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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Gender attitudes—individuals' beliefs about appropriate roles for women and men in paid work and family life—have long been recognized as important predictors of family and labor market outcomes (Chatillon et al., 2018; Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Both partners' individual level gender attitudes also interact at the couple level, jointly shaping these outcomes interactively, as a growing body of research demonstrates (Bornatici & Zinn, 2025; Grunow & Lietzmann, 2021; Nitsche et al., 2025; Nitsche & Grunow, 2018; Wang & Hu, 2025). Couples in which both partners hold egalitarian views tend to arrange their lives most equally, joint traditional couples most unequally, while mixed couples lie in the middle (*ibid.*).

While there is rapid progress in understanding how couples' combined gender attitudes relate to work arrangements, we know little about how these pairings themselves evolve over time. While research has shown that individuals' gender attitudes shift over the life course, in particular in response to major life transitions such as marriage or parenthood, these investigations leave couples' joint ideological shifts under researched (Baxter et al., 2014; Perales et al., 2018; Vespa, 2009; Yu & Kuo, 2018). This evidence gap is, however, consequential: if couples' combined gender attitudes meaningfully shape their division of labor, understanding how these attitudinal pairings themselves transform around major life events becomes essential. For instance, studies indicate that individuals tend to adopt more traditional gender views following the birth of their first child in some contexts such as Australia or the United States (Perales et al., 2018; Vespa, 2009)—yet it remains unknown whether couples *jointly* become more traditional after the birth of their first child, which may, in consequence, drive the often observed traditionalisation of care and work arrangements of new families, and has potential implications for higher parity fertility. This study addresses this evidence gap by asking: How do couples' attitudinal pairings change before and after they become parents?

Examining couple's shifting gender attitudes in one society or sample only may not be conclusive. First, research indicates that how individuals' gender attitudes evolve around their first birth varies across societies. For instance no change has been recorded in Sweden (Kaufman et al., 2017) and a shift toward more egalitarian views has been observed in Japan (Yu & Kuo, 2018). Second, Risman's gender structure theory (Risman, 2004) reminds us that couples' attitudes and their evolution do not occur in a vacuum—which may explain the varying findings across societies. According to gender structure theory, the broader institutional and normative environment—including welfare state framings, family policies, and prevailing gender cultures—shapes both the attitudes individuals hold and how parenthood may alter those views. Investigating couples' attitudinal trajectories around first birth is therefore ideally done using a comparative approach.

Therefore, we investigate this question by comparing couples' gender attitude pairing trajectories from before to after their transition to parenthood across three societies that feature variation in gender culture and welfare regimes: Germany, Switzerland and Australia. To do so, we draw from high-quality household panel studies *Panel Study of Intimate*

Relationships and Family Dynamics—Pairfam for Germany (Brüderl et al. 2022); the Swiss Household Panel—SHP for Switzerland and The Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia Survey—HILDA for Australia (Department of Social Services & Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic Social Research, 2024). model partners’ gender ideological pairings over the transition to first birth using fixed effects panel regression models. These panel surveys repeatedly survey both partners’ gender attitudes among coupled respondents through the transition to parenthood and contain comparable gender attitudinal measurements, while the three countries offer valuable contextual variation in family policy regimes and greater societal gender norms. Germany is typically defined as a conservative welfare state, Australia as a liberal one, and Switzerland as a hybrid case combining limited welfare provision with strong familialisation.

DATA AND METHOD

Data and Independent Measure

We compare longitudinal couple-level data from the Australian Household, Income and Labour Dynamics survey (HILDA), the Swiss household panel survey (SHP) and the German Panel survey for family dynamics (PAIRFAM). Ideally, gender attitudes would be measured as a latent multidimensional construct, formed by using various gender attitudinal measures on separate domains (e.g. division of domestic work, division of paid work, effects of gendered work arrangements on children or child-parent relationships) (Begall et al., 2023) . However, the datasets feature only one strictly comparable gender attitude item, namely the item that measures whether respondents believe that young children will suffer when their mother works. While in future work we may compare a broader set of less strictly comparable items that assess attitudes on other dimensions, for the moment we focus only on this item.

Here an overview of the measure and its wording across the panels:

	Scale	Recoding	Frequency asked
PAIRFAM; “Children <6 suffer when their mothers work”	1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)	Recoded: 1, 2 = “Egalitarian”, 3-5 “Non egalitarian”	Every second wave (1 through 13 plus wave 10)
HILDA: “A pre school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works full time”	1 to 7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree)	Recoded: 1-3 = “Egalitarian”, 4-7 = “Non egalitarian”	Every third or fourth wave: Waves 5, 8, 11, 15, 19, 23
SHP: “A pre-school child suffers, if his or her mother works for pay.”	0 (Completely disagree) to 10 (Completely agree)	Recoded: 0-3 = “Egalitarian”, 4-10 = “Non egalitarian”	Waves 4-13, 16, 19, 22, 25

We form four couple-types. Couples are classified as either being a) both egalitarian, b) both traditional, or c) mixed with him being egalitarian and her being traditional, and d) mixed with her being egalitarian and him being traditional.

Analytical Strategy and Sample

We select couples who are childless at their first interview and who offer information on both partner’s attitude towards maternal employment at least once before and once after their first child’s birth. Couples are observed for at least three years before and after the birth of their first child recorded in the data. We estimate a fixed effect multinomial logistic panel regression using the couple’s joint attitude combination as the dependent variable and the birth of the first child as the main independent variable.

	Sample size
PAIRFAM	598 couples, 3273 couple-year observations
HILDA	1164 couples, 4967 couple-year observations
SHP	348 couples, 1304 couple-year observations

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Initial results suggest a shift toward egalitarian attitudes in relation to the transition to childbirth: both partners are more likely to express joint egalitarian attitudes after the birth of the first child in the three countries considered.

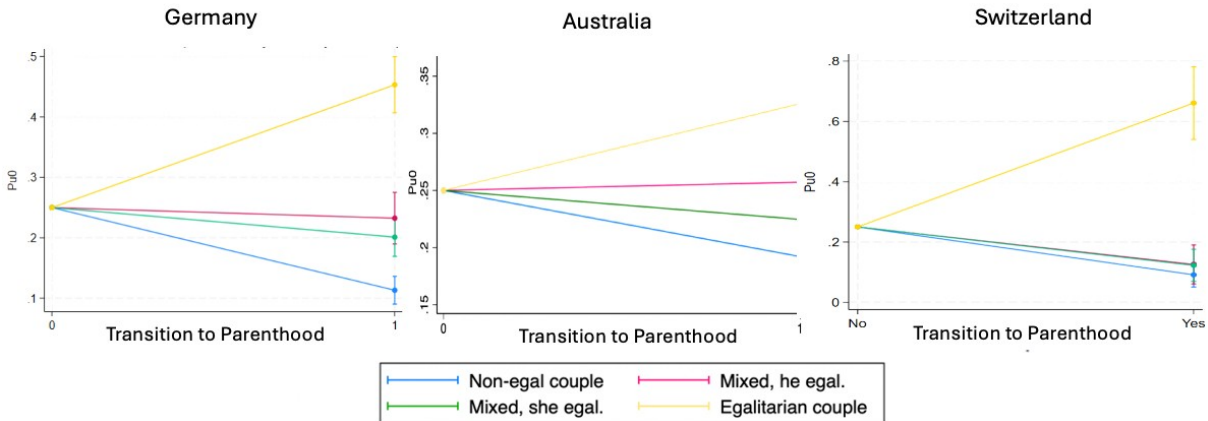


Figure 1 predicted the probability of transitioning to each couple-combination of attitudes after childbirth in Germany, Australia and Switzerland. FE model, six-year observation period, no controls

To investigate potential time-dependent trends, we also regress the couple’s joint attitudes over the elapsed years before/after the birth of the first child. Through these results we can appreciate how the transition towards more egalitarian attitudes commences before the birth of the first child, and tends to taper off after two years. The phenomenon is more pronounced in the two European countries considered, with Australia showing less a pronounced but still broadly significant trend.

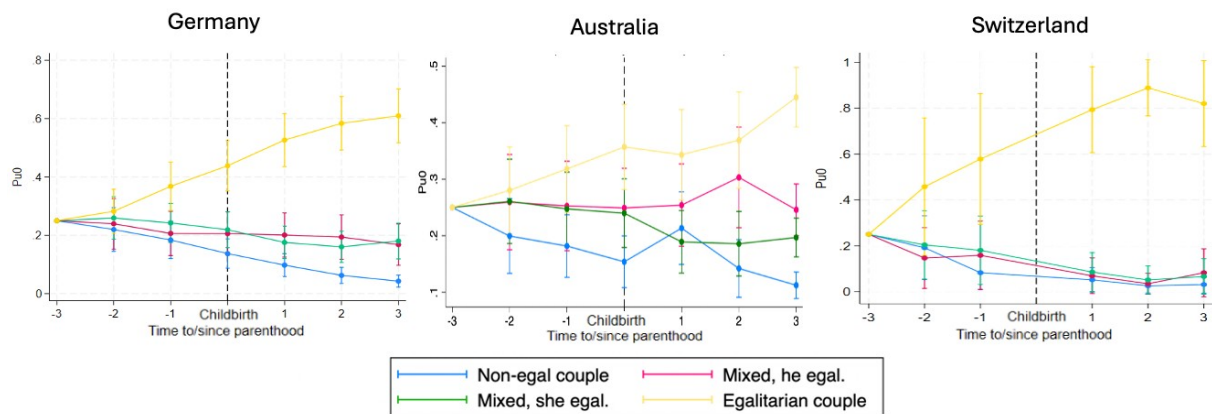


Figure 2: Predicted probability of transitioning to each attitude combination for each year before/after childbirth in Germany, Australia and Switzerland. FE model, no controls.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Our results show a pattern of attitudinal change common for the three contexts considered: across the birth of the first child, couples alter their attitudes towards mother's employment in an egalitarian direction. This phenomenon can be observed two years before the birth of the first child is recorded in the data. We aim to extend the observation period scope of the analysis and include socio-demographic and contextual factors that might influence the egalitarianisation phenomenon observed.

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