Divorce Without Divorcing: How the Right to Exit Reshapes Women's Labour Supply in Malta

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Abstract

This paper studies how married women's labour supply responds to the transition from legally indissoluble marriage to legal divorce. I examine Malta's 2011 divorce legalisation, exploiting the reform as a sharp shift in the expected enforceability and stability of marriage contracts. Because the reform applied nationally, identification relies on complementary sources of within-country variation in exposure to the reform. First, I exploit geographic variation in support for divorce legalisation across electoral divisions, using referendum vote shares as a measure of the local "bite" of the reform. Second, I compare married and single women before and after the reform. Heterogeneity analyses further examine whether responses vary by age and education, groups that differ in expected exposure to marital dissolution risk. I find that divorce legalisation increased labour supply primarily along the intensive margin. Married women in districts with stronger support for divorce increased weekly hours worked relative to married women in low-support districts, while effects on labour force participation are limited. The responses are concentrated among younger and lower-educated married women, groups more likely to anticipate future exposure to divorce risk. I also find suggestive evidence of reductions in domestic work. Overall, the results are consistent with an expectations channel in which divorce legalisation alters women's incentives within marriage even before any marital dissolution occurs.

Keywords: Divorce Legalisation · Female Labour Supply · Expectations · Malta
JEL codes: J12 · J16 · J22 · D13

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1 Introduction

One of the most striking economic phenomena of the last century was the dramatic rise in women's labour force participation, particularly among married women (Blau and Kahn, 2017). Scholars have proposed a range of explanations for this trend, including real wage growth (Goldin, 1990), structural transformation toward services (Blau and Kahn, 2017), the declining time-cost of home production enabled by household technology (Greenwood et al., 2005), and the expansion of family-friendly policies such as subsidies of childcare and parental leave (Gustafsson and Stafford, 1992; Cascio, 2009; Gehringer and Klasen, 2017; Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017). A complementary explanation focuses on the evolving landscape surrounding marriage. If women anticipate that their marriage may dissolve, they have strong incentives to invest in labour market skills and maintain attachment to the workforce as a form of self-insurance. In a pioneering study, Johnson and Skinner (1986) estimated that the changing prospect of marital dissolution accounted for approximately one-sixth of the increase in female labour force participation in the United States between 1960 and 1980.

This paper studies the effect of divorce risk on female labour supply by exploiting the legislation of divorce in Malta in 2011 as a natural experiment. Malta was the last country in Europe, and the third-to-last country in the world,[1] to permit divorce, having maintained a constitutional ban rooted in the island's Catholic tradition until a narrowly won referendum opened the path to legislative change. Following the reform, divorce rates emerged and evolved steadily (Figure 1a). This institutional setting offers a unique opportunity relative to the existing literature, which has largely focused on reforms that reduce the cost of an already-available divorce (such as the adoption of unilateral or no-fault divorce regimes across U.S. states). In contrast, the Maltese case involves the introduction of divorce as a legal institution for the first time, capturing the full extensive margin: how women adjust labour supply when the option of exiting marriage becomes newly available.

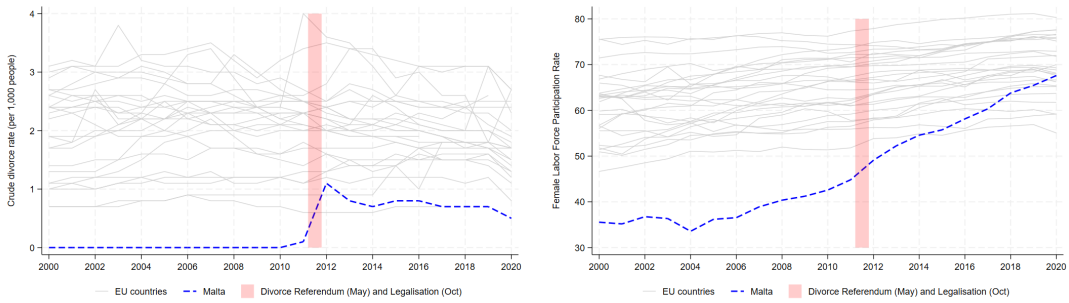
The Maltese context is also substantively important, as the country experienced one of the most dramatic increases in female labour supply over the past two decades: it increased from just over 35% in 2000, well below the EU average, to approximately 68% by 2020 (Figure 1b). Part of this growth began following EU accession in 2004 and associated labour market reforms, generating a sustained upward trend in participation prior to the legalisation of divorce. The analysis must therefore separate the effect of divorce legalisation from these pre-existing trends. At the same time, what makes Malta uniquely informative, beyond the sharpness of the legal discontinuity, is its timing. It provides an opportunity to examine how expectations of marital dissolution shape women's labour supply in a modern European economy, one in which women already

[1] There are still two places in the world, the Philippines and the Vatican City, where divorce is not allowed (Abela, 2013).

have broad access to education, service-sector employment, and evolving gender norms.[2]

Figure 1. Trends in Divorce Rates and Female Labour Force Participation

(a) Divorce Rate (b) FLFP



Notes: Figure 1(a) shows the annual female labour force participation rate computed as the proportion of the female population ages 15-64 that is economically active. Source: International Labour Organization. Figure 1(b) shows the crude divorce rate, which is the ratio of the number of divorces during the year per 1,000 people. Source: Eurostat. In both figures, the unit of observation is a country-year. The blue-dashed line represents Malta, while all the other grey lines represent EU countries.

Isolating the causal effect of divorce risk on female labour force participation is empirically challenging due to reverse causality. On the one hand, higher female participation in the labour market may itself raise divorce rates by decreasing women's economic dependence and reducing the returns to marriage-specific skill specialisation.[3] On the other hand, married women who anticipate a higher risk of marital dissolution may increase their labour supply in order to self-insure against a future loss of spousal income or to raise the opportunity cost of divorce for their partners. This implies a causal effect running from divorce risk to labour supply. Even if neither of these causal pathways holds, a correlation between divorce risk and female labour force participation may still arise due to selection: women with higher earning potential, lower tolerance for unequal partnerships, and stronger preferences for independence may be both more likely to work and more likely to favour, or benefit from, the availability of divorce, generating a spurious correlation even in the absence of any causal effect of divorce law.[4] In addition, and specific to the Maltese setting, there is another layer of complexity, as the reform was implemented nationally and simultaneously, leaving no geographic or temporal

[2]The Maltese setting differs fundamentally from earlier-studied contexts, such as Italy (1970), Spain (1981), Ireland (1996), or Chile (2004), where divorce was introduced under markedly different economic and social conditions.

[3]Allen (1998) argues that the increase in the labour force participation of women was the driving force behind the rise in divorce reforms during the late 1960s and 1970s in the western world.

[4]This concern has two implications for the present analysis. First, cross-sectional comparisons of labour supply between women in more or less divorce-prone relationships are unlikely to recover causal effects, since exposure to marital instability is itself endogenous to preferences, bargaining dynamics and labour-market attachment. Exploiting a nationwide legal reform mitigates this problem by shifting divorce availability at the institutional level rather than through individual relationship characteristics. However, a separate compositional concern remains: if the reform changes the incentives to marry rather than cohabit, the composition of married women observed after the reform may differ from that observed before the reform. One way to partially address this concern would be to restrict the sample to women whose marriages predate the reform. However, this information is not available in the survey.

variation that could be exploited in a difference-in-difference design. One candidate identification strategy is to compare the labour force participation of married women in Malta to that of married women in other European countries, particularly those that also joined the European Union in 2004 and had already legalized divorce, using a synthetic control approach. However, no country in this group replicates Malta's sharp acceleration in female labour force participation, especially in the years leading up to 2011, making the use of European countries as donors infeasible.[5]

To overcome these challenges, I exploit complementary sources of within-country variation in exposure to the reform. The primary strategy uses geographic variation in the intensity of the reform across Malta's 13 electoral divisions. The 2011 divorce referendum produced substantial cross-district variation in the share of votes in favor of divorce, ranging from 32% in Gozo to 66% in the most pro-divorce mainland district, which I use as a measure of treatment intensity. Districts with stronger pro-divorce sentiment exhibit greater latent demand for divorce and experienced larger shifts in belief and expectations about marital stability. Identification comes from comparing post-reform changes across districts with different levels of support for divorce in the 2011 referendum.

The second strategy compares married women to young single women that are not at risk of marital dissolution. These comparison groups are exposed to the same macroeconomic conditions, labour market policies, and cultural trends as married women, while remaining largely unaffected by the legalisation of divorce. To the extent that the reform indirectly influences marriage-market conditions for single women anticipating future marriage, this group is partially treated and the estimates should be interpreted as a lower on the causal effect of divorce legalisation on married women's labour supply.

Two findings emerge. First, the geographic bite design identifies a significant intensive-margin response among married women: hours worked increase by 0.08 for each percentage-point increase in district divorce support after the reform. Quantitatively, this is roughly equivalent to a 2% increase over the pre-reform mean of 33.3 hours per week, or about one standard work week per year. The estimate is stable across a battery of robustness checks, including the exclusion of Gozo, controls for pre-existing partisan geography, a binary above-median specification, and a turnout-adjusted bite measure addressing potential strategic abstention in the referendum. Second, the married-versus-single comparison confirms that the labour supply response is concentrated on the marital-status margin, with married women exhibiting significant increases in employment and full-time work relative to single women post-reform. The pattern across the two strategies consistently indicates that married women reallocate time toward market work and away from domestic labour. This pattern is consistent with the

[5]Synthetic control relies on closely matching pre-treatment trends to generate valid inferences, this poor pre-intervention fit renders the method unsuitable in this context (Abadie et al., 2010).

expectations channel emphasised in this paper: divorce legalisation reshapes women's outside options, generating labour supply responses through changes in beliefs about marital stability rather than only through realised divorces. The hours response is concentrated among married women aged 35–44 and is increasing in educational attainment.

The effect of divorce on female labour force participation has been intensively investigated for decades. Most of the existing literature studies reforms to already-available divorce regimes, particularly reductions in the cost or difficulty of marital dissolution, such as shorter separation requirements and, more prominently, the adoption of unilateral and no-fault divorce laws (Peters, 1986; Parkman, 1992; Friedberg, 1998; Genadek et al., 2007; Hoehn-Velasco and Penglase, 2021). The findings to date are not conclusive, and this raises the question of how much these regulation changes affect the perceived risk of marital dissolution. When positive, some of these studies found that the switch from mutual consent to unilateral divorce increased female labour force participation between 1 and 2 percentage points. Others have exploited the passage of unilateral divorce laws to measure the effect on different dimensions, from political affiliation and voting turnout Edlund and Pande (2002); Dehdari et al. (2022), to women's motherhood timing (Gallegos and Ondrich, 2017) and daily time allocation (Genadek, 2018), household saving behaviour (González and Özcan, 2013), the implication for children (Gruber, 2004; González and Viitanen, 2018), family formation (Drewianka, 2008), on family violence (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2006; Brassiolo, 2016), marriage-specific capital (Stevenson, 2007) and on marriage (Rasul, 2003, 2006) and divorce rates themselves (Peters, 1986; Allen, 1998; Friedberg, 1998; Wolfers, 2006; González and Viitanen, 2009).

Building on this literature, this paper focuses on a distinct institutional margin: the legalisation of divorce from a complete ban. The closest antecedent is Bargain et al. (2012), who also studies Ireland's 1996 divorce legalisation and finds a 4–7 percentage point increase in female participation. Their identification relies on using religiosity to distinguish couples at high versus low risk of marital dissolution. Importantly, the Irish setting is structurally close to Malta's as divorce was legalised on top of a pre-existing judicial-separation regime that already governed maintenance and property division. Other work has used legalisation episodes to study related but distinct outcomes: González and Özcan (2013) examine household saving behaviour using the same Irish reform, Gallegos and Ondrich (2017) study the effect of Chile's 2004 divorce legalisation on the timing of women's first birth, and Heggeness (2020) exploits the Chilean reform to show that the compensatory provision embedded in the divorce law shifted intrahousehold bargaining power toward homemakers, leading to a significant increase in children's school enrolment.

A parallel and more recent literature recovers some of these mechanisms structurally. Reynoso (2024) estimates a life-cycle equilibrium model of marriage, labour supply and divorce and

shows that unilateral divorce raises assortative matching; Foerster (2025) models the dynamic role of alimony and child support in couples' decisions and welfare; and Brown et al. (2025) identify the effects of family law on divorce, fertility and child investment. Most closely related to this paper, Joubert and Choi (2026) estimate a structural model of Chile's 2004 legalisation and find that it raised marriage and fertility and reduced the labour supply of married women (particularly highly educated ones) because the reform strengthened the legal protection afforded to the home-specialised spouse upon dissolution, lowering the risk of specialising in home production. The Maltese reform complements this literature by providing quasi-experimental variation that isolates the exit-option and expectations channel in a setting where post-dissolution protection remained essentially unchanged.

This distinction is substantively important because the Chilean and Maltese reforms altered different dimensions of the marriage contract. In Chile, divorce legalisation simultaneously introduced divorce and enhanced the financial protection of the home-specialised spouse (the provision through which Heggeness (2020) traces effects on children) so that the exit-option and protection channels move together. In Malta, by contrast, the financial architecture of dissolution, namely division of the community of acquests and maintenance, was already established through the legal separation regime in place since 1870, and the 2011 reform added the right to exit and remarry while leaving that protection essentially unchanged, as was the case in Ireland. See Table A1 for a comparison of reforms in Ireland, Chile and Malta.

This paper contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it provides evidence on divorce legalisation and female labour supply in a modern high-income economy with broad female educational attainment, service-sector employment and rapidly rising female participation, a setting markedly different from Ireland in the mid-1990s or Chile in the early 2000s, where the classic specialisation and self-insurance mechanisms may have operated differently. Second, by exploiting within-country geographic variation in latent demand for divorce in a reform that left post-dissolution financial protection largely unchanged, the paper isolates the exit-option and expectations channel separately from the protection and bargaining mechanisms that were jointly affected in earlier reforms.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section II sets out the conceptual framework linking divorce legalisation to female labour supply. Section III describes the Maltese institutional setting and the 2011 reform. Section IV describes the data and the construction of the district-level treatment-intensity and religiosity measures, and describes the sample. Section V presents the empirical strategy, and Section VI reports the results. Section VII presents robustness and falsification tests, Section VIII examines heterogeneous effects, and Section IV concludes.

2 Conceptual Framework

Marriage creates opportunities for specialisation: one spouse invests in market oriented human capital while the other specialises in home production activities such as childcare and household management (Becker et al., 1977). When the marriage contract is permanent, as was the case in Malta prior to 2011, this division can be efficient as returns to specialisation are shared through the joint household budget. The legalisation of divorce disrupts this efficient dynamic. The spouse who has specialised in marriage-specific capital, typically the wife, at the expense of labour market experience and skills accumulates human capital with limited value outside the marriage. the possibility of divorce raises the expected cost of home specialisation and lowers the expected returns, pushing women towards maintaining workforce attachment. This basic insight connects divorce with female labour supply through the expected returns to specialisation, and holds even if women makes her decision in isolation. However, marriage is not an individual decision problem, it is a strategic interaction between two partners whose interest may diverge.

The household bargaining model framework formalises this strategic dimension. In collective models of the household, individual outcomes depend not only on total household resources but also on each partner's outside option (i.e., the utility they could attain if the marriage were to dissolve) (Lundberg and Pollak, 1993, 1996; Chiappori, 1992). Legal changes that affect the feasibility or cost of divorce alter these outside options. When divorce becomes more accessible, women's threat point improves, strengthening their bargaining power within the household and potentially shifting the reallocation of time and resources toward greater labour market participation, even within intact marriages.

Beyond this bargaining-power channel, divorce risk also affects labour supply through a self-insurance motive. In the presence of incomplete insurance markets, married women may increase labour supply in anticipation of a potential future dissolution of marriage. Greater access to divorce raises the expected probability of separation, thereby increasing the value of maintaining labour market attachment and accumulating human capital. This mechanism operates even in the absence of realised divorce and reflects forward-looking behaviour in response to changes in expected marital stability.

The legalisation of divorce, as distinct from a reform that merely lowers the cost of an already available divorce, introduces an outside option where none previously existed, and, with it, a fundamental change in the expected permanence of the marital contract. This first-order change may potentially lead to larger behavioural responses. However, in a modern economy the strength of these channels may change. On the one hand, the insurance motive may be weaker when women already have high levels of education, labour market experience, and access to service-sector employment. In such a setting, women are already partially self-insured

through their human capital; the additional push from divorce legalisation may be marginal. On the other hand, the bargaining channel could be stronger in a modern economy precisely because women are better positioned to act on the new outside option.

The extent to which these mechanisms translate into observed changes in labour supply also depends on prevailing cultural norms and gender roles. Even when divorce becomes more accessible and incentives to increase labour supply strengthen, persistent social norms regarding female labour market participation may constrain women's responses. In such contexts, women may face social or institutional barriers to entering or remaining in the labour force, limiting the impact of changes in divorce legalisation. Evidence on the attenuation or delay of women's labour supply response are documented by Martínez A. (2013) for Chile and by Hoehn-Velasco and Penglase (2021) for Mexico. In the Maltese context, where female labour force participation remained low until the early 2000s and social norms have historically emphasised traditional family roles, such constraints may be particularly relevant. At the same time, the rapid increase in female employment in the years preceding the reform suggests that these norms were already evolving, making Malta a particularly informative setting to study the interaction between legal change and shifting social attitudes.

3 Divorce Legalisation in Malta

Malta was the last European country where divorce was not legal.[6] The legalisation followed a two-step institutional process. First, a referendum was held on 28 May 2011, in which 53.2% of votes were cast in favour. Although the referendum was not legally binding, Parliament acted on its outcome despite strong opposition from the Catholic Church. The Parliament of Malta subsequently approved the divorce legislation on 25 July 2011, with 52 members voting in favour, 11 against, and five abstained (House of Representatives of Malta, 2011). The law came into force on 1 October 2011.

The referendum marked the beginning of a broader liberalisation of family law in Malta: same-sex civil unions followed in 2014 and and same-sex marriage in 2017, both passed despite opposition from the catholic Church (Pace, 2012).

The question put to voters in the referendum reflected the scope of the proposed reform:

"*Do you agree with the introduction of the option of divorce in the case of a married couple who has been separated or has been living apart for at least four (4) years, and where there is no reasonable hope for reconciliation between the spouses, whilst adequate maintenance is guaranteed and the children are protected?*"

[6] In descending chronological order, the previous set of European countries introducing the right to divorce were Ireland in 1996, followed by Spain in 1981, Portugal in 1976 and Italy in 1971. All other European countries allowed divorce before 1950.

While the reform introduced divorce under restrictive conditions, the key change was not the ease of access but in establishing a legal endpoint in marriage that had previously been entirely absent.[7]

Prior to 2011, Maltese couples could separate but not divorce in Civil Courts. The only route to divorce was to obtain it abroad by establishing domicile overseas and then having the decree recognised in Malta. By 2011, 785 such divorces had been acknowledged locally (Laiviera, 2011). This suggests that legal separation was an imperfect substitute for divorce and that couples faced binding constraints under the pre-reform regime.

As shown in Figure 1a, the legalisation of divorce led to a sharp and sustained increase in divorce rates from 2011 onwards. While only 42 divorces were decreed in 2011, the first full year of the law's operation recorded 441 divorces, after which the rate stabilised above 0.7 divorces per 1000 persons (Eurostat, nd). Despite the legalisation of divorce, Malta continues to exhibit one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe.

4 Data and Descriptive Statistics

The main datasource is the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), provided by Eurostat. EU-SILC collects information on demographics, income, and living conditions for the population aged 16 and over.[8].

EU-SILC includes a longitudinal and a cross-sectional component. Although the panel data are particularly valuable as they allow control for unobserved time-invariant individual heterogeneity, EU-SILC's rotating panel design produces limited within-person variation around the 2011 reform. Approximately one quarter of the sample is replaced each year and individuals are observed for at most four consecutive years before exiting the sample. As a result, the subsample of married women observed in both pre- and post-reform years is small. Within-person panel methods would be statistically uninformative at this scale, and the analysis therefore relies on the repeated cross-section.

[7] Divorce in Malta is granted on a non-fault basis, but subject to specific conditions. In particular, couples must have lived apart for at least four years (or four years must have elapsed since legal separation, and the court must be satisfied that the marriage is irreparable and that adequate alimony is being provided. See Abela (2013) for an historical overview of divorce in Malta. In 2021, a reform reduced the required period of separation to six months.

[8] EU-SILC is a nationally representative probability sample of the population residing in private households in a country. See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions

4.1 Labour Market Outcomes

I construct measures of labour supply using the self-defined economic status variable from EU-SILC, which assigns individuals to mutually exclusive categories based on their main activity.

I define an indicator for employment equal to one if the individual reports being in employment (either as an employee or self-employed, full-time or part-time), and zero otherwise. I also construct an indicator for domestic work equal to one if the individual reports "fulfilling domestic tasks and care responsibilities" as their main activity. This category captures individuals who are out of the labour force and primarily engaged in home production. This measure provides information on time allocation and allows me to examine whether the reform affected the allocation of women's time between market work and domestic activities.

In addition, I examine intensive-margin outcomes among employed individuals. These include usual hours worked and log wages. Hours worked correspond to usual weekly hours in the main job and are measured in levels. Wages are defined as gross employee earnings, computed as the sum of cash and non-cash employee income, and are expressed in logarithms.

4.2 Measuring Regional Bite

A key limitation of the data provided by Eurostat is the absent of the geographical identifiers. To overcome this, I obtained access to the EU-SILC cross-sectional data directly from the National Statistical Office (NSO) from Malta. The NSO can not release locality-level identifiers for confidentiality reasons, but instead provided an electoral-district identifier constructed from the underlying locality information. These electoral divisions correspond to those used in the 2008 general election, which form the basis of the electoral register used in the 2011 divorce referendum (Table A2).[9]

I leverage geographic variation in latent demand for divorce to identify the effect of divorce legalisation on female labour supply. One candidate to proxy latent demand is the referendum vote share.

Table 1 shows the result of the referendum across the 13 electoral districts of roughly equal size into which the Maltese islands (Malta and Gozo) are divided. Support for divorce was relatively narrow at the national level, with 53.2% of valid votes cast in favour. However, this aggregate outcome masks substantial heterogeneity across electoral divisions: the pro-divorce vote share ranges from 32.2% in Division 13 to 65.6% in Division 2, with a majority in favour in 10 out of 13 electoral districts. This variation indicates meaningful differences in local support

[9] In the 2008 electoral division classification, Division 1 includes parts of Marsa and Santa Venera. Because the EU-SILC data do not allow for partial assignment of localities, it is necessary to allocate each locality entirely to a single electoral division. I therefore provided the NSO with allocation rules, under which Marsa is fully assigned to District 1 and Santa Venera fully to District 8.

for divorce across Malta.

Table 1. Referendum Outcome by Electoral Division and Sunday Mass Attendance

Electoral Division	Votes Polled	Turnout (%)	Valid Votes	Invalid Votes	Yes	No	Yes Votes (%)	Sunday Mass (%)
2	17179	71	17006	173	11148	5858	65.6	39.6
3	18545	72	18364	181	11762	6602	64.0	40.2
5	18237	72	18060	177	11131	6929	61.6	42.9
4	17301	73	17104	197	10268	6836	60.0	44.2
9	17652	71	17529	123	9516	8013	54.3	39.7
6	17585	70	17431	154	9202	8229	52.8	45.5
12	17803	69	17638	165	9278	8360	52.6	42.1
1	16245	71	16094	151	8433	7661	52.4	40.5
7	18305	72	18132	173	9417	8715	51.9	50.1
10	17353	71	17218	135	8913	8305	51.8	45.2
8	18150	73	17990	160	8645	9345	48.1	46.7
11	19389	75	19223	166	8812	10411	45.8	53.2
13	18947	70	18729	218	6022	12707	32.2	63.4
Total	232691		230518	2173	122547	107971		

Notes: Electoral divisions are ordered by share of votes supporting divorce (descending). The share supporting divorce is computed as the number of Yes votes divided by valid votes. The total number of registered voters at the time of the referendum (May 2011) was 325102, implying a national turnout of 71.6%. Turnout data extracted from Malta Network Resources (2011). Source: Electoral Commission of Malta. Sunday mass attendance is measured as the proportion of the resident population attending Sunday mass in 2005, using parish-level records from the Maltese Catholic Church. Parish attendance counts are aggregated to the locality level and matched to residential population counts from the 2005 census. Electoral division attendance rates are then constructed by aggregating attendance counts and residential populations across all localities within each division and computing the corresponding population-weighted attendance rate. Parish-level mass attendance data are from Discern – Institute for Research on the Signs of the Times (2009). Residential population data used to compute attendance rates are from the 2005 Census of Population and Housing, National Statistics Office Malta.

Turnout was 71.6% (Electoral Commission of Malta, 2011), relatively low compared with general elections, which typically reached around 95 percent turnout (Pace, 2012). This lower turnout is consistent with the non-biding and consultative nature of the referendum. Notably, participation was remarkably stable across electoral divisions, ranging from 69.7% in Division 1 to 78.5% in Division 11. There is no evident systematic relationship between turnout and the share of votes in favour of divorce.[10]

A potential concern is that opposition to divorce may have been expressed through abstention rather than a "no" vote (Debono, 2011), which would result in lower turnout in districts more opposed to divorce. However, this interpretation is not supported by voting patterns. Turnout rates are similar across electoral divisions with different levels of support for divorce, including those with the lower Yes shares.

Another concern with using the referendum vote share as a bite measure is that it might be en-

[10]District-level registered voters are drawn from the 2008 general election, the closest available breakdown prior to the referendum. The number of registered voters for the referendum was 325102 rather than 315217 as reported in Table 1.

dogenous: Districts that voted more heavily might have been on a different pre-existing FLFP trend for reasons unrelated to divorce legalisation itself. For instance, more economically progressive or urbanised districts might both vote yes and have faster-growing female employment independently. The political origin of the referendum, substantially weakens this concern. The referendum was called on a personal initiative by an MP from the Nationalist Party, Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, without party approval and it was not the result of a strategically timed campaign from the government.

Similarly, it is possible to think that the referendum outcome tracked closely with the geographic distribution of partisan support. The Nationalist Party leadership opposed the bill while the Labour opposition backed it. The share of votes backing divorce tracks MLP/PN geography, but imperfectly. The correlation between the share of votes in favour of divorce and the votes capture by the MLP party in the 2008 general elections is 68%. As shown in Table A3, all seven MLP districts voted Yes, but so did three PN districts.

Finally, the legalisation of divorce may have simple formalise unions that were already effectively dissolved, implying limited scope for behavioural responses. Under this interpretation, the reform would have provided a legal channel for existing separations rather than altering the perceived stability of intact marriages. I argue that this is not the case. The number of separations remained stable around the reform (Figure A1), suggesting that divorce did not substitute for separations but instead introduced a new legal margin, increasing the incidence of divorce and likely raised the perceived risk of marital dissolution among married women.

Table 1 also reports the Sunday mass attendance rate for each electoral division, computed from parish-level records for 2005 and expressed as the share of the residential population attending Sunday mass. The geographic distribution of religious practice mirrors the referendum outcome closely but in the opposite direction: divisions with the highest divorce support exhibit the lowest mass attendance rates. The correlation between the two measures at the division level is -0.85. Importantly, the two measures are conceptually distinct. While the referendum support captures revealed preference for divorce (a direct measure of latent demand for the reform) it may also partly reflect contemporaneous local attitudes or expectations that are endogenous to pre-existing labour market trends. In contrast, Sunday mass attendance in 2005 captures the underlying cultural norm that shaped both opposition to divorce and historically low female labour force participation in Malta and, importantly, is fully predetermined relative to the reform. Consequently, I use mass attendance as an alternative exposure measure for the identification strategy.

4.3 Sample characteristics

The analysis focuses on legally married Maltese women aged 25–54 who are cohabiting with a spouse at the time of the survey. The restriction to women cohabiting with a spouse excludes legally married women who are de facto separated, ensuring that the treatment group consists of women in intact marriages for whom the legalisation of divorce introduced a new and previously unavailable outside option.

Table 2. Married Women Pre-Reform Characteristics by Divorce Support

	Referendum support			
	Below median	Above median	Difference	p-value
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age Group				
25-29	0.070	0.082	0.013	0.079
30-34	0.134	0.167	0.033	0.001
35-39	0.161	0.156	-0.006	0.558
40-44	0.199	0.157	-0.042	0.000
45-49	0.231	0.203	-0.029	0.010
50-54	0.205	0.236	0.031	0.006
Education				
Up to lower secondary	0.682	0.768	0.085	0.000
Upper secondary and vocational	0.175	0.141	-0.034	0.001
Tertiary education	0.140	0.090	-0.051	0.000
Children				
Number of children under 5	0.232	0.242	0.009	0.508
Number of children 5-14	0.705	0.641	-0.064	0.004
Economic Activity				
Employment	0.409	0.354	-0.055	0.000
Employee	0.378	0.325	-0.053	0.000
Full-time employment	0.297	0.261	-0.036	0.003
Part-time employment	0.112	0.093	-0.019	0.019
Unemployment	0.004	0.005	0.001	0.668
Hours worked (per week)	33.316	33.301	-0.014	0.975
(Log) Wage	9.358	9.352	-0.006	0.885
Household Activity				
Domestic tasks and care responsibilities	0.575	0.634	0.059	0.000

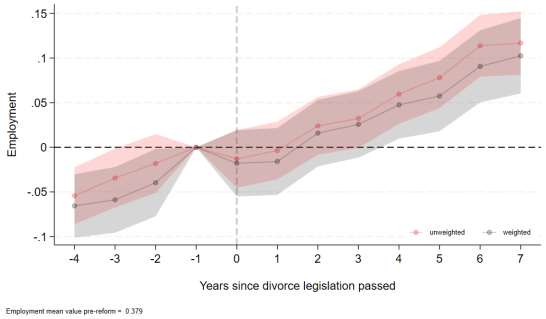
Notes: The table reports summary statistics for legally married Maltese women aged 25–54 living with their spouse. Columns (1) and (2) report mean values for districts below and above the median referendum divorce support (2007–2010). Column (3) reports differences in means between the two groups, while column (4) reports the corresponding p-values from two-sample t-tests allowing for unequal variances.

Table 2 reports pre-reform summary statistics for this sample split by district-level referendum support. In districts with stronger support for divorce legalisation, married women are less educated and have higher rates of domestic work, which is consistent with greater latent

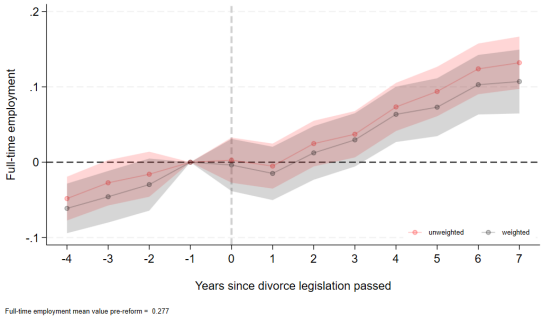
demand for divorce in areas where women faced more constrained outside options.[11]

Figure 2. Divorce Legislation and Economic and Domestic Activities of Married Women

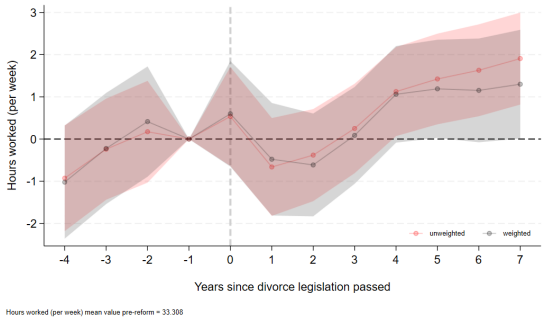
(a) Employed



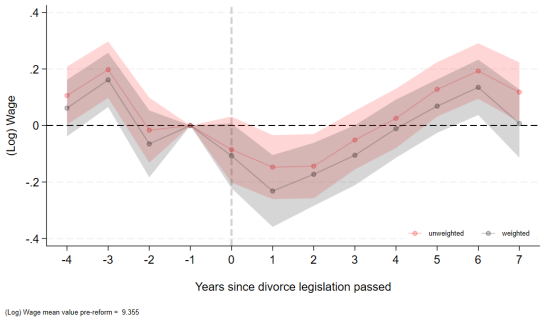
(b) Full-time employment



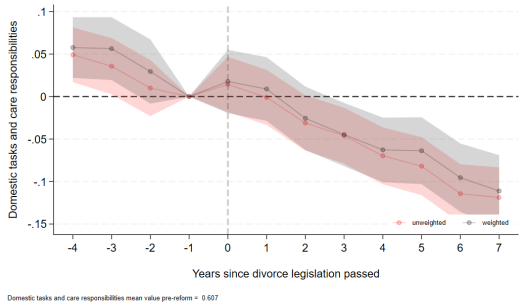
(c) Working hours



(d) (log) Wage



(e) Domestic work



Notes: The figure plots adjusted differences in outcomes relative to the pre-reform reference year among legally married Maltese women aged 25–54 living with their spouse. Redish lines correspond to unweighted estimates and grey lines to estimates weighted using EU-SILC sampling weights. Estimates are obtained from regressions controlling for age, education, and electoral district fixed effects. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals based on heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors.

Figure 2 plots the evolution of labour market outcome and household activity for this sample

[11] Pre-reform characteristics of married women by Sunday mass attendance district are reported in Table A4. Districts above and below the median attendance rate exhibit broadly consistent differences in education and domestic work to those observed across referendum support groups, though somewhat less pronounced.

relative to the year of divorce legalization. These figures document substantial changes in labor-market attachment and work arrangements among married women after the legalization of divorce. However, these patterns are descriptive and may reflect concurrent macroeconomic or compositional changes.

The second identification strategy compares married women to young single women, defined as women aged 25–44 who are not in a consensual union. The upper age bound of 44 is set to focus on women who remain plausibly at risk of marriage and thus share similar long-run labour market incentives with the treatment group; women above this age who have never married are unlikely to do so and represent a qualitatively different population.

Table 3. Pre-Reform Characteristics of Married and Single Women

	Single (1)	Married (2)	Difference (3)	p-value (4)
Age Group				
25-29	0.605	0.076	0.529	0.000
30-34	0.191	0.152	0.040	0.003
35-39	0.112	0.158	-0.046	0.000
40-44	0.091	0.176	-0.085	0.000
45-49	0.000	0.216	-0.216	0.000
50-54	0.000	0.222	-0.222	0.000
Education				
Up to lower secondary	0.507	0.728	-0.221	0.000
Upper secondary and vocational	0.216	0.157	0.059	0.000
Tertiary education	0.277	0.113	0.164	0.000
Children				
Number of children under 5	0.099	0.237	-0.138	0.000
Number of children 5-14	0.121	0.670	-0.549	0.000
Economic Activity				
Employment	0.776	0.379	0.397	0.000
Employee	0.746	0.350	0.396	0.000
Full-time employment	0.725	0.278	0.447	0.000
Part-time employment	0.052	0.102	-0.050	0.000
Unemployment	0.040	0.004	0.036	0.000
Hours worked (per week)	38.976	33.308	5.667	0.000
(Log) Wage	9.580	9.355	0.224	0.000
Household Activity				
Domestic tasks and care responsibilities	0.122	0.607	-0.484	0.000

Notes: Column (1) reports mean values pre-reform (2007–2010) for legally married Maltese women cohabiting with a spouse (aged 25–54) while column (2) for single women not in a consensual union (aged 25–44). Column (3) reports differences in means between the two groups, while column (4) reports the corresponding p-values from two-sample t-tests allowing for unequal variances.

Table 3 reports pre-reform summary statistics for both groups. The two groups differ substantially in age composition, education, and labour market attachment at baseline, with single women concentrated at younger ages and exhibiting employment rates nearly 40 percentage points higher than married women.

5 Empirical Specification

I proxy for geographic variation in exposure to divorce legalisation using the share of votes in favour of divorce in the 2011 referendum. As this measure may reflect endogenous local preferences. I also use pre-reform variation in religiosity, measured by Sunday mass attendance in the 2005 census, as an alternative proxy for underlying social norms. The two measures are highly correlated (-0.85), suggesting they capture a common dimension of cultural attitudes toward divorce. Bacause treatment is common in timing but heterogeneous in dose, this is naturally a continuous-treatment difference-in-differences model. The estimating equation interacts the exposure measure with post-reform indicator while absorbing division and year fixed effects.

$$y_{idt} = \lambda_d + \tau_t + \beta(DivSupport_d \times Post_t) + X_{idt}^{'}\Gamma + \epsilon_{idt}, \tag{1}$$

where y_{idt} is one of the labour outcome measures for women i in district d at time t, with time ranging from 2007 to 2018. λ_d and τ_t are district and year fixed effects, respectively. X_{idt} are individual controls such as age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. $Post_t$ is an indicator for years after divorce legalisation (2012-2017), and zero for years 2007-2010. I exclude 2011 from the analysis as survey observations contains a mixture of pre- and post-reform exposure. $DivSupport_d$ is the share of votes supporting divorce legalisation at electoral division level, measured on a 0-100 scale. β is the main parameter of interest capturing post-2011 change in the outcome associated with a 1 percentage point increase in the referendum support.

As an alternative measure, I use Sunday mass attendance in 2005 ($MassAttendance_d$) instead of divorce support at division level. This variable predates the reform and captures underlying religiosity and traditional norms, which shaped opposition to divorce legalisation. Because mass attendance is predetermined, it helps address concerns that referendum support may partly reflect contemporaneous local attitudes or expectations about the reform.

I complement the baseline specification with an event-study model that interacts the exposure measure with year indicators. This allows me to assess whether divisions with higher referendum support were already on differential trends prior to legalisation and to trace the dynamic response after the reform.

$$y_{idt} = \lambda_d + \tau_t + \sum_{k \neq -1} \beta_k (DivSupport_d \times 1[t - 2011 = k]) + X_{idt}^{'}\Gamma + \epsilon_{idt}, \tag{2}$$

This shows whether high- and low-support divisions were already trending differently before the reform. The pre-2011 coefficients are especially important

A second identification strategy uses young single women aged 25–44 as the comparison group. Single women of working age share the key demographic characteristics of married women and face the same local labour market conditions, yet are not directly exposed to the change in divorce law. The estimating equation is:

$$y_{idt} = \alpha + \beta (Married_{id} \times Post_t) + \lambda_d + \tau_t + X_{idt}^{'}\Gamma + \epsilon_{idt}, \tag{3}$$

where $Married_{id}$ is an indicator equal to one for working-age married women cohabiting with a spouse (aged 25-54) and zero for young single women (not in a consensual union and aged 25-44).[12] The coefficient of interest, β, captures the average change in outcomes for married women relative to young women following legalisation.

The identifying assumption is that, absent the reform, the labour market trajectories of married and young single women would have evolved in parallel, an assumption we assess via pre-trend tests. A potential concern is that young single women may themselves be affected by the reform through anticipatory marriage-market responses or changes in the outside option of potential partners; if anything, such spillovers would attenuate $\hat{\beta}$ towards zero, making estimates conservative.

A further limitation of this strategy is that the data do not record year of marriage, precluding the exclusion of women who married in 2011 or later. This matters because the reform may itself alter the incentives to marry: if legalisation lowers the cost of exiting a marriage, some women who would not otherwise have done so may select into matrimony post-2011, changing the composition of the treatment group over time. Any such compositional shift would bias $\hat{\beta}$ in an indeterminate direction and complicate a clean causal interpretation.

6 Results

6.1 Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation

Table 4 reports the main results from the continuous-treatment difference-in-differences model of equation 1, exploiting cross-district variation in exposure to the reform (Panel A) and

[12] The difference in age restriction between treated and control group is to focus on women who remain plausibly at risk of marriage and thus share similar long-run labour market incentives with the treatment group.

variation in Sunday mass attendance (Panel B).

Table 4. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Referendum Support for Divorce Legalisation					
DivSupport × Post	-0.001	0.000	0.080***	-0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.016)	(0.002)	(0.001)
	[0.702]	[0.982]	[0.021]	[0.922]	[0.802]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Sunday Mass Attendance (2005)					
SundayMass × Post	0.001	0.001	-0.084***	0.004*	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.024)	(0.002)	(0.001)
	[0.616]	[0.642]	[0.186]	[0.113]	[0.767]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. Panel A reports difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of divorce legalisation on female labour market outcomes, exploiting geographic variation in exposure to the reform across Malta's 13 electoral divisions. The sample consists of legally married Maltese women cohabiting with a spouse, aged 25–54. Panel B uses the Sunday mass attendance rate from the 2005 census as an alternative, fully predetermined exposure measure. All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results are consistent across both exposure measures and across outcomes. Neither referendum support nor mass attendance predicts differential post-reform changes in employment, full-time work, or domestic work. The one outcome that shows a consistent and statistically robust pattern is weekly hours worked. In Panel A, a one percentage point increase in divorce support is associated with an increase of 0.080 hours per week among employed women (bootstrap p=0.021). Panel B shows a mirror-image result: a one percentage point increase in Sunday mass attendance is associated with a reduction of 0.084 hours per week (bootstrap p=0.186), consistent in direction but less precisely estimated, reflecting the lower cross-district variance in mass attendance relative to the referendum results.[13]

[13]Results are robust to the use of alternative weighting schemes: Table A5 in the appendix replicates the main specification using EU-SILC survey weights and district-year population weights, and in both cases the hours result survives with similar magnitude and statistical significance while the employment and domestic work estimates remain close to zero.

To put the hours estimate in perspective, a one-standard-deviation increase in district Yes share is associated with approximately 0.7 additional hours per week, or 2.1% of the pre-reform mean of 33.3 hours. This represents a modest but economically interpretable intensive-margin response concentrated among women already in employment, rather than a broad shift in labour force participation at the extensive margin.

The pattern documented here places the Maltese evidence closer to Hoehn-Velasco and Penglase (2021) than to Bargain et al. (2012). While Bargain et al. (2012) find a sizeable extensive-margin response, which they interpret through an insurance-against-divorce mechanism whereby women strengthen outside options as marital dissolution becomes credible, Hoehn-Velasco and Penglase (2021) report little evidence of a participation response but a modest increase in hours among already-employed married women. The latter pattern aligns more closely with the Maltese evidence.

However, there is an important distinction to make here. Hoehn-Velasco and Penglase (2021) attribute their muted extensive-margin response to two features of the Mexican setting: restrictive gender norms against female employment and limited access to the formal labour market, with informal employment absorbing the majority of women's labour supply. Neither explanation transposes cleanly to Malta.

The more demanding comparison is with Bargain et al. (2012), because Ireland in 1996 sits institutionally in the same place as Malta in 2011: a comprehensive legal separation framework was already in place, and the reform added the right to remarry on top of it. Two features of the Maltese setting may nevertheless account for the difference in response. First, Bargain et al. identify off religiosity, with their effect concentrated in low-religiosity couples; Malta's near-universal Catholic affiliation compresses this dimension and likely thins the population of couples for whom the insurance motive operates. Second, Malta's separation regime dates to 1870, whereas Ireland's modern no-fault separation framework was only seven years old at the time of the 1996 reform. If labour supply had been adjusting to the possibility of separation for over a century in Malta, the marginal information content of adding remarriage in 2011 is correspondingly smaller.

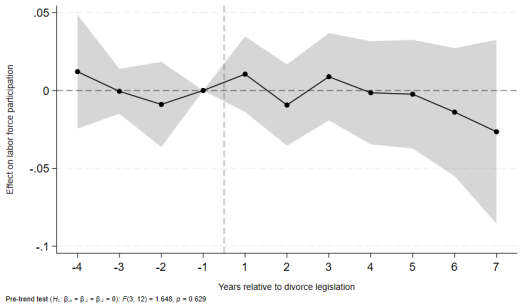
Figure 3 presents event-study estimates from equation 2, tracing the dynamic effect of district-level referendum support on married women's labour market and domestic activity outcomes. Each coefficient gives the differential outcome in event year k associated with a one standard deviation increase in the share of votes supporting divorce, relative to the omitted pre-reform reference year 2010.

The pre-reform coefficients are flat across all five outcomes. None of the three pre-period coefficients is individually distinguishable from zero, and the joint pre-trend test fails to reject

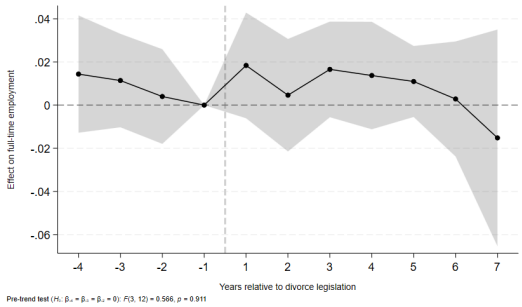
the null of parallel trends across districts with different referendum support in every panel. This pattern supports the identifying assumption that, absent the reform, married women's outcomes in high- and low-Yes-share districts would have evolved in parallel.

Figure 3. Even study: Labour Market Outcomes and Divorce Support

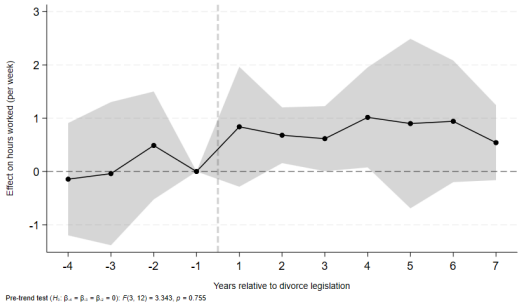
(a) Employed



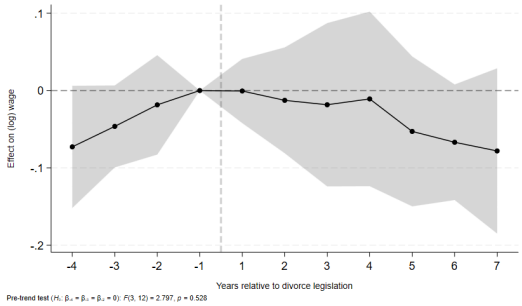
(b) Full-time employment



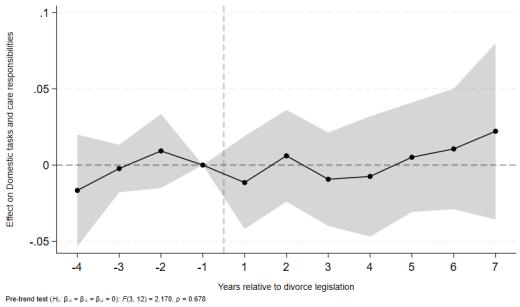
(c) Working Hours



(d) (log) Wage



(e) Domestic work

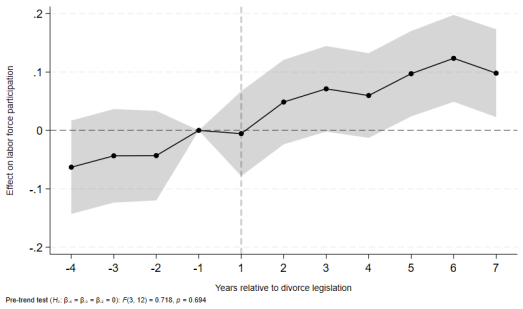


Notes: This figure presents event-study estimates following equation 2 of the effects of the legalisation of divorce in Malta on labor market and domestic activity outcomes. The sample consists of legally married Maltese women cohabiting with a spouse, aged 25–54. Each coefficient represents the differential effect of a one standard deviation increase in the district-level share of votes in favour of divorce legalisation in a given year before or after the 2011 referendum. The omitted reference period is the pre-reform year 2010, so all coefficients are interpreted relative to that year. Year 2011 is excluded from the estimation as it spans the pre- and post-reform period. All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects, and control for age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the electoral district level. The pre-trend test reports the p-value from a joint test that the three pre-period coefficients (β_{-4}, β_{-3}, β_{-2}) are equal to zero.

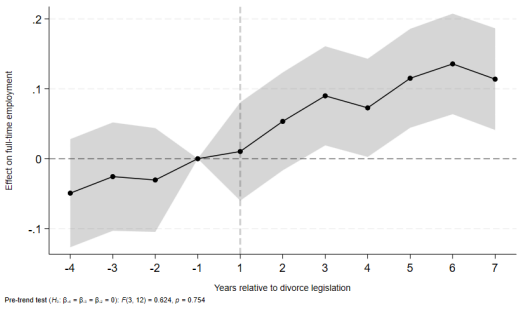
Following legalisation, weekly hours rise sharply between $t = -1$ and $t = 1$, stabilise at approximately 0.7 to 1.0 additional hours per week for most of the post-reform window, and remain above the pre-reform level. This dynamic profile is consistent with the pooled estimate reported in Table 4 Panel A and indicates that the intensive-margin response materialises immediately after legalisation rather than building gradually. The remaining outcomes show no comparable post-reform divergence.

Figure 4. Even study: Married versus Single Women

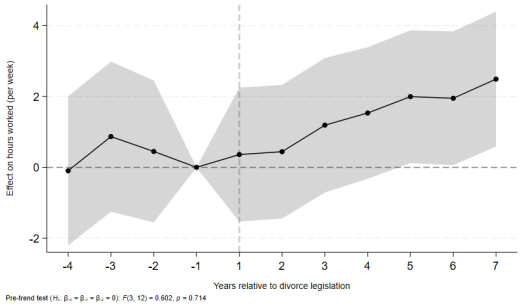
(a) Employed



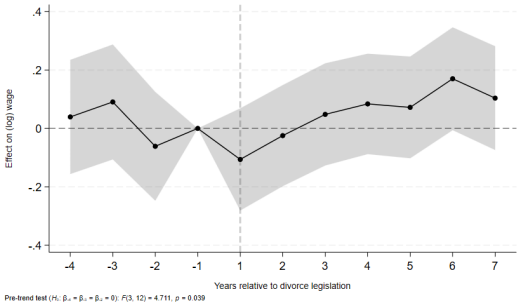
(b) Full-time employment



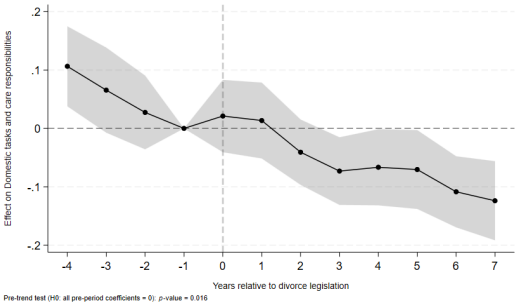
(c) Working Hours



(d) (log) Wage



(e) Domestic work



Notes: This figure presents event-study estimates following equation 2 of the effects of the legalisation of divorce in Malta on labor market and domestic activity outcomes. Each coefficient represents the differential effect for married women relative to single women in a given year before or after the 2011 divorce referendum. The omitted reference period is the pre-reform year 2010, so all coefficients are interpreted relative to that year. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the electoral district level. The pre-trend test reports the p-value from a joint test that the three pre-period coefficients (β_{-4}, β_{-3}, β_{-2}) are equal to zero.

Table 5 and Figure 4 report results from the second identification strategy, which compares labour market outcomes of married women to those of young single women before and after the legalisation of divorce. Figure 4 plots the event-study coefficients from equation 3, allowing a visual assessment of pre-reform trends and the dynamic pattern of any post-reform divergence between the two groups.

The pre-reform coefficients are jointly insignificant across all outcomes, with formal tests failing to reject the null of zero pre-period coefficients, lending support to the parallel trends assumption underlying this strategy. Following legalisation, the estimates for employment, full-time work, and domestic work show a pattern consistent with a post-reform divergence: married women become progressively more likely to be employed and less likely to be engaged in domestic tasks relative to single women, with effects that grow over the post-reform period and remain within the confidence bands throughout. The hours and wage event studies show a noisier pattern, with wider confidence intervals reflecting the smaller sample of employed women for whom these outcomes are observed.

Table 5. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation

	Employed	Full-time	Hours worked	(Log) Wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Married × Post	0.105***	0.109***	1.121**	0.036	-0.113***
	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.488)	(0.034)	(0.016)
	[0.004]	[0.003]	[0.035]	[0.307]	[0.000]
Married	-0.122***	-0.160***	-2.431***	-0.030	0.214***
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.516)	(0.045)	(0.021)
Observations	18120	18120	9692	9900	18120
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports difference-in-differences estimates comparing labour market outcomes of married and single women before and after divorce legalisation. The sample consists of legally married Maltese women cohabiting with a spouse (aged 25–54) and single women not in a consensual union (aged 25–44). All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. Statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5 reports the pooled difference-in-differences estimates. Married women experience a 10.5 percentage point increase in employment relative to single women following legalisation, a 10.9 percentage point increase in full-time employment, and a reduction of 11.3 percentage points in domestic work, all significant at the 1 percent level under both conventional inference and wild cluster bootstrap. Weekly hours increase by approximately 1.1 hours among employed women, significant at the 5 percent level under bootstrap. Log wages show a positive but

imprecisely estimated effect that does not survive conventional inference.

One important point when interpreting this results is that married and single women differ substantially in demographic composition at baseline, and the parallel trends assumption, while supported by the pre-reform event study, may not hold unconditionally. Additionally, because the data do not record year of marriage, it is not possible to exclude women who married after the reform, introducing a potential compositional change in the treatment group over the post-reform period whose direction is indeterminate.

6.2 Divorce Risk, Time Reallocation and the Specialisation Channel

The employment and domestic work estimates in Table 5 are not independent outcomes but two sides of a single time-allocation decision. Married women's employment rises by 10.5 percentage points relative to single women following legalisation, while their probability of reporting domestic tasks as their main activity falls by 11.3 percentage points. The two coefficients are mirror images in magnitude, opposite in sign, and individually estimated with similar precision. Together they indicate that the post-reform adjustment operates almost entirely through a reallocation of women's time between market and home production, rather than through a shift between employment and unemployment, education, or other non-market states.

This pattern maps directly onto the specialisation mechanism outlined in Section 2. Under the pre-reform regime, the indissolubility of the marriage contract supported a Beckerian division of labour in which the wife specialised in marriage-specific home production and the husband in market work, with the gains from specialisation shared through the joint household budget (Becker et al., 1977). The legalisation of divorce disrupts this allocation in two ways. First, it raises the expected cost of marriage-specific specialisation by introducing a non-zero probability that the marriage will end, leaving the home-specialising spouse with limited human capital outside the household. Second, by improving the wife's outside option, it shifts intra-household bargaining toward an allocation in which her time is divided more evenly across market and home activities (Lundberg and Pollak, 1993; Chiappori, 1992). Both channels predict that married women reduce time spent on domestic production and increase time spent in market work, with the magnitudes of the two adjustments tightly linked. The symmetry of the estimates is consistent with this prediction.

7 Robustness of Results

Table 6 assesses the sensitivity of the main results to a series of alternative specifications. Panel A replicates the baseline using Post$\geq$2011, including the transition year in the post-reform period as a check on whether the exclusion of 2011 drives the main findings. Panel

B adds the 2008 general election PN vote share interacted with the post-reform indicator as a control for pre-existing differences in political composition across districts, addressing the concern that referendum support partly reflects partisan geography rather than attitudes toward divorce specifically. Panel C excludes Division 13, which corresponds to the island of Gozo: as a geographically separate island with a structurally distinct labour market and the lowest divorce support in the sample at 32.2%, its influence on the continuous treatment regression may be disproportionate. Panel D replaces the continuous divorce support with a binary indicator equal to one for districts above the median referendum support, providing a functional form check that does not rely on linearity assumptions about how treatment intensity translates into outcomes. Panel E uses a turnout-adjusted divorce support, computed as Yes votes divided by district-level registered voters from the 2008 electoral register, to address the concern that opposition to divorce may have been expressed through abstention rather than a No vote, which would otherwise inflate the Yes share in high-opposition districts.

Overall, the results show that the point estimates are stable across specifications, indicating that the underlying effect is not driven by any single specification choice. Including 2011 in the post-reform period (Panel A) preserves both the point estimate (0.075) and statistical significance under wild cluster bootstrap inference (p=0.012). Controlling for 2008 partisan vote shares (Panel B) yields a coefficient of 0.079, statistically indistinguishable from the baseline. Morevoer, the PN-vote-share interaction itself is small and insignificant in the hours equation, indicating that partisan geography does not operate through the same channel as divorce support for this outcome.

When Gozo is excluded from the sample (Panel C), the estimated coefficient remains virtually unchanged at 0.081. This reassures that the results are not driven by structural differences between Gozo and mainland Malta, but rather by variation across electoral divisions within mainland Malta. Once the divorce support is dichotomised at the median (Panel D), the point estimate increases to 1.031 additional hours per week in high-support districts; the larger standard error reflects the power loss from collapsing continuous variation into a binary contrast across only thirteen districts. Last, using the turnout-adjusted measure (Panel E) to address potential bias from strategic abstention yields a coefficient that is positive, statistically significant under wild bootstrap inference (p=0.032), and consistent in implied magnitude to the baseline estimates.

Table 6. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation: Robustness

	Employed (1)	Fulltime (2)	Hours worked (3)	(Log) wage (4)	Domestic work (5)
Panel A: Inluding year 2011					
DivSupport × Post	-0.000	0.000	0.075***	-0.001	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.014)	(0.002)	(0.001)
	[0.719]	[0.818]	[0.012]	[0.688]	[0.834]
Observations	16058	16058	7576	7747	16058
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Adding 2008 General Election PN Vote Share					
DivSupport × Post	-0.002*	-0.002***	0.079***	-0.003***	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.024)	(0.001)	(0.001)
	[0.319]	[0.315]	[0.178]	[0.083]	[0.432]
SharePN × Post	-0.002	-0.002**	-0.002	-0.004***	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.033)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel C: Excluding Gozo					
DivSupport × Post	0.001	0.002*	0.081*	0.002	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.040)	(0.003)	(0.002)
	[0.556]	[0.118]	[0.203]	[0.500]	[0.356]
Observations	13357	13357	6318	6475	13357
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel D: Binary Treatment Intensity					
DivSupport (median) × Post	0.001	0.009	1.031	-0.007	-0.007
	(0.020)	(0.013)	(0.688)	(0.042)	(0.024)
	[0.953]	[0.549]	[0.199]	[0.872]	[0.790]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel E: Turnout Adjusted Divorce Support					
Adj. DivSupport × Post	-0.121	0.004	17.534***	-0.133	0.091
	(0.202)	(0.184)	(3.453)	(0.380)	(0.272)
	[0.720]	[0.996]	[0.032]	[0.727]	[0.818]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports robustness checks for the baseline specification of Panel A of Table 4. The sample, dependent variables and control variables are identical to those in Table 4: All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

7.1 Do the married-versus-single effects concentrated in districts with higher latent demand for divorce?

As a further check, I combine the marital status and regional exposure in a triple difference specification:

$$\begin{aligned} y_{idt} = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \,\text{Married}_i + \beta_2 \,\text{DivSupport}_d + \beta_3 \,\text{Post}_t \\ &+ \beta_4 \,(\text{Married}_i \times \text{DivSupport}_d) + \beta_5 \,(\text{Married}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \beta_6 \,(\text{DivSupport}_d \times \text{Post}_t) \\ &+ \beta_7 \,(\text{Married}_i \times \text{DivSupport}_d \times \text{Post}_t) + X'_{idt}\gamma + \alpha_d + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{idt} \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

If the married-versus-single employment gap documented in Table 5 reflects a causal response to divorce legalisation, $\hat{\beta}_7$ should be positive: married women should respond more strongly in districts with higher latent demand for divorce, narrowing the employment gap between married and single women more in those districts than in districts where the reform was less salient. Conversely, if the gap reflects a common demographic trend between married and single women unrelated to the reform, there is no reason to expect it to vary systematically with district-level referendum support.

Table 7 reports the results. The point estimates on the triple interaction coefficient point in the theoretically predicted direction for both employment and domestic work: $\hat{\beta}_7$ is positive for employment (0.003) and full-time work (0.004), indicating that married women increased labour supply more relative to single women in districts with stronger referendum support, thereby narrowing the employment gap between the two groups more in those districts. The domestic work coefficient is negative (-0.002), consistent with a larger reallocation of time away from home production among married women in high-support districts. However, none of these coefficients survive wild cluster bootstrap inference.

Table 7. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation

	Employed	Full-time	Hours worked	(Log) Wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
DivSupport × Married × Post	0.003	0.004*	0.045	0.001	-0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.037)	(0.004)	(0.001)
	[0.242]	[0.130]	[0.271]	[0.827]	[0.134]
Married	0.038	-0.051	-2.488	-0.061	0.105
	(0.117)	(0.147)	(2.264)	(0.087)	(0.086)
Married × DivSupport	-0.003	-0.002	-0.000	0.001	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.041)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Married × Post	-0.077	-0.085	-1.204	-0.013	-0.014
	(0.116)	(0.095)	(2.144)	(0.231)	(0.063)
DivSupport × Post	-0.004*	-0.004**	0.034	-0.001	0.002**
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.027)	(0.003)	(0.001)
Observations	18120	18120	9692	9900	18120
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports estimates from triple-difference specification as outlined in equation 4. All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors, clustered at the level of the electoral district, are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-value for the triple-interaction coefficient is reported in square brackets. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Two interpretations of these results are possible. First, the bootstrap estimates qualify the married-versus-single results in Table 5: the labour-supply responses documented there are not detectably larger in districts with stronger latent demand for divorce, as a purely reform-driven mechanism would predict. Second, the triple-difference specification is statistically demanding, as it combines variation across only 13 electoral districts with individual-level marital-status comparisons in a single interaction term. As a result, statistical power is limited and confidence intervals remain wide enough to accommodate economically meaningful effects. The triple-difference estimates are therefore best interpreted as directionally suggestive rather than as a powered test of the reform-specific component of the married-versus-single comparison.

7.2 Falsification Test

The geographic identification rests on divorce support capturing variation in latent demand for divorce rather than other district-level characteristics. Table 8 reports the baseline specification estimated on two placebo samples: married men and single women, neither of whom face the labour supply incentives that the reform changes for married women. The coefficient on hours is positive and insignificant in both placebo samples, meaning that the geographic strategy identifies a hours response for married women that is not detectable for married men or single

women under the same inference procedure.[14]

Table 8. Divorce Risk and Male Labour Force Participation

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Married Men Cohabiting with Spouse (aged 25-54)					
DivSupport × Post	-0.000	-0.000	0.102**	-0.000	0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.038)	(0.001)	(0.000)
	[0.592]	[0.470]	[0.226]	[0.966]	[0.056]
Observations	13175	13175	12063	10554	13175
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Married Men Cohabiting with Spouse (aged 25-54)					
SundayMass × Post	0.001	0.001	-0.139**	0.000	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.047)	(0.002)	(0.000)
	[0.455]	[0.166]	[0.288]	[0.982]	[0.102]
Observations	13175	13175	12063	10554	13175
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel C: Single Women not in a Consensual Union (aged 25-44)					
DivSupport × Post	-0.003	-0.002	0.054*	0.001	0.001*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.026)	(0.003)	(0.001)
	[0.255]	[0.219]	[0.203]	[0.850]	[0.082]
Observations	3500	3500	2709	2777	3500
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel D: Single Women not in a Consensual Union (aged 25-44)					
SundayMass × Post	0.003	0.003	-0.065	-0.003	-0.002**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.049)	(0.003)	(0.001)
	[0.273]	[0.190]	[0.350]	[0.760]	[0.118]
Observations	3500	3500	2709	2777	3500
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports estimates replicating the specification of equation 1 for legally married Maltese men cohabiting with a spouse (aged 25–54) in Panels A–B and for single women not in a consensual union (aged 25–44) in Panels C–D. All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

[14]Husband's labour supply responses are not necessarily evidence of a confounded geographic identification. The empirical literature on how husbands' labour supply responds to changes in their wives' labour market situation is thin (in contrast to the well-developed literature on wives' responses to husbands' shocks, e.g. Lundberg (1985); Melvin Stephens (2002), making a theoretical prediction for the sign of the placebo coefficient on married men difficult to anchor.

I replicate the baseline specification replacing married and single women with their male counterparts. If the estimates in Table 5 reflect a causal response to divorce legalisation rather than a differential trend between married and single individuals unrelated to the reform, the same comparison applied to men should yield systematically smaller effects. Men's labour supply decisions are unlikely to be directly affected by the legalisation of divorce through the specialisation, insurance, or bargaining channels that motivate the analysis for women: under the traditional division of labour that characterised Maltese households prior to the reform, it is women who specialised in home production and therefore women who had the most to gain — or lose — from a change in the permanence of the marital contract. Any positive result for men would therefore indicate that the married-versus-single comparison is partly contaminated by a common demographic trend rather than a reform-specific effect.

Table 9 reports the results. While some positive coefficients emerge for men, the estimates on the outcomes most directly connected to the theoretical mechanisms are substantially attenuated relative to women: female employment effect is more than four times the male employment effect, and that the hours and domestic work effects are significant for women but essentially zero for men. This pattern is difficult to reconcile with a pure trend story, under which broadly similar magnitudes would be expected across genders, and provides indirect support for a reform-specific labour supply response among married women.

Table 9. Divorce Risk and Male Labour Force Participation

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) Wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Married × Post	0.023	0.019	-0.030	0.079***	0.002
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.317)	(0.026)	(0.002)
	[0.099]	[0.173]	[0.928]	[0.019]	[0.310]
Married	0.088***	0.108***	1.528***	0.184***	0.000
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.371)	(0.021)	(0.003)
Observations	18560	18560	16599	14944	18560
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports estimates replicating the specification of equation 3 for married and single men. The sample consists of legally married Maltese men cohabiting with a spouse (aged 25–54) and single men not in a consensual union (aged 25–44). All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Event-study estimates for men, reported in Appendix Figure A2 in the appendix, confirm that the pre-reform trends are flat for both married and single men, ruling out differential pre-existing trends as an explanation for the pattern observed in Table 9.

Table 11 replicates the analysis using legally separated women as the treated group, comparing them both to the district bite measure (Panel A) and to young single women as a control group (Panel B). This exercise is motivated by the observation that separated women are the population for whom the reform created the most direct legal change, the right to remarry and to formalise dissolution, and their labour market response therefore speaks to the effect of the reform on the most directly exposed margin.

This exercise should be interpreted with caution. The survey does not have dates for marital status changes and groups separated and divorced individuals together. Consequently, the separated category in the data conflates three populations: women who separated before the reform and whose labour supply adjustment predates 2011; women who separated after the reform, possibly induced to do so by the new availability of divorce; and women who had already converted their separation into a divorce post-2011.

Panel A, which interacts the separated indicator with district referendum support, yields uniformly insignificant results across all outcomes, likely reflecting the small number of separated women per district (1,419 observations in total) rather than a genuine null effect. Panel B, which compares separated to single women, shows large and statistically significant effects on employment, full-time work, hours, and domestic work, with magnitudes comparable to or exceeding those in Table 5.

These results should be interpreted with caution for two reasons. First, separated women have already lost access to joint household income at the point of separation, and the primary labour supply adjustment is likely to occur at separation rather than at legalisation. Under this interpretation, the post-reform DiD coefficient captures the residual adjustment rather than a reform-induced response, and the large estimates are more difficult to reconcile with theory than a smaller effect would be. Second, and more importantly, the data do not record the date of separation or divorce, precluding the distinction between women who separated before the reform — for whom the legalisation introduced a new legal option into an already-dissolved marriage — and women who separated after 2011, possibly induced to do so by the new availability of divorce. The post-reform composition of the separated group is therefore potentially endogenous to the reform itself, and the Panel B estimates may partly reflect the initial labour supply adjustment of newly separated women rather than a behavioural response to legalisation among the stock of previously separated women. For these reasons, the separated women analysis is presented as a supplementary check rather than a primary identification strategy, and its results are not used to draw causal conclusions about the effect of the reform.

Table 10. Divorce Risk and Labour Force Participation of Separated Women

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Separated Women and Referendum Support					
DivSupport × Post	0.002	0.001	0.110	-0.009	-0.002
	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.123)	(0.011)	(0.007)
	[0.666]	[0.694]	[0.412]	[0.554]	[0.868]
Observations	1419	1419	714	752	1419
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Separated versus Single Women					
Separated × Post	0.108**	0.127***	2.665**	0.081	-0.143***
	(0.043)	(0.031)	(1.008)	(0.074)	(0.034)
	[0.036]	[0.002]	[0.021]	[0.281]	[0.003]
Separated	-0.098*	-0.156***	-3.311***	-0.156	0.169***
	(0.046)	(0.038)	(0.891)	(0.103)	(0.043)
Observations	4919	4919	3423	3529	4919
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. Panel A reports difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of divorce legalisation on female labour market outcomes, exploiting geographic variation in exposure to the reform across Malta's 13 electoral divisions. The sample consists of separated Maltese women aged 25–54. Panel B reports difference-in-differences estimates comparing labour market outcomes of separated and single women before and after divorce legalisation. The sample consists of separated Maltese women (aged 25–54) and single women not in a consensual union (aged 25–44). All specifications include year and electoral district fixed effects. Controls include age group, education, the number of children aged 0–4, and the number of children aged 5–14. Standard errors clustered at the electoral district level are reported in parentheses. Wild cluster bootstrap p-values are reported in brackets. Statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

8 Heterogeneity in Women Response

Last, I explore whether the cost of adjusting hours identified in the baselines estimates vary with horizon, household composition, and human capital. For each dimension we estimate a fully interacted specification on the sample of married women aged 25–54

Table 11. Heterogeneous effects by Age, Age of Youngest Child and Education

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: By age group					
Yes share × Post	0.000	0.000	0.059*	0.000	-0.000
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.028)	(0.001)	(0.002)
× (35-44 age group)	-0.000	0.002	0.067*	0.003	-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.035)	(0.005)	(0.003)
× (45-54 age group)	-0.002	-0.002	-0.010	-0.005	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.056)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: By age of youngest child					
Yes share × Post	0.001	0.001	0.071*	0.001	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.036)	(0.006)	(0.002)
× (Youngest 5-14)	-0.003*	-0.003	-0.030	-0.004	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.031)	(0.006)	(0.002)
× (No children 0-14)	-0.001	-0.001	0.048	-0.000	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.046)	(0.008)	(0.003)
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel C: By educational attainment					
Yes share × Post	0.000	0.001	0.052	0.001	-0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.034)	(0.004)	(0.002)
× (Upper secondary)	-0.003	-0.001	0.065	-0.001	0.003
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.048)	(0.003)	(0.003)
× (University)	-0.003	-0.001	0.072	-0.000	0.003
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.054)	(0.006)	(0.003)
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. This table shows xxx. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Across all three heterogeneity dimensions, the estimated effects on employment, full-time work, log wages, and domestic work are economically small and statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Panel A reports heterogeneity by age group. The point estimate for hours worked is largest for the 35–44 group (0.126, recovered as the sum of the base effect for 25–34 and the differential),

roughly twice the magnitude of the 25–34 estimate (0.059) and a multiple of the 45–54 estimate (0.049). The pattern is non-monotone and peaks in mid-career, which a pure horizon argument in the spirit of Stevenson (2007) would not predict. A coherent reading is that the 35–44 cohort married under the pre-reform no-divorce regime and entered marriage with the full Becker specialization contract, while retaining sufficient remaining horizon for the option-value of labour-market attachment to be quantitatively meaningful. The 25–34 group, much of which married after 2011 or close to it, faced a less binding ex-ante specialization decision and accordingly has less margin to adjust. The 45–54 group has the smallest remaining horizon and the highest cost of re-entry through human capital depreciation.

Panel B reports heterogeneity by the age of the youngest child at home. Within-group hours effects are largest for women without children aged 0–14 (0.119), intermediate for women whose youngest is 0–4 (0.071), and smallest for women whose youngest is 5–14 (0.041). The ordering observed here suggests instead that the post-reform adjustment concentrates where the immediate constraint on market work is loosest, an interpretation that complements rather than conflicts with the age-group result: the "no children 0–14" category is composed disproportionately of older women whose children have aged out of the most time-intensive phase of home production, overlapping mechanically with the mid-career cohort identified in Panel A.

Panel C reports heterogeneity by educational attainment. The point estimates for hours rise monotonically in education: 0.052 for women with lower secondary education or less, 0.117 for upper-secondary, and 0.124 for university graduates. The gradient is the opposite of the outside-options interpretation of Bargain et al. (2012), under which the divorce option matters most for women with the weakest pre-reform bargaining position.

Taken together, the three panels describe a consistent profile of the women for whom the post-reform hours response is largest: mid-career, without binding young-child constraints, and with higher human capital.

9 Concluding Remarks

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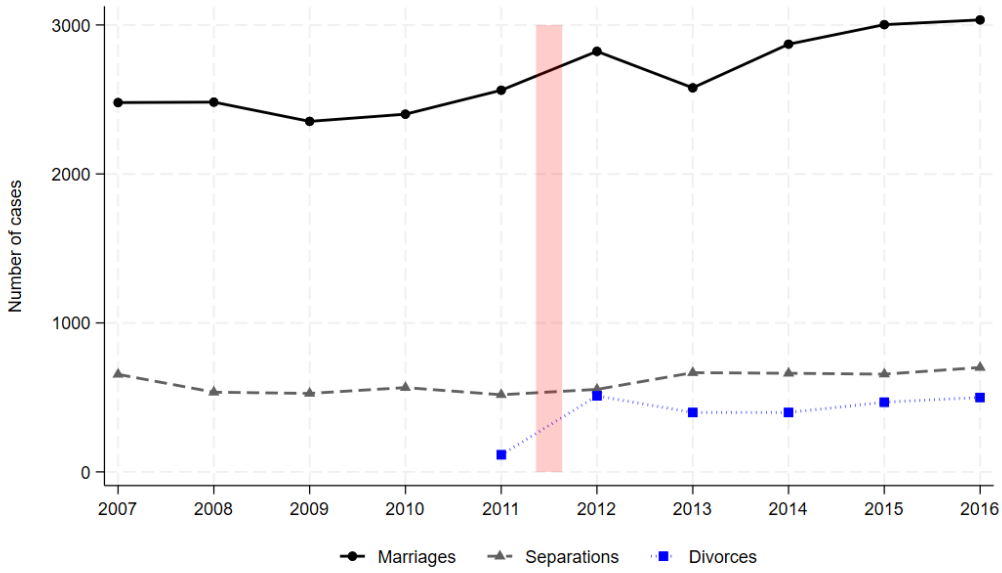
APPENDIX

Table A1. Divorce Legalisation and Female Labour Supply: Three Reforms Compared

Reform	Financial provision before legalisation	New protection for the home-specialised spouse at legalisation	Female labour-supply response
Ireland (1996)	Judicial separation since 1989; maintenance, property- and pension-adjustment orders under the "proper provision" standard	None. Divorce mirrored the pre-existing ancillary-relief regime	*Positive* (Bargain et al., 2012)
Chile (2004)	Annulment the only route out; no separation-stage settlement and no compensation regime	Yes: *compensación económica* compensates the home-specialised spouse for forgone earnings	*Negative*, concentrated among educated women (Joubert and Choi, 2026)
Malta (2011)	Legal separation since 1870; division of the community of acquests and maintenance	None. Only post-divorce and dependent-child maintenance clarified	*Positive* (this paper)

Notes: Each reform introduced divorce where none had existed previously. The reforms differ in whether legalisation also altered the financial protection of the home-specialised spouse upon dissolution. In Ireland and Malta this protection pre-dated divorce through the separation regime and was left essentially unchanged. Chile's 2004 reform bundled the introduction of divorce with a new compensation regime.

Figure A1. Marriages, Separations and Divorces



Notes: The figure plots annual counts of marriages, registered separations, and divorces in Malta between 2007 and 2016. The shaded area indicates the period of the divorce referendum (28 May 2011) and the entry into force of the Divorce Act (1 October 2011). Divorce data begin in 2011, the first year in which divorce was legally available. Data are from the National Statistics Office Malta (National Statistics Office Malta, 2007, 2009, 2010).

Table A2. Mapping Localities to Electoral Divisions

Electoral Division	Locality Distribution 2008	Final Distribution
1	Valletta, Floriana, Hamrun, part of Marsa, Pietà, Guardamangia, part of Santa Venera	Valletta, Floriana, Hamrun, Pietà, Guardamangia
2	Vittoriosa, Senglea, Cospicua, Zabbar, Kalkara, Xgħajra	Same as 2008
3	Żejtun, Fgura, Marsascala	Same as 2008
4	Gudja, Għaxaq, Marsa, Paola, Santa Luċija, Tarxien	Same as 2008
5	Birżebbuġa, Kirkop, Marsaxlokk, Mqabba, Qrendi, Safi, Żurrieq, Bubaqra	Same as 2008
6	Qormi, Siġġiewi, Luqa	Same as 2008
7	Żebbuġ (Malta), Dingli, Mġarr, Mtarfa, Rabat (Malta)	Same as 2008
8	Birkirkara, Fleur-de-Lys, Iklin, Lija, part of Santa Venera	Birkirkara, Fleur-de-Lys, Iklin, Lija, Santa Venera
9	Għargħur, Msida, San Ġwann, Kappara, Swieqi, Ibraġġ, Madliena, Ta' Xbiex	Same as 2008
10	Gżira, Pembroke, St Julian's, Paceville, Sliema	Same as 2008
11	Mdina, Attard, Balzan, Mosta	Same as 2008
12	Mellieħa, Naxxar, St Paul's Bay	Same as 2008
13	Victoria (Gozo), Fontana, Għajnsielem, Għarb, Għasri, Kerċem, Santa Luċija, Munxar, Xlendi, Nadur, Qala, San Lawrenz, Sannat, Xagħra, Xewkija, Żebbuġ (Gozo), Marsalforn	Same as 2008

Notes: Data from the Electoral Commission of Malta

Table A3. Referendum Outcome and General Elections 2008

Electoral Division	Yes Votes (%) Referendum 2011	General Election 2008			
		Partisan Party	PN share	MLP share	PN-MLP Margin
2	65.55	MLP	31.93	66.67	−34.74
3	64.05	MLP	35.70	62.47	−26.77
5	61.63	MLP	38.28	60.29	−22.01
4	60.03	MLP	37.26	61.51	−24.25
9	54.29	PN	61.12	36.19	+24.93
6	52.79	MLP	45.32	53.64	−8.32
12	52.60	PN	58.61	38.97	+19.64
1	52.40	MLP	49.26	49.73	−0.47
7	51.94	MLP	47.79	50.61	−2.82
10	51.77	PN	63.20	33.91	+29.29
8	48.05	PN	56.52	41.38	+15.14
11	45.84	PN	61.31	35.72	+25.59
13[a]	32.15	PN	55.35	42.90	+12.45

Notes: Electoral divisions are ordered by share of votes supporting divorce (descending). Yes share computed as Yes votes divided by valid votes cast in the 2011 referendum. First preference vote shares are from the 2008 general election (n = 294,214 valid votes). PN−MLP margin is the difference in first-preference vote shares between the Nationalist Party (PN) and the Malta Labour Party (MLP); negative values indicate MLP-majority divisions. Dominant party defined as the party with the higher first-preference vote share in the division.

[a] Division 13 corresponds to the island of Gozo.

Table A4. Summary Statistics: Top and Bottom Sunday Mass Attendance (2007-2010)

	Sunday Mass Attendance			
	Below median	Above median	Difference	p-value
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age Group				
25-29	0.078	0.075	-0.002	0.736
30-34	0.168	0.139	-0.029	0.004
35-39	0.161	0.156	-0.004	0.660
40-44	0.159	0.188	0.029	0.005
45-49	0.199	0.228	0.029	0.009
50-54	0.235	0.212	-0.023	0.045
Education				
Up to lower secondary	0.753	0.710	-0.042	0.000
Upper secondary and vocational	0.152	0.161	0.009	0.377
Tertiary education	0.093	0.128	0.035	0.000
Children				
Number of children under 5	0.245	0.232	-0.014	0.337
Number of children 5-14	0.649	0.686	0.038	0.088
Economic Activity				
Employment	0.363	0.391	0.029	0.031
Employee	0.333	0.362	0.029	0.024
Full-time employment	0.271	0.282	0.011	0.384
Part-time employment	0.091	0.109	0.018	0.027
Unemployment	0.005	0.004	-0.001	0.729
Hours worked (per week)	33.299	33.315	0.016	0.972
(Log) Wage	9.356	9.355	-0.001	0.974
Household Activity				
Domestic tasks and care responsibilities	0.628	0.591	-0.037	0.005

Notes: The table reports summary statistics for legally married Maltese women aged 25–54 living with their spouse. Columns (1) and (2) report mean values for districts below and above the median attendance rate. The Difference column reports differences in means between the two groups, and the p-value column reports the corresponding p-values from two-sample t-tests allowing for unequal variances.

Table A5. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation: Weights

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Main Specification					
DivSupport × Post	-0.001	0.000	0.080***	-0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.016)	(0.002)	(0.001)
	[0.702]	[0.982]	[0.021]	[0.922]	[0.802]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Survey weights					
DivSupport × Post	-0.001	0.000	0.083***	-0.000	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.018)	(0.001)	(0.001)
	[0.367]	[0.831]	[0.039]	[0.837]	[0.541]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel C: District-year population weights					
DivSupport × Post	-0.000	0.000	0.079***	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.016)	(0.002)	(0.001)
	[0.778]	[0.769]	[0.021]	[0.839]	[0.844]
Observations	14620	14620	6983	7123	14620
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. This table shows xxx. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

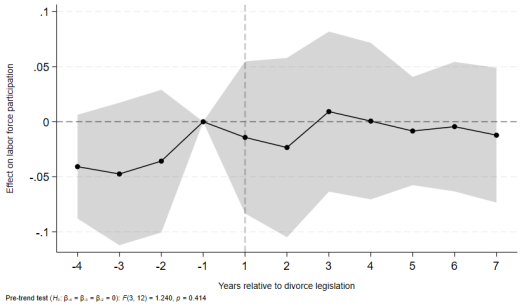
Table A6. Divorce Risk and Female Labour Force Participation: Weights

	Employed	Fulltime	Hours worked	(Log) wage	Domestic work
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Main Specification					
Married × Post	0.105***	0.109***	1.121**	0.036	-0.113***
	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.488)	(0.034)	(0.016)
	[0.004]	[0.003]	[0.035]	[0.307]	[0.000]
Married	-0.122***	-0.160***	-2.431***	-0.030	0.214***
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.516)	(0.045)	(0.021)
Observations	18120	18120	9692	9900	18120
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel B: Survey weights					
Married × Post	0.116***	0.121***	1.163**	0.012	-0.125***
	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.523)	(0.034)	(0.016)
	[0.004]	[0.006]	[0.047]	[0.732]	[0.000]
Married	-0.110***	-0.138***	-1.968***	0.019	0.196***
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.538)	(0.040)	(0.020)
Observations	18120	18120	9692	9900	18120
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel C: District-year population weights					
Married × Post	0.095***	0.099***	1.004*	0.034	-0.103***
	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.534)	(0.037)	(0.017)
	[0.009]	[0.005]	[0.094]	[0.377]	[0.001]
Married	-0.117***	-0.156***	-2.411***	-0.041	0.210***
	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.511)	(0.045)	(0.022)
Observations	18120	18120	9692	9900	18120
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

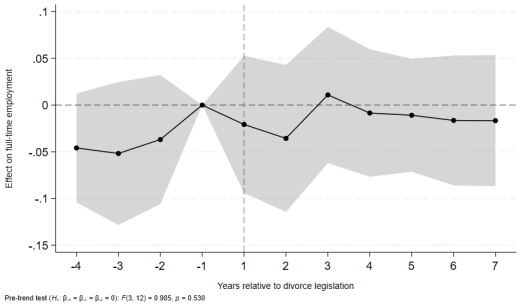
Notes. This table shows xxx. statistical significance is denoted by * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure A2. Even study: Married versus Single Men

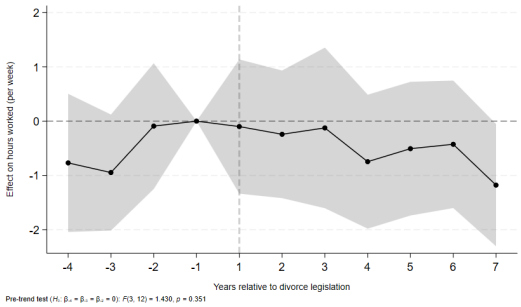
(a) Employed



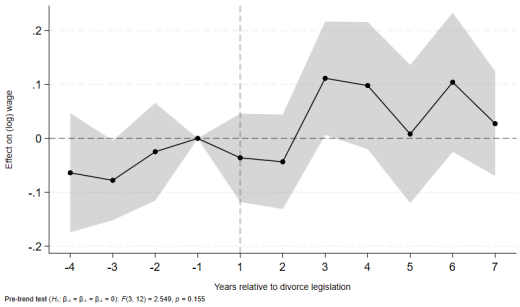
(b) Full-time employment



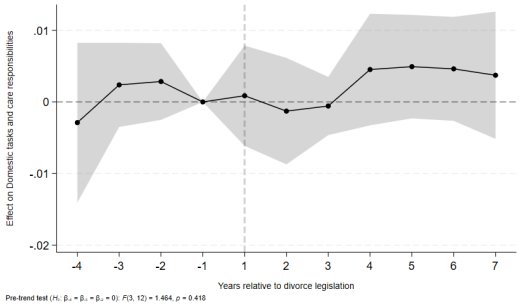
(c) Working Hours



(d) (log) Wage



(e) Domestic work



Notes: This figure presents event-study estimates following equation 2 of the effects of the legalisation of divorce in Malta on labor market and domestic activity outcomes. Each coefficient represents the differential effect for married men relative to single men in a given year before or after the 2011 divorce referendum. The omitted reference period is the pre-reform year 2010, so all coefficients are interpreted relative to that year. The figures allow for an assessment of pre-trends prior to the reform and the dynamic evolution of outcomes following the introduction of divorce. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors clustered at the district level.