline in segregation but, on the other hand, resulted in weaker community support systems for immigrants within these groups.⁹

Additionally, naturalization policies by linking women's citizenship status to their marital status created structural barriers and incentives that influenced both family formation and legal and social integration. For instance, in 1855, women lost the right to control their citizenship when a legislative act stipulated that they could only become citizens through their husband's naturalization or, if married to an American citizen, automatically upon marriage.

The Expatriation Act of 1907 expanded this principle to American women, requiring women to renounce their citizenship if they married foreign nationals thereby generating significantly negative pressure on intermarriage between American women and foreign-born men, particularly noncitizens. Most women regained control over their nationality with the Cable Act of 1922, and, by 1931, women's citizenship became fully independent of their marital status or their spouse's citizenship.¹⁰

Even though socioeconomic assimilation was accomplished for all European origin groups, immigrants who started at the bottom of the ladder took longer to catch up to the descendants of native-born, often requiring two or more generations. In general, the process by which immigrants and their descendants converged with native white Americans in terms of income, occupational status, and employment opportunities varied significantly across immigrant groups and over time. This process was slower for southern and eastern Europeans than it was for immigrants from northern and western Europe.¹¹

These different patterns were also linked to specific difficulties in the labor market. Ethnic occupational clustering was common, with certain industries dominated by specific immigrant groups. For instance, studies document how surname-based ethnicity served as a proxy for

occupational segregation, underscoring the barriers that immigrants faced due to ethnic discrimination and limited networks. Additionally, immigrant outcomes were strongly influenced by location, with urban wages higher than those in rural areas. Such differences tended to persist across generations. Yet, though immigrants often filled low-wage jobs, their contributions spurred economic growth and industrial production, enriching the broader economic fabric of the United States.¹²

During the twentieth century, American society changed as immigrants became active participants as workers, political actors, and creators of cultures. The children of immigrants played a remarkable role in this change, caught between the cultural world in which they grew up, dominated by American norms and values, and the one transmitted by their parents, which was at least partly oriented toward the culture of a country that they often had never known themselves.¹³

Second-generation European immigrants found pathways to upward mobility, partly by acquiring the additional increments of schooling demanded by the industrial economy during the twentieth century. However, they continued to carry certain cultural traits capable of influencing their behaviors, including those related to family formation. This tendency is evidenced by the significant differences in marriage choices among second-generation immigrants according to their country of origin. For instance, compared to other groups with a more extended history of immigration to the United States, such as the Irish and the Swedes, immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were the least inclined to intermarry, even after controlling for generation and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Italians and Poles typically lived in ethnically homogeneous communities in urban areas with a strong emphasis on family cohesion and groups of solidarity. An additional factor of variability among ethnic groups also emerged in the size and composition

of households. Italians and Poles generally had large families and an average of nearly one non-family member in the nucleus, but other groups, such as the British, Scandinavians, and Germans did not.¹⁴

These dissimilarities can also be attributed to differences in fertility, which was significantly higher for immigrants from Italy and Poland. At the same time, fertility levels for German, Scandinavian, and British immigrants were closer to natives, with the Irish at an even lower level. Among second generations, which show fertility levels intermediate between those of natives and the first generation, differences attenuated. In general, as underlined by cohort studies, the influence of a new social environment and the knowledge of the new language favored the rapid spread of innovative reproduction practices in all ethnic groups.¹⁵

LEAVING THE PARENTAL HOME AND FAMILY FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY Among young Americans in the nineteenth century, the timing of departure from the parental home varied depending on gender and region of residence. Steckel's analysis of families surveyed in the 1850 and 1860 censuses shows that males tended to leave home later than females, with mean ages of 26.6 years and 22.0 years, respectively. Similarly, individuals residing in northeastern states exhibited exit ages that were mostly one year higher than those in the southern states and the so-called "border states."¹⁶

In the twentieth century, there was a decrease in the age at which young individuals left their parental homes, leading to more uniform patterns. This trend is evident in the progressive narrowing of the age range for independent living. However, Gutmann and colleagues demonstrated that this decline in age at exit only started after 1940 for men and 1950 for women, whereas, from 1880 to World War II, the age at which young people left home actually

increased. Nevertheless, despite the significant reduction in differences during the 1950s, ethnic groups failed to converge. Native white Americans tended to leave home at an older age than foreigners and Black Americans. Additionally, young people living on farms managed to leave their families of origin at a later stage in life. After World War II, life course transitions shifted toward greater conformity in sequences, a change that can also be attributed to the decline of agricultural farmers and the progressive assimilation of European immigrants and their descendants into the American way of life.¹⁷

According to the existing literature, primary factors that influence the timing of leaving the parental home included economic conditions and labor market opportunities. In the twentieth century, economic downturns, such as the Great Depression, significantly delayed young adults' departure from the parental home, revealing the connection between economic capability and early nest-leaving. In this perspective, the broader economic transformations affecting family dynamics, including urbanization and industrialization, also impacted young adults' living arrangements. Considering New England in the nineteenth century, Galenson showed that economic opportunities and labor market conditions influenced the decision to leave the parental home. Specifically, a child's decision to leave home depended on a calculation about the potential impact on either family wealth or the opportunity cost of the child's retention at home. Young individuals were inclined to leave earlier if their families could not support them financially or if there were better opportunities outside the family unit. For instance, young farmers might have remained in their households while waiting to inherit the farm. In other cases, the presence or absence of opportunities to contribute to the family budget influenced the decision to stay or leave.¹⁸

In addition to economic factors and labor market position, at least three sociodemographical factors influenced the timing of leaving the parental home. The first is the age at marriage, as most young individuals, particularly until the 1960s, left home primarily due to marriage, and gender differences explain the earlier departure for women. Education is the second influential element. Since the 1940s, increased access to a college education has led to a decrease in the average age at which young individuals, who are not financially independent, leave their families. The rise in college attendance can be attributed to a significant increase in high school graduates during the first half of the twentieth century and to changes in laws that facilitate access to higher education. Third, the evolution of survival (specifically the living status of parents) also influenced the age at which young individuals left home. Indeed, the increase in the age at departure during the early twentieth century may partly be attributed to improved parental survival.¹⁹

EUROPEAN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: GEOGRAPHICAL HETEROGENEITY The literature that points out the various territorial patterns for the transition to adulthood in western and eastern Europe is substantial. Hajnal's seminal work, rooted in Le Play's, underlined a specific geographical distribution of the marriage patterns differentiating the western area—in which families were mainly neolocal and nuclear, with a late mean age at marriage and a significant proportion who never married—from the eastern area—which was characterized by an earlier and universal marriage, patrilocality, and co-residence with relatives as a permanent solution. Moreover, households often have vertically and horizontally extended structures.²⁰

Subsequent analyses confirmed a strong link between timing in family formation and geographical area. Research has shown that in the central and northwestern regions of Europe, a

significant percentage of young males and females left their parents' households long before marriage, usually spending a prolonged period of their lives working as urban or rural servants (life-cycle servants) to gather sufficient resources to build a family of their own. For the preindustrial northwest, Mitterauer and Sieder found that 75 percent of boys and 50 percent of girls left their families to live and work in other families as domestic servants or apprentices.²¹

This trend is not typical of southern Europe, where the proportion of young people involved in life-cycle service was smaller and consisted mainly of males who usually reentered the family of origin at the end of a temporary work experience. A prolonged stay of children in their family of origin and their caring work toward parents when aging are the two characteristics of the "strong" family, supported by moral obligations and aimed at the inter-generational transmission of deep-rooted traits.²²

Cavalli and Galland distinguished three broad geographical patterns in the transition to adulthood in contemporary Europe, partially rooted in historical trends: (1) a Mediterranean pattern, characterized by a prolonged stay with parents and synchronization between exit and marriage; (2) a French and northern European model, where a period living by one's self usually preceded the establishment of one's own family; (3) a British pattern, with an early transition to work but slower and more protracted family formation.²³

The age at exit from the parental home declined in Europe between the 1920s and 1970s. The trend then reversed in many regions. Despite fragmentary evidence, we attempt to provide further insight into different European contexts by examining the pathways to adulthood in the European countries where the main migration flows to the United States originated.²⁴

Evidence in the literature confirms that, during industrialization in northwestern Europe, young people tended to leave the parental roof by 15–20 years of age in various situations.

Demographical, economic, and cultural factors influenced autonomy and, therefore, family formation and co-residence patterns. Sweden was characterized by late marriage and neolocal residence, high levels of celibacy and life-cycle service systems. Table 1 shows that 24 percent of men born in Sweden in 1920 still lived with their parents at 18 years of age, whereas women show a clear delayed exit, likely due to the higher occurrence of life-cycle services among men. Among those born in the second half of the twentieth century, the age at exit decreased substantially, particularly among women, indicating a marked change in the way people acquired housing autonomy.²⁵

In Sweden, the exit from the family of origin can historically be seen as one of the family strategies to cope with short-term economic and demographical stresses. In his study of family exit in rural Scania in the nineteenth century, Dribe finds that about 50 percent of the children of smallholders and laborers left their families between the ages of 16 and 19. Looking, however, at cohorts born during the first decade of the twentieth century, a portion ranging from 13 percent to 15 percent were already out of the household at age 16 to achieve economic independence or to help the family.

Table 1 Percentage of Home Leavers at Eighteen Years of Age by Cohort and Gender
(Sweden, Birth Cohorts: 1829–1964)

COHORT	MEN	WOMEN
1829–1866	16.9	17.4
1900	21.0	32.0
1910	22.0	27.0
1920	24.0	31.0
1949	20.4	19.3
1959	20.4	18.6
1964	20.2	18.9

SOURCE Martin Dribe, *Leaving Home in a Peasant Society: Economic Fluctuations, Household Dynamics and Youth Migration in Southern Sweden, 1829–1866*, (Sodertalje, 2000), 237; *idem* e and Maria Stanfors, “Leaving home in post-war Sweden. A micro-level analysis of leaving the parental home in three birth cohorts,” *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, LIII(2005), 30-49.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain was characterized by relatively early exits from the parental home, especially for males, whose first exit occurred on average between the ages of 14 and 16, with significant variability by geographical area. Table 2 highlights the early exit from the parental home in England and Wales in 1881, due mainly to work-related reasons, particularly where farm services predominated. Indeed, in the rural north and west, the absence of nonservice occupations drove children of poorer families to leave the parental home from the age of 16, the earliest age at which it was culturally permissible for children to leave.²⁶

Table 2 The Age Range in Which 50 Percent of Young People Left Their Parental Home (England and Wales, 1881)

AREA	MEN		WOMEN	
	INTERVAL AGE	LENGTH	INTERVAL AGE	LENGTH
North and west (family farms)	14.0–25.0	11.0	14.0–24.0	10.0
Southeast	16.5–25.5	9.0		
High (industrial areas and cities)	19.0–27.0	8.0	16.0–25.0	10.0

SOURCE Joseph Day, “Leaving Home in 19th Century England and Wales: A Spatial Analysis,” *Demographic Research*, XXXIX (2018), 95–135.

The Irish patterns show some similarities with the British. Ireland was known for three widespread demographical behaviors among young people: a solid propensity to migrate, low proneness to marriage, and a tendency to form large families once married. Guinnane estimates an average age at exit between 13.4 and 26.1 years for males and 11.1 and 24.3 for girls depending on their household economic activity (agricultural or other), social group, and region. Servants were mostly unmarried, and permanent celibacy was widespread. The time gap between leaving the family and marriage remained wide, with the average age at first marriage of around 30 years for men and 26 for women.²⁷

Social history indicates that many areas of Germany and Austria experienced low levels of nuptiality during the nineteenth century. In Germany, the census of 1880 reveals that more than 16 percent of men and women aged 45–49 in the southern regions had never married. Several insights suggest that family formation and prevailing residence patterns fell into an intermediate category, characterized by high ages at marriage, a substantial proportion of stem families—usually consisting of no more than two generations—and the widespread presence of household servants.²⁸

As a Mediterranean model country, Italy typically showed a delayed transition to adulthood and family formation but with high internal complexity and heterogeneity. Table 3 shows that during the third decade of the twentieth century, the percentage of men still living with their parents ranged from 27.0 percent and 29.4 percent, depending on the subnational area. These values are notably higher than those observed in Sweden (see Table 1). However, the opposite trend is evident among women, with Swedish women experiencing a delayed exit from the parental home compared to Italian women. This difference is primarily due to the higher

simultaneity between leaving home and marriage in Italy, where women typically married at a younger age than men. In general, unlike northern Europe, where neolocal residence at marriage prevailed, the age at marriage in Italy was relatively low. However, it tended to be higher for both males and females in central and northern regions, where the extended patriarchal family structure dominated.²⁹

Table 3 Percentages of Home Leavers at Eighteen Years of Age by Cohort, Gender, and Geographical Area (Italy, Birth Cohorts: 1919–1933)

COHORTS	MEN	WOMEN
NORTHWEST		
1919–1923	28.8	25.1
1924–1928	27.6	24.4
1929–1933	27.6	24.6
NORTHEAST		
1919–1923	29.3	24.3
1924–1928	29.4	24.4
1929–1933	28.7	24.2
SOUTH AND ISLANDS		
1919–1923	27.5	24.8
1924–1928	26.6	23.6
1929–1933	27.0	23.8

SOURCE Marzio Barbagli, Maria Castiglioni, and Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, *Fare famiglia in Italia: Un secolo di cambiamenti* (Bologna, 2003), 36–38.

Greater uncertainty surrounds the transition to adulthood in eastern Europe. However, recent literature suggests that this large region can be viewed as an area of “cultural transition” regarding the patterns of marriage, residence, and leaving the parental home, linking the West to

the more distant East. The Baltic countries and parts of Poland align more closely with western and central European family and co-residence patterns. Other countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Serbia, and, more generally, the whole Balkan area show proximities with the eastern patterns. In western areas, men tended to marry later, and a substantial proportion of women did not marry before the age of 24. Going into service was more common in western regions, where life-cycle service constituted an economic opportunity for many young Poles, with servants making up over 13 percent of the population.³⁰

DATA AND METHODS This research examines and analyzes data from the IPUMS full count censuses spanning 1910, 1920, and 1930. These comprehensive datasets provide valuable information for investigating the living arrangements and social inheritance of second-generation immigrants in the United States during the early twentieth century.³¹

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, our analysis focuses exclusively on individuals aged 16 to 29 at the time of the census interview. We aim to compare the native white American population—specifically individuals with both parents born in the United States (*U.S. white*)—with second-generation immigrants (individuals born in the United States with both parents born in their country of origin). Consequently, we excluded from the analysis individuals who immigrated to the United States after birth, individuals born in the United States with parents of mixed origin (one born in the United States and one born abroad), and non-white native ethnic groups.

The children of immigrants in our study originated from the six most prominent European sending countries from 1910 to 1930: Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the United

Kingdom. Immigrant families from these countries were unevenly distributed across the United States, particularly in New England, the Middle Atlantic, East North Central states, and West North Central states).

Table 4 presents the resulting sizes for each group. The largest second-generation group originated in Germany (2.38 million cases), followed by Ireland (1.14 million) and Italy (1.12 million). As underlined above, migrant flows from central and northern Europe decreased during the first three decades of the twentieth century and were progressively substituted by immigrants from the southern and eastern parts of Europe. The distribution of cases across the different censuses therefore reflects migration dynamics. Consequently, children of German, Irish, British, and, to a lesser extent, Swedish immigrants reduced in number between the 1910 to 1930 censuses. The opposite occurred for second-generation Italians and Poles.

Table 4 Individuals Aged 16–29 by Origin, Gender, and Year of Observation (in Thousands)

ORIGIN	GENDER		YEAR OF OBSERVATION			TOTAL
	MEN	WOMEN	1910	1920	1930	
U.S. white	21,197	21,840	12,294	13,866	16,878	43,037
Germany	1,162	1,214	1,161	766	448	2,376
Ireland	546	599	477	384	283	1,144
Italy	560	563	87	261	776	1,123
Poland	394	398	7	232	552	791
Sweden	306	313	195	238	185	619
U.K.	293	303	251	204	141	596
Total	24,457	25,230	14,472	15,952	19,263	49,687

SOURCE IPUMS full count censuses (1910, 1920, 1930); Ruggles et al., IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data (Version 4.0), IPUMS, 2024, available at <http://www.doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0R> (accessed March 17, 2025).

The outcome of interest is the living arrangement at the time of the census interview, including the following mutually exclusive categories: living with parents and not married, living with parents and married, left parental home and not married, left parental home and married.

We employed fixed-effect multinomial logistic regression analysis on a pooled dataset of all three censuses to assess and compare how each type of living arrangement was affected by the different origins of their parents. The models, estimated separately for males and females, accounted for occupational and socioeconomic status. We included in the models the employment status and the IPUMS-constructed Duncan socioeconomic index (SEI). The latter is a measure of occupational status based on the income level and educational attainment associated with each occupation. The variable, included in the models both as a linear and as a quadratic term to capture potential nonlinear effects, is based on the 1950 occupation classification, although it has been shown to be reasonably robust to change over time.³²

The models also control for the age (both as a linear and quadratic term) and school attendance at the interview. Additionally, a set of contextual factors was considered. The census year (1910, 1920, 1930) captures any temporal variations in the data. The urban/rural classification indicates the household's location and includes the following categories (based on IPUMS classification): rural, rural in metropolitan areas, urban not in metropolitan areas, urban in metropolitan areas, and central city. Finally, a fixed effect at the state level was incorporated into the model to address unobserved geographical heterogeneity, capturing unique characteristics specific to each state in the analysis.

Several robustness checks have been performed to ensure the accuracy of our findings, and in all cases, the results have been confirmed regardless of the specification of the regression

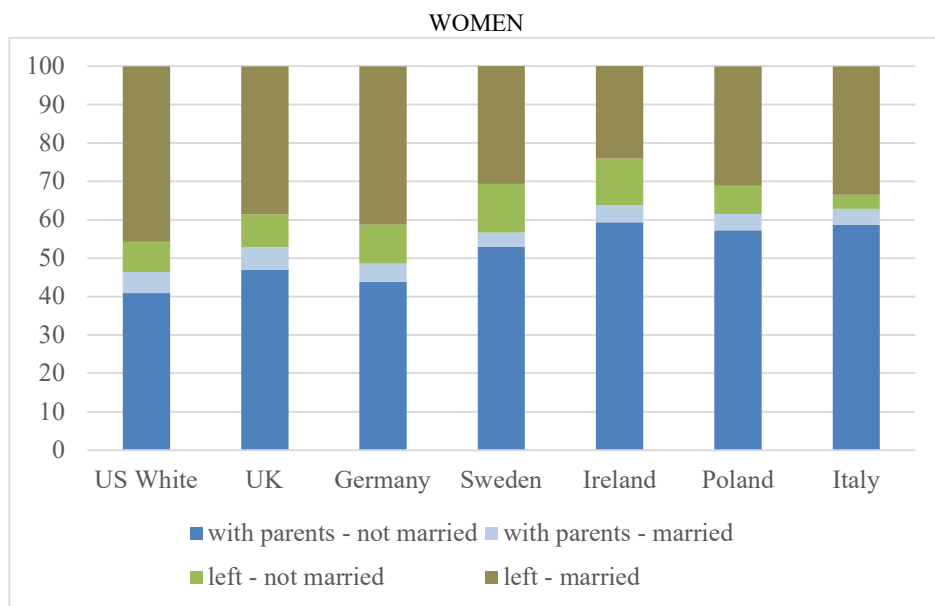
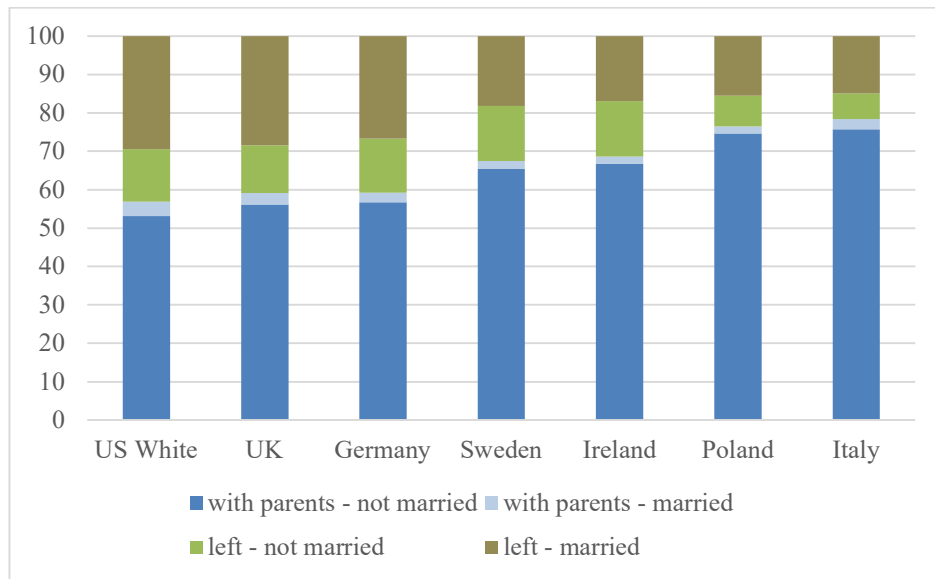
model. First, we replicated the analysis using different measures for the socioeconomic status, such as the occupational income score, and the Siegel occupational prestige³³. Second, we limited our observation to states with an adequate presence of immigrant children. Specifically, we dropped from the analysis those states for which the counting of second generations was less than the first quartile of the distribution. Finally, we tested whether the clustering of immigrant communities contributes to variations in living arrangements and family formation among second generations. To do so, we included in the models the proportion of immigrants by county according to each specific origin as a proxy of ethnic neighborhood residence (the results are available in in Figs. A1–A4 in the Appendix). We estimated the model only for second-generation individuals, as this measure specifically pertains to ethnic minorities. Including white American individuals would result in a strong collinearity bias in the model estimation.

FINDINGS

Descriptives Figure 1 shows the distribution of living arrangements for men and women aged 16–29. Overall, the second generation stayed longer with their parents than American natives. However, differences based on country of origin are evident. Italian and Polish descendants, regardless of gender, tended to delay leaving home, although women generally left earlier. The second-generation immigrants from the United Kingdom and Germany exhibited behavior like that experienced by white Americans, and descendants from Sweden and Ireland show intermediate patterns.

Fig. 1 Living Arrangements by Country of Origin and Gender, Individuals Aged 16–29

MEN



SOURCE See Table 4.

White Americans and second-generation immigrants from the United Kingdom and Germany have the highest proportion of men as part of a couple after leaving the parental home (29 percent, 28 percent, and 27 percent, respectively). In comparison, those from Sweden and Ireland follow with 18 percent and 17 percent. The lowest values pertain to the second

generations from Italy and Poland (15 percent). For married women, percentages are generally higher, reflecting earlier family formation. White Americans (46 percent), the children of immigrants from the United Kingdom (39 percent) and Germany (41 percent) show higher proportions of women as part of a couple outside the parents' home.

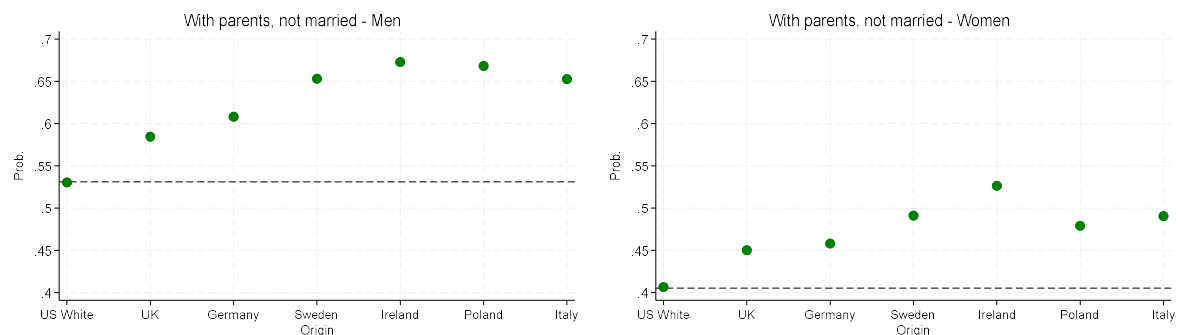
Conversely, women originating from Italy and Poland exhibit percentages (33 percent and 31 percent) that align with, or are higher than, those from Sweden and Ireland (31 percent and 24 percent). Therefore, Italian and, to some extent, Polish immigrant daughters tended to delay their departure from the parental home, like men of the same origin. However, once they left, they entered marriage much more rapidly than the other groups. Indeed, this result should be read in conjunction with the very low propensity of children of Italians and Poles choosing to live alone. The second generations from Sweden and Ireland experienced this living arrangement more often. Interpreting the proportions related to those living alone (left, not married) can only be complementary. The percentage of people living alone is particularly low in Italy (7 percent for men and 4 percent for women) and Poland (8 percent for men and 7 percent for women). In contrast, it is higher in other countries, especially among men.

Multinomial Logistic Models Focusing on individuals aged 16–29, Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of living with parents and not being married categorized by origin and gender and derived from the multinomial logit regression model. After accounting for the various confounding effects, the results widely confirm the heterogeneity by country that emerged in the descriptive analysis. On the one hand, second generations stayed longer with their parents compared to white Americans. On the other hand, the likelihood of living with parents and not being married tend to be closer to that of white Americans among children of immigrants from the United Kingdom and Germany (respectively 0.59 and 0.61 compared to 0.53 for white

Americans). In contrast, this probability was higher for those from Sweden, Ireland, Italy, and Poland, with values ranging from 0.65 to 0.67 (see Fig. 2, left panel).

The magnitude of the probabilities for living with parents without getting married is generally lower among women indicating an early exit from the parental home (see Fig. 2, right panel). However, the gradient observed for men is largely reflected in the patterns for women as well. Specifically, second-generation women from the United Kingdom and Germany have similar probabilities (just over 0.45), while those from Sweden, Poland, and Italy are just below 0.5. At the same time, American native white women and Irish women registered the lowest and highest values, respectively.

Fig. 2 Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Living with Parents and Not Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)

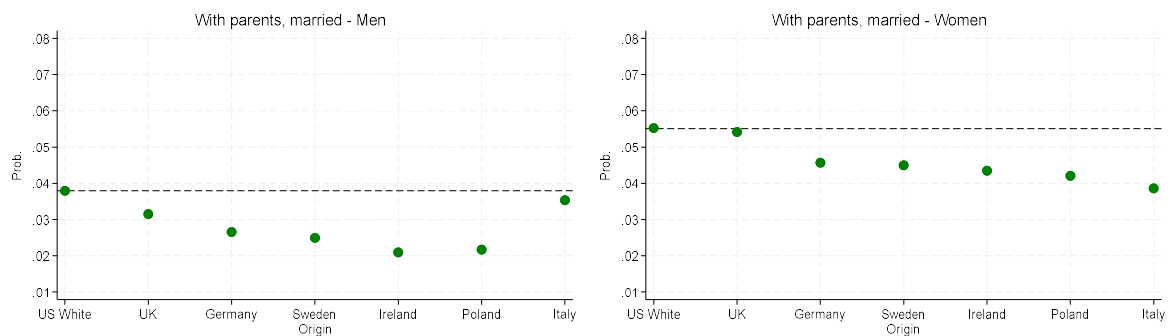


SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term).

In Figure 3, the probabilities pertain to living with parents and being married, as predicted by the multinomial logit model, which controls for several individual and contextual factors. In the left panel, all national second-generation groups of males are below the probability for American whites, although the differences are relatively small for the British and Italian categories. In the right panel, a similar gradient is shown for females but with consistently higher predicted probabilities. In contrast to what is observed for men, and despite the limited variation range (0.038–0.055), it is noteworthy that Italian females register the lowest probability of living with their parents after being married.

Fig. 3 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Living with Parents and Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)

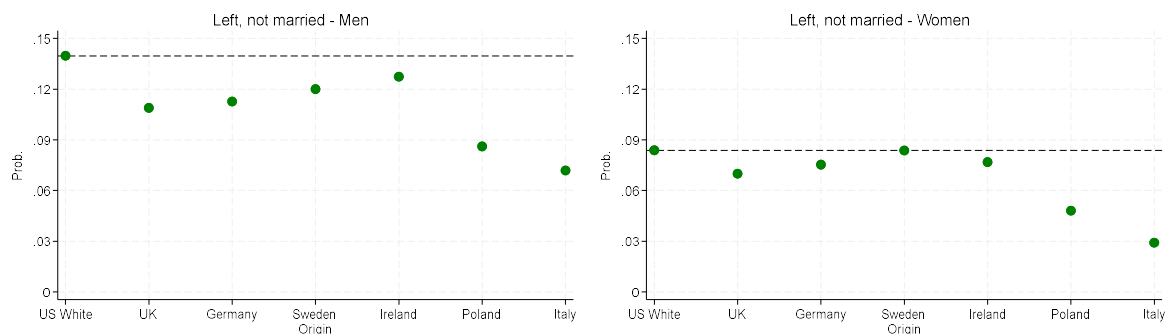


SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term).

In Figure 4, the predicted probabilities of males who have left the parental home without marriage show higher values for white Americans (0.14) and individuals with Swedish and Irish origins (around 0.12). At the same time, those from Poland and Italy have lower probabilities (0.08 and 0.07, respectively). These results, which are also confirmed among women, provide evidence of a lower propensity for children of immigrants from southern and eastern European countries to leave home for reasons other than marriage. This outcome is consistent with the life cycle characteristics of individuals in Poland and Italy, where leaving the parental home for service or other professions was much less common compared to other countries.

Fig. 4 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Having Left Parental Home and Not Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)

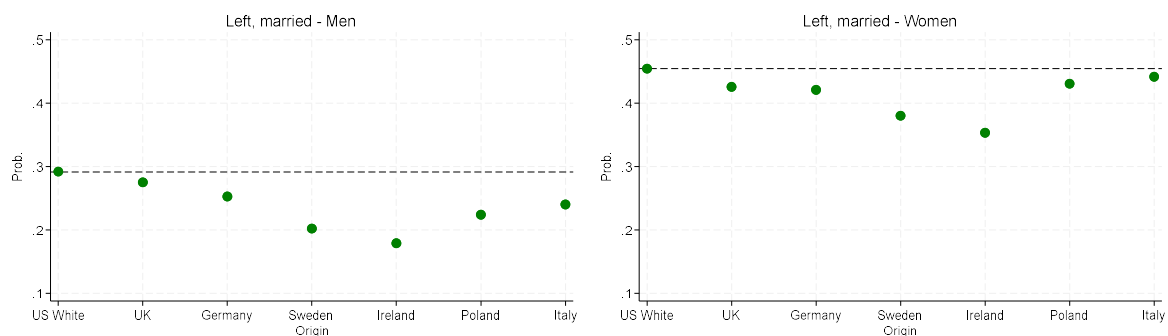


SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term).

Finally, Figure 5 considers individuals aged 16–29 who have left their parental homes and were married at the time of the census. Males and females follow a similar pattern with predicted probabilities that tend to be lower among young people from Sweden and Ireland—second generations from these countries have a higher propensity to leave the family of origin without being married. Children of immigrants from the United Kingdom and Germany show probabilities closer to white Americans. The only gender difference is that while women of Italian and Polish origin are aligned with American natives, men from these groups have a significantly lower likelihood of having left the parental home and to be living with a spouse. This outcome is related to the gender differences in the timing of leaving the parental home among second generations from Italy and Polish, as shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 5 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Having Left the Parental Home and Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)



SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, labor force status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term).

DISCUSSION Though the findings presented in this article are solely descriptive, the comparison between children of immigrants and the native population offers valuable insights into the role of contextual and cultural factors. Despite being raised in the same institutional context, the second generations represent an intriguing social group. They carried norms and values capable of shaping individual behaviors and influencing the timing and modalities of family formation. The availability of census data from the past, provided by the IPUMS project, presents an opportunity to explore these aspects in greater depth, particularly from a historical perspective.

Considering the main findings in this article, a clear trend emerges regarding the transition to adulthood in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Children of European immigrants—men in particular—tended to stay longer with their parents compared to white Americans, who exhibited early exits from the parental home and early marriages, as already underlined in the literature. The delayed exit from the parental home compared to white Americans indicates that the immigration and integration experience distinctively influenced family dynamics in the American context with potential challenges in the adaptation process among children of immigrants.³⁴

This result might be linked to potential disadvantages in the labor market, low income levels, socioeconomic background, and economic resources available to young adults. Therefore, descendants of immigrants may have faced structural barriers in the transition to adulthood despite the adoption of prevailing norms and preferences in the host country. Additionally, limitations related to the housing market, including potential discrimination in accessing housing, may have played a role. Notably, immigrants arriving in the United States at the end of

the nineteenth century often faced poverty and had limited professional skills. They settled in neighborhoods characterized by high poverty levels and cultural distinctiveness and were primarily engaging in industries such as construction and mining.³⁵

The economic assimilation of immigrants varied significantly across groups due to differences in language, skills, and initial socioeconomic status. These differences shaped life trajectories, with successful economic integration often leading to social mobility, broader social networks (through intermarriage), and opportunities for subsequent generations. Additionally, economic assimilation influenced living arrangements; those who achieved higher economic status were more likely to settle outside ethnic enclaves, fostering spatial and social integration. Conversely, groups facing occupational and economic segregation often remained in concentrated ethnic communities, which influenced both their life trajectories and integration into American society.

However, even after controlling for confounding factors related to occupational and socioeconomic status, some differences across countries of origin persist, suggesting the potential influence of cultural maintenance among the children of European second generations. Indeed, those originating in Italy and Poland display a delayed exit from the parental home and higher synchronicity between leaving home and getting married, especially notable among women.

Conversely, children of immigrants from central and northern Europe exhibit a higher propensity to remain unmarried once they leave their parental home, particularly those from Sweden and Ireland. These results, which tend to mirror the behaviors observed in the respective country of origin, suggest the action of a socialization process where norms and values transmitted from immigrant parents have a role, as testified by previous research. Giuliano found

a significant correlation between the fraction of southern European second generations living with their parents in the United States and the corresponding proportions in their countries of origin. In Australia, Khoo and colleagues utilized 1996 census data to demonstrate that young individuals with Italian and Greek parents tended to leave home later, live alone less frequently, and have fewer children than their peers with Australian origins or parents from other European countries like Germany and the United Kingdom. In France, Impicciatore highlighted a similar trend for the children of Italian and Spanish immigrants during the twentieth century, reflecting the behavior observed in their countries of origin.³⁶

This article also identifies some unexpected results that call for further research to understand the underlying factors contributing to these variations in family formation behaviors. For instance, Swedish and Irish individuals have quite a slow exit from the parental home compared to other groups. At the same time, second generations from the United Kingdom show a small probability of leaving their parental home without being married. These aspects lead us to consider some limitations of our study and suggest future lines of research.

First, cross-country differences in the transition to adulthood and family formation in Europe are not clear-cut due to a substantial variability within each country. More detailed data concerning the subnational areas of origin of the immigrants are required to explore potential variations in living arrangements based on specific regional cultural backgrounds.³⁷

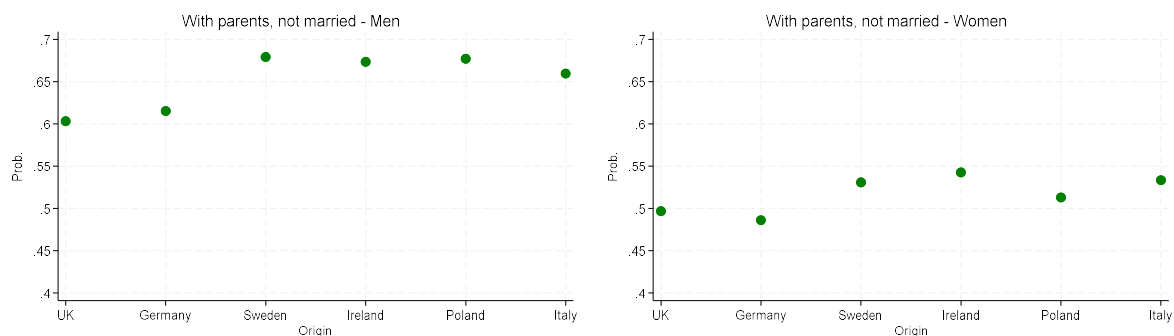
Second, a substantial part of heterogeneity may not be considered in our model, such as more detailed information about parents' characteristics, parents' migratory background, family ties, the role of ethnic communities, and the peculiarities of migration chains. Furthermore, one of the main areas for improvement in our analysis stems from the cross-sectional nature of the data. This limitation restricts our ability to capture changes over time and hampers establishing

causal relationships. Future research with more comprehensive and longitudinal data will be essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the life-course trajectories of second-generation immigrants and the role of cultural roots or constraints tied to being part of an immigrant family.

Despite these limitations, by delving deeper into such complexities and considering the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage, socioeconomic circumstances, and contextual influences—while leveraging the potentialities of the IPUMS data—this article contributes valuable insights into the lives and trajectories of second-generation immigrants in the United States. We have provided evidence of factors hindering the adaptation to mainstream behavior and reinforcing the role of a socialization effect among children of immigrants in their transition to adulthood. These findings contribute to the theoretical debate surrounding second-generation immigrant experiences and also offer valuable insights for understanding contemporary migrant families.

APPENDIX

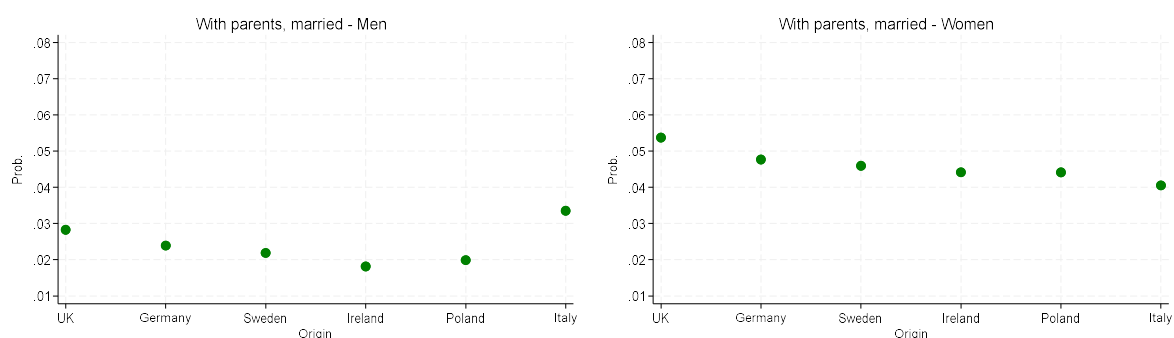
Fig. A1 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Living with Parents and Not Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)



SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term), proportion of immigrants by single county and origin.

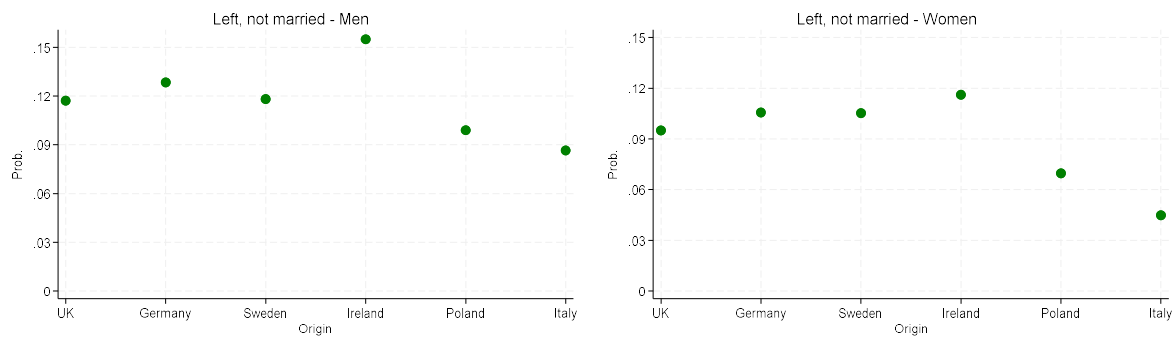
Fig. A2 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Living with Parents and Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)



SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term), proportion of immigrants by single county and origin.

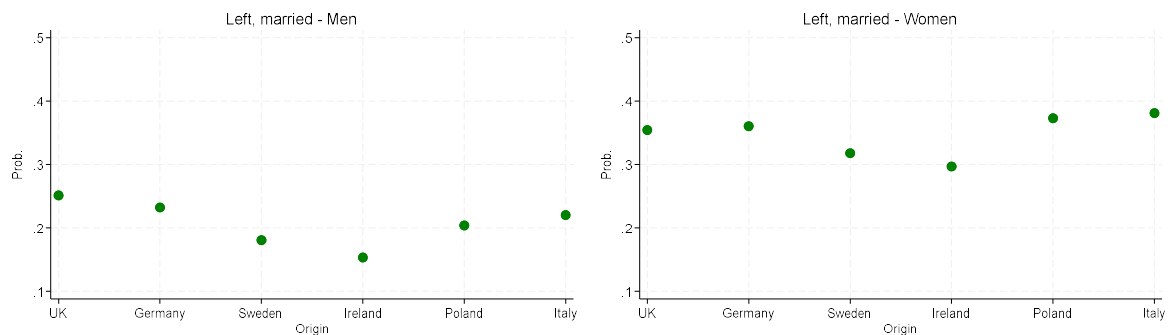
Fig. A3 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Having Left the Parental Home and Not Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)



SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term), proportion of immigrants by single county and origin.

Fig. A4 Predicted Probabilities of Individuals Aged 16–29 Having Left the Parental Home and Being Married by Origin and Gender (Multinomial Logit Regression Model)



SOURCE See Table 4.

NOTE Control variables included in the model: age at the interview (linear and quadratic term), year of observation, urban/rural area, state, school attendance, employment status, Duncan Socioeconomic Index (linear and quadratic term), proportion of immigrants by single county and origin.

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³³ The occupation income score indicates the median total income per person in each occupation in 1950 with a positive income. See Sobek, “The Comparability of Occupations and the Generation of Income Scores,” *Historical Methods*, XXVII (1995), 47–51. The Siegel Prestige score is based on the subjective evaluation of occupations collected in a series of surveys taken by the National Opinion Center (NORC) in the 1960s. The score is based on the 1950 occupation classification and is the same for a given occupation across all census years. For more

information, see Paul M. Siegel, "Prestige in the American Occupational Structure," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1971).

³⁴ Foley and Guinnane, "Did Irish Marriage Patterns Survive the Emigrant Voyage?" 15–34.

³⁵ See Perlmann, *Italians Then, Mexicans Now*, 37–45.

³⁶ Paola Giuliano, "Living Arrangements in Western Europe: Does Cultural Origin Matter?" *Journal of the European Economic Association*, V (2007), 927–952; Siew-Ean Khoo et al., *Second-Generation Australians, Report for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs* (Canberra, 2002), 17–45; Impicciatore, "Transition to Adulthood of the Italian Second Generation in France," 529–560.

³⁷ Day, "Leaving Home," 95–135; Sklar, "The Role of Marriage Behaviour," 231–247; Clare Holdsworth, "Leaving Home in Spain: A Regional Analysis," *International Journal of Population Geography*, IV (1998), 341–360; Viazzo, "What's So Special About the Mediterranean?" 111–137