

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIVORTIALITY PATTERNS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVORCE IN GREECE, ITALY, SPAIN AND FRANCE

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Abstract

Since the mid-1970s, family patterns in the European South have undergone substantial change, with some increasing similarity in aggregate demographic indicators but also persistent cross-national diversity. In Mediterranean countries, declining marriage and fertility rates began in the 1970s, followed by an increase in divorce since the 1980s, although the timing and pace of change differ across countries. Against this background, the present study examines changes in divortiality in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France – a country that shares some geographic and cultural proximity with Southern Europe but also differs in important institutional and historical respects. The paper begins with a demographic analysis of divorce since the 1950s (period and cohort analysis). The second part explores attitudes toward divorce. Traditional demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, binary logistic regression, and several machine learning algorithms (XGBoost, CatBoost, LightGBM and Random Forest) were employed. Our findings indicate that divorce has been more prevalent since the 2010s in France and Spain, while Greece and Italy remain at comparatively lower levels and experienced increases at a later stage. Attitudes toward divorce are also more positive in France and Spain. Age, sex, religiosity, marital status, and views regarding the deinstitutionalisation of marriage are associated with attitudes toward divorce. The machine learning models further indicate that age and religiosity are the most influential features contributing to the prediction of unconditional acceptance of divorce. Finally, we show that legal reforms have played an important role in shaping the observed trends in divortiality.

Keywords: divortiality, attitudes towards divorce, family law, religion, Machine Learning Algorithms
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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s and 1970s, divorce rates have increased across many European societies, although the timing, pace, and institutional contexts of change have varied substantially. Legal reforms facilitated marital dissolution in several countries, reducing state interference in private life and removing formal barriers to divorce (*Festy – Prioux, 1975; Sardon, 1986*). While some attributed rising divorce to a desire to remarry (*Berger, 1980*), remarriage rates increased more slowly, revealing more complex societal shifts (*Roussel, 1987*). Divorce rates in many countries began to rise even before major legislative reforms, suggesting that legal changes often followed—rather than initiated—broader societal transformations (*Festy, 1983; Sardon, 1986*). Nonetheless, specific law reforms did at times produce marked short-term fluctuations. For example, the shortening of divorce proceedings in Sweden in 1974 led to a temporary surge in divorce registrations, whereas in the Federal Republic of Germany the introduction of a new divorce law in 1977 initially produced a decline due to an accumulation of applications and legal ambiguities (*Monnier, 2006*). These examples illustrate how legislation interacts with underlying social change rather than operating in isolation.

In Southern Europe, divorce historically remained comparatively less prevalent, reflecting strong family norms, higher levels of religiosity, and later institutional recognition of divorce. Greece, Italy, and Spain shared a pattern of relatively late legal liberalisation and enduring cultural attachment to marriage. Over recent decades, however, divorce intensity has increased in all three countries. These developments raise questions about whether Southern European societies are undergoing similar processes of transformation or maintaining distinct national patterns shaped by institutional and cultural contexts.

France provides a useful contrast in this setting. Although part of France lies in the Mediterranean, it is commonly classified as Western European due to its distinct historical, demographic, and institutional developments. France is not included as a representative of Western Europe as a whole, nor as a normative benchmark, but as a theoretically relevant contrast case. Its earlier secularisation, long-standing divorce legislation, and specific Church–state relations provide an institutional configuration that differs from

Southern European settings. The comparison therefore does not aim to generalise to “Western Europe,” but to contrast Southern European patterns with this distinct case in order to assess how institutional and cultural contexts shape divorce behaviour and divorce attitudes.

The transformation of divorce patterns has been closely linked to broader theoretical debates in demography and sociology. Gender Equality Theory posits that more egalitarian gender roles increase relationship stability and fertility (*Esping-Andersen, 2009; Esping-Andersen – Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2010*). The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory further explains changing family forms through shifts in values such as individualisation and secularisation (*Lesthaeghe, 2010, 2014; Surkyn – Lesthaeghe, 2004; Van de Kaa, 1987; 2001*). Scholars also highlight evolving gender roles and economic uncertainty as key drivers of demographic change (*Bernhardt, 2004; Perelli-Harris – Gassen, 2010*). From the 1960s onward, marriage became increasingly fragile as individualistic values reshaped expectations, with individuals remaining married only insofar as their personal goals and aspirations were fulfilled. Within this context, rising female employment has often been linked to greater economic independence and, consequently, higher divorce risks (*Becker, 1993*), although empirical evidence is not uniform. For instance, women’s employment is positively associated with divorce in Poland but not in Hungary (*Vignoli et al., 2018*). While Becker argued that women’s labour-force participation reduces the “utility” of marriage, subsequent studies point to more complex dynamics, suggesting that in some settings women’s improved education and income may instead support the formation of unions with partners who share similar aspirations and values (*Blossfeld, 2009; Oppenheimer et al., 1997*).

Finally, growing union instability influences fertility patterns—both by reducing the number of children married couples may have, as it shortens the duration of marital life available for family formation and increasing them through re-partnering (*Oláh, 2015; Thomson, 2004*). However, this phenomenon will not be explored in detail in the current study. Overall, marital instability has contributed to the diversification of family forms across Europe, including single-parent and stepfamilies, within and beyond marriage.

1. Attitudes towards divorce

Attitudes toward divorce constitute an essential normative dimension of these processes. Normative acceptance both reflects and potentially reinforces behavioural change.

This study is grounded in theoretical perspectives associated with the Second Demographic Transition and the deinstitutionalization of marriage, which emphasize the growing role of individual values, secularization, and autonomy in shaping family behaviors. While changing values are often conceptualized as drivers of demographic change—such as rising divorce rates and earlier marital dissolution—the relationship between values and behavior is likely to be dynamic and reciprocal. Increasing divorce prevalence may itself contribute to the normalization of marital dissolution, reducing social stigma and reinforcing more permissive attitudes toward divorce. From this perspective, demographic behavior and attitudinal change are best understood as mutually reinforcing processes rather than as a simple unidirectional causal chain. Accordingly, the combined analysis of divorce behaviors and attitudes toward divorce, using both traditional demographic indicators and individual-level modeling approaches, allows us to examine these intertwined processes from complementary analytical perspectives. The inclusion of machine learning techniques further enables the identification of complex, non-linear relationships and interaction patterns that may characterize value–behavior dynamics across different social and institutional contexts.

Against this background, the present study examines both divorce behaviour and attitudes toward divorce in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France.

The study addresses five key questions:

1. To what extent do divorce patterns differ across Greece, Italy, Spain, and France in terms of level, timing, and pace of change?
2. Have divorce intensity and timing changed since the 1970s in these countries?
3. Are recent marriage cohorts divorcing earlier or more often than older ones?
4. How has legislation influenced divorce trends?
5. How do attitudes toward divorce vary across these countries?

To assess attitudes, we use data from the European Values Study (EVS 2017), based on the item “Do you

justify divorce?” Respondents answered on a 1 (“never”) to 10 (“always”) scale. We define unconditional acceptance as selecting the value “10,” which represents a substantial share of respondents in each country.

We investigate factors associated with these attitudes. In addition to country, we examine age, gender, marital status, religiosity, and views regarding the deinstitutionalisation of marriage. The belief that marriage is outdated draws on *Cherlin’s* (2004) discussion of the deinstitutionalisation of marriage and has been linked to greater support for divorce (*Kaufman et al.*, 2024). Religiosity is included given its established association with marital stability and lower tolerance of divorce (*Guarneri et al.*, 2021; *Kapinus – Pellerin*, 2008; *Stokes – Ellison*, 2010; *Vermeulen et al.*, 2023). However, it remains unclear whether the same relationship holds for couples and whether the effect of couple-level religiosity depends on the broader contextual level of religiosity (i.e., a cross-level interaction effect).

We adopt a mixed-methods quantitative design: first, we document long-run divorce dynamics using demographic period and cohort indicators; second, we examine individual-level attitudes toward divorce using regression models for adjusted associations and machine learning algorithms to assess predictive structure and variable importance.

2.1. Demographic analysis of divortiality (period and cohort/longitudinal analysis)

To analyse the intensity (the frequency of the dissolution of marriages) and timing (the median duration of marriage at its dissolution) of divorce, we used data on divorces by reached duration of marriage and the total number of marriages from which these divorces originated. Divorce data were available for France (1952–2016), Italy (1971–2022), Greece (1972–2023), and Spain (1981–2022). French data post-2016 became incomplete following the introduction of out-of-court divorces (*Breton et al.*, 2022). Marriage data were available from the 1890s in France, the 1910s in Italy and Greece, and the 1920s in Spain.

Data sources included the European Demographic Observatory (EDO, 2011), EUROSTAT (2023), LADS (2018), and national statistical agencies/institutes (ELSTAT, 2023; INE, 2023; INED, 2023; INSEE, 2023a; ISTAT, 2023). We applied classical methods of the French School of Demography, notably the Total

Divorce Rate (TDR), which estimates the number of divorces per 10,000 marriages based on observed divorce rates by duration of marriage:

$$TDR_i = \sum_{k=1}^{60+} divorce_rate,$$

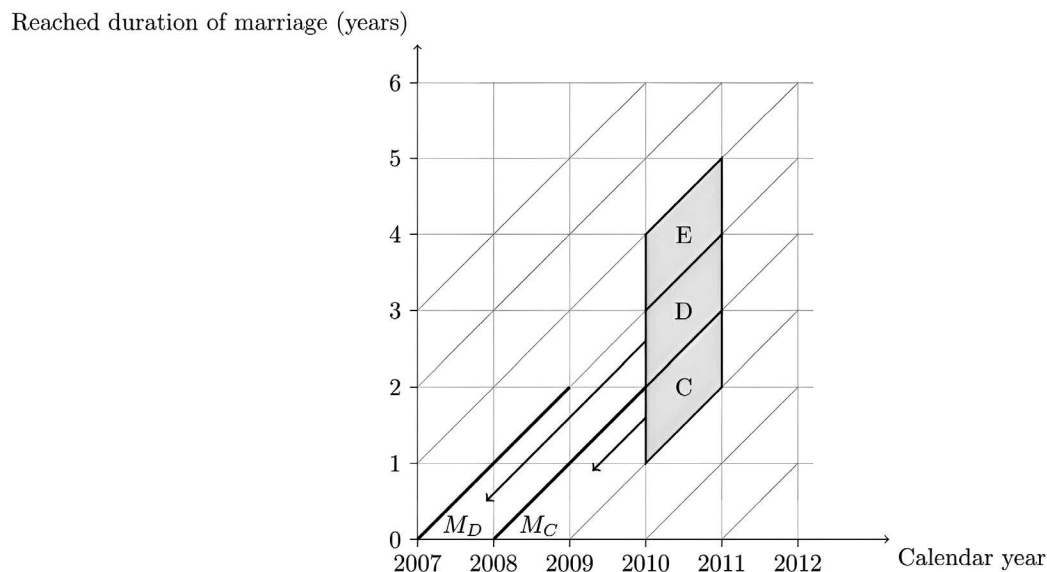
where i denotes the calendar year and k the duration of marriage. The TDR provides an indicator of the period-specific intensity of divorce, while the median duration of marriage at dissolution captures the timing of divorce within a given year.

Figure 1 illustrates how duration-specific divorce rates are constructed. Each parallelogram in the Lexis diagram (e.g. E, D, C) represents the number of divorces occurring in a given calendar year at a specific reached duration of marriage. The horizontal segments labelled M_C and M_D show the marriages from which these divorces originate (i.e. the marriage cohorts that have reached the relevant durations in the observed year) in 2010. Thus, parallelogram C shows the divorces

occurring at a duration of two years. To obtain the divorce rate at duration two, the number of divorces in parallelogram C is related to the marriages represented by M_C , corresponding to marriages formed in 2008 (the cohort that reached two years of marriage in 2010). Similarly, parallelogram D shows divorces at a duration of three years, with the corresponding marriages at risk represented by M_D (marriages formed in 2007).

The same logic applies to all other durations: each parallelogram contains divorces observed at duration k , and each horizontal segment identifies the marriages from which those divorces originate. After determining all duration-specific rates for 2010, these rates are summed to obtain the Total Divorce Rate for that year. The TDR thus represents the intensity of divorce that would be observed in a hypothetical marriage cohort if it were exposed to the duration-specific divorce rates recorded in that calendar year, in the absence of mortality and migration.

Figure 1 Lexis Diagram (analysis of divortiality)



The median duration of marriage at divorce was calculated in the same way as a conventional median derived from a set of numerical values. In this case, the values correspond to the duration-specific divorce

rates observed in a given calendar year (e.g. rates at durations 0, 1, 2, 3, ..., 60+ in 2010). These rates were ordered by duration, and the median was identified as the duration at which half of the cumulative divorce

intensity was observed at shorter durations and half at longer durations.

Alongside period analysis, we conducted cohort-based longitudinal analyses. For each marriage cohort (e.g. 1972), divorce rates were calculated for successive durations of marriage (e.g. first year, second year, etc.). This approach allows the estimation of cohort-specific patterns in the intensity and timing of divorce for marriage cohorts observed over time: 1972–1994 (Greece), 1971–1993 (Italy), 1981–1993 (Spain), and 1952–1987 (France). These analyses cover the first 30 years of marriage, during which the majority of divorces occur—94% in Greece and France, 85.9% in Italy, and 88.9% in Spain. Divorce rates for durations beyond 30 years were imputed using information from more recent observation periods (e.g. 2014–2022 for Greece).

2. 2. Examination of the attitudes towards divorce

Beyond divorce trends and timing, we analysed attitudes toward divorce using the European Values Study (EVS 2017). For France, Italy, and Spain we rely on the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 release (EVS/WVS, 2021), while Greece is drawn from the EVS 2017 Greece country file (EVS, 2020), which employed snowball sampling rather than the multistage or simple random sampling used in the other countries. Accordingly, country-specific inferential results for Greece should be interpreted with caution, and the pooled models are understood as capturing associations within the combined sample rather than providing population-level estimates for Greece. Greece was nevertheless retained in the comparative analysis due to the dataset's substantial size and geographic coverage, including both urban and rural areas across the country. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and binary logistic regression were applied to examine cross-national variation in attitudes toward divorce and to identify socio-demographic factors associated with these attitudes. To complement these traditional statistical techniques, several machine learning (ML) algorithms were also employed to assess the relative importance of predictors in shaping highly positive attitudes toward divorce, allowing for potential nonlinearities and interactions among covariates. Specifically, we implemented XGBoost (Extreme Gradient

Boosting) (Chen et al., 2024; Chen – Guestrin, 2016; Liu – Just, 2019; Lundberg – Lee, 2017), LightGBM (Light Gradient Boosting Machine) (Ke et al., 2017), CatBoost (Categorical Boosting) (Dorogush – Ershov – Gulin, 2018; Prokhorenkova et al., 2018), and Random Forests (Breiman, 2001; Wright – Ziegler, 2017), all of which are ensemble methods based on decision trees and are widely used in classification tasks. Detailed descriptions of the data sources and analytical procedures are provided in the sections devoted to the empirical analysis.

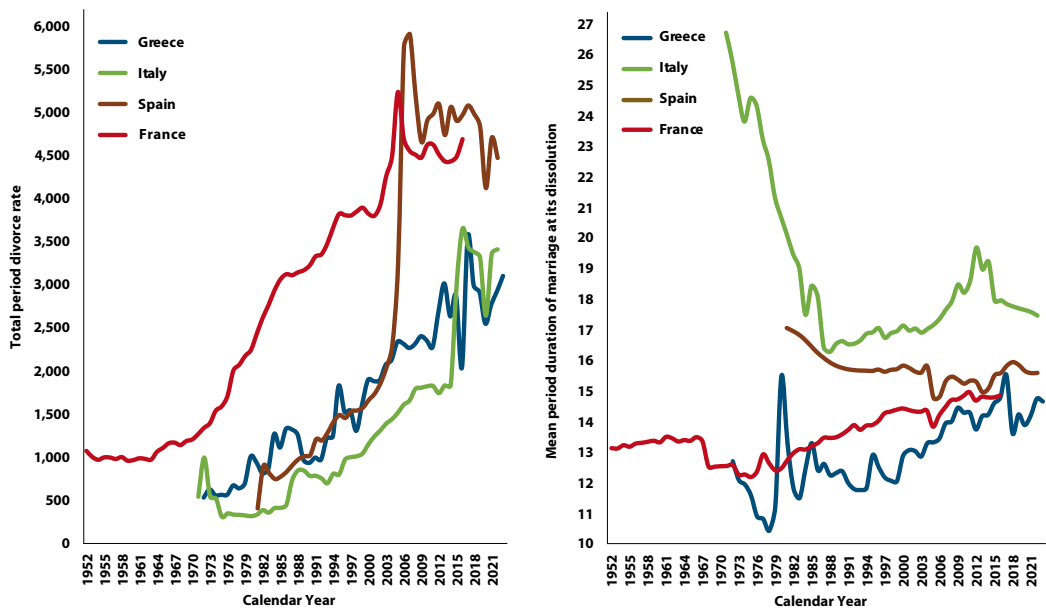
The decision to focus on unconditional acceptance of divorce rather than modelling the full ten-point scale reflects a deliberate analytical choice rather than a methodological constraint. Our primary interest lies in identifying the socio-demographic correlates of unequivocal normative approval of divorce, understood here as a distinct attitudinal position rather than as the upper end of a continuous scale. While alternative modelling strategies using the full scale (e.g. ordinal or continuous specifications) are possible, they address related but conceptually different questions concerning gradations of approval. Accordingly, we acknowledge that this operationalisation entails a loss of information and does not capture heterogeneity within intermediate response categories, a limitation that should be borne in mind when interpreting the results. Finally, additional details on data preparation and model implementation are provided in the relevant analytical sections.

RESULTS

3.1. The dissolution of marriages: demographic analysis of divorce and the impact of legislation

Divorce became widespread earlier in France than in Greece, Italy, or Spain (Fig. 2). By the mid-1980s, approximately 30% of French marriages ended in divorce (TDR \approx 3,000 divorces per 10,000 marriages), while divorce intensity in Southern European countries remained below 13%. Spain experienced a pronounced increase in divorce intensity from the mid-2000s onward. After 2010, divorce affected around 46% of marriages in France, 49% in Spain, 27% in Italy, and 28% in Greece. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a temporary decline in divorce rates across Southern Europe, likely reflecting the suspension

Figure 2 Total divorce rate (number of divorces per 10,000 initial marriages, period 1952–2023) – left, median marriage duration at its dissolution – right



Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

of judicial proceedings rather than changes in marital behaviour.

Unlike fertility, divorce intensity is closely linked to changes in family law (Kontogiannis, 2022). In Greece, legislation prior to 1979 imposed strong restrictions on marital dissolution. Law 868/1979 represented a major institutional change, allowing divorce after six years of separation without proof of fault. Following its introduction, the Total Divorce Rate rose from 631 per 10,000 marriages in 1978 to 1,000 in 1980. Over the same period, the median duration of marriage at divorce increased from 6.7 years to 12 years, reflecting the exit of long-standing marriages that had previously been legally constrained. The effect of this reform was temporary, as the law remained in force for only six months, although many divorces initiated during that period were finalised in 1980 or 1981.

Greece: legislative shifts and rising divorce intensity

Although divorce rates declined slightly in 1982–1983, they remained above 1970s levels, suggesting broader changes in social norms. Law 1329/1983 introduced

consensual divorce, leading to a renewed increase in divorce intensity (exceeding 1,000 divorces per 10,000 marriages between 1984 and 1988) and a rise in the median duration of marriage at divorce to 9.6 years by 1985. Since the late 1980s, divorce intensity in Greece has followed a generally upward trajectory, interrupted by short-term fluctuations, such as the sharp decline in 2016 caused by a temporary abstention of lawyers from court proceedings.

Subsequent legal reforms, including Laws 3719/2008 and 4055/2012, reduced the minimum duration of marriage required for divorce. Law 4509/2017 further simplified consensual divorce procedures by allowing their completion through notaries, substantially reducing administrative barriers.

Before 1983, mutual-consent divorce was not legally permitted in Greece. Couples seeking amicable separation often resorted to formally contested divorces by attributing fault—a practice commonly described as “pseudo-consensual” divorce (*crypto-synainetika*). Although systematic data are unavailable, media reports suggest an increase in so-called “white divorces” (*leyka diazygia*) during the post-2009 economic crisis,

whereby couples formally divorced while continuing to cohabit in order to address financial or legal constraints.

France: historical evolution and the shift to consensual divorce

In France, judicial separation was permitted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while divorce itself was prohibited under Canon Law (Sardon, 2005). Divorce was legalised in 1792 during the French Revolution, allowing for both consensual and incompatibility-based separation (“incompatibilité d’humeur”) (von Bóné, 2014) abolished in 1816 during the Bourbon Restoration (Carella et al., 2014), and reintroduced in 1884 in a fault-based form. Subsequent reforms progressively expanded access to divorce, culminating in the 1975 law (effective 1976), which reintroduced consensual divorce and broadened the grounds for marital dissolution (Sardon, 2005). Further simplifications were introduced in 2004, and since 2017 consensual divorce may proceed without judicial involvement (Breton et al., 2018).

Sardon (2005) argued that the 1976 reform accelerated an already ongoing rise in divorce rates (Fig. 2). Divorce intensity continued to increase through the 1980s and 1990s, with further changes observed after 2005 (Bellamy, 2016). Simplification of procedures coincided with a decline in fault-based divorces, which fell from 42.6% in 1999 to 7% in 2015, indicating a shift in both legal practice and social norms surrounding marital dissolution (Breton et al., 2017).

Spain: from prohibition to the 2005 “express divorce” reform

In Spain, divorce was briefly legal between 1934 and 1936 and was reintroduced in 1981 (Flaquer – Garriga, 2009; Spijker – Solsona, 2012). Prior to 1981, marriage was largely indissoluble, with judicial separation or ecclesiastical annulment as the only available options (Bernardi – Martínez-Pastor, 2011; Carella et al., 2014). The 1981 law legalised divorce but imposed procedural and financial constraints that limited its immediate diffusion (Roigé, 2013).

A major institutional change occurred in 2005 with the introduction of so-called “express divorce” (Duato – Jódar, 2013; González-Val – Marcén, 2017), which eliminated the requirement for prior judicial separa-

tion and allowed consensual divorce after three months of marriage (Carella et al., 2014). This reform substantially altered the institutional context of marital dissolution. Following its implementation, divorce intensity in Spain increased markedly, reaching levels comparable to those observed in other Western and Northern European countries (Roigé, 2013). Although the Catholic Church continued to oppose divorce, its influence on family behaviour declined over time (Dominguez-Folgueras – Castro-Martin, 2013).

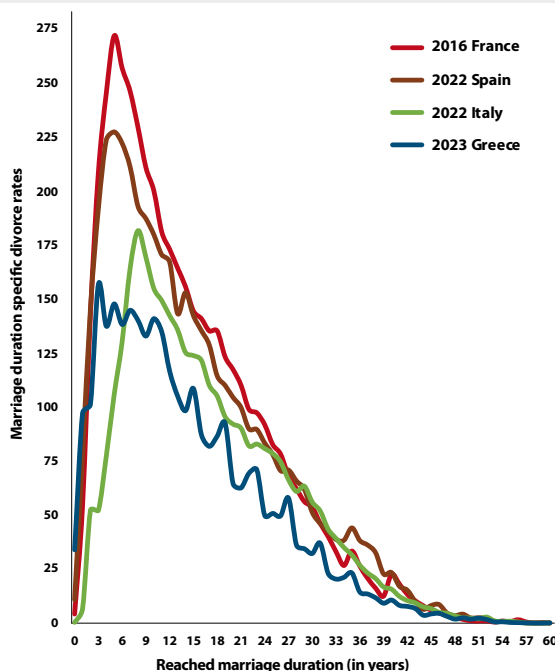
Italy: gradual liberalisation and late divorce timing

In Italy, marriage was legally indissoluble until 1970, when divorce was introduced through Law 898 (Castiglioni – Dalla Zuanna, 2008). This law established separate procedures for judicial separation and divorce, with a mandatory five-year separation period (Tamanza et al., 2013). Subsequent reforms in 1975, 1978, and 1987 expanded the grounds for divorce and reduced the required separation period to three years, contributing to a noticeable increase in divorce intensity between 1987 and 1991 (Carella et al., 2014).

Guarneri et al. (2021) noted that judicial separation, often the first step toward divorce in Italy, was sometimes the only one, as couples avoided divorce due to its financial and administrative costs. Divorce became necessary mainly when remarriage was desired. Salvini and Vignoli (2011) found that only 60% of couples separated in 1995 had divorced within ten years. Further reforms in 2014 and 2015 simplified procedures and reduced the separation period to six months for consensual divorces and twelve months for contentious divorces (Colonnelli, 2015). Following these changes, divorce intensity increased, reflecting both institutional adjustments and changing social attitudes toward marital dissolution.

Since 2010, the median duration of marriage at divorce has been broadly similar across Greece, France, and Spain (11.3, 11.6, and 12.1 years, respectively), while remaining higher in Italy (15.4 years). As shown in Figure 3, divorce intensity across countries is generally low during the first year of marriage, peaks between the fourth and ninth year (fourth year in Greece, sixth in France and Spain, ninth in Italy), and declines thereafter.

Figure 3 Distribution of marriage duration specific divorce rates, Greece (2023), Italy (2022), Spain (2022) and France (2016)



Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

An analysis of divorce intensity by marriage duration (1952–2023) shows that, across all countries examined, divorces are most frequently observed between the sixth and tenth year of marriage, occur less often between the eleventh and fifteenth year, and are relatively rare thereafter (Fig. 4). The first five years of marriage (durations 0–4) display notable cross-national variation, which appears closely related to differences in legal frameworks and procedural requirements.

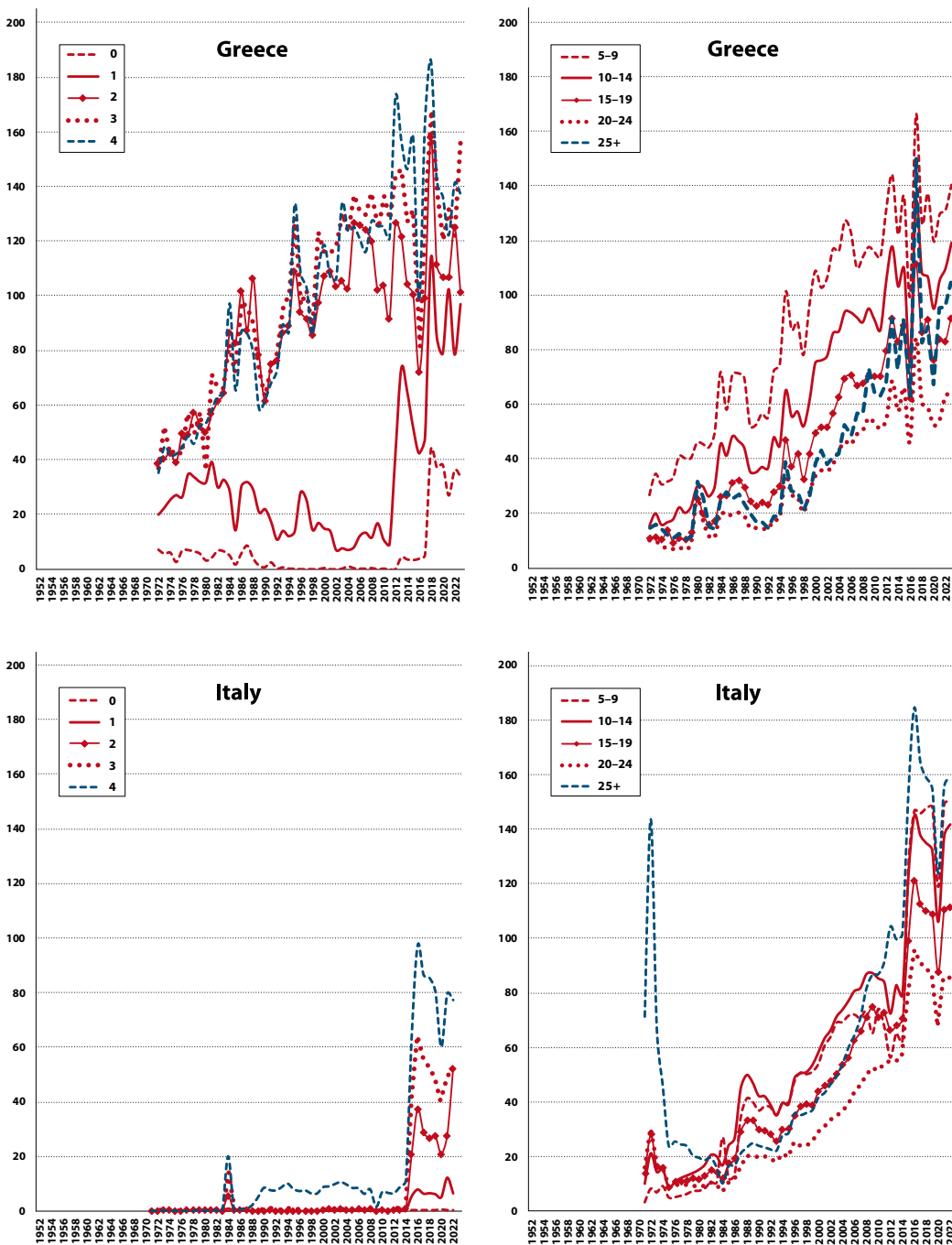
Italy exhibits comparatively low divorce intensity during the early years of marriage, a pattern consistent with the historically restrictive legal context and the widespread use of judicial separation as an intermediate or alternative arrangement (Guarneri *et al.*, 2021). This institutional configuration is also reflected in a higher median duration of marriage at

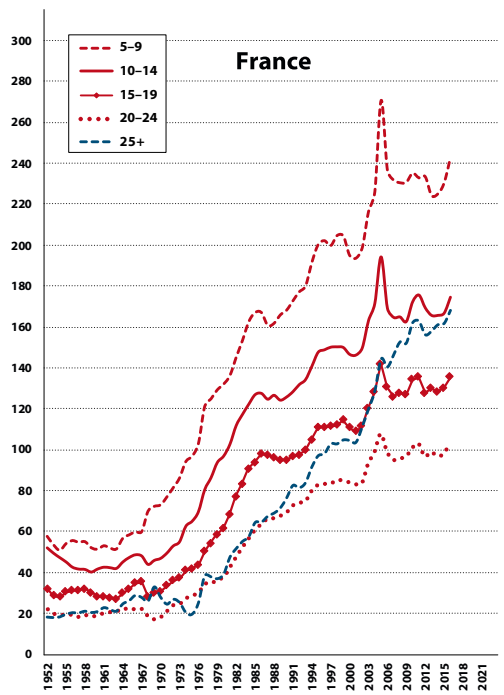
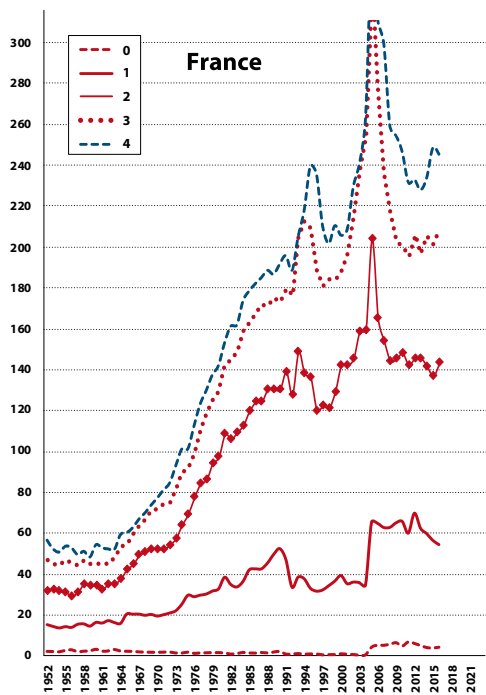
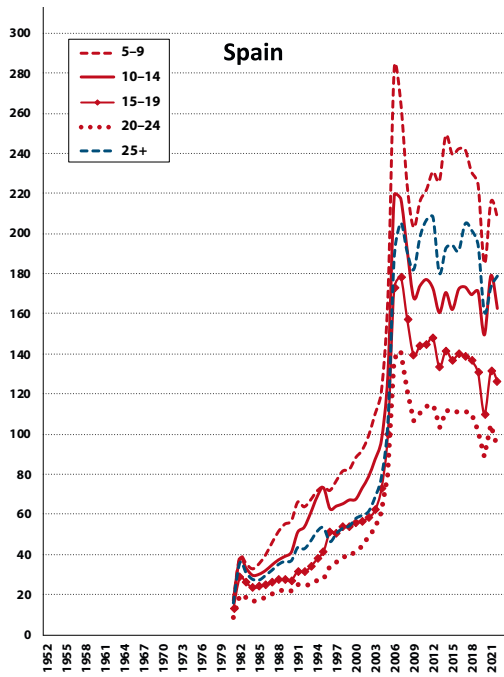
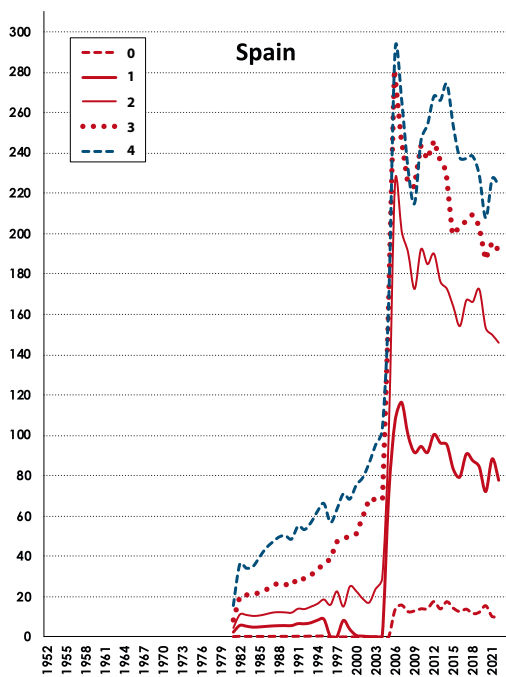
divorce. Following the 2015 reform, which shortened the required separation period, early divorce rates increased modestly, suggesting a gradual adjustment to the revised legal framework.

In Greece, divorce intensity during the early years of marriage—particularly around the second year—rose following Law 4055/2012, which reduced the minimum duration of marriage required for divorce. A more pronounced increase in divorces within the first two years of marriage is observed after 2018, coinciding with the implementation of Law 4509/2017, which further simplified divorce procedures. Unfortunately, comparable post-2016 French data are not available, preventing a direct assessment of the effects of the 2017 reform on early divorce timing in France. An analysis of marriage cohorts⁵⁾ formed between 1952 and 1994 highlights systematic differences in di-

5) A marriage cohort or cohort of marriages consists of all marriages (first, second, third order marriages etc.) contracted during a year.

Figure 4 Divorce rates by duration of marriage (years of marriage: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5–9, 10–14, 15–19, 20–24, 25+), 1952–2023, in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France

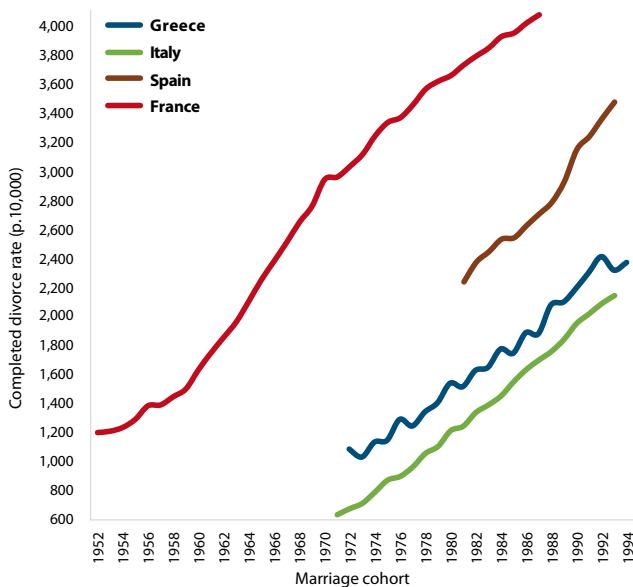




Note: The 5–9 duration category is constructed as the mean of durations 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. An identical averaging procedure was applied to all other duration categories (10–14, 15–19, 20–24, and 25+).

Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

Figure 5 Completed divorce rate (number of divorces per 10,000 marriages, cohorts of marriages 1952-1994), Greece, Italy, Spain and France



Note: Sum of marriage duration specific divorce rates, cohort view.

Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

divorce outcomes across cohorts and countries. Among couples married in 1987, approximately 41% had divorced in France, compared with 27% in Spain, 17% in Italy, and 18.7% in Greece (Fig. 5). For more recent cohorts, divorce intensity is higher in all four countries, although the magnitude of change varies cross-nationally. By the 1993 cohort, 34.7% of Spanish couples, 21.4% of Italian couples, and 23.2% of Greek couples had experienced marital dissolution, with divorce intensity in Greece reaching 23.8% in the 1994 cohort. Overall, these cohort comparisons indicate that divorce has become more prevalent among marriages formed in later periods, while maintaining persistent differences in levels across countries.

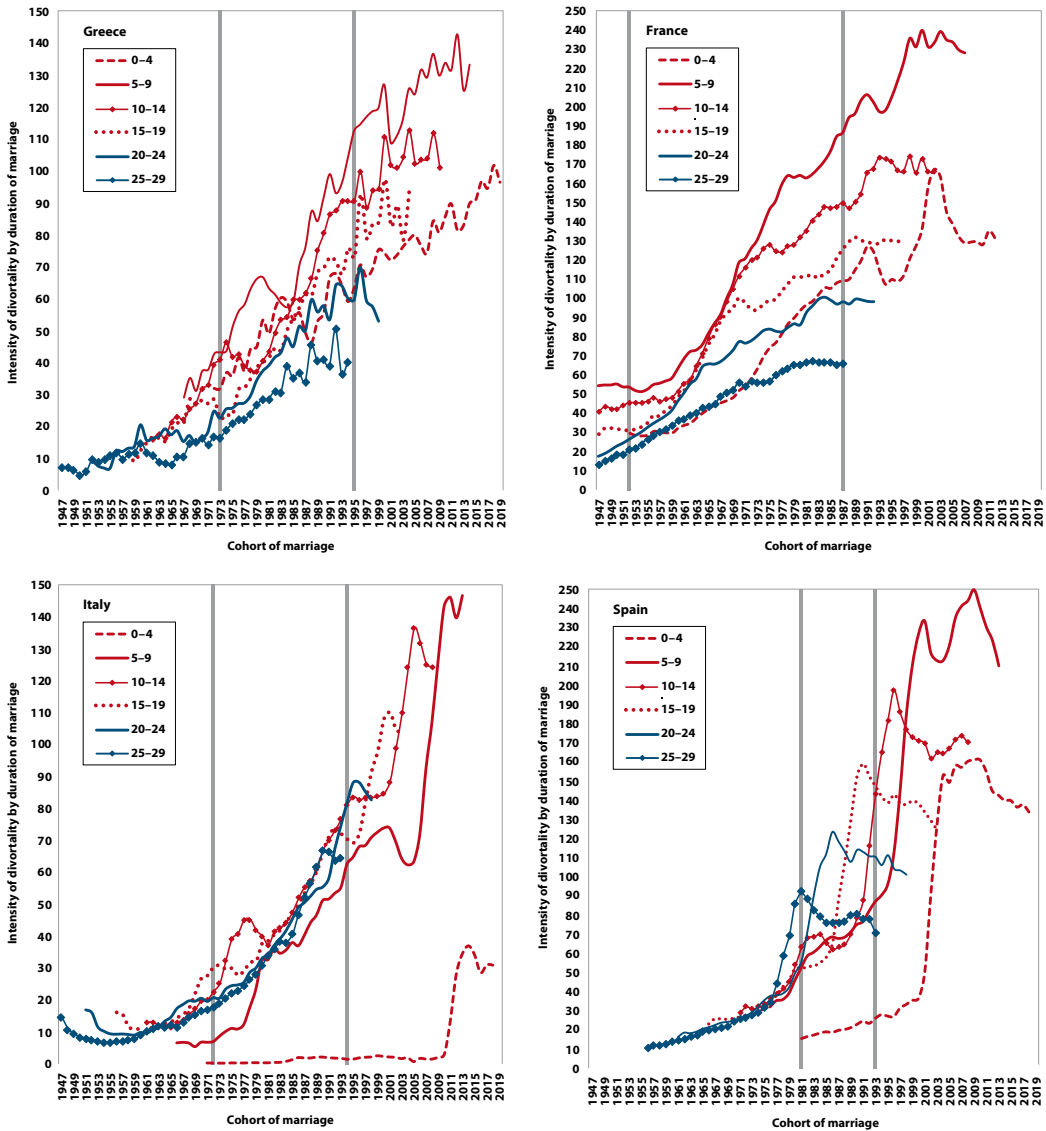
Figure 6 presents divorce rates by marriage cohort across all countries. For Greece, data availability varies by cohort and duration: for cohorts married between 1947 and 1971, information is available only for later durations (e.g. 5–9 and 10–14 years), as divorces occurring during the earliest years of marriage (0–4) predate 1972, the first year for which divorce data are available. Conversely, for cohorts married

between 1995 and 2019, data are available for early durations but not for later ones (25+ years), as these durations extend beyond 2023, the most recent year of observation.

For Greece, cohorts married between 1947 and 1971 display lower divorce intensity at the observed durations than cohorts married from 1972 onward. Comparable cohort differences are observed in Spain (1965–1980 versus post-1981 cohorts), Italy (1947–1970 versus early 1970s cohorts), and France (1947–1951 versus early 1950s cohorts). Final divorce intensities were calculated only for cohorts with at least 30 years of observation: Greece (1972–1994), Italy (1971–1993), Spain (1981–1993), and France (1952–1987).

Although data limitations prevent the calculation of completed divorce intensities for more recent cohorts, the available evidence allows for preliminary observations regarding cohort differences in divorce timing. In particular, cohorts married after 1994 in Greece, after 1993 in Italy and Spain, and after 1987 in France exhibit higher divorce rates at early dura-

Figure 6 Divorce rates by duration of marriage (1st, 2nd, ...,21st duration), cohorts of marriage 1947–2019, Greece, Italy, Spain and France

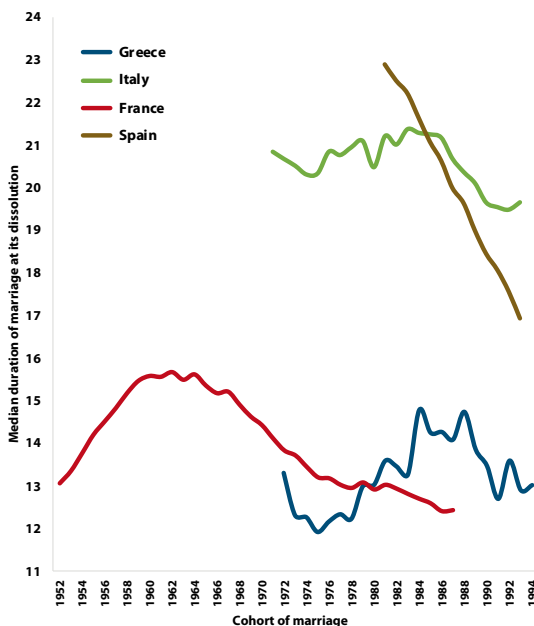


Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

tions compared with older cohorts. These patterns are consistent with changes in legal frameworks and broader social contexts over recent decades, although further observation is required to assess their long-term implications.

Couples in Italy and Spain tend to experience marital dissolution at later durations than those in Greece and France (Fig. 7), a pattern that is consistent with differences in institutional contexts and the timing of legal reforms. In Italy and Spain, divorce legisla-

Figure 7 Median duration of marriage at its dissolution, cohorts of marriages 1952–1994, Greece, Italy, Spain and France



Source: EDO, 2011; ELSTAT, 2023; EUROSTAT, 2023a; INE, 2023; INSEE, 2023b; ISTAT, 2023; LADS, 2018; own calculations.

tion remained comparatively restrictive until 2015 and 2005, respectively, and judicial separation often preceded divorce, particularly in Italy. As a result, divorces among couples married in the 1970s and 1980s were more frequently observed after longer marriage durations.

For more recent cohorts, divorce occurrences are observed at earlier durations in both countries compared with older cohorts. While completed divorce trajectories for these cohorts cannot yet be assessed, available evidence indicates a concentration of divorces at shorter durations than in earlier cohorts. These patterns coincide with changes in legal frameworks and broader shifts in social attitudes toward divorce, although further longitudinal observation is required to determine their long-term implications.

3.2 Attitudes towards divorce

As outlined in the Data and Methods section, we used data from the European Values Study (EVS 2017) to examine factors associated with attitudes toward

divorce, resulting in a final pooled sample of 8,494 individuals after excluding observations with missing values (Tab. 1). Greece accounts for 41.5% of the sample, followed by Italy (24.6%), France (20.6%), and Spain (13.3%). The Greek subsample is younger on average, reflecting the sampling procedure, which began with university students. Accordingly, the median age in the Greek sample is 33, compared with 52 in Italy, 49 in Spain, and 53 in France.

Women constitute 55.8% of the total sample, with higher female representation in Greece (60%), Spain (55.4%), and France (54.4%), while the Italian subsample displays a more balanced gender composition. With respect to marital status, 39.2% of respondents are single, 42.1% married, 9.5% divorced or separated, 7.1% widowed, and 2.1% report being in a registered partnership (RP). The Greek subsample contains a higher share of single respondents (54%), a pattern consistent with its younger age structure, whereas the proportion of singles ranges between 27% and 31% in the other countries. Widowed individuals are more

Table 1 Variables describing the four samples (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)

	Greece	Italy	Spain	France	Total
Sample Size					
Sample Size	3,527 (41.5%)	2,092 (24.6%)	1,129 (13.3%)	1,746 (20.6%)	8,494 (100.0%)
Median Age					
Median Age	33	52	49	53	46
Sex					
Females	2,116 (60.0%)	1,045 (50.0%)	626 (55.4%)	949 (54.4%)	4,736 (55.8%)
Males	1,411 (40.0%)	1,047 (50.0%)	503 (44.6%)	797 (45.6%)	3,758 (44.2%)
Marital Status					
Single	1,906 (54.0%)	580 (27.7%)	299 (26.5%)	545 (31.2%)	3,330 (39.2%)
In Registered Partnership	40 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	51 (4.5%)	87 (5.0%)	178 (2.1%)
Married	1,261 (35.8%)	1,179 (56.4%)	516 (45.7%)	621 (35.6%)	3,577 (42.1%)
Widowed	117 (3.3%)	191 (9.1%)	110 (9.7%)	183 (10.5%)	601 (7.1%)
Separated	39 (1.1%)	74 (3.5%)	63 (5.6%)	81 (4.6%)	257 (3.0%)
Divorced	164 (4.6%)	68 (3.3%)	90 (8.0%)	229 (13.1%)	551 (6.5%)
Is marriage an outdated institution?					
Yes	905 (25.7%)	680 (32.5%)	408 (36.1%)	631 (36.1%)	2,624 (30.9%)
No	2,622 (74.3%)	1,412 (67.5%)	721 (63.9%)	1,115 (63.9%)	5,870 (69.1%)
Is religion important for your life?					
Yes	2,372 (67.3%)	1,401 (67.0%)	453 (40.1%)	627 (35.9%)	4,853 (57.1%)
No	1,155 (32.7%)	691 (33.0%)	676 (59.9%)	1,119 (64.1%)	3,641 (42.9%)
I justify divorce					
Always	901 (25.5%)	489 (23.4%)	371 (32.9%)	637 (36.5%)	2,398 (28.2%)
Sometimes/Never	2,626 (74.5%)	1,603 (76.6%)	758 (67.1%)	1,109 (63.5%)	6,096 (71.8%)

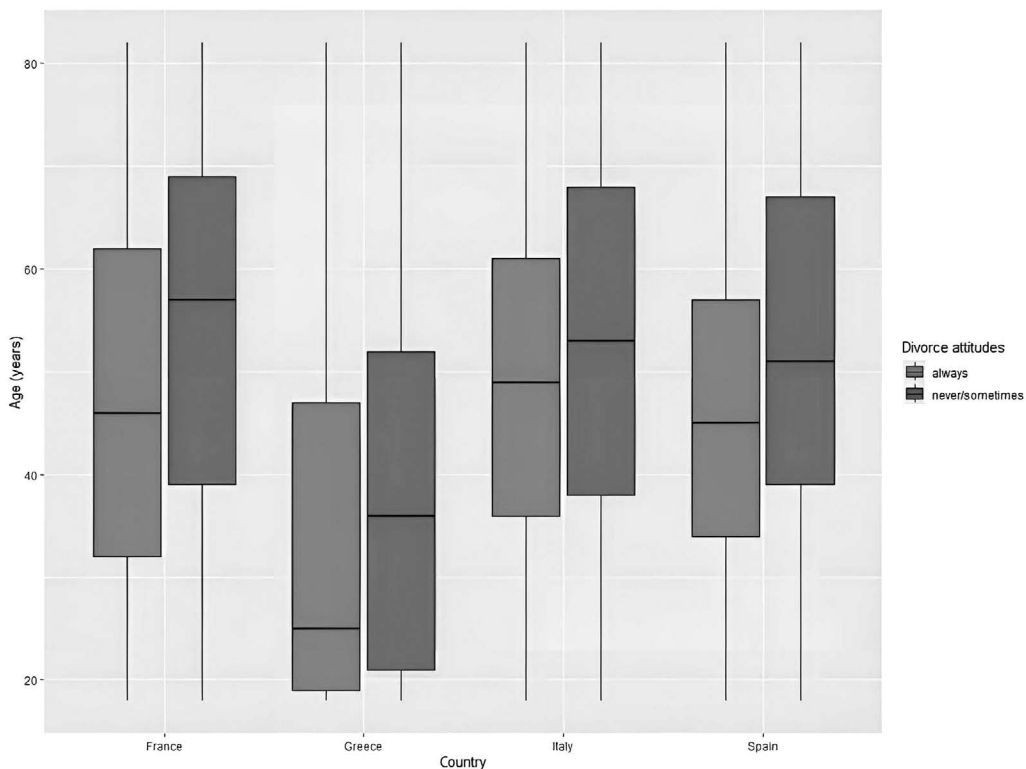
Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

prevalent in the Italian, Spanish, and French subsamples (approximately 10%) than in Greece.

The prevalence of registered partnerships varies across countries in line with differences in legal frameworks and timing of institutional recognition. No respondents in Italy report an RP, reflecting the relatively recent introduction of this legal status in 2016. Registered partnerships remain uncommon in Greece, where legal recognition was introduced in 2008 for heterosexual couples and extended to same-sex couples in

2015, while higher proportions are observed in Spain and France. Divorce and separation are more frequently reported in the Spanish and French subsamples, a pattern consistent with the higher divorce intensity observed at the population level in these countries. Regarding values, attitudes toward marriage and religion display marked cross-national variation. In Greece and Italy, a smaller proportion of respondents consider marriage to be an outdated institution (25.7% and 32.5%, respectively), compared with Spain and

Figure 8 Divorce attitudes versus age (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)



Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; Plot created using ggplot2 package in R by Wickham (2016).

France (both 36.1%). Similarly, religion is reported as important by a larger share of respondents in Greece and Italy (approximately 67%) than in Spain (40.1%) or France (35.9%). These patterns are consistent with previous findings highlighting stronger attachment to traditional family norms and higher religiosity in Southern European contexts (Kontogiannis, 2024a; Kontogiannis et al., 2025; Rontos et al., 2025). As noted in Section 2, the analysis focuses on the most positive attitudes toward divorce, defined as respondents who report that they always justify divorce. Accordingly, the binary dependent variable equals 1 for respondents who always justify divorce and 0 for those who report that they never or sometimes justify it. The proportion of respondents who always justify divorce is lowest in Greece (25.5%) and Italy (23.4%), while higher shares are observed in Spain (32.9%)

and France (36.5%). These cross-national differences in attitudes correspond to the demographic patterns described earlier, indicating that countries with higher divorce intensity also display higher levels of unconditional acceptance of divorce. A central objective of this study is to identify socio-demographic factors associated with these highly positive attitudes toward divorce. Age is examined first. As shown in Figure 8, younger individuals report more supportive views on divorce across all countries, while unconditional acceptance declines with increasing age. We next examined the association between sex and attitudes toward divorce. Tables 2a and 2b report chi-square tests examining the association between unconditional acceptance of divorce and each categorical explanatory variable. Regarding sex differences, statistically significant associations are observed pri-

Table 2a Variables associated with more positive attitudes towards divorce in the four samples (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)

	Do you justify divorce?	Greece	Italy	Spain	France	Total
Sex						
Females	<i>Always</i>	604 (28.5%)	232 (22.2%)	216 (34.5%)	354 (37.3%)	1,406 (29.7%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	1,512 (71.5%)	813 (77.8%)	410 (65.5%)	595 (62.7%)	3,333 (70.3%)
Males	<i>Always</i>	297 (21.0%)	257 (24.5%)	155 (30.8%)	283 (35.5%)	992 (26.4%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	1,114 (79.0%)	790 (75.5%)	348 (69.2%)	514 (64.5%)	2,766 (73.6%)
Marital Status						
Divorced or Separated	<i>Always</i>	52 (25.6%)	63 (44.4%)	60 (39.2%)	118 (38.1%)	293 (36.3%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	151 (74.4%)	79 (55.6%)	93 (60.8%)	192 (61.9%)	515 (63.7%)
Single or in a RP	<i>Always</i>	610 (31.3%)	158 (27.2%)	165 (47.1%)	287 (45.4%)	1,222 (34.8%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	1,336 (68.7%)	422 (72.8%)	185 (52.9%)	345 (54.6%)	2,288 (65.2%)
Married or Widowed	<i>Always</i>	239 (17.3%)	268 (19.6%)	146 (23.3%)	232 (28.9%)	885 (21.2%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	1,139 (82.7%)	1,102 (80.4%)	480 (76.7%)	572 (71.1%)	3,293 (78.8%)
Is marriage an outdated institution?						
Yes	<i>Always</i>	357 (39.4%)	205 (30.1%)	168 (41.2%)	253 (40.1%)	983 (37.5%)
	<i>Never/sometimes</i>	548 (60.6%)	475 (69.9%)	240 (58.8%)	378 (59.9%)	1,641 (62.5%)
No	<i>Always</i>	544 (20.7%)	284 (20.1%)	203 (28.2%)	384 (34.4%)	1,415 (24.1%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	2,078 (79.3%)	1,128 (79.9%)	518 (71.8%)	731 (65.6%)	4,455 (75.9%)
Is religion important for your life?						
Yes	<i>Always</i>	411 (17.3%)	233 (16.6%)	95 (21.0%)	160 (25.5%)	899 (18.5%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	1,961 (82.7%)	1,168 (83.4%)	358 (79.0%)	467 (74.5%)	3,954 (81.5%)
No	<i>Always</i>	490 (42.4%)	256 (37.0%)	276 (40.8%)	477 (42.6%)	1,499 (41.2%)
	<i>Never/Sometimes</i>	665 (57.6%)	435 (63.0%)	400 (59.2%)	642 (57.4%)	2,142 (58.8%)

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

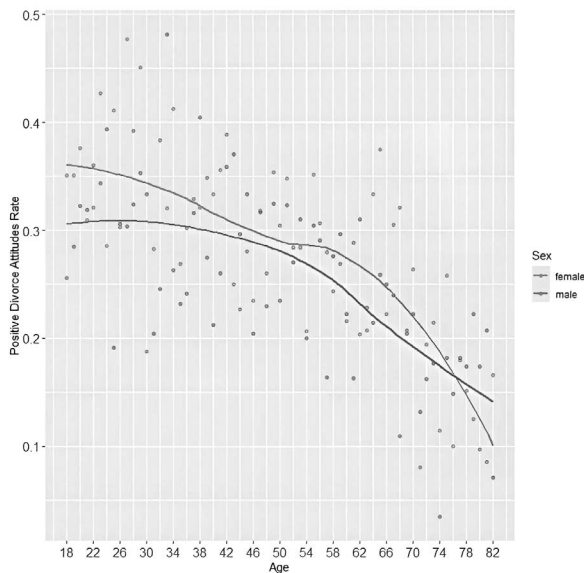
Table 2b Variables associated with more positive attitudes towards divorce in the four samples (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)

		Greece	Italy	Spain	France	Total
Sex	Chi-square value	24.613	1.478	1.558	0.527	11.035
	Degrees of freedom	1**	1	1	1	1**
Marital Status	Chi-square value	83.163	50.895	60.973	42.260	202.380
	Degrees of freedom	2**	2**	2**	2**	2**
Is marriage an outdated institution?	Chi-square value	122.710	25.241	19.438	5.321	159.000
	Degrees of freedom	1**	1**	1**	1*	1**
Is religion important for your life?	Chi-square value	255.920	106.56	47.580	50.024	525.400
	Degrees of freedom	1**	1**	1**	1**	1**

*P < 0.05, **P < 0.01.

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

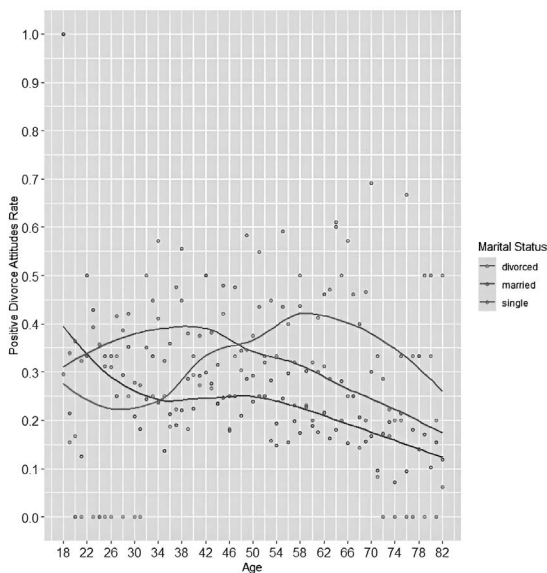
Figure 9 Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate versus age and sex (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)



Note: Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate is the proportion of respondents who always justify divorce (value 10 on the EVS 2017 scale), calculated for each age (single year) and subgroup displayed in the figure.

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; Plot created using ggplot2 package in R by Wickham (2016).

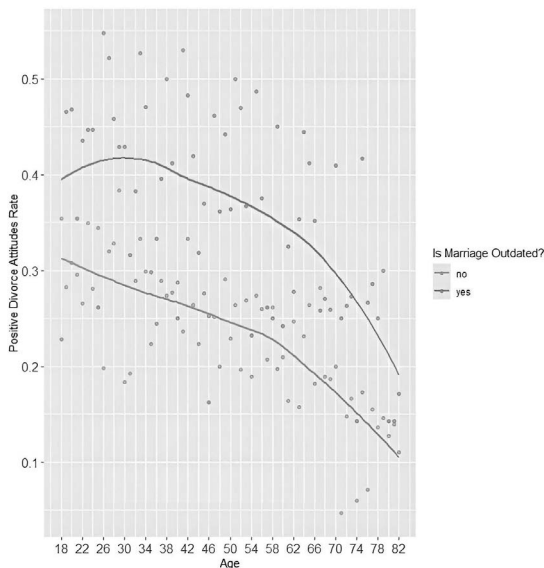
Figure 10 Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate versus age and marital status (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)



Note: Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate is the proportion of respondents who always justify divorce (value 10 on the EVS 2017 scale), calculated for each age (single year) and subgroup displayed in the figure.

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; Plot created using ggplot2 package in R by Wickham (2016).

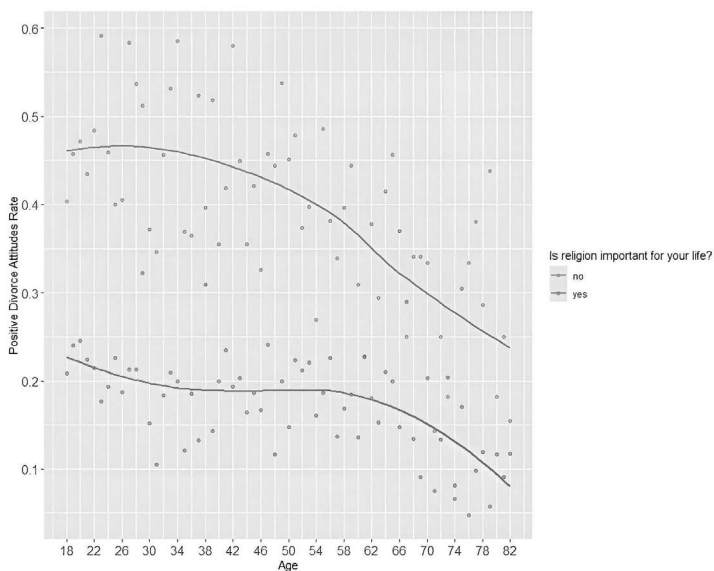
Figure 11 Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate versus age and 'Is marriage outdated?' (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)



Note: Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate is the proportion of respondents who always justify divorce (value 10 on the EVS 2017 scale), calculated for each age (single year) and subgroup displayed in the figure.

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; Plot created using ggplot2 package in R by Wickham (2016).

Figure 12 Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate versus age and 'Is religion important for your life?' (Greece, Italy, Spain, France)



Note: Positive Divorce Attitudes Rate is the proportion of respondents who always justify divorce (value 10 on the EVS 2017 scale), calculated for each age (single year) and subgroup displayed in the figure.

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; Plot created using ggplot2 package in R by Wickham (2016).

marily in Greece and in the pooled sample, a pattern that is likely influenced by the larger sample size of the Greek subsample.

Across countries, women generally report more positive attitudes toward divorce than men, with Italy representing an exception where differences are minimal. The largest gender gap is observed in Greece. Figure 9 further illustrates that, overall, women tend to express higher levels of support for divorce than men across most age groups, with the exception of the oldest respondents (aged 75 and above).

Marital status is also associated with attitudes toward divorce (Tables 2a and 2b). Divorced or separated respondents and single individuals (including those in a registered partnership) tend to report more positive attitudes than married or widowed respondents. In most countries, singles display higher levels of unconditional acceptance of divorce than divorced individuals, with Italy again representing an exception to this pattern.

Figure 10 shows that singles consistently report more positive attitudes toward divorce than married respondents across nearly all age groups. Among divorced individuals, attitudes vary by age: younger divorced respondents tend to express less unconditional acceptance of divorce, whereas older divorced individuals (aged 50 and above) display comparatively higher levels of support. While a detailed interpretation of these age-specific patterns lies beyond the scope of the present analysis, they point to heterogeneity within marital status groups that warrants further investigation.

Attitudes toward the institution of marriage are also associated with divorce attitudes. Respondents who consider marriage to be an outdated institution tend to express higher levels of unconditional acceptance of divorce (Tables 2a and 2b). In France, however, this association is weaker than in the other countries: support for divorce is high regardless of views on marriage, with 40.1% of respondents who view marriage as outdated and 34.4% of those who do not report always justifying divorce (chi-square test, $p = 0.021$). Notably, respondents in France who do not regard marriage as outdated display more positive attitudes toward divorce than respondents in Italy who do consider marriage outdated (34.4% versus 30.1%). Figure 11 confirms that across age groups, respond-

ents holding more critical views of marriage tend to express higher levels of support for divorce.

Finally, religiosity remains associated with attitudes toward divorce. Across all countries, respondents for whom religion is not considered important report more favorable attitudes toward divorce (Tables 2a and 2b). Figure 12 illustrates that this difference is particularly pronounced among younger respondents (under the age of 50).

3.2.1 Modelling attitudes towards divorce via Binary Logistic Regression

Model selection was guided by standard information criteria and diagnostic checks. Comparisons based on the Akaike and Bayesian Information Criteria indicated that the fully specified binary logistic regression model—including age, sex, country, religiosity, marital status, and attitudes toward marriage—provided an appropriate balance between parsimony and explanatory capacity. More specifically, the transition from the intercept-only to the fully specified model results in substantial reductions in AIC (10,112.04 to 9,372.746) and BIC (10,119.09 to 9,443.217), indicating a markedly better model fit. Diagnostic checks further indicated no problematic multicollinearity among the explanatory variables and a satisfactory overall model fit, based on commonly used procedures in regression analysis (Fox *et al.*, 2021; Fox – Monette, 1992; Hosmer – Lemeshow, 1980; Melo, 2013). Detailed diagnostic results are available upon request.

We estimated a binary logistic regression model in which the dependent variable equals 1 if respondents report *always* justifying divorce (value 10 on the EVS 2017 scale) and 0 if they report that they *sometimes* or *never* justify divorce (values 1–9). The model estimates the probability that an individual reports unconditional acceptance of divorce as a function of age, sex, country, religiosity, marital status, and attitudes toward the institution of marriage. All reported coefficients and odds ratios represent adjusted associations, controlling for all other variables included in the model. The results of the final model are presented in Table 3.

Results from the final model (Table 3) indicate that age is negatively associated with unconditional acceptance of divorce: with each additional year of age, the odds of always justifying divorce decrease

Table 3 Results of the binary logistic regression model

Variables	Estimate	Standard Error	Exp(Estimate)
Intercept	0.370**	0.117	1.448
Age-18	-0.011**	0.002	0.989
Sex (male vs female {ref.})	-0.278**	0.052	0.757
Country (Greece vs France {ref.})	-0.422**	0.073	0.656
Country (Italy vs France {ref.})	-0.303**	0.077	0.739
Country (Spain vs France {ref.})	-0.133	0.084	0.876
Is religion important for your life? ('Yes' vs 'No' {ref.})	-0.925**	0.055	0.397
Is marriage an outdated institution? ('Yes' vs 'No' {ref.})	+0.300**	0.055	1.350
Marital Status (married or widowed vs divorced or separated {ref.})	-0.426**	0.087	0.653
Marital status (Single or in a RP vs divorced or separated {ref.})	-0.147	0.094	0.863

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$

Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

by approximately 1.1%. Men display lower odds of unconditional acceptance compared with women. Relative to France, respondents in Greece and Italy exhibit lower odds of always justifying divorce, while differences between Spain and France are not statistically significant. Religiosity is strongly associated with divorce attitudes, with individuals for whom religion is important displaying substantially lower odds of unconditional acceptance. This association should be interpreted in light of the outcome definition: religious respondents may consider divorce acceptable under specific circumstances without endorsing it unconditionally, and may therefore select high but non-extreme values on the response scale (e.g. 8 or 9) rather than the maximum value of 10. In contrast, respondents who regard marriage as an outdated institution exhibit higher odds of unconditional acceptance. Finally, married or widowed respondents show lower odds compared with divorced or separated individuals, while single respondents and those in a registered partnership do not differ significantly from divorced or separated individuals.

3.2.2 The Application of ML Algorithms in the study of attitudes towards divorce

While binary logistic regression enables statistical inference and the estimation of adjusted associations between covariates and attitudes toward divorce, it

relies on parametric assumptions and linear effects on the log-odds scale. To complement this inferential approach, we also apply several machine learning (ML) algorithms. The purpose of the ML analysis is not causal inference, but predictive assessment and the identification of variables that contribute most strongly to the classification of highly positive attitudes toward divorce, while allowing for potential non-linearities and complex interactions among predictors. Accordingly, ML results are interpreted in terms of predictive contribution and feature importance rather than marginal effects or causal relationships, and should therefore be viewed as complementary to—rather than a replacement for—the regression-based findings.

Table 4 reports the classification performance of the machine learning models considered. Overall, all models display a comparable ability to distinguish respondents who always justify divorce from those who do not. Among them, the Random Forest model performs particularly well when recall and F1-score are prioritised, indicating a strong capacity to correctly identify respondents with highly positive attitudes toward divorce in the presence of class imbalance. Boosting-based models (XGBoost and CatBoost) achieve slightly higher overall discrimination as measured by the area under the ROC curve, suggesting similar predictive performance across alternative modelling strategies.

Table 4 Evaluation Metrics of Machine Learning Algorithms on Attitudes Toward Divorce

Model	Optimal Threshold	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1	AUC	AUPRC
XG Boost	0.51	0.666	0.446	0.651	0.529	0.707	0.468
Random Forest	0.38	0.653	0.607	0.870	0.715	0.734	0.714
Light GBM (with SMOTE)	0.42	0.627	0.414	0.712	0.524	0.699	0.470
Cat Boost (with SMOTE)	0.48	0.663	0.444	0.663	0.532	0.709	0.479

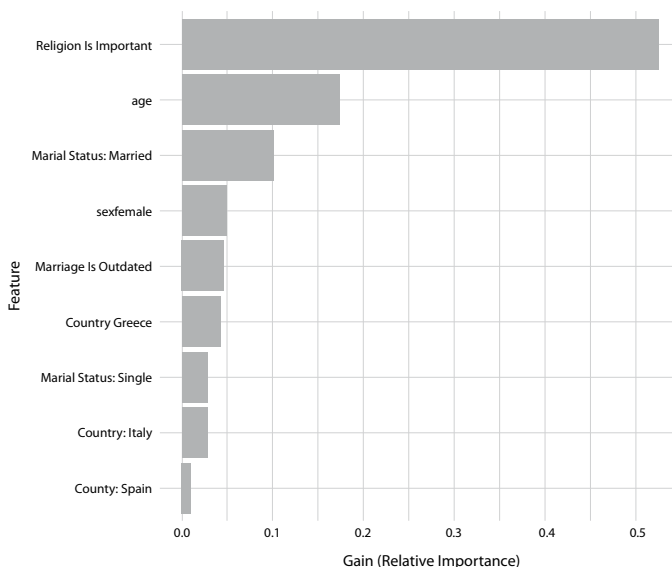
Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

To explore the variables most relevant for model predictions, we examine feature importance measures derived from the two best-performing models—Random Forests and XGBoost (Fig. 13 and 14). Differences in the presentation of feature importance across these figures reflect methodological differences between the algorithms. In the XGBoost model, categorical predictors are represented through one-hot encoding, and feature importance is therefore displayed at the level of individual categories. In contrast, the Random Forest model reports importance aggregated at the level of the original variables. Al-

though the magnitude of importance scores is not directly comparable across models, both approaches consistently identify age and the perceived importance of religion as the most influential predictors, with clearly higher importance than the remaining covariates.

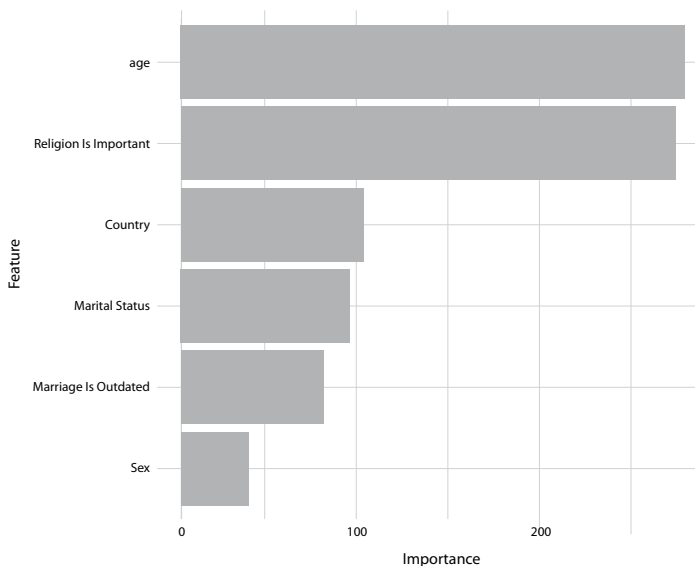
Additional insight into the direction and contribution of specific features is provided by the SHAP summary plot based on the XGBoost model (Fig. 15). Positive SHAP values indicate an increased predicted likelihood of always justifying divorce, while negative values indicate a reduced likelihood rela-

Figure 13 XGBoost Top Feature Importance (Gain) plot



Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

Figure 14 Random Forests' Top Feature Importance plot



Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

tive to the model's baseline prediction. The results show that respondents for whom religion is not considered important are associated with positive SHAP values, whereas those who report religion as important tend to exhibit negative SHAP values, corresponding to a lower predicted probability of unconditional acceptance of divorce. A similar pattern is observed for marital status, with married or widowed respondents displaying predominantly negative SHAP values. Higher age values are also mainly associated with negative SHAP values, indicating a reduced predicted likelihood of always justifying divorce among older respondents. Importantly, negative SHAP values do not imply a negative outcome in absolute terms, but rather a downward contribution of specific feature values to the predicted probability.

Overall, the machine learning results are consistent with the regression findings. Across both analytical frameworks, age and religiosity emerge as the most influential dimensions associated with attitudes toward divorce. This convergence suggests that these factors are not only statistically relevant in regression models,

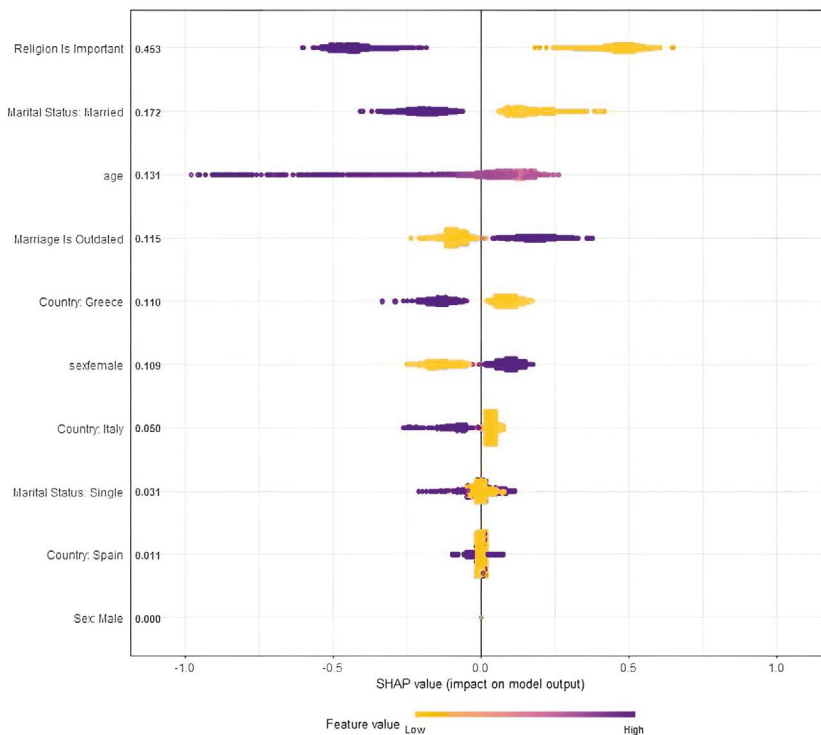
but also play a central role in shaping the predictive structure of divorce attitudes across countries.

4. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine both divorce behaviour and attitudes toward divorce in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France, combining long-term demographic indicators with individual-level attitudinal data. The results reveal both shared patterns and persistent cross-national differences, highlighting the importance of institutional context, religiosity, and cohort dynamics in shaping divorce trends and normative orientations.

From a behavioural perspective, divorce intensity increased in all four countries over the past decades, although at different points in time and with varying magnitude. France and Spain reached comparatively higher levels earlier, whereas Greece and Italy exhibited lower divorce intensity and later increases. These differences do not suggest a simple linear process of uniform transformation, but rather reflect context-specific configurations shaped by legal frameworks,

Figure 15 SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) values plot [XGBoost]



Source: EVS/WVS, 2021; EVS, 2020; own calculations.

religious influence, and broader social change. Legislative reforms facilitated divorce in each country, yet the evidence indicates that institutional change interacted with underlying value shifts and demographic dynamics rather than acting as an isolated trigger. The cohort analysis further demonstrates that more recent marriage cohorts tend to experience higher divorce risks and shorter marital durations before dissolution. This pattern is consistent with broader transformations in marital expectations, where individual fulfilment and personal autonomy increasingly shape the evaluation of intimate relationships. However, the pace and extent of these changes differ across countries, reinforcing the importance of institutional and cultural context. The attitudinal analysis provides complementary insight. Younger respondents and women are more likely to express unconditional acceptance of divorce, con-

sistent with prior research linking generational change and gender equality to more permissive family norms. Religiosity emerges as a central factor across analytical approaches, with higher levels of religious commitment associated with lower unconditional acceptance of divorce. Importantly, the outcome variable captures unconditional endorsement (“always acceptable”), rather than general permissiveness. Religious respondents may regard divorce as acceptable under specific circumstances without endorsing it unconditionally, which helps explain why high but non-extreme responses may coexist with lower selection of the most permissive category. The negative association should therefore be interpreted as reflecting resistance to absolute endorsement rather than categorical rejection of divorce. The convergence between regression and machine learning results strengthens confidence in these as-

sociations. Across modelling strategies, age and religiosity consistently appear as the most influential predictors, suggesting that these dimensions structure divorce attitudes across diverse institutional settings. The inclusion of machine learning techniques does not alter the substantive conclusions, but highlights the robustness of key relationships and allows the identification of potential non-linearities and interaction patterns.

The comparison between Southern Europe and France illustrates how divorce behaviour and attitudes are embedded within distinct institutional and cultural configurations. France's earlier secularisation and long-standing divorce legislation coincide with comparatively higher divorce intensity and more permissive attitudes. However, the findings do not support the idea of a single, uniform pathway of family change. Instead, the results suggest that similar macro-level transformations—such as increased individualisation and shifting gender roles—are mediated by country-specific institutional arrangements and religious contexts.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to debates surrounding the Second Demographic Transition and the deinstitutionalisation of marriage. While value change is often conceptualised as a driver of behavioural transformation, the evidence here supports a more reciprocal interpretation. Divorce prevalence and normative acceptance appear to reinforce one another over time, but within boundaries shaped by institutional structures and cultural traditions. Rather than a simple unidirectional process, the relationship between behaviour and attitudes emerges as context-dependent and mutually reinforcing.

Beyond academic debate, the findings have broader social implications. Rising divorce intensity and increasing acceptance of marital dissolution affect family structures, intergenerational relationships, and social policy considerations. Countries characterised by stronger religious influence or later legal liberalisation may experience distinct policy challenges compared to contexts where divorce has been institutionalised for decades. Understanding these differences is essential for designing family policies that respond to diverse demographic realities.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The attitudinal analysis relies on cross-sectional data, limiting causal inference regarding the directionality between behaviour and values. Additionally, sampling differences—particularly in the Greek survey—require cautious interpretation of country-specific estimates. Future research could extend the comparative framework to additional European contexts or examine other dimensions of family change, such as cohabitation or fertility behaviour, in conjunction with divorce.

Overall, the combined analysis of behavioural and attitudinal dimensions demonstrates that divorce change in Europe cannot be understood through a single explanatory lens. Institutional context, religiosity, generational change, and gender dynamics interact in shaping both marital instability and normative orientations. By focusing on Southern Europe and contrasting it with a historically distinct European case, this study provides a structured assessment of how demographic and value transformations unfold within differentiated institutional environments.

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SUMMARY

The paper examines long-term divorce patterns and attitudes toward divorce in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France, combining demographic period and cohort analysis with attitudinal analysis from the European Values Study (EVS 2017). France is used as a contrast case rather than as a benchmark because of its earlier secularisation and longer history of divorce legislation. The study applies descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, binary logistic regression, and machine learning models including Random Forest, XGBoost, LightGBM, and CatBoost. The analysis shows that divorce spread earlier and reached higher levels in France and, later, in Spain, while Greece and Italy followed a slower and more delayed path. After 2010, divorce affected roughly half of marriages in Spain and nearly half in France, compared with clearly lower levels in Greece and Italy. Cohort analysis further indicates that more recent marriage cohorts tend to divorce more often and at earlier durations than older cohorts, although the pace of change differs across countries.

A central finding is that legal reforms strongly shaped divorce trends, although they interacted with broader cultural and demographic changes rather than acting alone. Major reforms in Greece, Spain, and Italy progressively lowered institutional barriers and contributed to rising divorce levels, while France's longer legal tradition of divorce helped explain its earlier and higher prevalence.

The attitudinal analysis shows that unconditional acceptance of divorce is more common in France and Spain than in Greece and Italy. Younger individuals, women, divorced or single respondents, and those who consider marriage an outdated institution are more likely to justify divorce, whereas religiosity is consistently associated with lower acceptance.

Logistic regression and machine learning models confirm these patterns. Age and religiosity emerge as the strongest predictors of attitudes toward divorce, while marital status and beliefs about marriage also play an important role. Overall, the findings highlight the interaction between institutional change and broader cultural transformations, showing that although Southern European countries share some common trends, their divorce trajectories remain shaped by distinct legal, religious, and social contexts.



Statistika v mapách

Statistický geoportál

Statistické údaje
vztahované
k území

Demografická data,
pohyb obyvatel,
výsledky voleb
a mnoho dalšího

Názorně,
přehledně,
srozumitelně

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