

Introduction

“There is a remarkably pervasive desire (and supporting norms) for a family size of two children”

(Hagewen and Morgan's 2005: 510), United States

We look at the European evidence in 1979-2012

- Focus on ideal family size: mean and the share of respondents with a 2-child ideal
- 170 surveys, 37 countries
- Women aged 15-49

Data

Data: World Value Survey (WVS), European Values Study (EVS), International Social Survey (ISSP), and Eurobarometer (EB) surveys; few additional datasets.

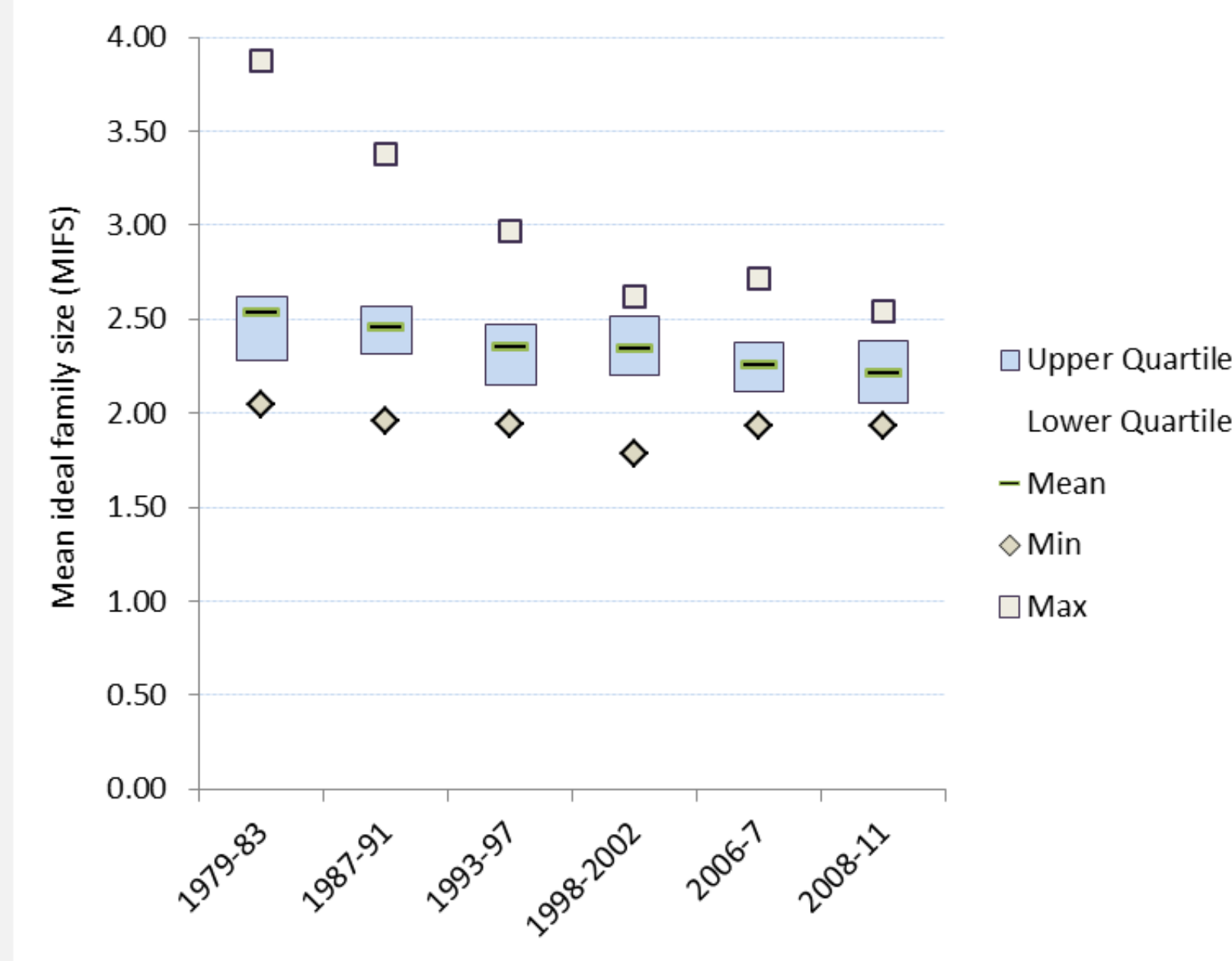
Question in most datasets: “What do you think is the ideal size of a family - how many children, if any?”

Period	# surveys	# countries	Mean MIFS	STDev MIFS	Surveys with > 50% stating 2-child ideal (%)	Adjusted for non-response			
						Mean share with 2-child ideal (%)	Mean share with ideal 0+1 (%)	Mean share with ideal 2 with 3+ (%)	
1979-84	22	14	2.58	0.43	50	48	4	53	43
1987-92	41	30	2.49	0.28	59	52	5	55	40
1993-97	37	28	2.37	0.23	76	57	6	60	34
1998-2002	26	20	2.37	0.24	73	53	7	58	35
2006-7	25	25	2.27	0.22	76	56	9	61	30
2008-11	30	27	2.21	0.19	87	56	11	61	28

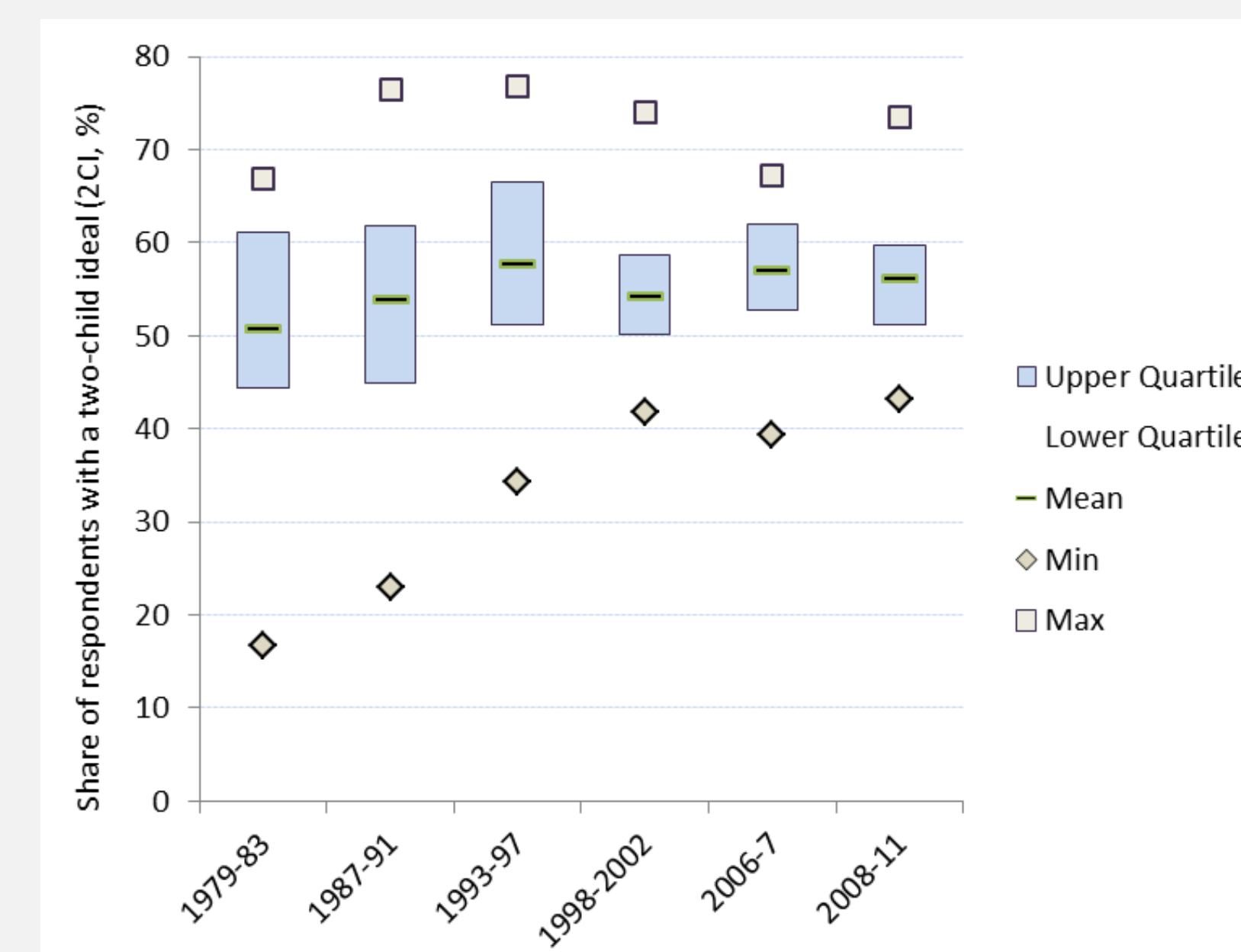
Survey selection: surveys with <18% missing and non-numerical responses, N > 100, countries with population above 1 million. Northern Ireland excluded. Eastern & western Germany studied separately.

Trends in ideal family size, 1979-2012

Mean ideal family size in Europe, summary results by period



Women with a 2-child ideal (%), summary results by period

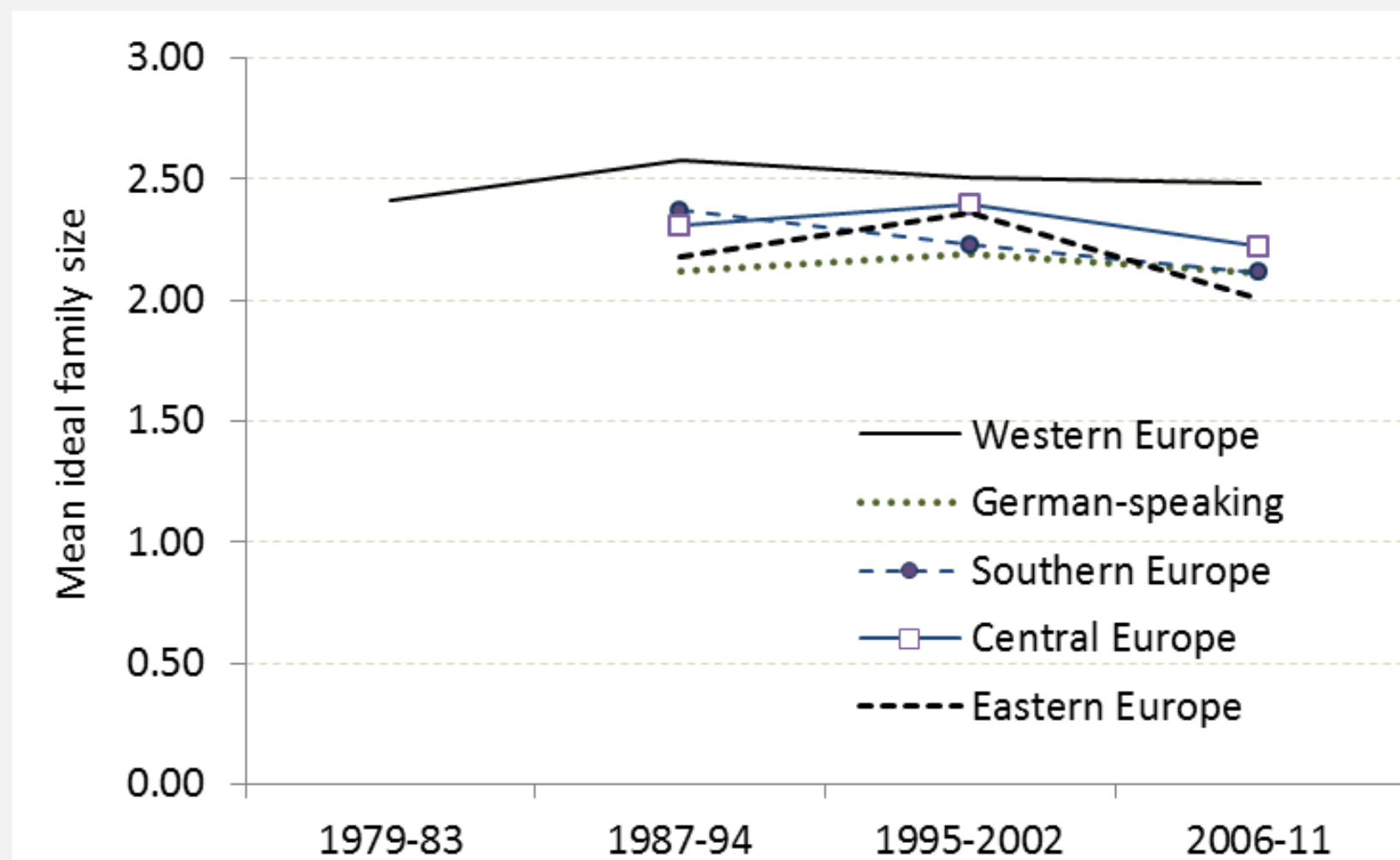


Additional results

- No clear link between early cohort fertility decline < 1.8 and ideal family size in 2011
- But: countries with a low cohort fertility (<1.6) share a low ideal family size around 2011
- Broad stabilization in ideal family size at lower levels? Yes, to some degree

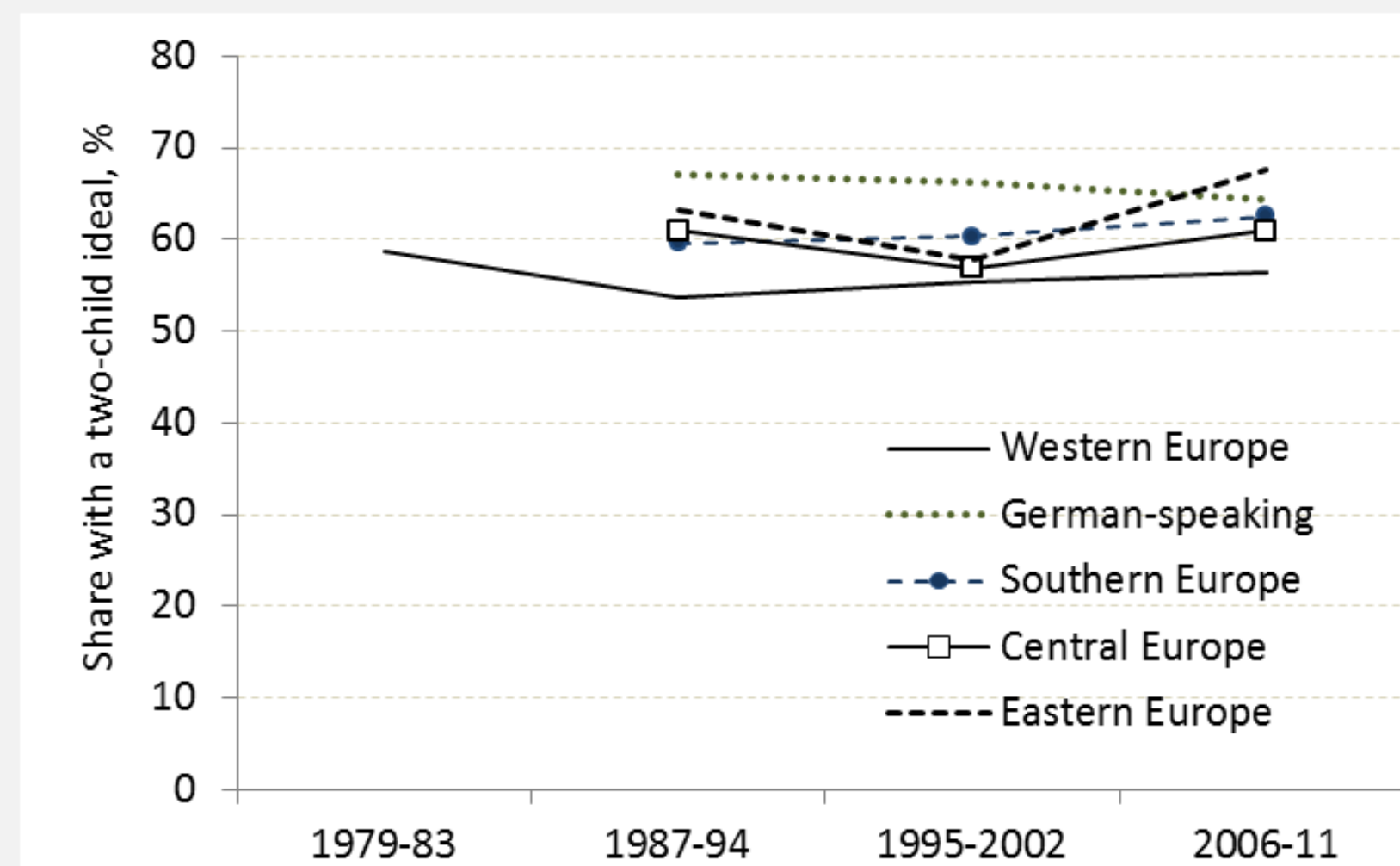
Comparison of major European regions

Mean ideal family size in European regions



Average values across all surveys in a given period; data adjusted for non-response and for non-numerical responses

Women with a two-child ideal (%) in European regions



- Two-child ideal clearly dominant in all the regions studied by the late 1980s (probably earlier)
- Gradual rise in the share of women with an ideal of 1 and a declining share of women with an ideal of 3+ children
- One-child ideal spreading faster in Southern, Eastern and South-eastern Europe

Summary: remarkable stability

A two-child ideal has become nearly universal among women in Europe

- ✓ Societal mean ideal family size remains closely clustered around 2.2 in most countries.
- ✓ A majority of women consider two children as ideal
- ✓ This share is stable around 60% in all regions
- ✓ Outside Europe, a two-child ideal becoming dominant in many countries, including Brazil, India, Morocco, Bangladesh (not shown here)

No evidence of decline of mean ideal family size considerably below replacement levels

But the share with ideals of 0 or 1 child is gradually increasing – will it become more prominent?

Why not an ideal of one?

Parenthood perceived by most people as a unique, valuable and desired experience (Rotkirch et al, 2011)

But can't this desire be satisfied by having one child?

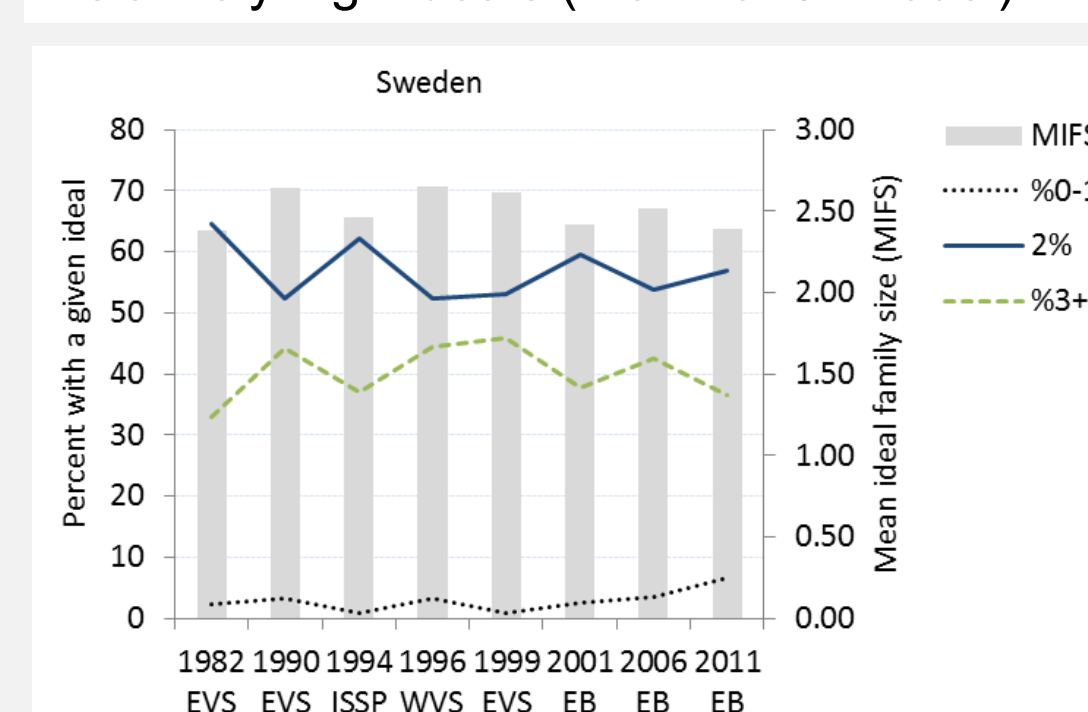
- lowest impact on parents leisure & employment, “cheapest way to become a parent” (Jefferies 2001)

What sustains an ideal of having two kids?

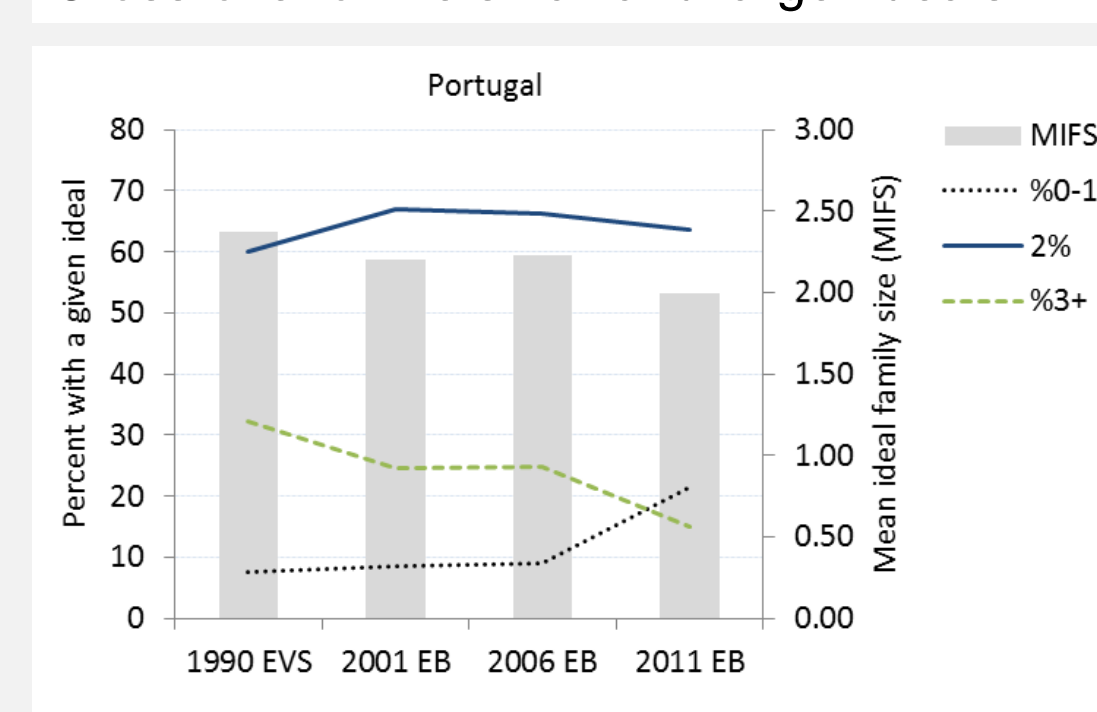
- Having one child of each sex (a distinct experience?)
- Continuing norms, prejudices and misperceptions against having one child (Blake 1981, Mancilas 2006)
- Two children as an “insurance strategy”?
- Fitting the established social norm...

Country examples

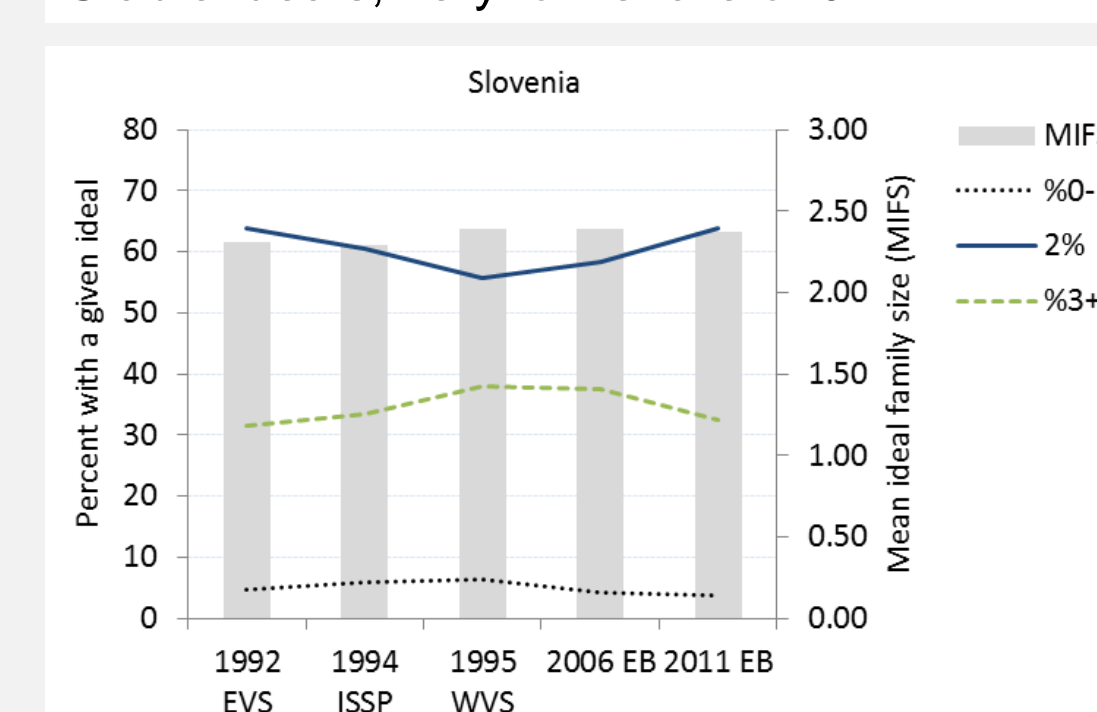
Sweden
Relatively high ideals (the “2 or 3” model)



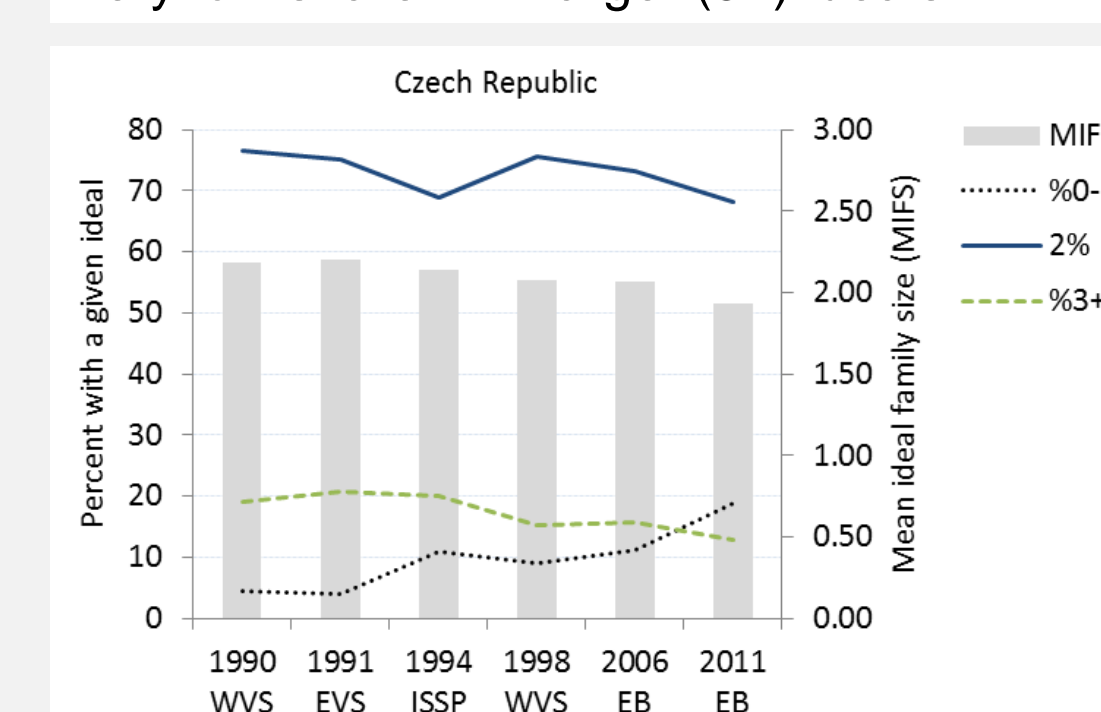
Portugal
Cross-over of the small and larger ideals



Slovenia
Stable ideals, very low share of 0+1



Czech Republic
Very low share with larger (3+) ideals

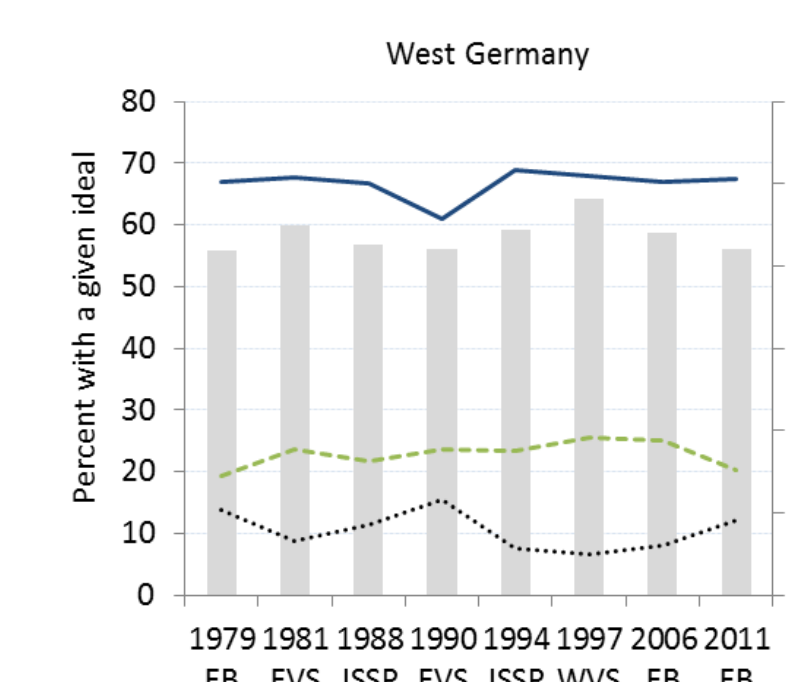
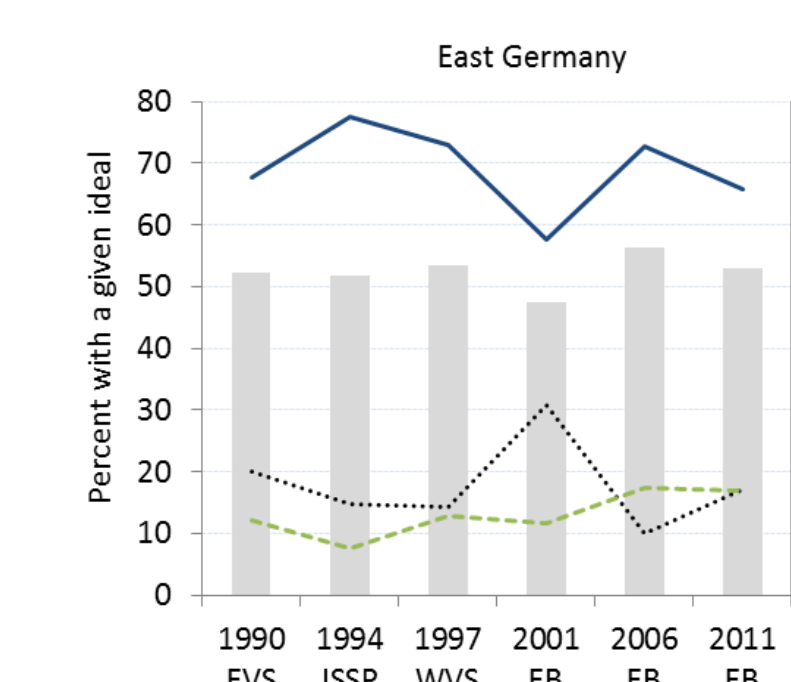
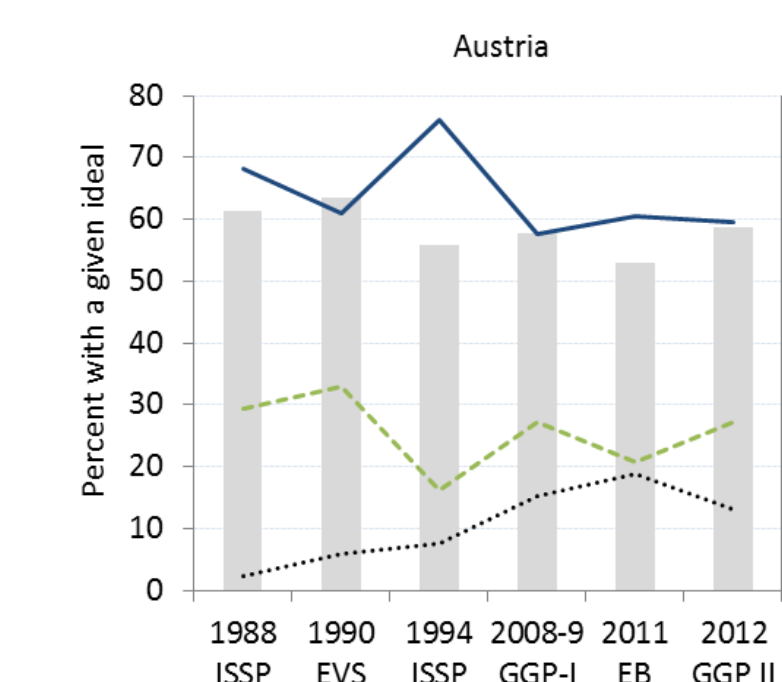


Focus on Austria and Germany

Motivation: Goldstein, Lutz & Testa (2003) showed that Austria and Germany heading towards a low mean ideal family size of 1.6-1.7 → first European countries embracing a low ideal family size?

What's the current evidence based on societal ideal family size?

- ✓ Remarkably stable mean around 2
- ✓ Dominant ideal of having two children, 60-70% in 2011
- ✓ Share with 3+ ideal not decreasing
- ✓ Some past fluctuations possibly due to high non-response, non-numeric responses and small sample in EB 2001, 2006



References

- Blake, Judith. 1981. “The only child in America: Prejudice versus performance.” *Population and Development Review* 7(1): 43-54.
- Goldstein, Joshua R., Wolfgang Lutz, and Maria Rita Testa. 2003. “The emergence of sub-replacement family size ideals in Europe”. *Population Research and Policy Review* 22 (5-6): 479-496.
- Hagewen, Kellie J. and S. Philip Morgan. 2005. “Intended and ideal family size in the United States.” *Population and Development Review* 31(3): 507-527.
- Philipov, Dimiter and Laura Bernardi. 2011. “Reproductive decisions: concepts and measurement in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.” *Comparative Population Studies*, 36(2-3): 495-530.
- Rotkirch, Anna, Stuart Basten, Heini Väisänen, and Markus Jokela. 2011. “Baby longing and men's reproductive motivation.” *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 2011(9): 283-306.