

Trends and challenges in household demography

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Outline

Part I: Developments in Household Demography (2000–2025)

Part II: Trends in Household Size and Composition

Part III: Danish Trends

Part IV: Should we trust the data?

Part V: Who are we missing?

Theoretical Frameworks

Convergence (Goode, 1963)

Industrialization drives all societies toward the Western conjugal family. Partially refuted – the Western model itself destabilized (Cherlin, 2012).

Second Demographic Transition

(Lesthaeghe, 2020)

Rising individualism, cohabitation, divorce, solo living, and delayed family formation in developed societies.

Divergence (Therborn, 2004)

Family systems on a global scale continue to evolve and diverge rather than converge. Growing complexity and heterogeneity persist.

Strong vs. Weak Families

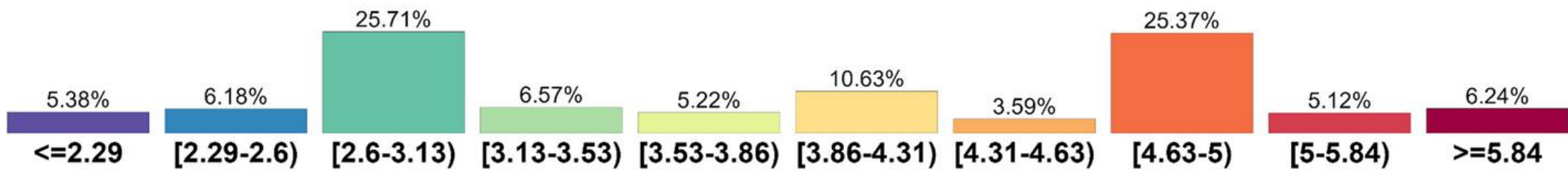
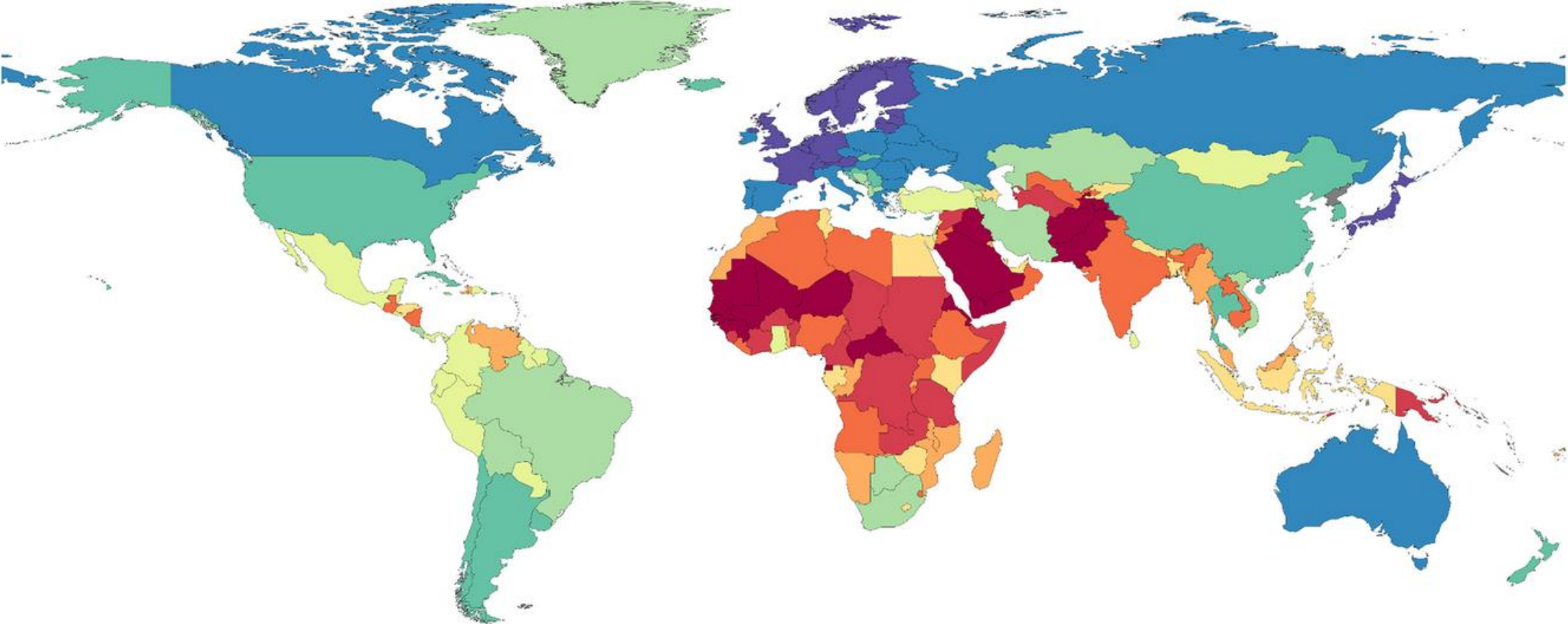
(Reher, 1998)

Persistent contrast between Mediterranean 'strong family' and Northern European 'weak family' systems with deep historical roots.

Current consensus:

Household sizes converge globally, but composition diverges (Esteve et al., 2024).

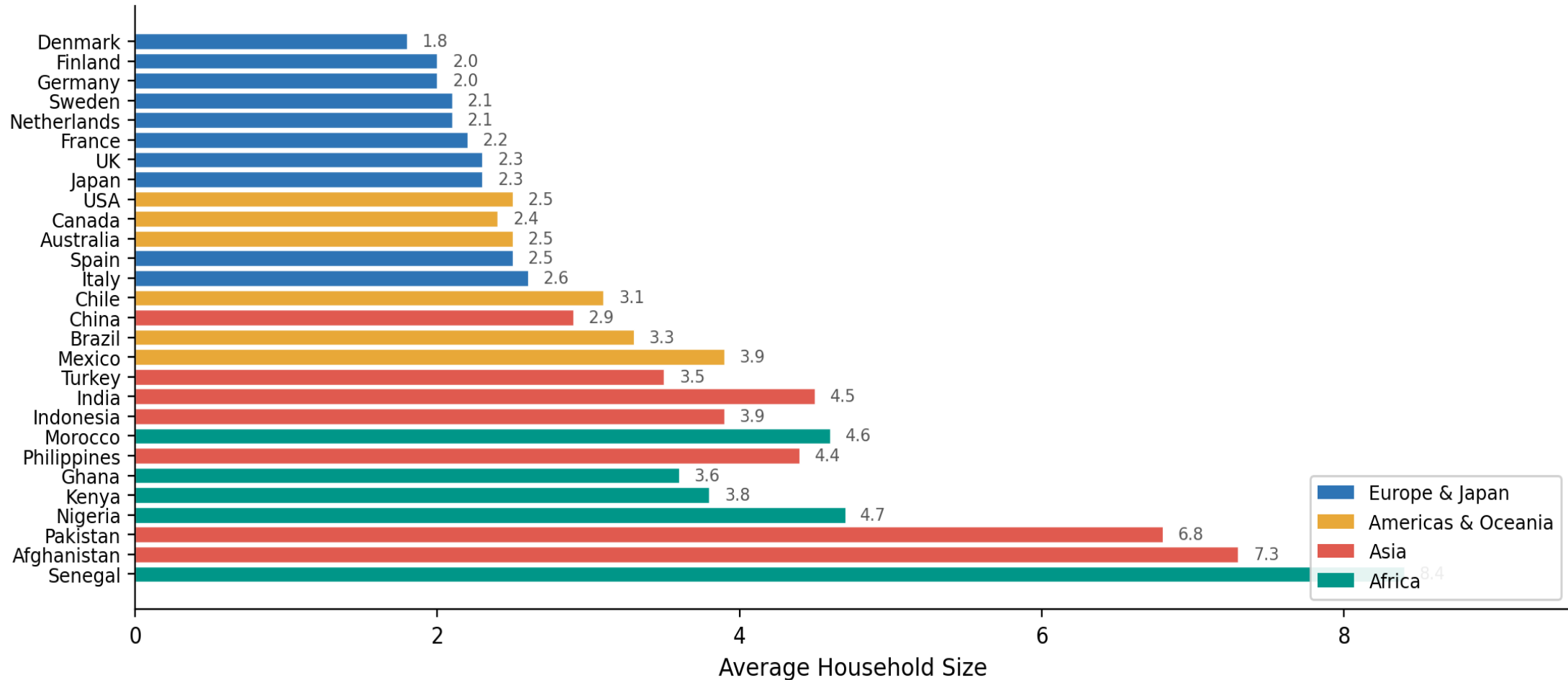
Global Household Size: The Big Picture (mean, 1970-2020)



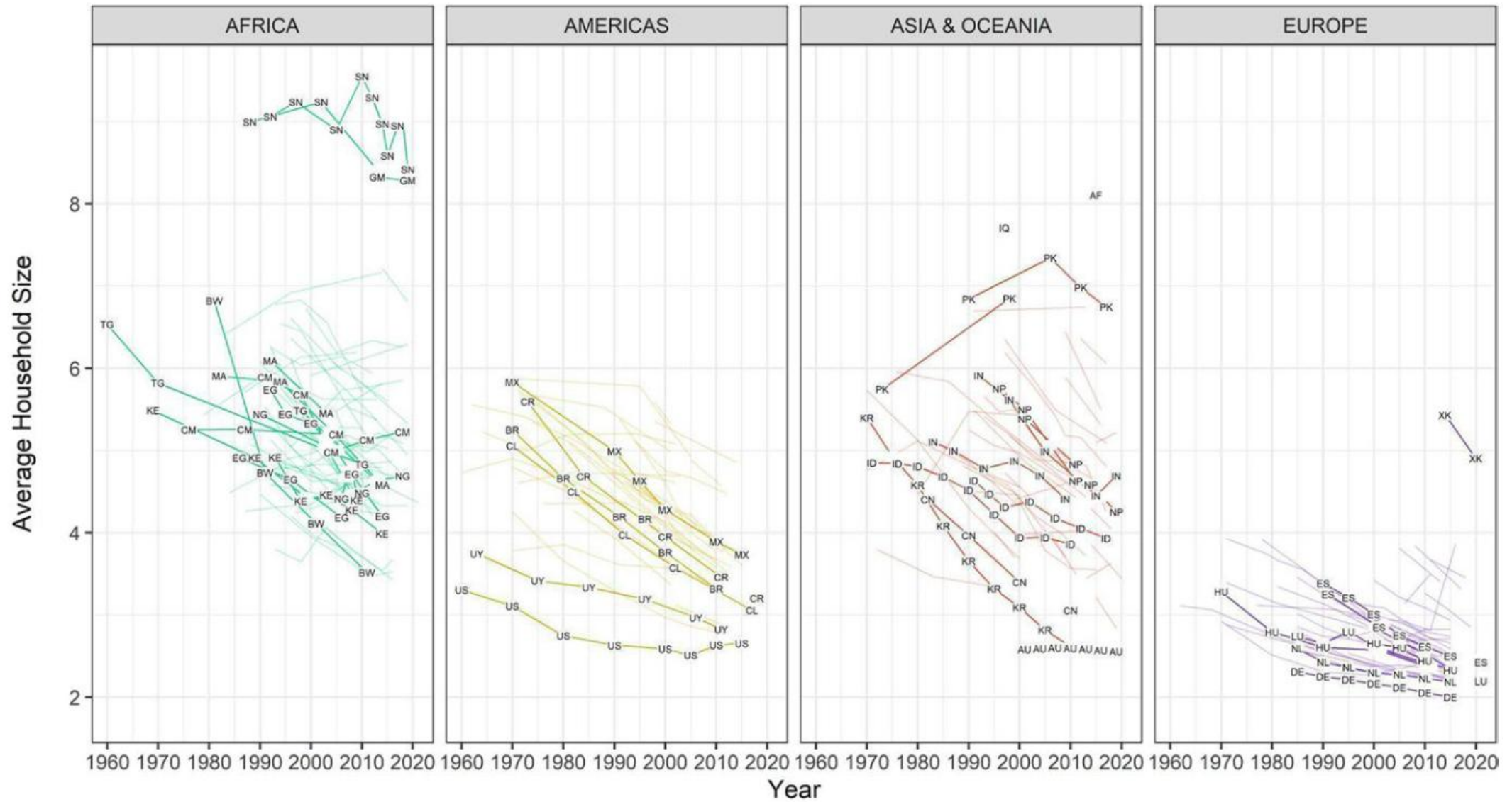
Data: Esteve et al. (2024), Genus 80:2; CORESIDENCE database. Range: 1.8 (Denmark) to 8.4 (Senegal)

Global Household Size: The Big Picture (most recent)

Average household size by country (most recent data available since 2000)

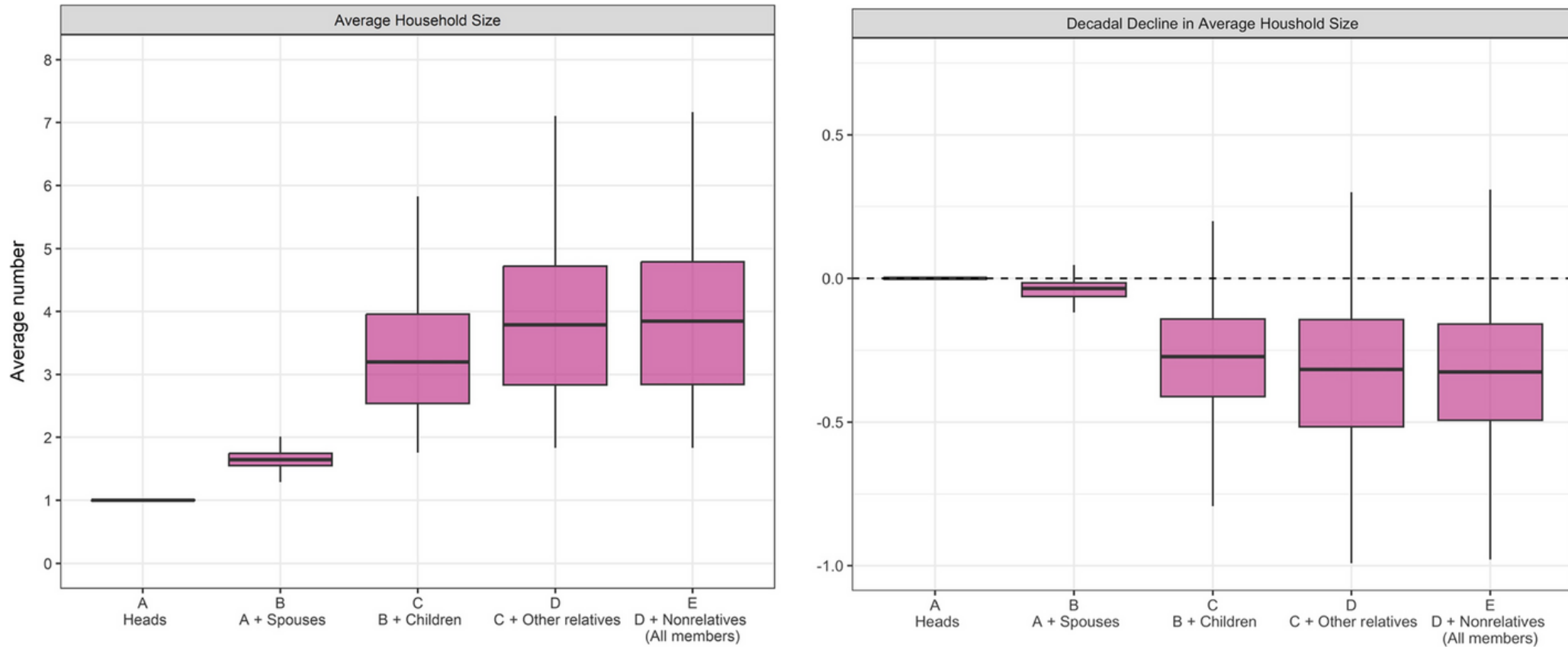


Declining Household Size Over Time (1970–2020)



Esteve et al. (2024), Genus 80:2, Fig. 2. Regional averages are approximate.

What Drives the Decline?

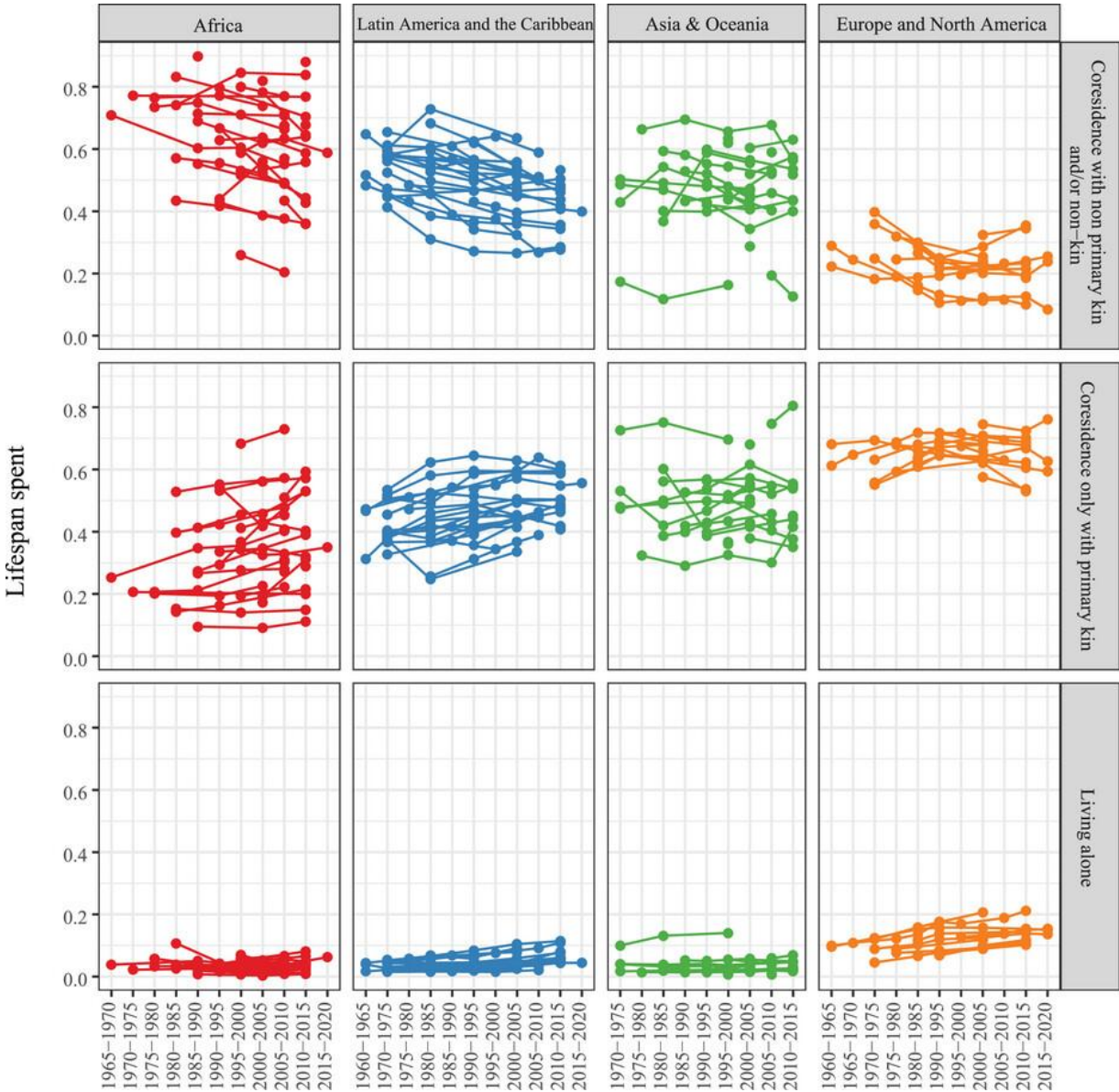


Children account for >66% of both cross-national variability and the decline in household size

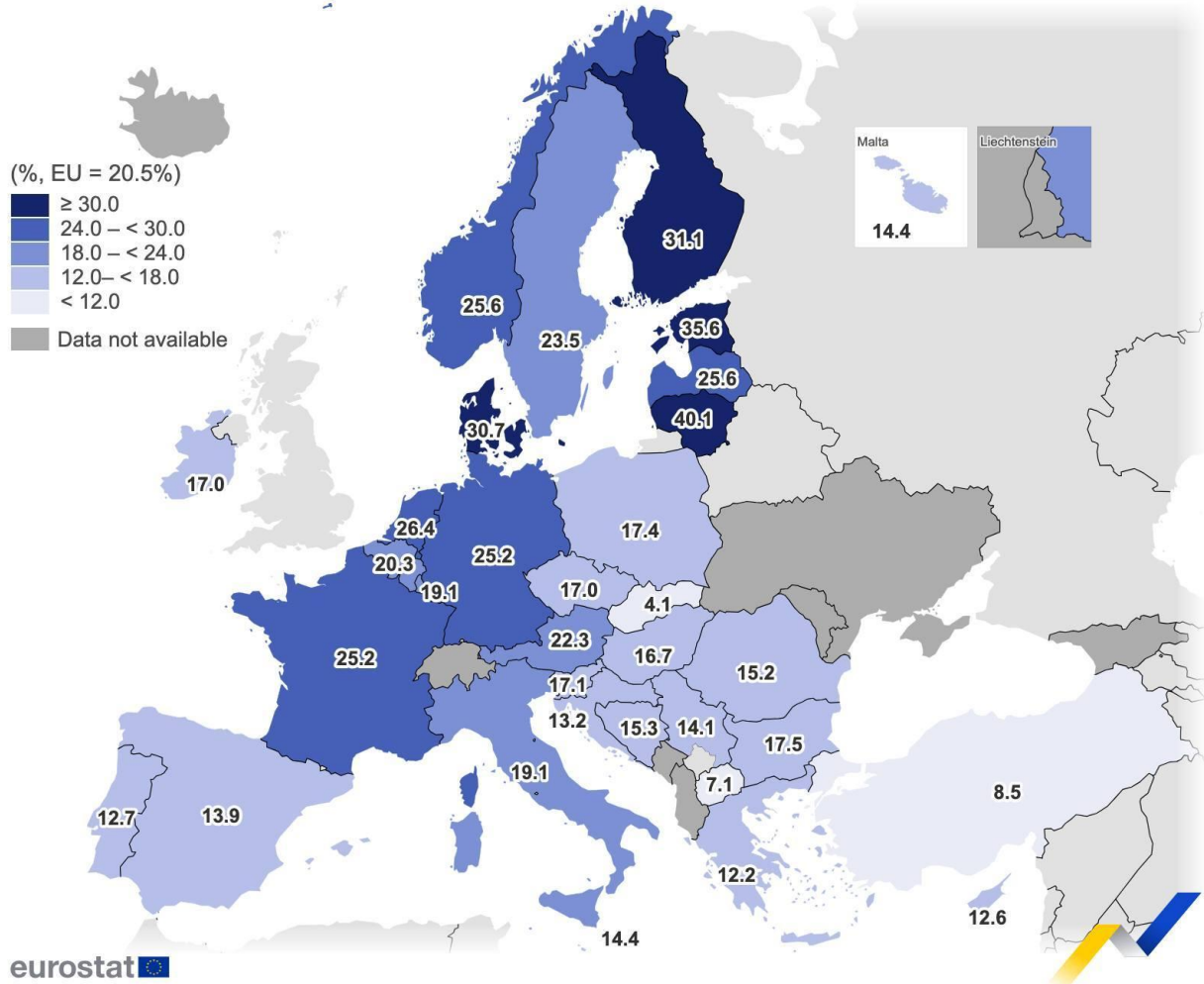
The number of other relatives has remained relatively stable or declined only moderately

Households are shrinking in size, but their composition is not converging globally

The Rise of Solo Living



Adults living alone, 2024
(% of total adult population)



eurostat 
Source: Eurostat (dataset code lfst_hhindws)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 02/2026

Intergenerational Coresidence: A Surprising Reversal

Counter to the narrative of universal nuclearization:

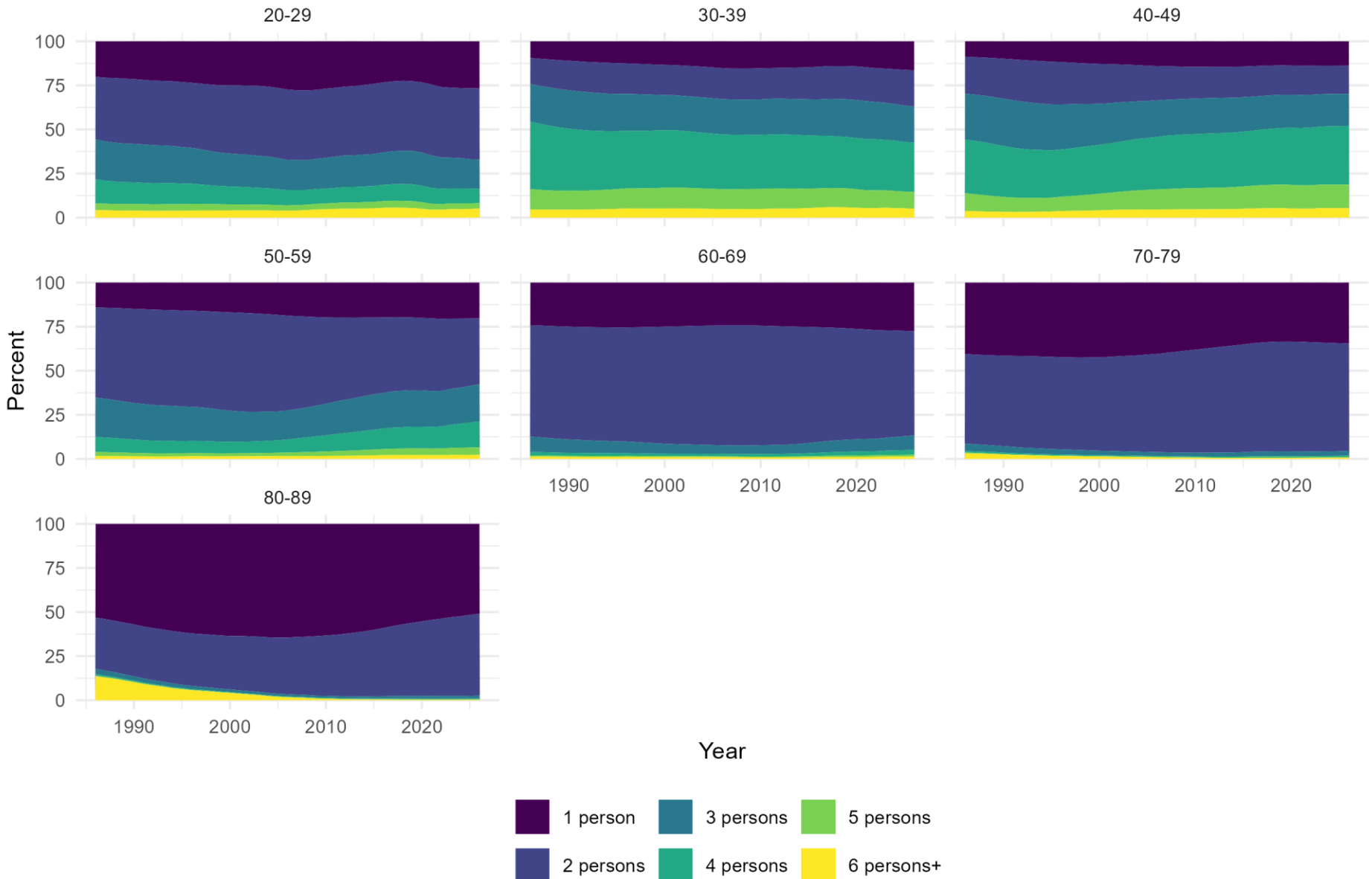
- Intergenerational coresidence among young adults (20–30) is rising globally – fastest in Asia, robust in Europe and Latin America (Esteve & Reher, 2021)
- In the US, 25% of adults aged 25–34 lived in multigenerational households in 2021, up from 9% in 1971 (Pew Research, 2022)
- 17% of US homes purchased in 2024 were multigenerational – a record (Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2025)

Drivers:

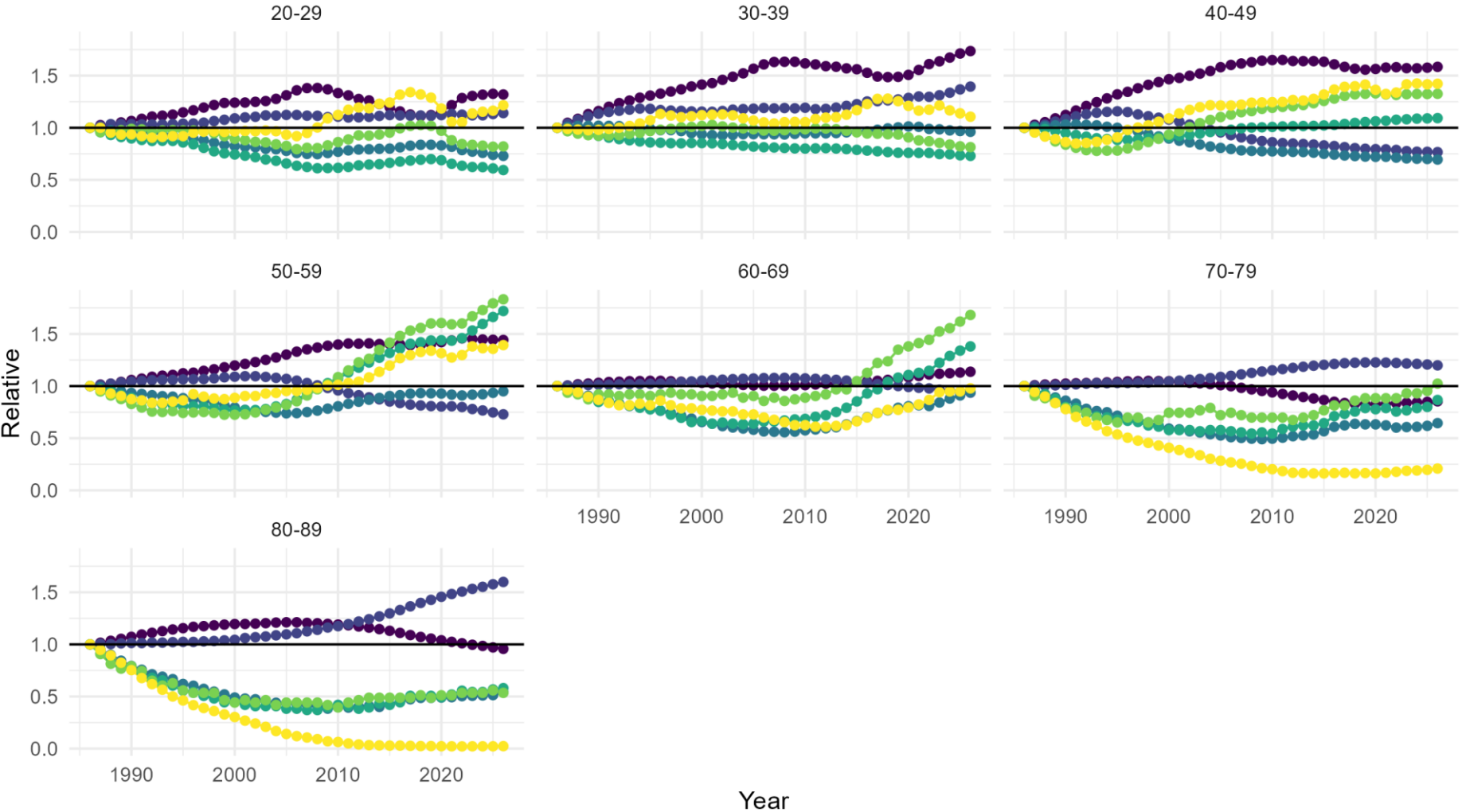
- Rising housing costs and affordability constraints for young adults
- Caring for aging parents/relatives
- Cultural preferences and strong family ties (Reher, 1998)
- Economic uncertainty and delayed transitions to adulthood
- In Mexico, ~42% of women anchor first partnership in an extended household (Becca & Esteve, 2026)

DANISH TRENDS

Trends in Danish household composition (1/2)

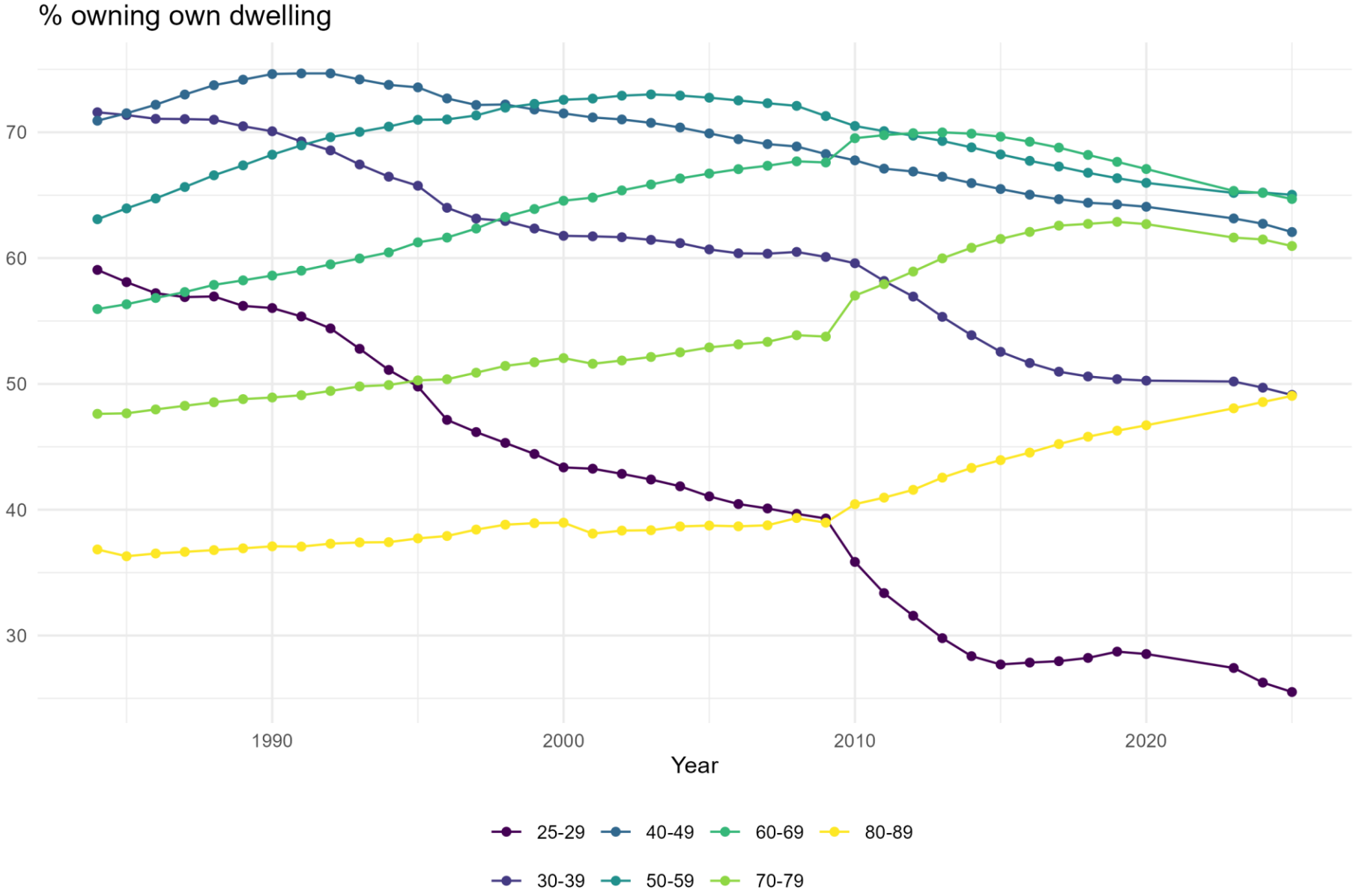


Trends in Danish household composition (2/2)



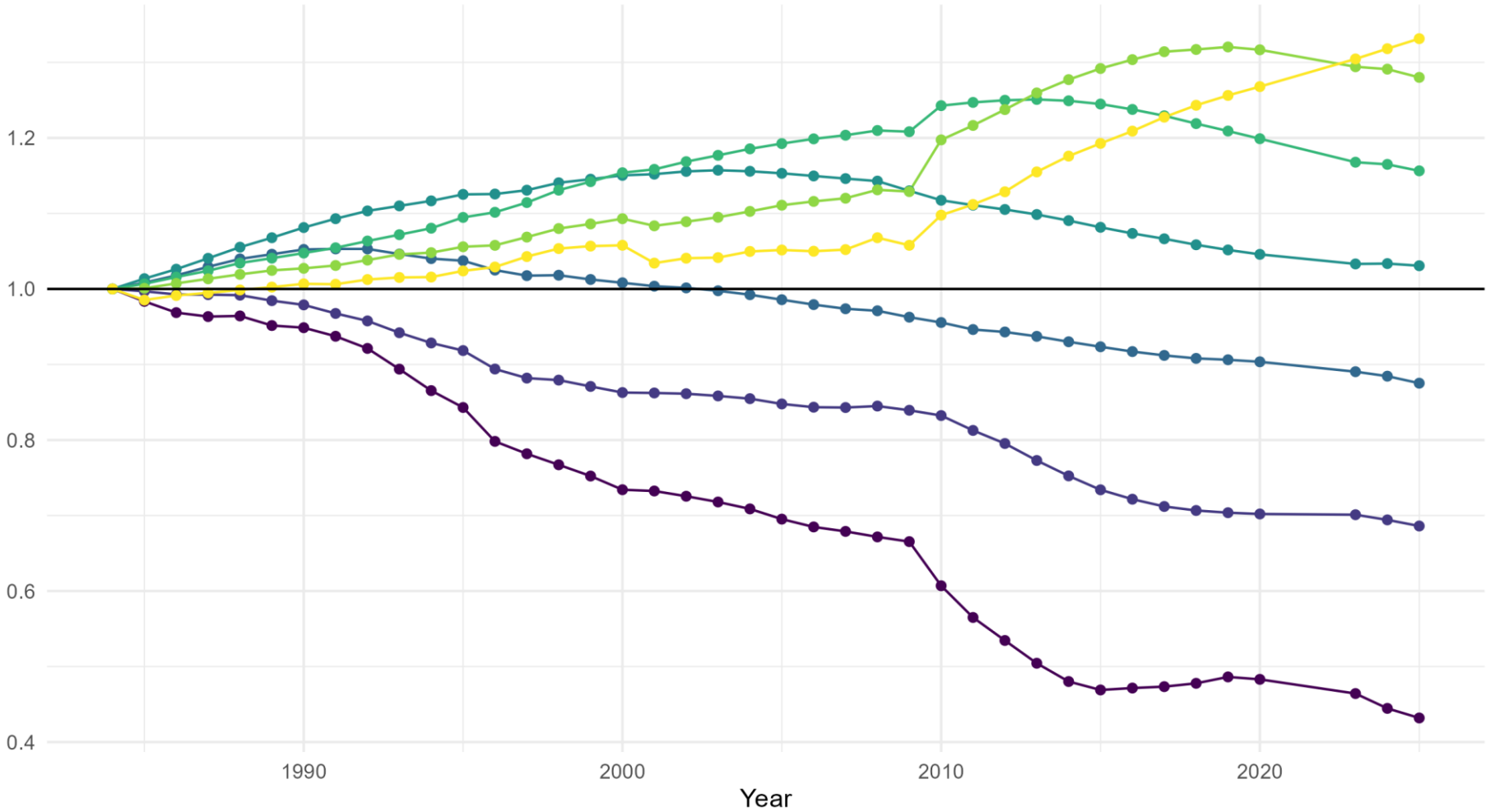
- 1 person ● 3 persons ● 5 persons
- 2 persons ● 4 persons ● 6 persons+

Generation rent (1/2)



Generation rent (2/2)

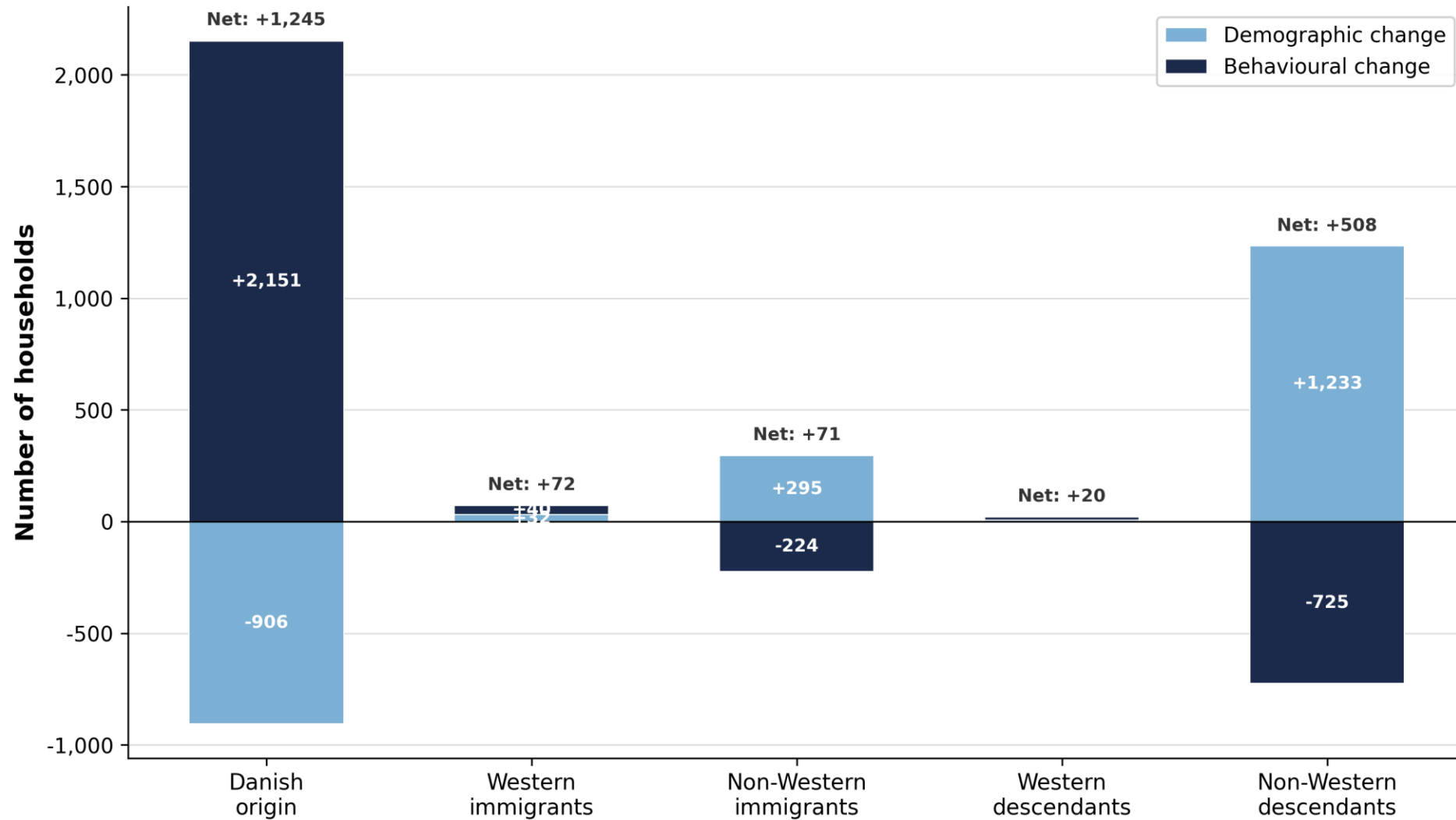
Relative change in ownership share



- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-89

Multigenerational Living

Decomposition of the change in three-generation households, 2007-2017, by ethnicity



SHOULD WE TRUST THE DATA

Assessing quality of cohabitation data

Cohabitation status is an often used variable in registry data research.

Potentially prone to misregistration.

How large is the problem, and for whom?

(Fallesen et al. 2023 OSF)

Assessing quality of cohabitation data

What is the overlap between people's direct statement on their cohabitation status and those provided by administrative housing registers?

92%

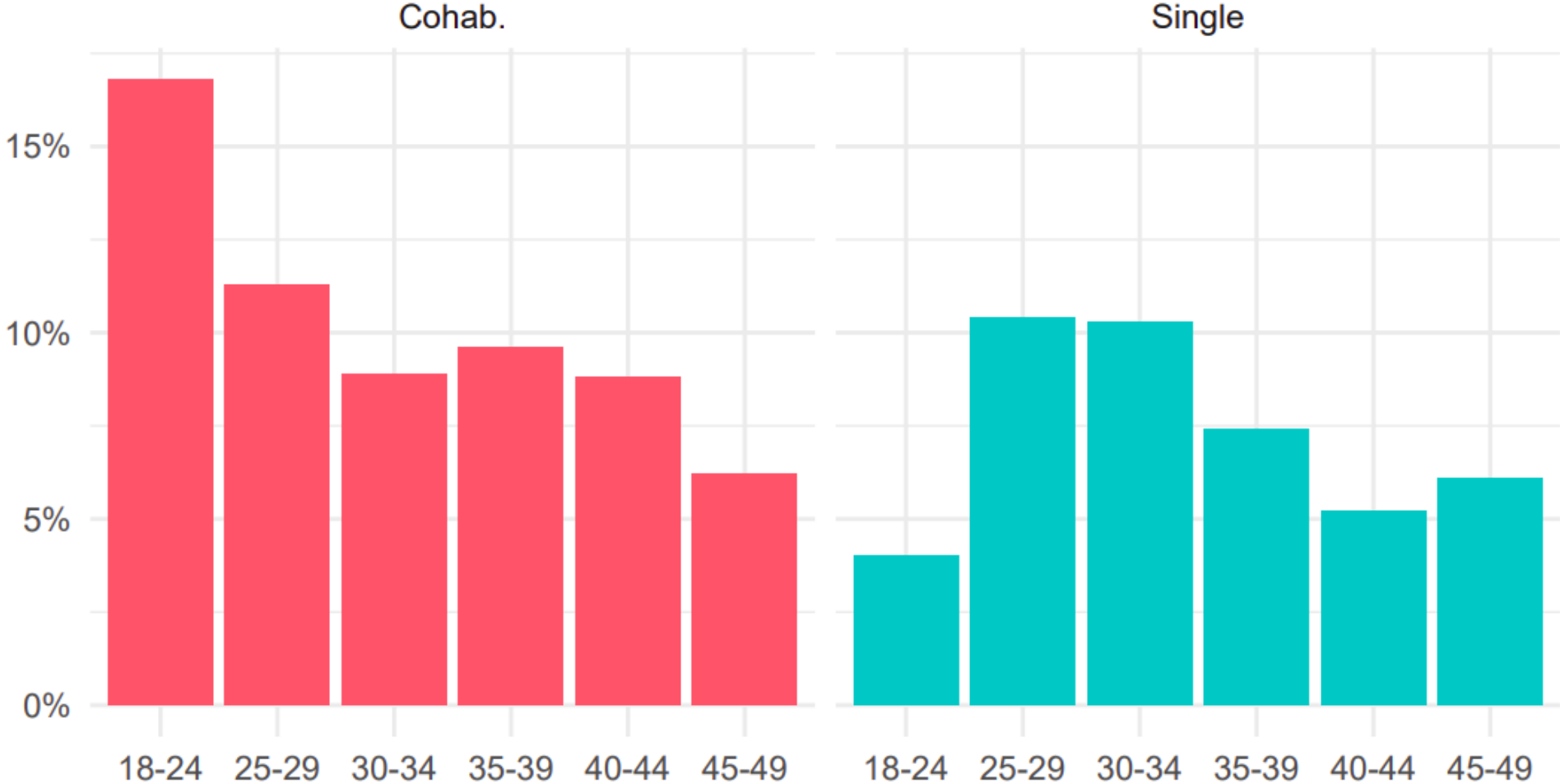
Assessing quality of cohabitation data



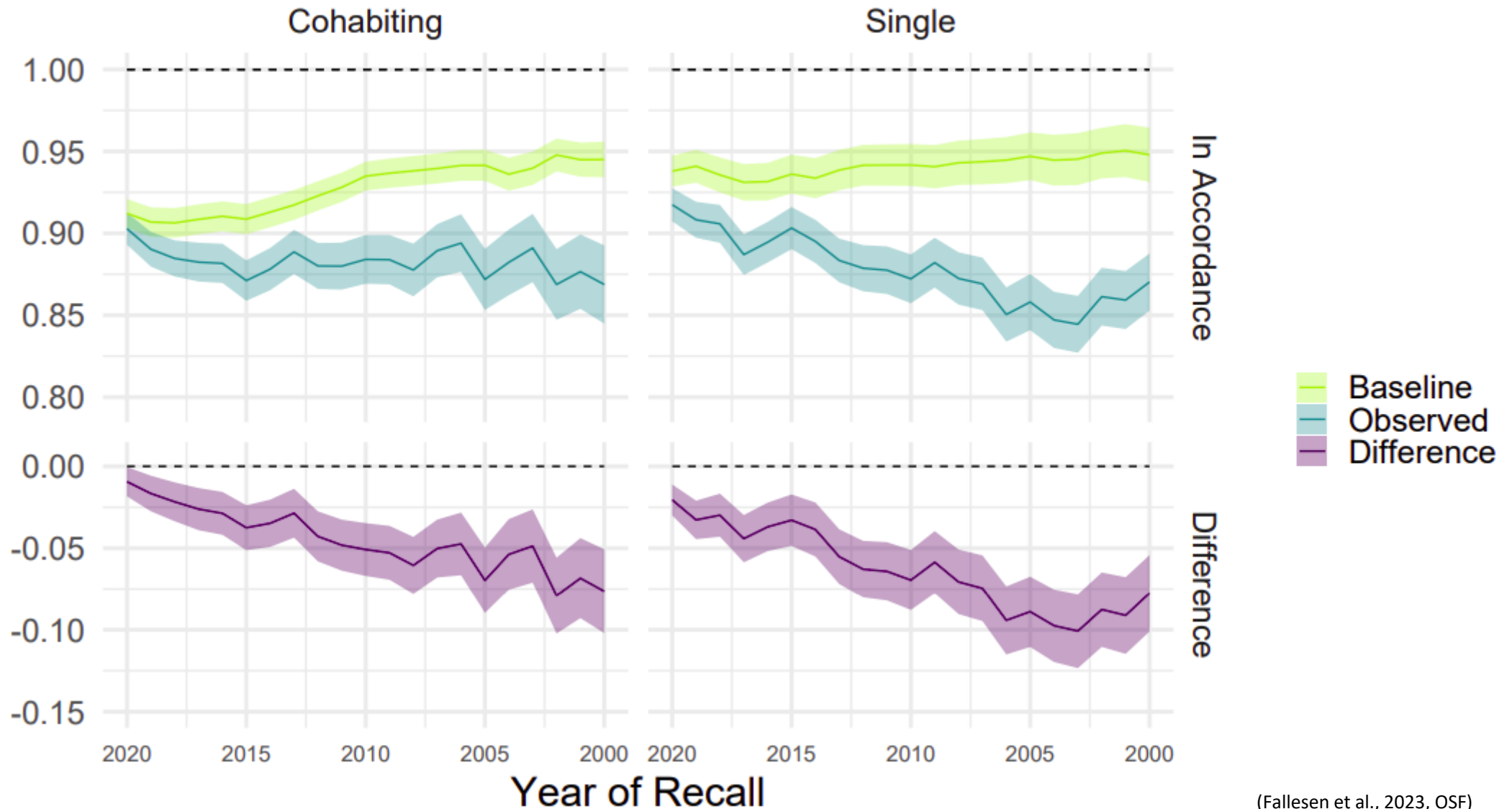
(Fallesen et al., 2023, OSF)

Assessing quality of cohabitation data

Share misclassified across age groups

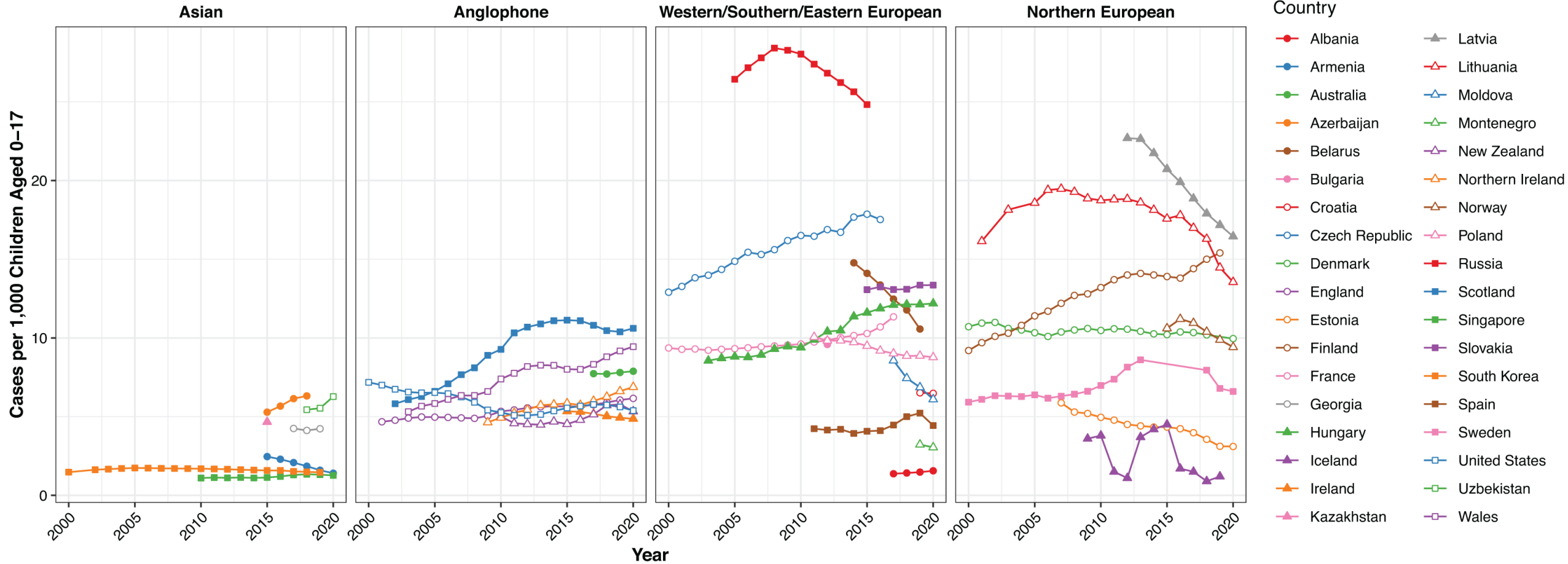


What is the quality of cohabitation histories in surveys?



**WHAT ABOUT THOSE OUTSIDE
MAINSTREAM HOUSEHOLDS?**

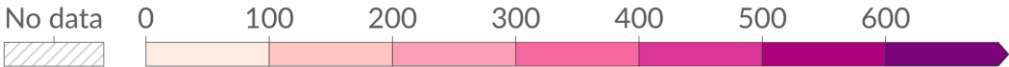
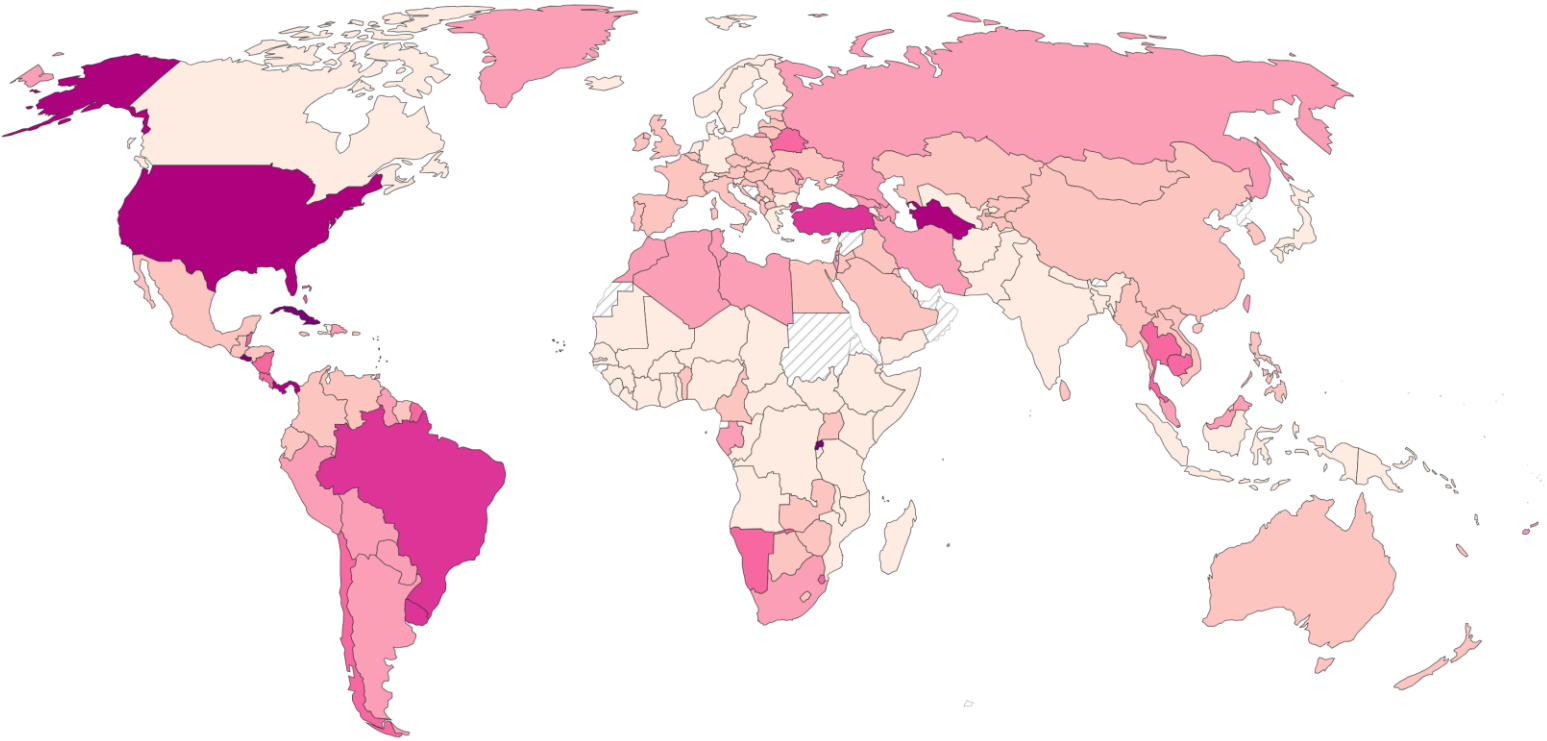
Children outside a traditional household



Adults outside a traditional household

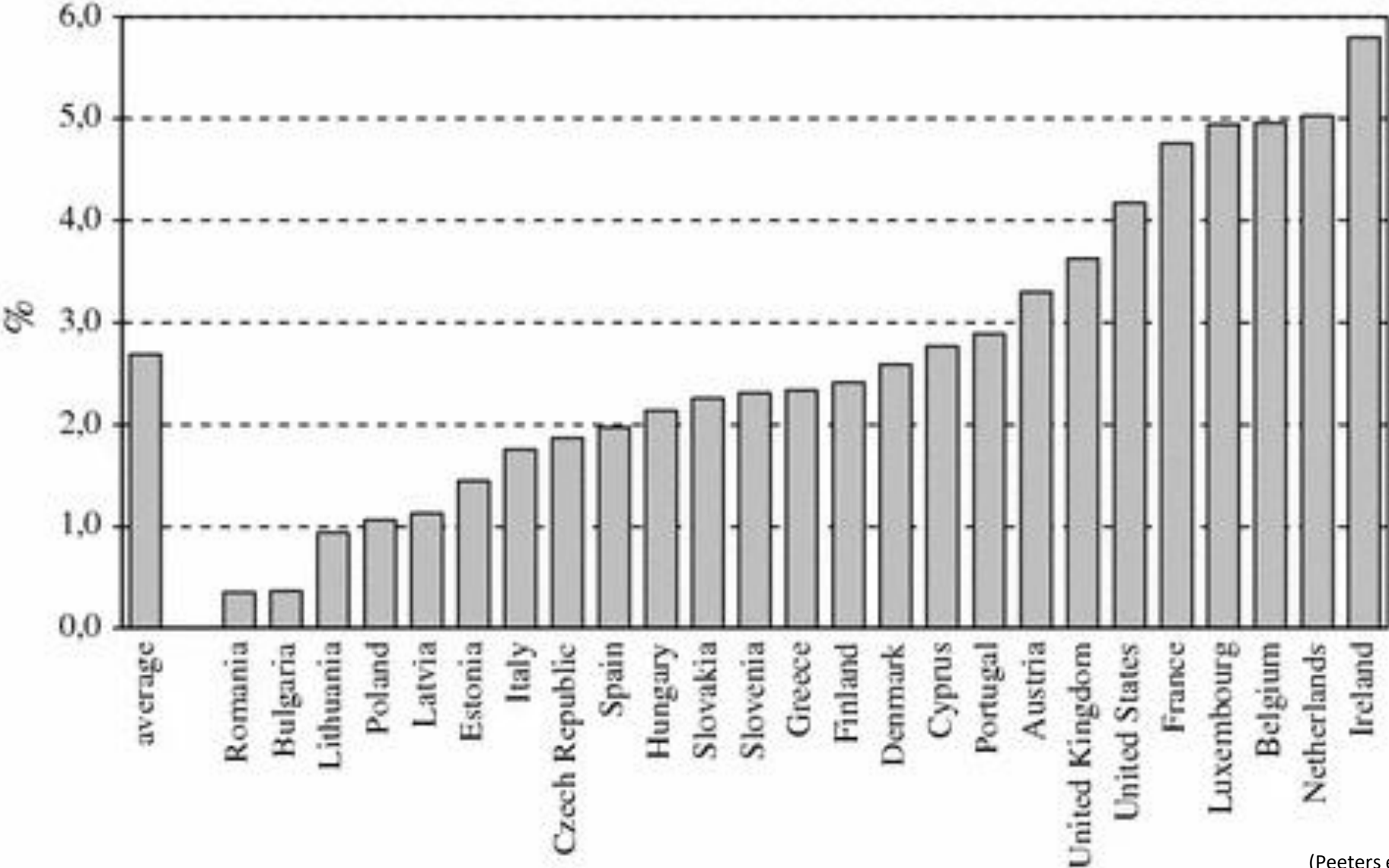
Prison population rate, 2026

Number of prisoners, including pre-trial and remand detainees, per 100,000 people.



Data source: Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (2026); Population based on various sources (2024)
OurWorldinData.org/state-capacity | CC BY

The elderly outside a traditional household



(Peeters et al., 2011, SIR)