

**CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION IN REPARTNERING ACROSS EUROPE AND IN THE US: THE
ROLE OF AGE PATTERNS OF FIRST UNION FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION AND
CHILDBEARING**

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(Extended abstract)

Background

Since the 1960s, divorce has increased in the US and nearly every European country (Galezewska et al. 2013, Goldstein 1999, Kalmijn 2007, Raley and Bumpass 2003, Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). As a consequence, individuals can re-enter the partner market and form new co-residential unions. In addition, many countries have experienced an increase in cohabiting unions, which are often a testing ground for relationships that may not last as long as marriages or be transformed into marriages (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008, Kiernan 2004, Perelli-Harris et al. 2012). The combination of these two trends has led to an increase in repartnering nearly everywhere, but the variation in the diffusion in divorce and cohabitation has also produced profound differences in the level and pace of repartnering across countries (Galezewska et al. 2013). For example, Figures 2 and 3 show that the lifetime experience of repartnering is much higher in the US and Northern and Western Europe compared to Southern Europe and the majority of Eastern European countries.

In this paper we examine three factors that can explain differences in repartnering behaviour across countries: 1) changes in the type of first union; 2) the age pattern of union formation and dissolution; and 3) the presence of children in the previous union. Changes in type of first partnership have important implications for repartnering dynamics. Cohabiting unions tend to be less stable than marital unions (Heuveline et al. 2003), thus resulting in increased exposure to repartnering. In addition, numerous studies have shown that cohabiting women differ from married women in their gender-role and family attitudes (e.g. Clarkberg et al. 1995, Lesthaeghe 2010), subjective well-being (Soons and Kalmijn 2009), relationship quality (Wiik et al. 2009) and fertility (e.g. Andersson and Philipov 2002, Kiernan 2002, Perelli-Harris 2013, Wu and Musick 2008). All of these factors may impact union dissolution and subsequently repartnering. Given that in many countries some stigma remains attached to divorce, it is possible that individuals who have experienced the dissolution of cohabitation could appear more attractive on the re-partnering market than those who have experienced a formal divorce (Berrington and Travena 2013). Thus, differences in the uptake of

cohabitation across Europe (Kiernan 2004, Perelli-Harris et al. 2010) may be an explanation for why some countries experience greater repartnering than others.

The age pattern of union formation and dissolution is also crucial to understanding differences in repartnering behaviour. Age at union dissolution has been found to be one of the most important predictors of women's chances to repartner (Beaujouan 2012, Bumpass et al. 1990). Women's age at union dissolution is generally negatively associated with the likelihood of repartnering (Lampard and Peggs 1999, Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008, Poortman 2007, Skew et al. 2009, Wu and Schimmele 2005). With increasing age, the pool of potential partners decreases because men tend to form unions with younger women (Bumpass et al. 1990, Dean and Gurak 1978, Hughes 2000, Ní Bhrolcháin 1992). Also, women's attractiveness to a potential partner may decrease with age due to declining physical attractiveness and health condition (Skew et al. 2009), or because older women may be less willing or, due to biological limits on fertility, unable to have (further) children (Beaujouan 2012, Ermisch and Wright 1991).

Differences in age at union formation and dissolution across countries can therefore play an important role in repartnering. The age pattern of marriage is much younger in Eastern European countries than in Western European countries and coupled with high levels of divorce may explain greater repartnering behaviour in a country such as Russia. On the other hand, the age at first cohabitation may be even more important than the age at marriage, since cohabiting unions are more likely to dissolve, which may help to explain the highest repartnering levels in Norway (Figure 2). The late age at marriage in Italy and Spain may be an important explanation for low levels of repartnering for those who divorce in these countries. In contrast, the high prevalence of repartnering in the US may be due to different family patterns than those documented for European countries (e.g. Cherlin 2009, Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, Raley 2001, Sobotka 2008, Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). Generally, US families are characterised by more transitions in and out of marital or cohabiting unions resulting from higher marriage and divorce rates and more fragile cohabitation than in Europe.

Furthermore, having dependent children in a household is generally viewed as an obstacle to women's repartnering, and thus the age pattern of fertility and whether childbearing in cohabitation is common may also be important explanatory factors for repartnering. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the effect of previous fertility depends on the number, age and co-residence of pre-union children (e.g. Ivanova et al. 2013, Koo et al. 1984, Lampard and Peggs 1999, Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008, Poortman 2007, Skew et al. 2009, Sweeney 1997). The presence of children may affect women's attractiveness on the partner market since a potential partner has to take into account the

direct financial costs and face the challenges associated with the complexity of stepfamilies (Allan et al. 2011, Cherlin and Furstenberg 1994, Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991, Stewart 2005, Stewart et al. 2003). Dependent children are also likely to restrict meeting and mating opportunities as they increase the cost of time women spend searching for a new partner (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003, Ivanova et al. 2013). However, as mothers experience more adverse economic consequences of union dissolution than their childless counterparts (Amato 2000) they may have a greater need to repartner in order to improve their economic situation (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003, Ivanova et al. 2013).

This study provides insights into how repartnering differs across countries due to the age pattern of first union formation and dissolution and the presence and age of children from a previous relationship. It also considers how the increase in cohabitation has led to increases in repartnering, given that cohabiting unions are more likely to end in union dissolution. What may be most important to the level of repartnering is the interaction between cohabitation, age at union dissolution and whether they have children, which may allow young people to cycle through relationships at a greater rate. Nonetheless, despite the shift towards cohabitation, it is important to recognize that the institution of marriage itself has experienced profound changes (Amato et al. 2007, Cherlin 2004, Coontz 2004, Giddens 1992, Thornton et al. 2007), leading to increasing divorce rates and contributing to the pool of people exposed to repartnering. Taken as a whole, examining how these changes occur across cohorts will provide a greater understanding of how demographic components have contributed to repartnering dynamics. As well as focusing on differences in repartnering according to union type, this study goes beyond existing comparative studies (Ivanova et al. 2013, Skew et al. 2009), by not only analysing 11 GGS-countries, but other European countries (the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) and the United States.

Data and methods

Our data represents different family patterns across Europe (Reher 1998, Sobotka and Toulemon 2008) and includes the United States (Cherlin 2009). It comes from the Harmonized Histories - a cross-national data set which contains cleaned, harmonized and highly comparable fertility and partnership histories collected from women in the United States (National Survey of Family Growth 1995, 2007) and within various European surveys: the British Household Panel Survey (2005), the Dutch Fertility and Family Survey (2003), the Polish Employment, Family and Education Survey (2006), the Spanish Fertility Survey (2006), and the Generations and Gender Surveys in Austria (2008), Belgium (2008), Bulgaria (2004), France (2005), Germany (2005), Hungary (2004), Italy (2003), Lithuania (2006),

Norway (2007), Romania (2005), and Russia (2004) (for more detail see Perelli-Harris et al. (2010)).

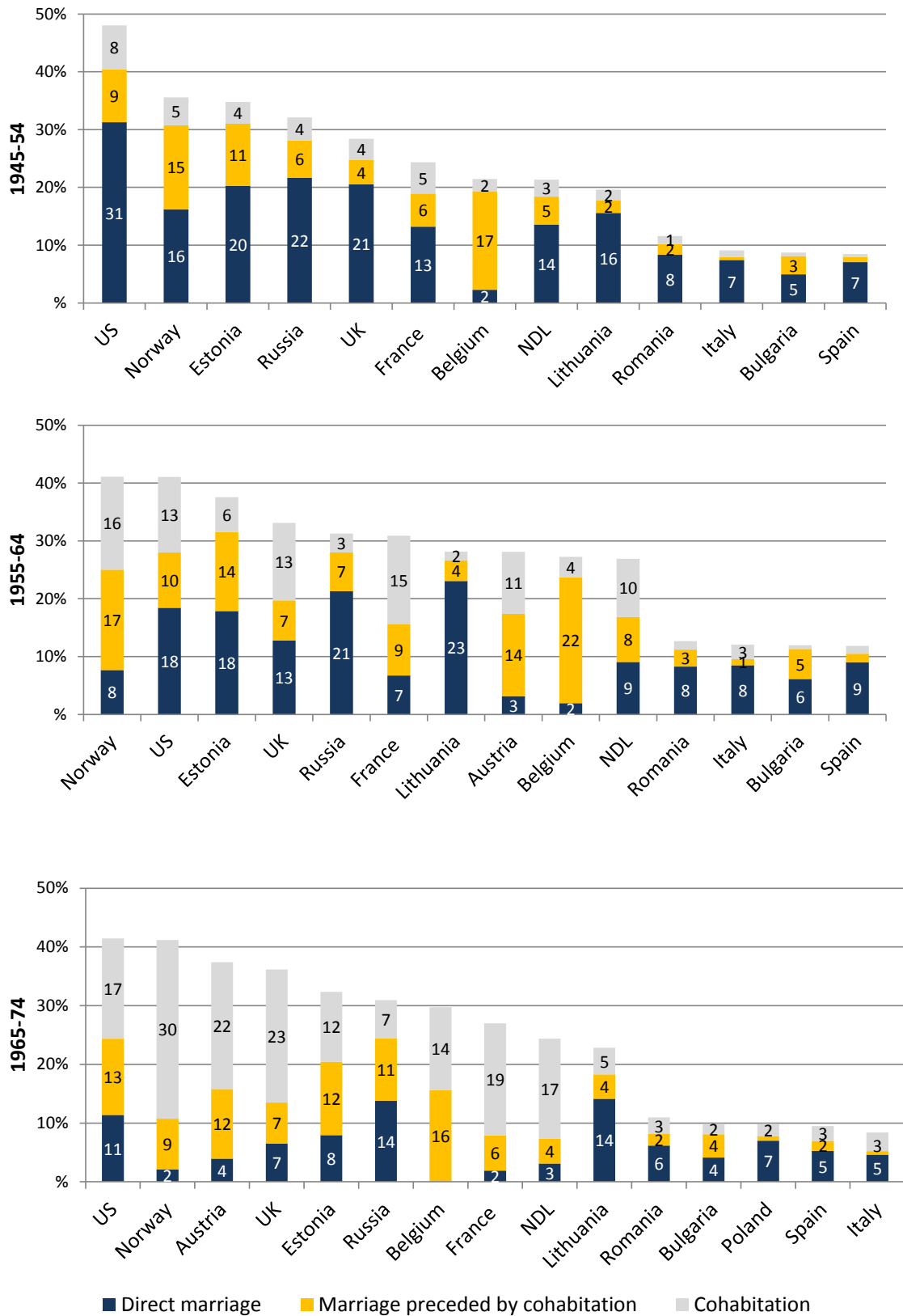
For female birth cohorts 1945-54, 1955-64 and 1965-74, we examine the likelihood of forming a new co-residential partnership following the dissolution of a first union. For each of our countries, we first use a discrete time hazard model to examine how the duration to repartnering differs according to first partnership type, age at dissolution, and the presence and age of children at dissolution. We then pool the cross-national data and calculate predicted probabilities of repartnering within 5 and 10 years. By incrementally including age at first partnership and first union dissolution, first partnership type, and childbearing before dissolution into the models, we examine how the observed cross-national differences in repartnering within 5 and 10 years are explained by variations in the demographic characteristics of the women exposed to the risk of repartnering. This approach allows us to better understand which demographic components (previous union formation, fertility) are most important for explaining the prevalence of repartnering across countries and over time.

Preliminary results

This paper will expand previous analyses shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Figure 1 presents changes in the population at risk of repartnering by first union status and cohort. While in the older cohorts, women whose first union ended in separation usually (directly) married, women in the youngest cohort who separated from their first partner either cohabited prior to marriage or continuously cohabited. Although cross-national differences in first union formation and dissolution remain striking, repartnering dynamics among younger cohorts are likely to be increasingly determined by second union formation patterns of previously cohabiting individuals. Figure 2 shows a strong increase in the percentage of women who repartner within 5 years after union dissolution in the youngest cohort, which results mainly from a greater proportion of previously cohabiting women entering second union (Figure 3). We hypothesise that the differences in repartnering behaviour by first union type may, to a great extent, arise from the differences in age and parenthood status at union dissolution of women who re-enter the partner market. In the next step, using the discrete time hazard models, we will look at changes in repartnering by age at union dissolution and parenthood status across countries and cohort.

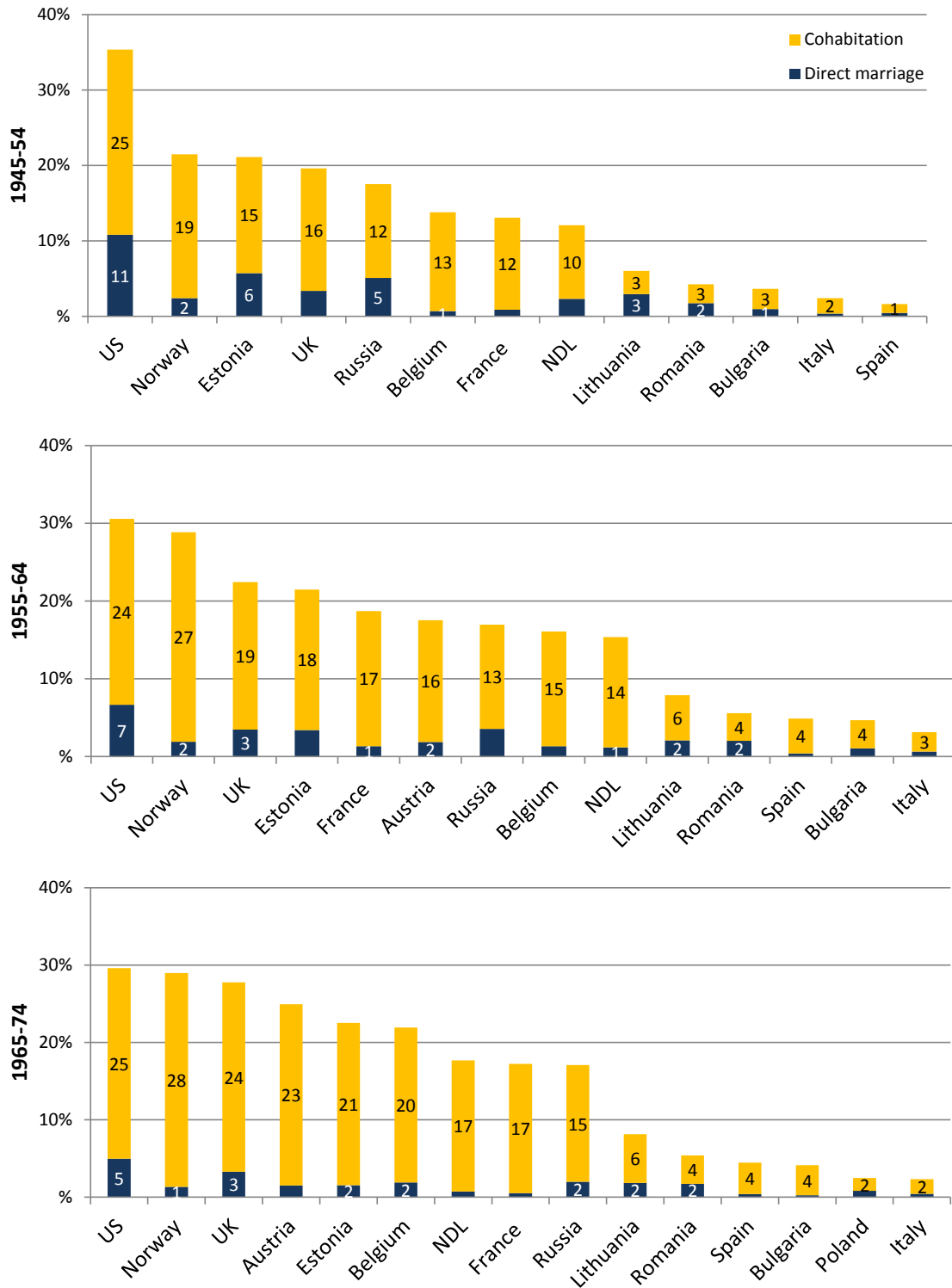
Taken as a whole, this paper extends our understanding of how different family processes are interrelated across the life-course, and how the interplay between first union type and the age and parenthood status at union dissolution explains differences in repartnering behaviour in Europe and in the United States.

Figure 1: Percentage of women who experience first union dissolution, by type of first union and birth cohort



Weights have been applied if available. Sources: *Harmonized Histories*, authors' calculations.

Figure 2: Percentage of all women who ever repartner, by type of second union at the beginning of the union and birth cohort



Weights have been applied if available. Sources: *Harmonized Histories*, authors' calculations.

Figure 3: Cumulative proportions of repartnering 5 years after union dissolution by cohort

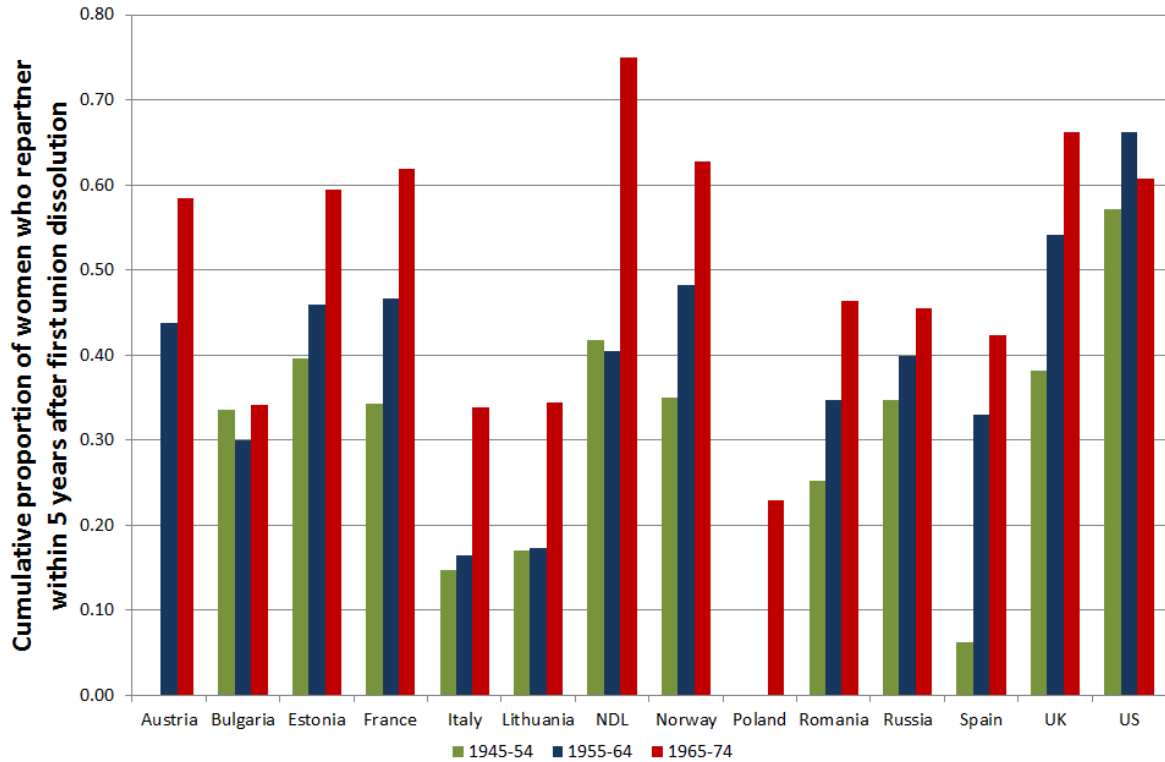
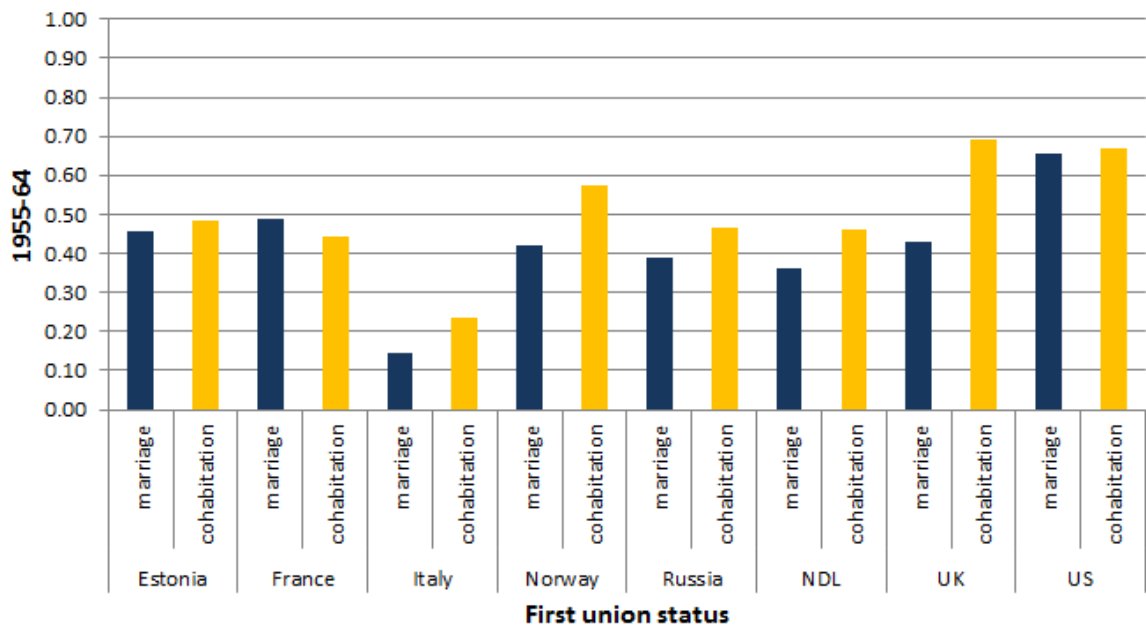
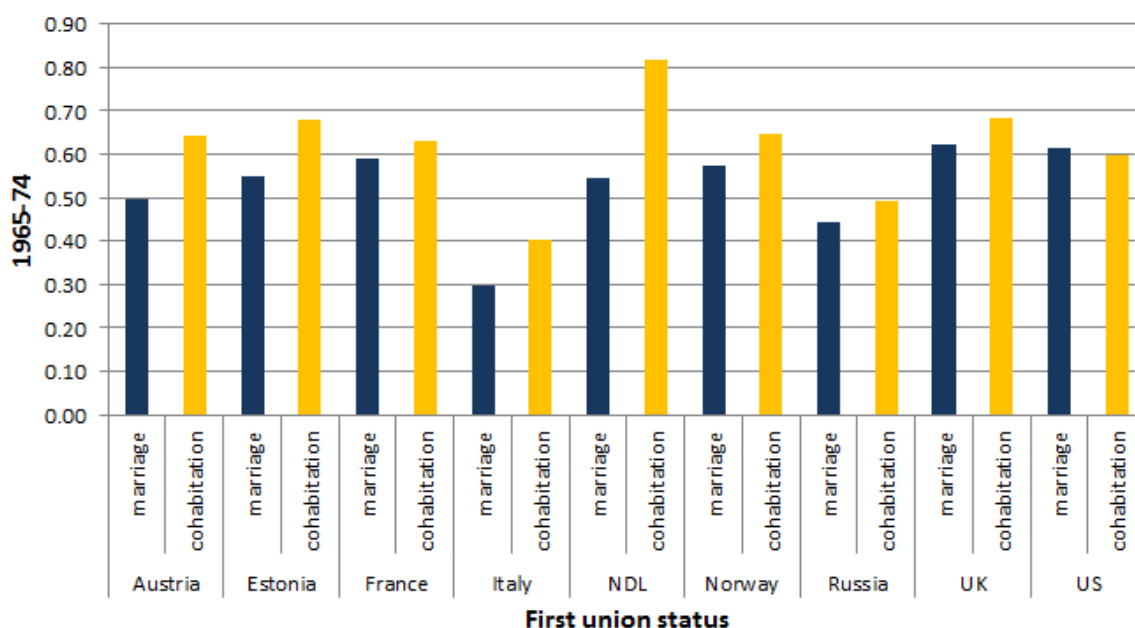


Figure 4: Proportion of women who have ever repartnered within 5 years after union dissolution by cohort and first union type





Weights have been applied if available. Sources: *Harmonized Histories*, authors' calculations

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