Joint Child Custody and Interstate Migration

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Joint Child Custody and Interstate Migration*

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Abstract

Joint custody following divorce is widespread, yet the implementation of joint custody is costly when individuals live in different states, so it affects interstate mobility. Migration of divorced fathers has fallen significantly more than that of married fathers. We show the causal effect of joint custody using two strategies. First, we survey divorced parents to elicit *beliefs* about the likelihood of interstate moves. Second, we use the staggered adoption of joint custody laws across U.S. states, and show a reduction in *actual* migration of 11 percentage points for fathers. For mothers, there is no impact on mobility from the adoption of joint custody, though there is suggestive evidence of beneficial labor market outcomes.

Keywords: Migration; Child Custody; Divorce.
JEL codes: D10, R23, J13.

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1 Introduction

The structure of the American family has changed markedly over the past fifty years. Childbearing outside marriage and divorce have become common, and the share of children not living with married parents increased by over one half between 1980 and 2021, rising from 23% to 35%.[1] These demographic shifts have been accompanied by changes in the legal framework governing parental rights after separation and divorce. For much of the twentieth century, mothers typically retained sole custody of children following divorce or separation. Beginning in the early 1970s, however, U.S. states began authorizing joint custody, establishing a legal foundation for both parents to share decision-making authority and responsibility for their children's upbringing. The aim of this paper is to examine whether these changes in child-custody arrangements have influenced divorced parents' migration decisions.

We hypothesize that the rise of joint custody, coupled with evolving social norms around fathers' roles in childcare, may have reduced the mobility of divorced parents, particularly over long distances which would impact the frequency of parent-child interactions. Married couples have more mechanisms available to coordinate a relocation that primarily benefits one partner's career, drawing on altruism, commitment, and gender norms (Mincer, 1978). Ex-partners, however, face greater challenges: transfers between ex-partners are likely more costly and harder to commit to than those between married spouses. Moving alone can reduce contact with one's children and thus entail significant utility costs. Under joint custody, a father's opportunity cost of relocating away from his children is likely higher than under a sole maternal-custody arrangement in which he only has visitation rights. Likewise, a mother seeking to move with her child may face stronger resistance from the father under joint custody than when she is the sole custodian. We therefore hypothesize that divorced parents with joint custody are less likely to move across state lines for employment opportunities compared to those subject to sole-custody arrangements.

Testing this hypothesis is challenging because custody arrangements are not randomly assigned; separated parents select into arrangements based on their preferences for time with their children and, likely, for geographic proximity. In addition, data on custody arrangements over time are scarce. Ideally, we would rely on a dataset that tracks custody outcomes and geographic location around the time of divorce, while also offering exogenous variation in custody decisions. No such dataset exists in the U.S.. To make progress on our question, we therefore draw on three sources: the Current Population Survey (CPS), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and a custom survey designed to elicit the beliefs of divorced parents under different custody scenarios. Together, these data can provide novel empirical insights into the causal impact of custody on the migration behavior of separated parents.

We begin by showing that the interstate migration patterns of divorced men have shifted markedly over time, and that joint custody is linked to distinct patterns of both mobility and parental time investment. Using CPS microdata from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), we find that in the 1970s divorced men had much higher interstate migration rates than married men and women. Over the following fifty years, migration declined for all groups, but the decline was especially pronounced for divorced men. In the 1980s, divorced men were about 25% more likely to move than married men, but by 2010 this difference had largely disappeared, with migration rates converging across groups.

[1] https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam1a.asp?, last accessed August 27 2025.

The CPS Child Supplement and our custom survey allow us to examine the association between custody arrangements, geographic mobility, and parental involvement. We find a strong correlation between joint custody and parents' likelihood of living in the same state as their children. Resident parents with joint legal custody are 10 percentage points more likely to report that their ex-partner also resides in the same state. Moreover, joint custody is linked to substantially greater time investments by non-resident parents: it increases the likelihood that a non-resident parent spends any time with their child by 46%. Under joint custody, equal sharing of childcare responsibilities emerges as a prominent focal point.

To examine how joint custody arrangements causally influence parental mobility, we use two complementary strategies. Our first approach relies on a custom online survey of divorced parents with children. Respondents were initially asked to report their expected probability of moving across state lines in the next three years under their current custody arrangement. We then elicited the same expectation under the counterfactual custody regime. For example, respondents who currently share joint legal custody were asked to imagine a situation in which only sole maternal legal custody was available at the time of separation. By eliciting expectations for both actual and hypothetical regimes from the same individuals, this within-respondent design allows us to estimate perceived causal effects of custody arrangements on mobility. The results indicate that respondents assign, on average, a six–percentage-point lower likelihood of moving under joint custody compared to sole maternal custody. More than one quarter of both men and women believe that joint custody would make them less likely to move, while only a small minority believe it would increase their mobility. These perceived effects are consistent across respondents who have selected into different current custody types: both parents with joint custody and those with maternal custody report lower expected mobility under joint custody.

We then exploit variation in joint custody authorization across states and over time in a difference-in-differences design. Many states legislated to authorize joint legal custody over the 1980s and early 1990s. The PSID allows us to observe respondent's state of residence over time, before and after separation. This enables us to compare the interstate mobility patterns for individuals who got divorced in states that did and did not authorize joint legal custody at the point of separation. We find that the authorization of joint legal custody reduced the likelihood that divorced men moved in the four years following separation by 12 p.p., while having no significant effect on divorced women on average. The effect is strongest among college-educated men, and there is suggestive—though imprecisely estimated—evidence that college-educated women also became less likely to move following joint custody authorization.

We also find suggestive evidence that joint legal custody results in improved economic outcomes for separated women. In our survey, 22% of separated women report that they believe their number of paid hours of work would be higher under joint custody as opposed to maternal sole custody, compared to 8% who believe their work hours would be less. The same proportion of men report that they would expect to work more under joint custody compared to maternal custody as the proportion of men reporting that they would expect to work less. Again harnessing the state-time variation in joint custody authorization with the PSID data, we find that separated women's annual hours of work increase by around 15% following the introduction of joint legal custody. We find no significant impact of joint legal custody on men's labor market outcomes.

This paper makes two contributions to the economics literature. The first contribution is to document a barrier to the mobility of (unmarried) workers in the United States. A seminal study of the labor-market determinants of geographic mobility of workers is Kennan and Walker (2011), who find that labor earnings gains are key determinants of interstate moves, and that moving costs are generally substantial. Interstate migration in the United States has been declining since the 1990s (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2017), but with a recent uptick during the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to increases in work-from-home (Bick et al., 2024). A growing literature has examined the migration decisions of *families*, starting with Mincer (1978), who first argued that "family ties" might constrain the geographic mobility of workers. More recently, Gemici (2023), Venator et al. (2022) and Jayachandran et al. (2024) study how couples make joint migration decisions, trading off the labor market opportunities of each partner. In contrast, only a small body of research, entirely outside of economics, has examined the geographic mobility of single workers after divorce.[2] In U.S. data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), Cooke, Mulder, and Thomas (2016) find that divorcees are less likely to migrate across state lines when they have children under the age of 18, even if they do not co-reside with them.[3] Spring et al. (2021) also use data from the PSID to analyze the level and motive for long-distance migration (50 km) amongst separated, married, and single individuals. They find that having family ties, including parents and non-resident children closeby, reduce the likelihood of migration.

Our second contribution is to study the consequences of child custody arrangements on parental behavior. Since the 1970s, joint custody after divorce has increasingly replaced sole maternal custody. Existing research in this area has argued that joint custody is associated with increased investments in children (Rasul, 2006; Brown, Flinn, and Mullins, 2025; Fernández-Kranz, Roff, and Sun, 2018), higher fertility (Brown, Flinn, and Mullins, 2025; Halla, 2013), higher female labor supply (Nunley and Seals, 2011; Halla, 2013; Vuri, 2018), and a more equitable division of home production in marriage (Altindag, Nunley, and Seals, 2017; Roff, 2017).[4] In a related literature, Flinn (2000), Del Boca and Flinn (1995), Rossin-Slater and Wüst (2018), and Chiappori et al. (2024) investigate parental decisions around child support payments and their impact on behavior. We add to the existing literature by highlighting that custody arrangements have implications for post-divorce geographic mobility.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the increase in joint custody arrangements may have contributed to the decline in intestate migration. *The Atlantic* magazine recently proposed that "The prevalence of joint custody makes it harder for members of divorced couples to move" (Appelbaum, 2025). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to explore this hypothesis conceptually and empirically, showing that legal shifts authorizing joint custody are correlated with lower rates of migrations among divorced men.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the institutional background, detailing the evolution of custody laws in the United States, and describes our data sources. Section 3 develops the conceptual framework, laying out the predictions on how custody arrangements could influence parental mobility. Section 4 provides some descriptive facts, while Section 5 studies the impact of joint custody laws on mobility.

[2] In this paper, we restrict our analysis to divorcees, noting that some of the mechanisms we highlight could be at play among non-cohabiting parents who were never married.

[3] In Belgian data, Zilincikova and Schnor (2023) find that distance from (non-custodial) father tends to increase with time since a separation. In Swedish data, the co-location of parents and siblings and re-partnering patterns are singled out as important correlates of mobility patterns after divorce (Mulder and Malmberg, 2011).

[4] Halla (2013) also shows evidence that custody arrangements are related to male suicide rates and domestic violence.

Section 6 concludes.

2 Institutional Context & Data

We begin by describing the institutional context and sources of variation, then introduce the main datasets.

2.1 Child Custody

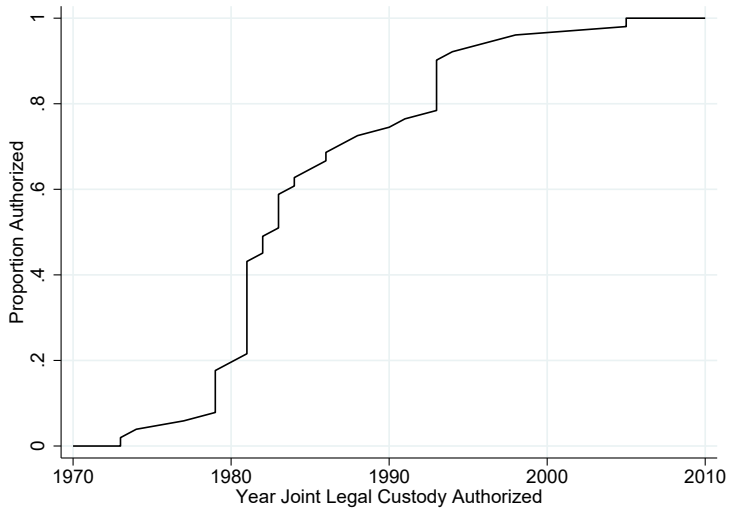
For centuries, in common law systems, mothers had no right to their children after divorce. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the mother's role in supporting child development was increasingly acknowledged, and during most of the twentieth century, roles were reversed, with mothers frequently becoming the custodial parent. Even if family law in most U.S. states officially sanctioned equal rights of both parents in custody determination, in practice, mothers were custodial parents and fathers had visitation rights in the vast majority of cases (Miller, 1979).

In part as a result of social changes that saw men becoming more involved in child rearing and women more likely to enter the labor force, sole custody became less popular. Courts moved in favor of joint custody, "a sharing of legal or physical custody by both parents so as to ensure the access of the child to both separated or divorced parents, in a frequent and continuing manner" (Freed and Foster, 1982). Under shared legal custody, parents are equally involved in decision making, and under shared physical custody, they also co-reside with the child: "the essence of joint custody is that both parents share responsibility and authority with respect to the children" (Miller, 1979). Starting in the early 1970s and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, all states moved to authorize the possibility of joint custody arrangements, as shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 displays the timing of the authorizations in each state, using data from the *Family Law Quarterly* annual reports from 1982 (Freed and Foster, 1982), and from Halla (2013) for the previous years. The map highlights that the authorization does not appear to follow a particular geographic pattern. Reassuringly, Appendix Table A.1 shows that the timing of joint custody authorization is not correlated with state-level characteristics in 1970 (before any authorization), such as female labor force participation, marriage, and divorce rates in the 5% subsample of the 1970 U.S. Census (Ruggles et al., 2025).

Brinig and Buckley (1997) describe two potential benefits of joint child custody: the *bonding* theory, which hypothesizes that a father may become more attached to his children if he does not expect to stop seeing them after a divorce, and the *monitoring* theory, which hypothesizes that cooperation in child support payments may be easier if ex partners can observe how the money is being spent—presumably an easier feat in joint custody cases. In this paper, we explore the related hypothesis that, by increasing the time fathers can spend with their children after divorce, joint custody arrangements make moving to a different state more costly and, hence, less likely.

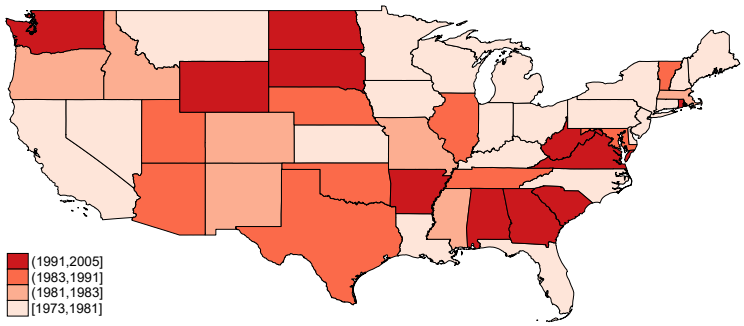
Joint custody may also be associated with a reduction in expected child support payments, although different states implement different rules (Seltzer, 1991), depending on the differences in parental income and in the way children share their time between the parents (Ryznar, 2016).

Figure 1: Distribution of Joint Custody Authorization Timing Across States



Notes: The Figure shows the cumulative distribution function (CDF) of the share of states adopting legal custody authorization over time.
Source: *Family Law Quarterly* annual reports from 1982 (Freed and Foster, 1982), and from Halla (2013) in previous years.

Figure 2: Joint Custody Authorization Timing Across States.



Notes: The Figure shows the adoption of legal custody authorization across states and time.
Source: *Family Law Quarterly* annual reports from 1982 (Freed and Foster, 1982), and from Halla (2013) in previous years.

2.2 Data

Ideally, we would use data that tracks both custody arrangements and geographic location around the time of divorce, while also providing exogenous variation in custody outcomes across divorced parents. However, no such dataset currently exists in the U.S. To address this gap, we rely on multiple data sources. We use the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) and Child Support Supplement (CSS) to study mobility and custody arrangements over time in the cross-section. We also leverage the PSID to study mobility decisions among divorcees during a period when legal custody laws varied across states, although the PSID does not directly record legal custody status. To complement these sources, we field a bespoke survey in which we elicit divorced parents' beliefs about the choices they would make under counterfactual custody arrangements.

Current Population Survey (CPS). For descriptive statistics on the mobility of divorced and married men and women, we use the version prepared by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) of CPS–ASEC (Ruggles et al., 2025), which provides consistent measures of interstate migration and marital status from the 1970s onward. We restrict our sample from this survey to ages 21-65 & opposite-sex married couples. Migration is measured using the MIGRATE1 variable, which records whether a person moved in the past year and, if so, whether the move was within county, within state, across states, or abroad.[5] Marital status is taken from MARST. We classify as married those coded "married, spouse present" or "married, spouse absent," and as divorced only those explicitly coded "divorced," excluding separated and widowed individuals. We impose no restriction on having a child, as information on children outside the household is only available from 2011, and precise child–parent links within households are available starting in 2007.[6]

For descriptive statistics on the relationship between resident parents' characteristics, time spent with non-resident parents, and custody arrangements, we use repeated cross-sectional data from the CPS Child Support Supplement (CSS) spanning 1994 to 2020. We exclude earlier years because key questions are not consistently comparable over time.[7] In the CPS-CSS, respondents with at least one child under age 21 whose other biological parent lives outside the household are asked about child support payments, custody arrangements, and the involvement of the non-resident parent.[8] We restrict our sample to resident parents with a child aged 16 or younger, whose other biological parent lives outside the household, and who responded to the question on legal custody arrangements. Table A.2 presents summary statistics for custodial mothers and fathers in our analysis sample.

Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). We use all available waves of the PSID (1968–2021) to examine how the staggered rollout of joint legal custody laws across U.S. states affected interstate migration.

[5]We exclude individuals whose status is "abroad" or "unknown." Additionally we drop year 1995 since migration question in this year is not comparable to other years. Imputed observations for migration are dropped for years between 1996-2005 taking the problem identified by Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl (2012) into account.

[6]Since 2007, CPS-ASEC reports the exact line numbers of parents within the household. Pre-2007, IPUMS relied on alternative linking methods, which vary in clarity.

[7]In the 1992 survey, respondents without joint legal custody are coded as "Not in universe (NIU)," and an additional 3,444 eligible respondents are coded NIU for all supplement variables despite meeting universe requirements (see IPUMS website). We therefore exclude 1992. Earlier surveys also did not ask specifically about joint legal custody or time transfers.

[8]Eligible people are identified during the conduct of Annual Socioeconomic Supplement (ASEC) (also known as March Supplement) of the Current Population Survey and they are usually surveyed in April. The CPS-CSS sample is matched to ASEC, so the answers to questions about income and employment are available in CPS-CSS as well.

The PSID is a longitudinal survey that tracks individuals from households in the original 1968 sample and their descendants in each subsequent wave.[9] Its panel structure allows us to observe the timing of key life events—including marriage, family separation, childbirth, and migration—as well as outcomes such as income, work hours, and educational attainment. However, the PSID does not directly record child custody arrangements.

Our analysis focuses on a subsample of parents who separated from their child(ren)'s other parent during the period covered by the PSID. This includes both married and cohabiting parents who later divorced or separated. We exclude individuals who were previously married but did not have children from that marriage and subsequently separated from a co-parent with whom they did have children. We restrict the sample to observations where the individual is between ages 21 and 65. In constructing our sample, identifying co-parenting relationships is crucial. We use the *Childbirth and Adoption History* and *Parent Identification* files to link parents and children. Officially married co-parents who later divorce or separate are identified from the *Marriage History* files, which also record the year the marriage ends. For unmarried cohabiting co-parents, we use the *Marital Pairs Indicator* in the PSID Individual-level files: if two individuals are listed as a pair in one wave but not in the next, we classify this as a separation unless the change is due to death.[10] Table A.3 presents summary statistics for this sample.

Bespoke Survey. To examine how parents believe custody arrangements influence their geographic mobility and other outcomes, we conducted a custom survey of divorced parents. By collecting our own data, we are able to directly assess parents' beliefs about how their decisions might change under alternative custody scenarios. The survey was administered online via the Prolific platform in July 2025. Eligible participants were U.S. residents aged 18 to 65 who had at least one biological child under age 16 and were not living with the child's other biological parent. We collected 696 eligible responses from 503 women and 193 men. We drop 13 observations where a respondent indicated that their children do not live with either biological parent.

Table A.4 presents the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. We disaggrate by gender and custody arrangement. We also compare the subset of resident parents in our survey to the characteristics of resident parent respondents in our most recent wave of the CPS-CSS (Table A.5). As is typical for online surveys (Adams et al., 2020), our sample is not fully representative of the broader U.S. population of divorced (resident) parents; in particular, respondents tend to be more highly educated. We also find a higher share of respondents to our survey report a joint custody arrangement with their ex-spouse compared to the CPS. For example, 33% of resident mothers report a joint custody arrangement in our survey compared to 20% in the CPS. However, since our analysis focuses primarily on within-person comparisons of hypothetical behavior under different custody regimes, this limitation is not too severe for our analysis.

After completing a brief set of demographic questions, respondents were asked to report the details of their current legal custody arrangement and how they shared childcare with their ex-partner. For individuals with multiple previous partners, we instructed them to focus on their most recent separation involving shared

[9] In 1997 and 2017, the PSID added immigrant refresher samples to improve representation. Due to funding limitations in 1997, the sample size was reduced by dropping some split-off families. For details, see the user guide: https://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/data/Documentation/UserGuide2021.pdf

[10] Figure A.5 illustrates in detail how we determine whether a person should be included in our sample.

biological children. If respondents had different custody arrangements across children, we asked them to answer with reference to their youngest child.

In the main section of the survey, we asked respondents to consider their plans over the next three years. Specifically, we elicited their subjective probability (on a scale from 0 to 100%) of moving to another state, as well as the number of hours of paid work they expected to do in a typical week. Respondents were finally introduced to a counterfactual custody scenario. For respondents who currently had joint legal custody, we asked them to imagine a situation in which only maternal sole legal custody was allowed from the outset of their separation. For those who reported having maternal custody, we asked them to consider a scenario where only joint legal custody was possible from the onset of divorce. We provide more details of the wording of the vignette in Section 5. We finally elicited respondents' expectations about interstate migration and paid work under the alternative custody regime. As a result, for each individual we observe beliefs under two conditions: their current custody arrangement and the hypothetical alternative.

3 Conceptual Framework

We present a simple conceptual framework that motivates our empirical analysis and offers a theoretical basis for understanding how child custody arrangements may affect geographic mobility. Consider a man and woman, M and W, who have baseline earnings y_j for $j \in \{M, W\}$ and who have had a child together.[11] Each individual draws a return from migration (net of cost) R_j from a joint distribution with cdf $F(R_M, R_W)$. Denote the migration decision as $r_j \in \{0, 1\}$.

Married couples can only move jointly, with $r = r_M = r_W \in \{0, 1\}$. Couples maximize their joint utility in a unitary framework, and hence choose to migrate if and only if the joint net returns are strictly positive ($R_M + R_W > 0$), as described in Mincer (1978).[12] The decision is different when M and W are divorced. Ex-partners cannot make binding agreements and commit to future payments, and hence may act non-cooperatively.[13] Whether the migration of any given partner occurs more often in divorce than in marriage depends on the joint distribution of R_M and R_W and on the costs of moving which can depend on child custody arrangements.

Sole Custody. If the mother has *sole custody* of the child, she can move with the child regardless of what the other parent would wish.[14] The father then incurs a dis-utility from not being in close geographical proximity of their (non-custody) child, which we denote δ^N.[15] The father, M, incurs this cost either if he moves but the mother (and thus the child) does not, or if the mother (and the child) moves while he stays.

[11] We label the individuals as a man (M) and woman (W) to reflect the data, where over 90% of cases of sole custody are to mothers and there are differences in behaviour by gender.

[12] We abstract from complex, non-unitary decisions in marriage. See Gemici (2023).

[13] If an ex-spouse can commit to making child support payments, that may help former couples to coordinate on a move with negative R_M and positive R_W. In Del Boca and Flinn (1995), ex-partners can pool resources to support the consumption of the children. To the extent that joint custody reduces the scope for child support payments, such a mechanism may further exacerbate the difficulty in coordinating a move. A large fraction of child support payments are never paid, and an even larger fraction is not paid in full (Grall, 2007).

[14] This assumption simplifies the move-away process under sole custody, which could in practice become the subject of litigation between ex spouses.

[15] We focus our attention on *interstate* moves, which are likely to entail a significant disruption in day-to-day activities when parent and child live in different states and which introduce a significant cost of moving away (ie. δ^N is large.

In this sole custody setting, the woman will therefore migrate if and only if the net return to migration is positive ($R_W > 0$), while the man's migration decision depends on the woman's moving decision. In particular, the man requires a net return greater than δ^N to move if his former partner does not move, and he is willing to move for a return greater than $-\delta^N$ if the ex-partner is moving, to avoid a separation from from the child. Therefore, the optimal migration decisions under maternal custody is

$$r_W^\star = \mathbb{1}\{R_W > 0\}$$
$$r_M^\star = \begin{cases} \mathbb{1}\{R_M > \delta^N\} & \text{if } r_W = 0 \\ \mathbb{1}\{R_M > -\delta^N\} & \text{if } r_W = 1. \end{cases}$$

In the absence of children, the man will move post-divorce so long as $R_M > 0$. This in turn implies that the man will move less post-divorce if his ex-wife does not move, compared to in the absence of children.

Joint Custody. When the mother and father have *joint custody* of the child, there are two changes to our framework: first, the costs of moving state may change for each parent; second, the decision process for moving changes because the decision on where the child lives is no longer the unilateral decision of the mother. To address these two aspects, we first consider how the costs of moving are affected by joint custody, under the assumption that the child lives wherever the mother locates. This reflects common practice from when the law was first introduced that the parent that has the bulk of the physical care is often able to move with the child regardless of the other parent.[16] We then consider the impact of the principle that for the child to move both parents have to consent. This leads to a status quo default regarding the location of the child: if a parent with joint custody migrates to a different state, the child stays with the remaining parent.

The costs of moving under joint custody are affected in two ways, maintaining the assumption that the child will remain with the mother. First, the cost of living away from the child for the father is higher relative to living away when there is sole custody with the mother. This is because the father can spend more time with the child if they remain in the same state under joint custody than when the other parent has sole custody. We label this *lost-time* cost for the father as ζ. Second, joint custody can imply greater sharing of tasks such as childcare, and so this is lost when the father moves to a different state. This loss of *task-sharing* imposes a cost, κ, on the mother if the father moves.[17]

Therefore, the migration decision rule under joint custody when the child stays with the mother regardless

[16] This reflects the difference between joint legal custody and joint physical custody. The change to joint legal custody did not lead to equal contact. We return to the issue of how contact changed with joint legal custody in the empirical section below.

[17] This gendered difference in the costs reflects the data where the *lost-time* cost falls more typically on the father, and the *task-sharing* cost falls more typically on the mother.

of whether the mother moves is:[18]

$$r_W^\star = \begin{cases} \mathbf{1}(R_W > 0) & \text{if } r_M^\star = 1 \\ \mathbf{1}(R_W > \kappa) & \text{if } r_M^\star = 0 \end{cases}$$

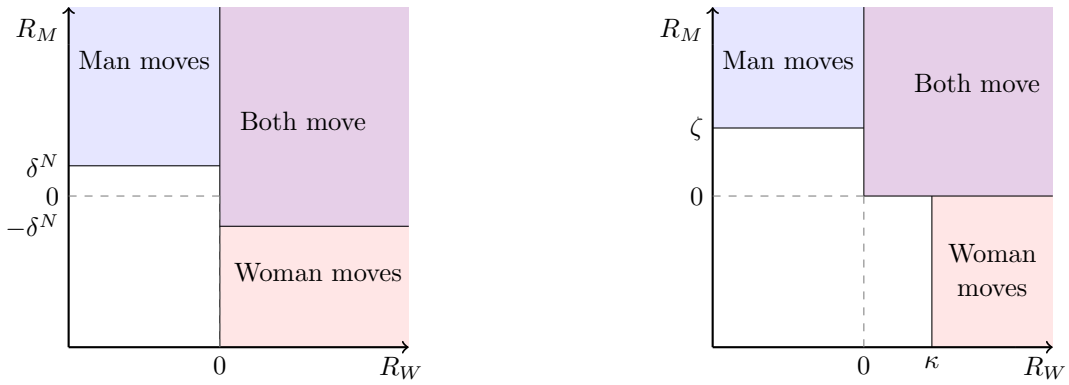
$$r_M^\star = \begin{cases} \mathbf{1}(R_M > 0) & \text{if } r_W^\star = 1 \\ \mathbf{1}(R_M > \zeta) & \text{if } r_W^\star = 0. \end{cases}$$

Figure 3 depicts the optimal migration decisions with these additional costs. Panel (a) shows the decision when there is sole custody to mothers; and panel (b) for joint legal custody but where the child remains with the mother. The implication of this simple framework is that, among divorcees, joint custody reduces the chances of migration of both parents. In particular, mothers may face more difficulties moving unilaterally under joint custody because moving away from the father incurs the cost κ. Likewise, the father will move less under joint custody because the father will incur the lost-time cost ζ.

The reduced mobility caused by the increased costs associated with joint custody is further increased if joint custody changes the decision process. In particular, if joint custody leads to each parent having the right of veto over whether the child moves, then there will be a presumption in favour of the status quo, leading to less mobility for both fathers and mothers.

In the empirical section that follows, we test directly whether the move to joint custody leads to reduced mobility for fathers. Reduced mobility of fathers implies that the lost-time cost, ζ, is important. We further test the implications of joint-custody for mothers, focusing on how their economic outcomes change. Improved outcomes imply that the task-sharing value of the father being present, κ, is important.

Figure 3: Migration Decisions of Divorcees under Different Custody Arrangements.



(a) Sole custody

(b) Joint custody

Notes: The Figure shows the theoretical predictions on migration decisions in our simple framework. Panel a) shows how the mother (W) and father (M) will optimally chose to remain in the original state or move if the mother has sole custody as a function of both parents return from migrating. Blue colors indicate situations in which the father moves and red colors indicate situations in which the mother moves. White areas are return levels that leads neither parent to migrate. Panel b) shows migration decisions under joint legal custody, with the assumption that the child stays with the mother.

[18] We assume for simplicity that the costs, κ and ζ are incurred either if one parent moves state or if they both move.

4 Descriptive Facts

Figure 4 illustrates changes over time in the proportion of individuals moving interstate within a given year, broken down by marital status. Panel (a) presents trends for men, while panel (b) shows trends for women. As previously noted in Molloy, Smith, and Wozniak (2011), the likelihood of moving interstate has declined across all groups over time. In the 1980s, approximately 3% of both married and divorced women moved interstate each year. Since 2010, this figure has declined by about 1.5 percentage points for both groups. Among men, however, divorced individuals historically exhibited much higher mobility than married men. In the 1980s, more than 4% of divorced men moved interstate annually—over 25% more than their married counterparts. Between 1990 and 2010, the mobility rate for divorced men declined at a faster pace than that of married men, and by 2010, the difference in interstate mobility between the two groups had largely disappeared. Interstate migration in general accounts for a substantial share of moves. In 2022, around 42% of moves was across counties, and around 41% of these moves were also across state borders.[19] Appendix Figure A.4 reveals broadly similar patterns for *intrastate* moves across counties.

Our primary interest is whether changes in legal rules surrounding child custody have contributed to shifting patterns of interstate mobility. While joint legal custody does not automatically alter the amount of contact or involvement a non-resident parent has with their child, it may influence these dynamics indirectly—through evolving social norms or shifts in bargaining power during divorce.

We first explore this using the CPS data from 1994 onward to investigate whether custody arrangements correlate with the geographic decisions of separated parents. Our analysis focuses on resident parents who have at least one child under age 16 and who no longer live with the child's other biological parent. We create a binary variable indicating whether the non-resident parent lives in the same state as the resident parent and regress this on a variable capturing whether the resident parent reports joint legal custody with their ex-partner. The results, shown in Table 1 columns (1) and (2), indicate that joint legal custody is associated with a 10 percentage point higher likelihood that the non-resident parent resides in the same state. This relationship persists after controlling for the resident parent's age, education, and earnings. Both specifications also include fixed effects for survey year, number of children, and the gender of the resident parent.

In addition, joint legal custody is linked to greater time investments by non-resident parents, as shown in Table 1 columns (3) through (6). Resident parents report the number of days the non-resident parent had contact with the child in the past year. We find that joint legal custody is associated with a 46% higher likelihood that the non-resident parent spent any time with the child. Non-resident parents with joint legal custody spent nearly five additional weeks of time with the child per year.

We use our bespoke survey data to further explore the relationship between legal custody, co-residence in the same state, and parental time allocation. First, we replicate the finding that joint legal custody is strongly associated with separated parents currently living in the same state. Appendix Table A.6 reproduces the results from Table 1 columns (1) and (2).[20] The association remains robust: joint legal custody is linked to approximately a 18 p.p. higher likelihood that separated parents reside in the same state.[21] Unlike the

[19] Source: https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/why-people-move.html, last retrieved October 27, 2025.
[20] We of course exclude survey year fixed effects as there is only one wave of our own survey.
[21] The average proportion of separated parents living in the same state is similar in our CPS and bespoke survey sample; 0.75

CPS, which does not record state of residence at the time of divorce, our survey allows us to assess whether this co-location reflects reduced mobility or coordinated moves. Our data suggest that neither parent moves in most cases: among those who report living in the same state as their ex-partner, only 2.8% say they now live in a different state from where they resided at the time of divorce.

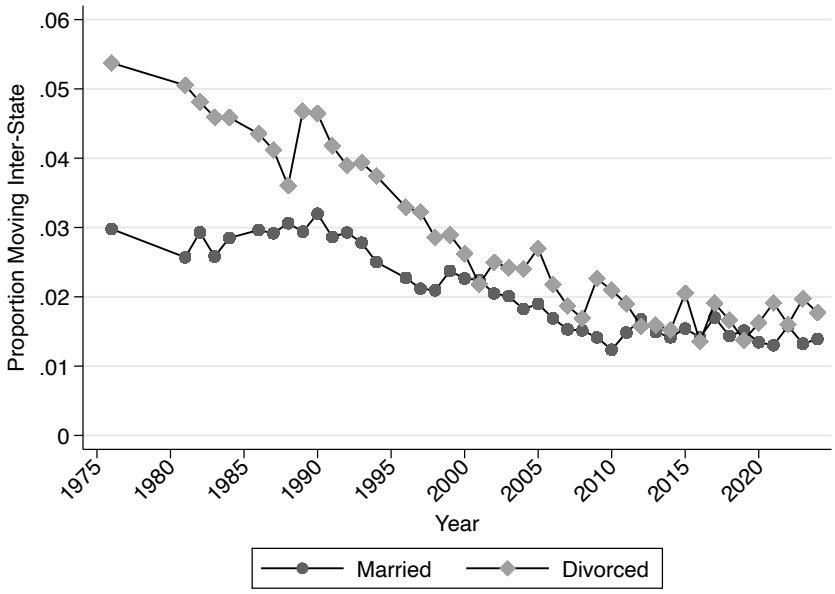
We also examine how childcare responsibilities are divided between separated parents who report either maternal or joint custody. Because parenting schedules often vary from week to week, we did not ask about a "typical week". Instead, respondents were instructed: "Please think about how you and your ex-partner split childcare duties (like dropping off children at school, getting them dressed, etc.) and leisure time with your joint children. On a scale of 0–100, how do you split these activities with your ex-partner?"

Figure 5 presents the cumulative distribution of reported shares of childcare and joint leisure time carried out by separated fathers. The horizontal axis reflects the father's share of responsibility (0–100%), and the vertical axis shows the cumulative proportion of respondents. Under maternal custody, over 60% of fathers are reported to do no childcare at all and around 50% spend no joint leisure time with their children. In contrast, under joint custody, only around 20% of fathers are reported to contribute nothing to childcare and only 10% have no leisure time with their children. Equal sharing of responsibilities emerges as a focal point under joint custody: 27% of respondents report a 50/50 split for childcare, and 35% report equal shares of leisure time with children. Interestingly, under maternal custody, fathers' involvement in childcare and leisure time is nearly identical—the distributions of their shares across both activities are statistically indistinguishable. Under joint custody, however, fathers take on significantly more responsibility in both areas, with a larger increase in leisure time than in childcare. Consequently, mothers with joint custody are 7 percentage points more likely to be reported as bearing a greater share of childcare duties than of leisure time, relative to those with maternal custody.

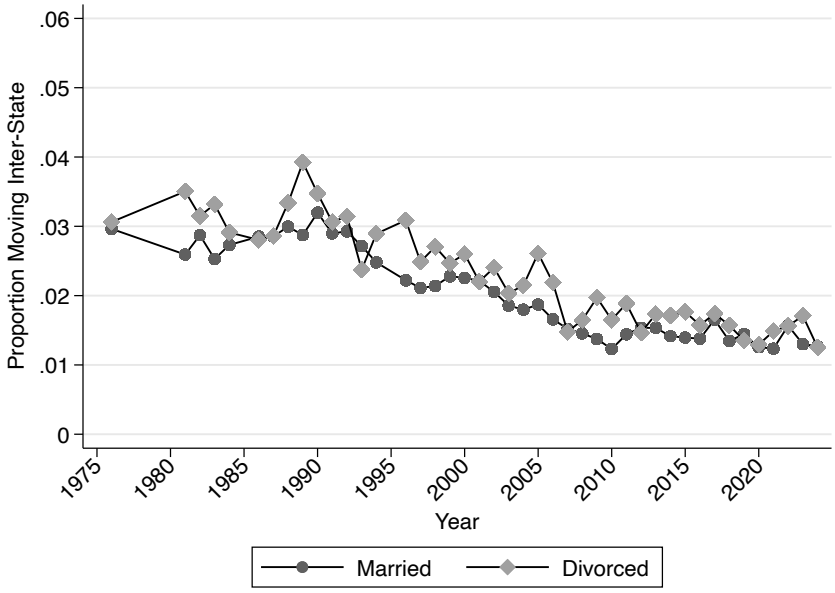
and 0.71 respectively.

Figure 4: Proportion Moving Interstate By Marital Status and Gender

(a) Men



(b) Women



Notes: The figure illustrates the trend in inter-state migration by marital status and gender for individuals aged 21–65. We drop observations with unknown or abroad migration status. Year 1995 is excluded because the migration question is not comparable to other years. For 1996–2005, we drop imputed migration responses, following Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl (2012). Source: CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) version prepared by IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2025), covering years 1964–2024.

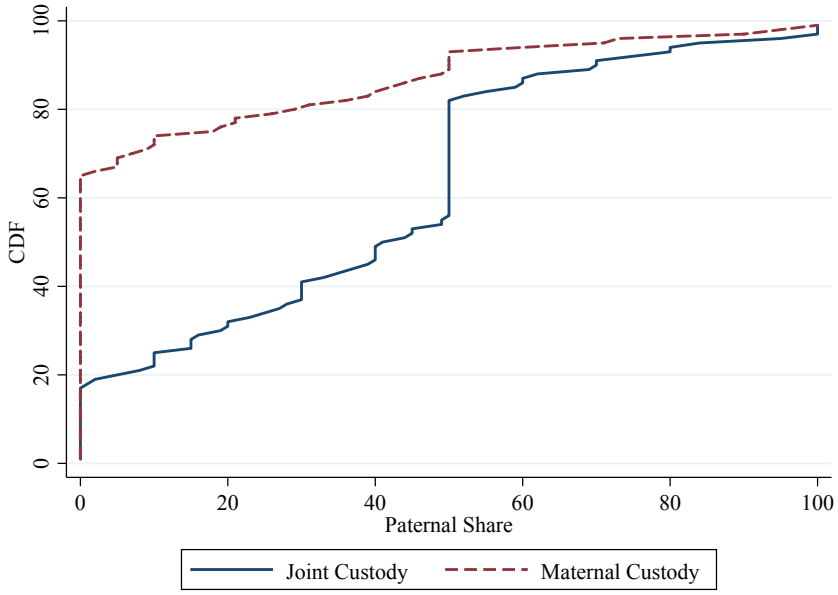
Table 1: Correlation Between Joint Custody, Time with Children & Parent Living in Different State

	Same State		+ve Weeks		No. Weeks	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Joint Legal	0.1040***	0.1161***	0.3050***	0.2869***	4.9230***	4.8958***
	(0.0048)	(0.0049)	(0.0044)	(0.0046)	(0.1507)	(0.1541)
Resident Parent Age		-0.0037***		-0.0012***		-0.0863***
		(0.0003)		(0.0003)		(0.0080)
Resident Parent College		-0.0135**		0.0845***		1.4075***
		(0.0066)		(0.0063)		(0.1823)
Resident Parent >		0.0129***		0.0630***		0.6476***
Median Earnings		(0.0048)		(0.0051)		(0.1358)
Observations	48583	48583	48583	48583	48583	48583
Dep. Var Mean	.7531	.7531	.6683	.6683	8.3362	8.3362
Year FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
No. Kid FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Parent Gender		yes		yes		yes

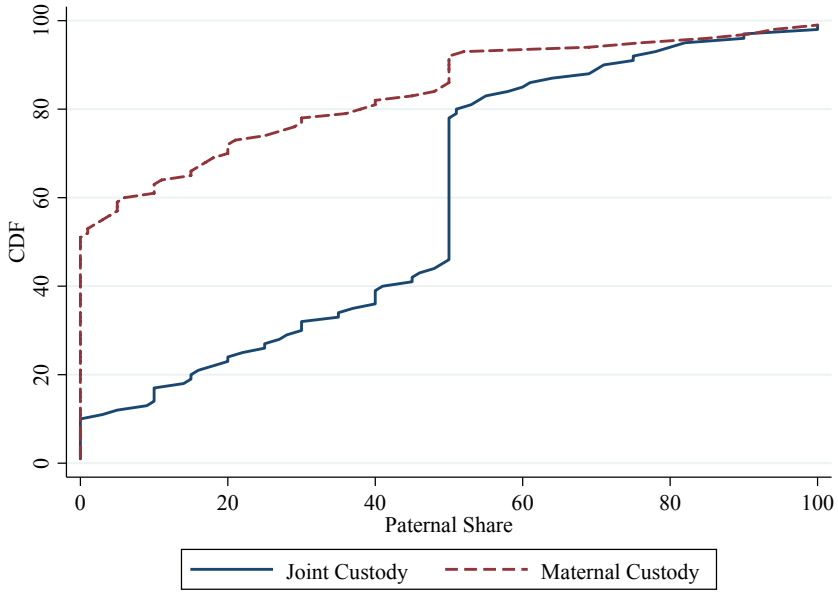
Notes: The table illustrates the relationship of joint legal custody with non-resident parent's residence and time with kids. The sample consists of parents co-residing with their children aged 16-years and younger whose other parent is living elsewhere. In columns (1)-(2), the dependent variable, "Same State", is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the non-resident parents lives in the same state to the respondent. In columns (3)-(4), the dependent variable, "+ve Weeks", a dummy variable taking the value 1 if the non-resident parent spends positive time with their child. In columns (5)-(6), the dependent variable is the number of weeks the non-resident parent spends with their child. "Joint Legal" is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if the respondent indicates joint legal custody. Source: Current Population Survey (CPS) Child Support Supplement (CSS), covering every two years between 1994–2020. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are in parenthesis.

Figure 5: Paternal Share of Childcare & Leisure with Children: Maternal vs. Joint Custody

(a) Paternal Share of Childcare



(b) Paternal Share of Leisure Time with Children



Notes: The figure shows the cumulative distribution function of the paternal share of childcare and joint leisure time with children that respondents report. For male respondents, this is the share they report; for female respondents, this is 100 minus their reported share.
Source Authors' survey conducted in July 2025.

5 Impact of Joint Custody Laws on Geographic Mobility

Section 4 showed a strong correlation between joint custody arrangements and the interstate mobility patterns of separated parents. However, this relationship could simply reflect selection. If fathers who are more committed to staying close to their children are also more likely to obtain joint custody, then the observed association could overstate the true effect of custody laws themselves.

In this section, we take two strategies to establish whether the relationship between joint custody and mobility is causal. First, we use our bespoke data to compare parents' beliefs about their likelihood of moving under maternal custody and under joint custody. This allows us to calculate a within-individual (perceived) treatment effect of the impact of joint custody laws. Second, we harness the staggered authorization of joint legal custody across U.S. states with observational data from the PSID.

5.1 Beliefs over Impact of Joint Custody

After eliciting information on current custody arrangements, we prompted respondents to our custom bespoke survey to "think about the future and what choices you will make about paid work, child care, and where to live." Specifically, we asked them to assess on a scale of 0-100% the likelihood that they would move state in the next three years and the number of paid hours of work they expected to do in a typical week.

We then introduced a counterfactual custody scenario. For respondents who currently had joint legal custody with their ex-partner we asked them to imagine a situation in which only maternal sole legal custody was allowed from the outset of their separation. We presented the following explanation:

> "Imagine a scenario where only maternal sole legal custody was possible from the start of your separation.
>
> This means that if you are the mother of your joint children, you would have the exclusive right to make decisions about your child.
>
> This means that if you are the father, your ex-partner would have the exclusive right to make decisions about your child."

For respondents who either held or had granted sole custody, we asked them to imagine a scenario in which only joint legal custody was possible:

> "Imagine a scenario where only joint legal custody was possible.
>
> This means that you and your ex-partner would both share the right and responsibility to make major decisions about your joint children's upbringing."

Following this counterfactual prompt, we again elicited respondents' expectations about interstate migration and paid work. As a result, for each individual we observe beliefs under two conditions: their current custody arrangement and a hypothetical alternative.

Empirical Approach. A comparison of each respondent's beliefs across the two custody scenarios allows us to recover the *perceived causal impact* of custody arrangements on future outcomes among individuals who are currently divorced with children.[22] Because we only survey divorced parents, our elicited beliefs reflect expected outcomes conditional on being divorced, rather than hypothetical beliefs about what would happen upon divorce for those still married.

Let $J_i \in \{0, 1\}$ indicate whether respondent i currently has a joint custody arrangement, and let $Y_i(1)$ and $Y_i(0)$ denote the potential outcomes for that individual under joint and maternal custody, respectively. We use a tilde, $\widetilde{Y}_i(d)$, to denote beliefs about these potential outcomes. The average perceived treatment effect of joint custody on outcome Y is:

$$\begin{aligned}\widetilde{ATE} &= \mathbb{E}\Big[\widetilde{Y}_i(1) - \widetilde{Y}_i(0)\Big] \\ &= \mathbb{E}\Big[\widetilde{\Delta}_i\Big],\end{aligned}$$

where $\widetilde{\Delta}_i$ is the respondent's perceived individual-level effect.

Our survey design allows us to compute $\widetilde{\Delta}_i$ for every respondent. For those with joint custody ($J_i = 1$), we use their stated belief about future outcomes under their current arrangement to form $\widetilde{Y}_i(1)$, and their stated belief under the *hypothetical maternal custody* scenario to form $\widetilde{Y}_i(0)$. For those with maternal custody ($J_i = 0$), we reverse the assignment. This within-person contrast isolates the perceived causal effect because it holds individual characteristics fixed. In contrast, comparing $\mathbb{E}[Y_i(1) \,|\, J_i = 1] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i(0) \,|\, J_i = 0]$ would conflate the causal impact of custody with selection into custody regimes based on differing expectations or characteristics.

Averaging over both custody groups yields the overall average perceived treatment effect:

$$\widetilde{ATE} = \mathbb{E}\Big[\widetilde{\Delta}_i \mid J_i = 0\Big]\,\mathbb{P}(J_i = 0) + \mathbb{E}\Big[\widetilde{\Delta}_i \mid J_i = 1\Big]\,\mathbb{P}(J_i = 1). \tag{1}$$

Provided that respondents interpret the hypothetical scenarios correctly (i.e., there is no framing bias) and that both custody groups are equally able to imagine their own counterfactual regime (no asymmetric counterfactual bias),[23] this procedure identifies an unbiased estimate of the *average perceived causal effect* of joint custody on the outcome of interest.

Results Figure 6 presents the distribution of respondents' subjective beliefs about the likelihood of moving interstate in the following three years under two different custody regimes. Respondents generally perceive a higher likelihood of moving under a maternal custody arrangement. In fact, the distribution of beliefs under maternal custody first-order stochastically dominates that under joint custody. On average, respondents estimated a 30.6% chance of moving within the next three years under maternal custody, compared to 24.7% under joint custody.

Figure 7 panels (a) and (b) compare each respondent's perceived likelihood of moving under the two regimes. We create two indicators: One for whether respondents expect to move more under joint custody,

[22] See Giustinelli and Shapiro (2024) for a related approach where they elicit respondents' perceived probability of working under different hypothetical health states.

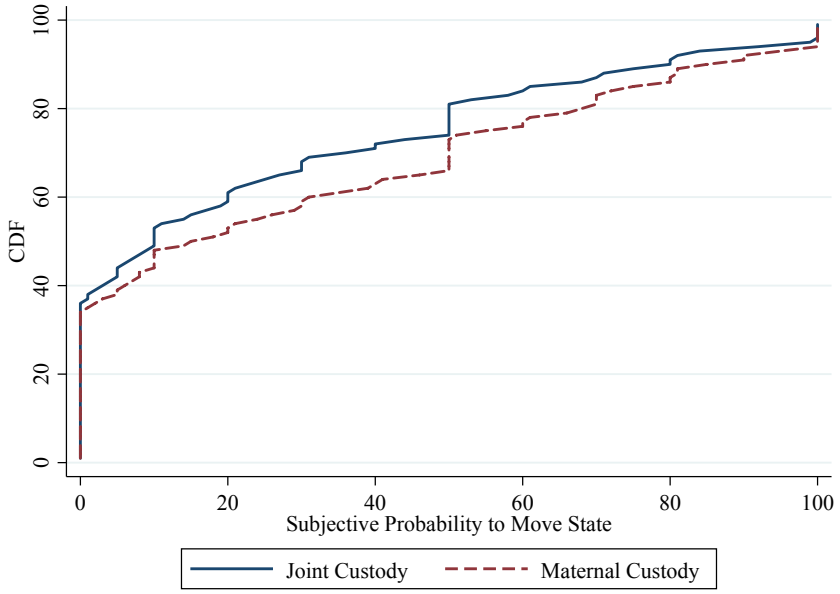
[23] Note that this does not imply that each group has on average the same perception of the return to joint custody.

and another for whether they expect to move less under joint custody. Respondents could also indicate that their custody arrangement would not affect their mobility. A substantial share of both men and women report that joint custody would reduce their likelihood of moving: approximately one quarter of divorced parents expect to move less with joint legal custody, with no heterogeneity across mothers and fathers. Fewer than 8% believe they would be more likely to move under joint custody. Figure A.1 in the Appendix demonstrates that beliefs about the impact of joint custody on the likelihood of moving do not vary by respondents' current custody arrangement, i.e. the conditional expectations in eq. (1) are very similar. Both those currently in joint custody and those in maternal custody report that their probability of moving interstate within the next three years would be lower under joint custody than under maternal custody.

We also explore whether respondents believe custody arrangements would affect their labor supply. Specifically, we first ask respondents: "On an average week over the next three years, how many hours of paid work do you expect to do?". We then elicit labor supply expectations under the hypothetical custody regime. Figure 7 (c) shows that separated mothers are more likely to report they would increase their typical paid work hours under joint custody compared to maternal custody. This is consistent with the descriptive finding in Section 4 that joint custody is associated with a more balanced division of childcare responsibilities between separated parents. Appendix Figure A.2 (a) dis-aggregates beliefs by a mother's current custody regime. It shows that both mothers who currently have joint custody and those with maternal custody both perceive higher labor supply under a joint custody arrangement.

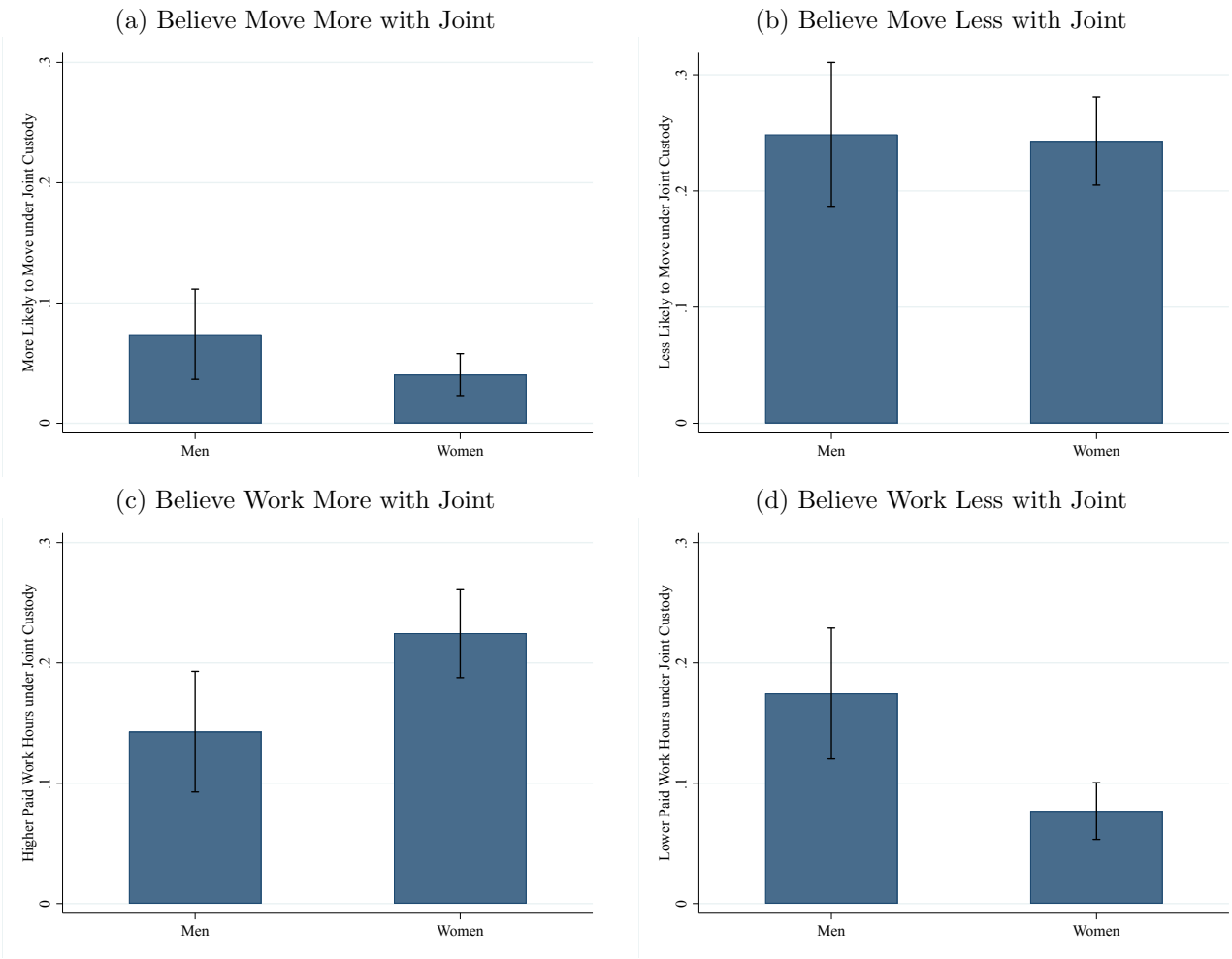
Among fathers, the perceived effect of joint custody on labor supply is, on average, close to zero. As shown in Figure 7 (d), roughly equal shares of separated fathers report that they would work more or fewer hours under a joint custody arrangement compared to maternal custody. However, this aggregate pattern masks heterogeneity by current custody status. Figure A.2 (b) shows that fathers who currently have joint custody tend to believe that this arrangement will reduce their paid work hours relative to maternal custody, perhaps reflecting the greater time devoted to childcare under shared arrangements. In contrast, fathers with maternal custody expect higher labor supply under joint custody. Although such heterogeneity does not threaten the internal validity of our belief-based design—which identifies effects through within-respondent counterfactuals—it suggests that men's selection into custody regimes may be correlated with their preferences over paid work and caregiving responsibilities, highlighting an important avenue for future research.

Figure 6: Expected Likelihood of Moving State: Maternal vs Joint Legal Custody



Notes: The figure shows the cumulative distribution function of the subjective probability of moving interstate in the next three years under a maternal sole custody arrangement and a joint child custody arrangement.
Source: Authors' survey conducted in July 2025.

Figure 7: Expected Change in Moving & Paid Work Hours: Maternal vs. Joint Custody



Notes: The figure shows the fraction of men and women reporting that the likelihood of them changing their decision to move interstate or changing their paid work hours under joint custody versus maternal sole custody. Respondent could also express that there would be no significant difference in their moving likelihood or labor supply by custody regime. 95% confidence intervals provided.
Source: Authors' survey conducted in July 2025.

5.2 Adoption of Joint Custody Authorization Laws

To identify the effect of custody arrangements on migration, we exploit the timing of joint custody authorization across U.S. states. Ideally, we would use data that track individuals from the time of divorce, including their state of residence at divorce, the custody arrangement agreed upon, and subsequent behavior. However, such data are not available in the U.S. context. The CPS is unsuitable for this purpose because it lacks information on the legal custody regime at the time of divorce. It only provides the respondent's current state and whether they moved within the past year, but not their state of residence at the time of divorce.[24] While the PSID does capture the state of residence at divorce, it does not include data on the actual custody arrangement.

As a result, we use variation in the timing of joint custody law authorization across states as a direct explanatory variable in regressions of mobility. As we do not observe actual custody outcomes, we cannot use these legal changes as an instrument to address the endogeneity of observed joint custody arrangements. In turn, we interpret our results as intention-to-treat (ITT) estimates of joint custody authorization on the outcomes of divorced parents.

We estimate the following difference-in-differences specification:

$$Y_{ist}^{\tau} = \delta^{\tau} JointCustodyAuth_{st} + \alpha_s + \gamma_t + \beta X_i + \epsilon_{ist} \tag{2}$$

where Y_{ist}^{τ} gives the outcome τ years after the divorce date for individual i who gets divorced while living in state s at time t, α_s is the state fixed effect, γ_t is the year-of-divorce fixed effect. X_i is a set of demographic characteristics in the year before divorce: college, age, whether employed, age of the youngest child and number of children. The coefficient of interest is δ^{τ}. Standard errors are clustered at the level of the pre-divorce state throughout.

In our main analysis, we assess the effect of joint custody authorization on interstate mobility by determining whether individuals reside in a different state than their pre-divorce location within four years following divorce. We limit our analysis to this four-year window because attrition from the PSID panel beyond this period is related to whether a state had authorized joint custody. However, before this period there is no systematic relationship between panel attrition and treatment for men and women. Concretely, we run regressions of the form:

$$A_{ist}^{j} = \mu_j JointCustodyAuth_{st} + \alpha_s + \gamma_t + \beta X_i + \epsilon_{ist} \tag{3}$$

where A_{ist}^{j} is an indicator equal to one if individual i who got a divorce in state s in year t is missing j years after divorce. Figure A.3 plots coefficients μ_j for $j \in \{0, 1, 2 \ldots, 8\}$ separately for men and women. All coefficients up to year 5 are very close to zero and insignificant at the 5% significance level. However, for women, attrition in later years is correlated with the custody regime in place at the time of divorce.

Our main results on the impact of joint custody authorization on interstate mobility are presented in Table 2. Columns (1) and (2) give estimates for Equation (2) estimated using a standard two-way fixed effect

[24] The CPS does however allow us to assess the strength of the first stage relationship between joint custody being authorized in a state and take-up. Appendix Table A.7 demonstrates a strong first stage in our context.

estimator. Two-way fixed effect designs with staggered treatment timing have been the subject of much recent interest (Sun and Abraham, 2021; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille, 2020; Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021; Roth et al., 2023). With heterogeneous treatment effects, the estimates yielded by the standard two-way fixed effect estimator do not necessarily represent weighted averages of unit-level treatment effects. Column (3) gives the average of cohort-specific treatment effects that account for the staggered nature of treatment onset using the approach suggested by Wooldridge (2025).[25] As all states authorize joint custody by the end of the sample period, we use a not-yet-treated comparison group. The point estimates are similar for both the standard two-way fixed effect estimator and the approach suggested by Wooldridge (2025), suggesting that treatment effect heterogeneity across cohorts is not a significant issue in this setting.

Our main finding is that the introduction of joint custody authorization laws substantially reduces the likelihood that separated fathers move interstate after divorce. On average, these laws make divorced fathers 12 p.p. less likely to relocate across state lines in the four years following separation. Although sizable, this effect is plausible: it brings post-divorce interstate mobility down to the rate observed while the fathers were still married. Our estimates suggest that fathers subject to joint custody authorization have an ≈8% probability of moving interstate in the four years after separation, compared with 8.7% in the period six to two years before divorce. In contrast, we find no significant effect of joint custody authorization on the average mobility of separated mothers. In all specifications, the coefficient on treatment is small, indicating that the policy primarily affects fathers' post-divorce behavior over the period when joint custody laws were introduced.

A key identifying assumption is that divorce *timing* is quasi-random and there are no differential anticipatory effects on inter-state mobility leading up to divorce across joint-custody and sole-custody states. To investigate the plausibility of this assumption, we report estimation results for whether an individual was in the same state at $\tau = -4$ as in the year before divorce. Appendix Table A.9 columns (1) and (2) shows that there is no significant difference in mobility four years before divorce for neither men nor women for those divorcing in states where joint custody is authorized versus those where it is not.

To explore potential heterogeneity in these effects, Table 3 examines whether the impact of joint custody authorization varies across demographic groups. Given the stability of estimated effects to the staggered corrections, we report two-way fixed effect results. Our sample size is small, with few divorces occurring in each year-state cell and so we lack power to use more recent estimation approaches with staggered corrections as our primary specification. We find that the reduction in mobility is particularly pronounced among college-educated men. There is also some suggestive evidence of a smaller but sizable effect for college-educated women; however, these estimates are imprecise and not statistically significant, so we interpret them with caution. The greater sensitivity of migration among college graduates to custody arrangements could be explained by two mechanisms. First, it is well known that interstate migration is substantially more common among college graduates. Kennan and Walker (2011) show that young men who have completed college are twice as likely to migrate compared to men who have not attended college. In our data, divorced male college graduates are *four times* more likely to migrate after divorce compared to the non-graduates (see Table 3). Second, college-educated fathers tend to spend more time with their children compared to

[25] Appendix Table A.10 gives the average of cohort-specific treatment effects using the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) estimator which shows comparable but less precise results which is unsurprising given our relatively small sample size.

Table 2: Joint Custody & Interstate Moves Within Four Years of Divorce: Difference in Differences Estimates

	TWFE		Timing Robust
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: Men			
Joint Custody Auth.	-0.1142***	-0.1259***	-0.1267**
	(0.0408)	(0.0414)	(0.0501)
Observations	869	861	606
Control Mean	.1969	.1969	.1855
Panel B: Women			
Joint Custody Auth.	0.0041	-0.0058	-0.0382
	(0.0538)	(0.0553)	(0.0498)
Observations	1205	1178	792
Control Mean	.1974	.1974	.1981
State FEs	yes	yes	yes
Year FEs	yes	yes	yes
Demographics	no	yes	yes

Notes: The table reports the coefficients for regressions of interstate mobility within 4 years after divorce or separation on joint custody authorization, for men and women who divorce/separate from their child's other parent between PSID waves. "Joint Custody Auth." equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. The outcome variable, "Move 4-Years Post", equals 1 if the individual is observed in a different state than the state of residence in the last pre-divorce/separation observation, within 4 years after divorce, and 0 otherwise. "Year FEs" denote divorce-year fixed effects, and "State FEs" denote fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence. Demographic controls are indicators for college graduation, age, number of children, and whether the individual worked positive hours in the year prior to divorce. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated using the two way fixed effect model. Column (3) takes the approach of Wooldridge (2025). Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. Standard errors, clustered at the pre-divorce state level, are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

fathers without a college degree, even after divorce (Livingston and Parker, 2011; King, Harris, and Heard, 2004), suggesting they may face a higher opportunity cost of moving without their children.

Figure 8 assesses whether the authorization of joint legal custody affected parents' post-divorce labor market outcomes. Panel (a) reports estimated impacts on annual hours of paid work four years after separation, and panel (b) reports effects on wages over the same horizon. Panel (a) shows a statistically significant increase in annual hours worked among divorced women in states that had authorized joint custody at the time of their separation. The magnitude of the effect is large—roughly a 20% increase relative to the average for women in states without legal custody authorization—and aligns with our belief-elicitation evidence, in which many mothers reported they would work more hours under joint custody. In contrast, the estimated effect for men is small and imprecise, indicating little systematic response in fathers' labor supply. Panel (b) provides suggestive evidence of a positive wage response for women of roughly 25%.[26] We interpret these results with some caution, however, as there is a marginally significant differential pre-trend in women's hours four years prior to divorce (Appendix Table A.9). Importantly, we do not observe any pre-trends in mobility—the primary outcome of interest for our analysis.

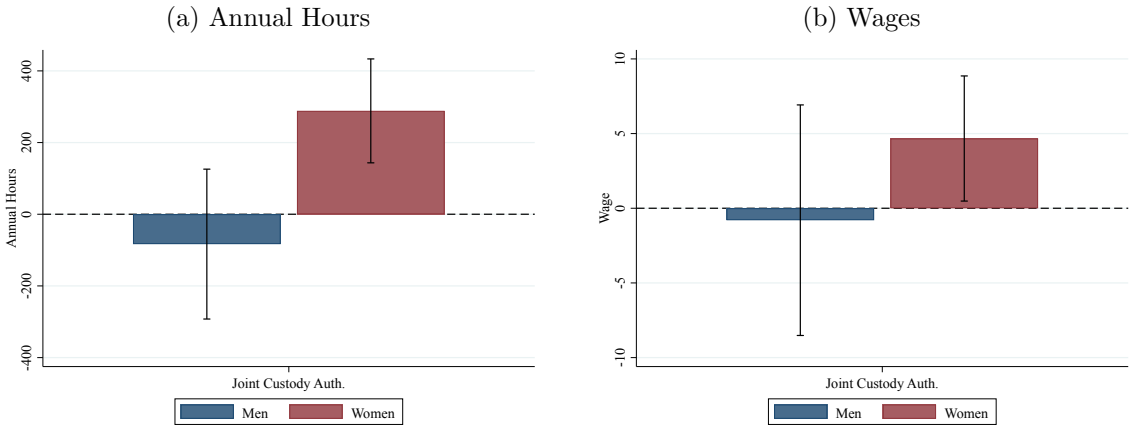
[26] Women's average annual hours are 1,364 and average hourly wages are 16.7 in control states.

Table 3: Joint Custody & Interstate Moves within Four Years of Divorce: Heterogeneity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Men					
Joint Custody Auth.	-0.1261***	-0.1207**	-0.0725*	-0.1351***	-0.1234**
	(0.0405)	(0.0472)	(0.0419)	(0.0462)	(0.0479)
Joint Custody Auth. x Aged 40+		-0.0242			
		(0.0687)			
Joint Custody Auth. x College			-0.2801***		
			(0.0791)		
Joint Custody Auth. x 3+ Kids				0.0206	
				(0.0530)	
Joint Custody Auth. x Oldest Kid > 10yrs					-0.0062
					(0.0656)
Observations	800	800	800	800	800
Control Mean	.1969	.1969	.1969	.1969	.1969
Control Mean (No College)	.1192	.1192	.1192	.1192	.1192
Control Mean (College)	.4426	.4426	.4426	.4426	.4426
Panel B: Women					
Joint Custody Auth.	-0.0114	-0.0210	0.0025	-0.0265	0.0146
	(0.0522)	(0.0545)	(0.0525)	(0.0559)	(0.0593)
Joint Custody Auth. x Aged 40+		0.0517			
		(0.0502)			
Joint Custody Auth. x College			-0.0822		
			(0.0676)		
Joint Custody Auth. x 3+ Kids				0.0351	
				(0.0514)	
Joint Custody Auth. x Oldest Kid > 10yrs					-0.0511
					(0.0500)
Observations	1109	1109	1109	1109	1109
Control Mean	.1974	.1974	.1974	.1974	.1974
Control Mean (No College)	.1825	.1825	.1825	.1825	.1825
Control Mean (College)	.2826	.2826	.2826	.2826	.2826
State FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Demographics	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the effect of joint custody authorization on interstate mobility within four years after divorce or separation, for men and women who divorce/separate from their child's other parent between PSID waves. Heterogeneity is shown by age, college degree, number of children, and age of the oldest child at divorce. "Joint Custody Auth." equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. Dependent variable equals 1 if the individual is observed in a different state than the state of residence in the last pre-divorce/separation observation, within 4 years after divorce, and 0 otherwise. "Year FEs" denote divorce-year fixed effects, and "State FEs" denote fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence. Demographic controls include indicators for college graduation, age, age-group of the oldest child at divorce, number of children, and whether the individual worked positive hours in the year prior to divorce. Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. Standard errors, clustered at the pre-divorce state level, are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 8: Joint Custody Authorization & Economic Outcomes



Notes: The figure reports the magnitude of the coefficient from the regressions of annual hours and wages 4 years after divorce on residing in a state where joint custody is authorized before divorce. The sample consists of individuals who divorce/separate from their child's other parent between PSID waves. The explanatory variable of interest, "Joint Custody Auth.", equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. Included controls are denote divorce-year fixed effects, fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence, and indicators for college graduation, age, age-group of the oldest child at divorce, number of children, and whether the individual worked positive hours in the year prior to divorce. Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. Standard errors are clustered at the pre-divorce state level. Bars display coefficient estimates; line segments represent 95% confidence intervals.

6 Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined how child custody arrangements influence parents' location decisions after divorce. Unlike monetary transfers, time transfers between separated parents can be very costly when individuals live apart. Using a variety of data sources, we have shown that custody institutions shape not only how parents share responsibility for children, but also where they live and work.

Our findings highlight that joint legal child custody after divorce causes a reduction in divorced parents' geographic mobility. In our bespoke survey of separated parents fielded in 2025, both mothers and fathers report that they would be less likely to move across state lines under a joint custody regime than under sole maternal custody. Using the staggered adoption of joint legal custody laws across U.S. states in the 1980s and 1990s, we found that these laws produced a 12 p.p. decline in fathers' interstate mobility. The impact is particularly pronounced among college-educated men, who tend to be more mobile in the absence of custody constraints. By contrast, we found no statistically significant effect on women's interstate mobility in response to the authorization of joint legal custody. One explanation for these varied results on separated mothers is that the economic position of divorced women has changed markedly over the last 40 years, such that the women captured in the PSID were less strongly attached to the labor market than today's separating mothers. Consistent with this view, we found suggestive evidence that interstate mobility also fell for college-educated women following joint custody authorization, though the estimates are imprecise.

Our findings suggest that broad social shifts in family structure —such as rising divorce, separation, and nonmarital fertility— may have significant implications for aggregate geographic mobility, the allocation of talent across space, and workers' ability to cope with shocks by relocating. An interesting question is what the *quantitative* implications of these social forces for economic growth and welfare are. Our findings

also have implications for policy design. In particular, they suggest that institutions that promote the enforcement of child support payments can act as commitment devices and promote cooperation in the time use and location decisions of divorced or separated parents. We leave these questions for future research.

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A Additional Figures and Tables

Table A.1: Correlation between timing of joint custody authorization and 1970 state-level outcomes

	(1) Year of JCA	(2) Year of JCA	(3) Year of JCA	(4) Year of JCA
% Women in Labor Force	-0.120			-0.422
	(0.334)			(0.306)
% Women Ever Married		-0.157		-0.374
		(0.353)		(0.323)
% Women Sep./Div.			0.514	0.790
			(0.529)	(0.516)
Observations	49	49	49	49
Adj. R-squared	-0.015	-0.015	0.003	0.010

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Notes: Correlations between the year of joint custody authorization and outcomes from the 5% subsample of the 1970 U.S. Census for women aged 15 to 64. State-level means computed with sampling weights. Data from IPUMS-U.S.A (Ruggles et al., 2025).

Table A.2: CPS-CSS summary statistics

	Custodial mothers	Custodial fathers
Age	34.40 (8.53)	38.70 (8.85)
College degree	0.15 (0.36)	0.18 (0.38)
Employed	0.69 (0.46)	0.82 (0.39)
Hours conditional on l.f.p.	32.03 (16.46)	37.33 (17.84)
Earnings (CPI adj.) cond. on l.f.p.	31962.70 (35398.92)	56950.70 (62138.11)
Nr. cust. child.	1.77 (0.95)	1.58 (0.79)
Married	0.19 (0.39)	0.23 (0.42)
Divorced	0.31 (0.46)	0.42 (0.49)
Widowed	0.01 (0.11)	0.01 (0.10)
Separated	0.12 (0.33)	0.10 (0.31)
Never Married	0.37 (0.48)	0.24 (0.43)
Joint legal custody	0.21 (0.40)	0.34 (0.47)
Joint physical custody	0.14 (0.34)	0.28 (0.45)
Child support received	2487.80 (5116.80)	1338.55 (3885.91)
Father lives in same state	0.75 (0.43)	0.78 (0.41)
Days with other parent	54.66 (84.86)	77.21 (91.37)
Weeks with other parent	7.81 (12.12)	11.03 (13.05)
Positive weeks with other parent	0.65 (0.48)	0.76 (0.43)
Any agreement or separation year	1999.03 (8.33)	1999.48 (8.69)
Any legal agreement year	1998.67 (8.10)	1999.30 (8.81)
Any agreement year	1998.92 (8.15)	1999.47 (8.80)
Observations	40722	7974

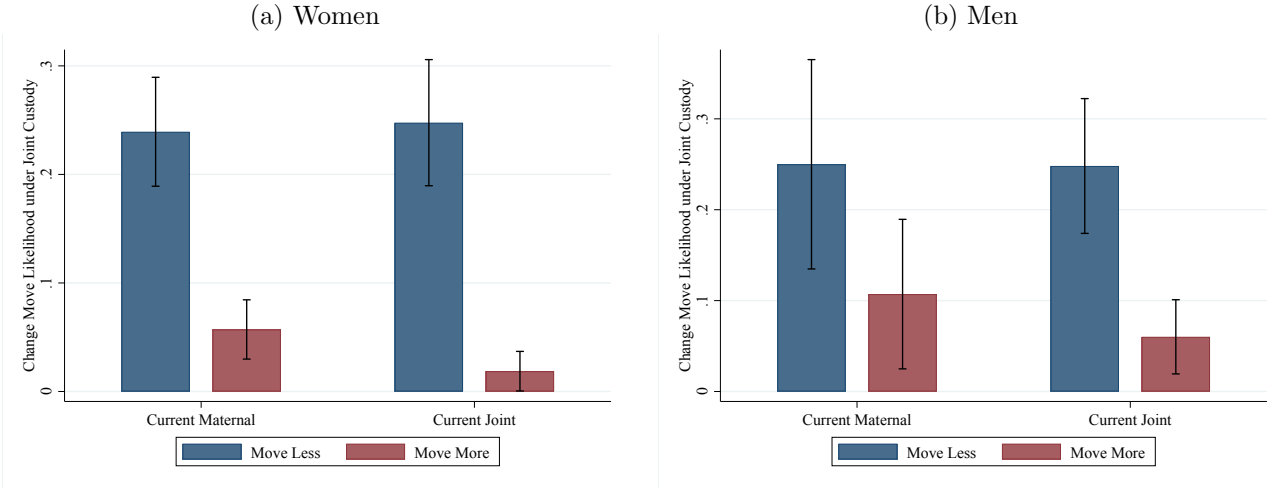
Notes: The table reports summary statistics for custodial parents, defined as those living with a child under 16 whose other biological parent resides elsewhere. Earnings and child support variable is adjusted using Consumer Price Index. For hours, earnings, legal agreement year, any agreement year, any agreement or separation year the number of non-missing observations are 7181, 7181, 2799, 2993 and 6128 for men, respectively. The respective numbers are 31217, 31217, 21290, 23442 and 30317 for women. Source: CPS-CSS 1994-2020. Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Table A.3: PSID Summary Statistics

	Men	Women
Average Age	35.51 (6.88)	34.94 (6.59)
Nr. of obs.	18.04 (10.26)	17.16 (10.36)
Nr. obs. as hd./sps.	17.53 (10.53)	16.73 (10.66)
Nr. of years in sample	23.35 (12.17)	23.21 (12.28)
Nr. of years in sample as hd./sps.	22.57 (12.44)	22.52 (12.70)
Years of education	13.33 (3.90)	13.72 (4.84)
Average annual hours	1972.23 (576.06)	1327.14 (618.51)
Average annual earnings	50648.27 (35953.84)	27365.07 (27304.59)
Average employment	0.85 (0.21)	0.69 (0.29)
Total children	2.60 (1.50)	2.51 (1.25)
Ever changed state	0.35 (0.48)	0.32 (0.47)
Observations	1475	1943

Notes: The table reports the summary statistics of sub-sample of parents who had child before age 65 and separated from the other parent of their child(ren) within the PSID waves. This includes parents who are separated/divorced from their partners with whom they share a child and were married as well as partners with whom they were cohabiting without marriage. We exclude those who had a previous marriage without having any children from that marriage and later parted ways with their child(ren)'s co-parent who is different from the person they first married to. We restrict our attention to observations of such people between ages 21 and 65. Earnings variable is adjusted using Consumer Price Index. Source: PSID 1968–2021. Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Figure A.1: Perceived Treatment Effect of Joint Custody on Moving by Current Custody Arrangement



Notes: The figure shows the fraction of men and women reporting that the likelihood of them changing their decision to move interstate under joint custody versus maternal sole custody disaggregated by their current custody arrangement. Respondent could also express that there would be no significant difference in their moving likelihood or labor supply by custody regime. 95% confidence intervals provided.
Source: Authors' survey conducted in July 2025.

Table A.4: Bespoke Survey: Summary Statistics

	All	Men		Women	
		All	Joint Cust.	All	Joint Cust.
Joint Legal	0.51	0.70	1.00	0.43	1.00
	(0.500)	(0.458)	(0)	(0.496)	(0)
Female	0.72	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
	(0.448)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Age	41.46	41.47	41.77	41.46	43.23
	(8.520)	(8.667)	(8.599)	(8.472)	(8.144)
College	0.46	0.49	0.53	0.45	0.52
	(0.499)	(0.501)	(0.501)	(0.498)	(0.501)
Weekly Work Hours	34.44	37.68	37.88	33.19	34.78
	(13.09)	(11.70)	(10.96)	(13.39)	(12.29)
No. Bio Kid	1.62	1.54	1.58	1.64	1.68
	(0.855)	(0.748)	(0.800)	(0.892)	(0.926)
Year Separated	2017.86	2018.59	2018.73	2017.58	2018.14
	(4.393)	(4.082)	(4.105)	(4.478)	(4.205)
Age Youngest Kid at Sep.	10.55	10.52	10.87	10.56	10.93
	(4.727)	(4.425)	(4.464)	(4.842)	(4.524)
Observations	683	189	133	494	214

Notes: The table reports summary statistics for parents that have a child with a partner they are separated from. "Joint Legal" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the respondent has joint legal child custody. "Parent College" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the respondent the survey has a college degree. "Weekly Work Hours" is the number of paid work hours in a typical week. "No. Bio Kid" is the number of biological children reported. "Year Separated" is the year of separation from the last partner with whom the respondent has joint children. "Age Youngest Kid at Sep" is the age of the youngest child at separation that the respondent shared with their ex-partner.
Source: Authors' own survey in July 2025.

Table A.5: Comparing Demographics of Resident Parents in the CPS & Bespoke Survey

	Men		Women	
	Survey	CPS	Survey	CPS
Joint Legal	0.44	0.34	0.33	0.20
	(0.500)	(0.474)	(0.472)	(0.403)
Age	40.88	39.23	40.95	35.87
	(9.220)	(9.301)	(8.711)	(9.125)
College	0.53	0.22	0.43	0.19
	(0.503)	(0.414)	(0.496)	(0.396)
Weekly Hours	39.02	34.37	32.49	25.19
	(11.07)	(18.85)	(13.76)	(19.62)
No. Children	1.36	1.60	1.66	1.83
	(0.572)	(0.795)	(0.908)	(0.986)
Year Separated	2018.39	2011.81	2017.40	2011.58
	(3.770)	(4.939)	(4.531)	(4.606)
Observations	66	543	382	2077

Notes: The table reports summary statistics for custodial parents in our own survey and the 2018 wave of the CPS=CSS. "Joint Legal" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the respondent has joint legal child custody. "Parent College" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the respondent the survey has a college degree. "No. Bio Kid" is the number of biological children reported. "Year Separated" is the year of separation from the last partner with whom the respondent has joint children. "Age Youngest Kid at Sep" is the age of the youngest child at separation that the respondent shared with their ex-partner.
Source: Authors' own survey in July 2025 and 2018 CPS-CSS.

Table A.6: Correlation Between Joint Custody & Parents Living in Different State in Survey

	(1)	(2)
Joint Legal	0.1782***	0.1874***
	(0.0353)	(0.0362)
Parent College		-0.0429
		(0.0379)
Parent Age		0.0015
		(0.0021)
Parent Above Median Earnings		-0.0418
		(0.0393)
Observations	681	681
Dep. Var Mean	.7072	.7072
No. Kid FE	yes	yes
Parent Gender	yes	yes

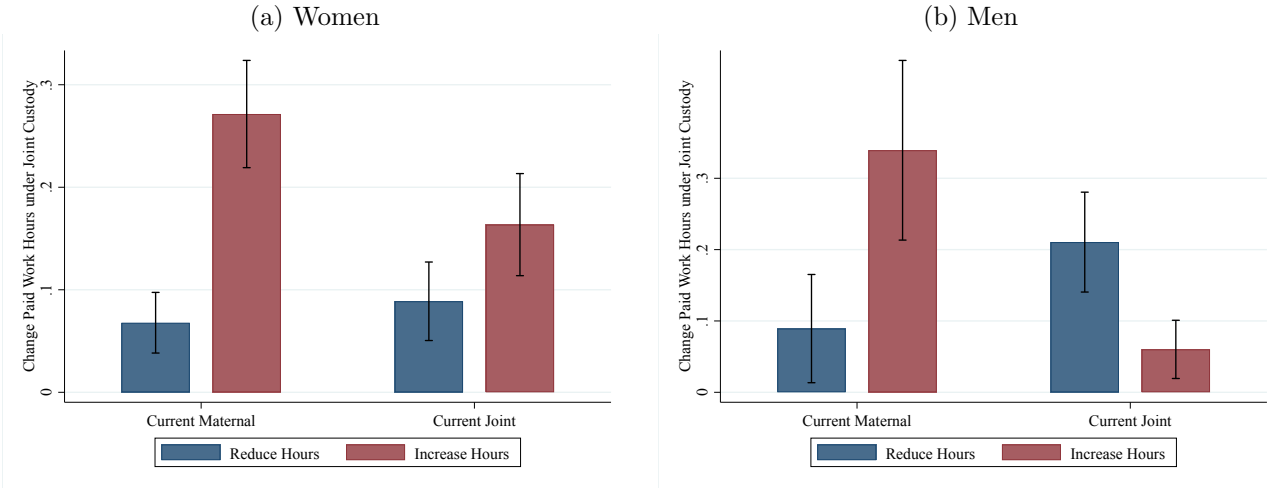
Notes: The table illustrates the relationship of joint legal custody with whether parents' are resident in the same state. "Parent College" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the biological parent answering the survey has a college degree. "Age" is the age of the biological parent answering the survey. "Parent Above Median Earnings" is a binary variable equal to 1 when the biological parent answering the survey has a gross annual income greater than the median in the sample. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are in parenthesis.
Source: Authors' own survey in July 2025.

Table A.7: First Stage using CPS-CSS

	Joint legal custody			Joint physical custody		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
JCust auth. at any agr. or sep.	0.0656***			0.0212*		
	(5.8584)			(2.1555)		
JCust auth. at agr.		0.0659***			0.0165	
		(4.8165)			(1.4159)	
JCust auth. at leg. agr.			0.0702***			0.0177
			(4.8481)			(1.4317)
Constant	0.1895***	0.1910***	0.2039***	0.1526***	0.1422***	0.1504***
	(17.7596)	(14.6607)	(14.8160)	(16.1555)	(12.7306)	(12.7146)
Observations	36354	26372	24030	36354	26372	24030
R^2	0.0841	0.0844	0.0864	0.0619	0.0490	0.0506

Notes: The table reports the first stage regressions of joint legal and physical custody on authorization timing of joint custody. "J. Cust. auth. at leg. agr. or sep" stands for a dummy variable which is 1 if joint custody is authorized in the state of the individual at "any agreement or separation year". "J. Cust. auth. at agr." stands for a dummy variable which is 1 if joint custody is authorized in the state of the individual at the year of any divorce agreement. "J. Cust. auth. at leg. agr." stands for a dummy variable which is 1 if joint custody is authorized in the state of the individual at the year of legal divorce agreement. Analysis sample is parents who are 15 years or older, with at least one child under 16 years of age whose other biological parent lives outside the household. Summary statistics for the sample used in this first stage are given in Table A.8. All specifications include age, survey year, and state fixed effects, as well as indicators for gender, employment status, and the number of custodial children (one, two, or three+). Source: CPS-CSS 1994-2018. In 2020 survey, the first year the child support agreement was made legal (PES259) is wrongly coded and also people are not asked about the most recent divorce date (variable name is PES705 for the previous waves). Therefore, 2020 survey is excluded. For the remaining years, around half of never married and one fifth of married eligible parents were not asked questions about legal agreement/any agreement/separation date. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. t-statistics are in parenthesis.

Figure A.2: Perceived Treatment Effect of Joint Custody on Labor Supply by Current Custody Arrangement



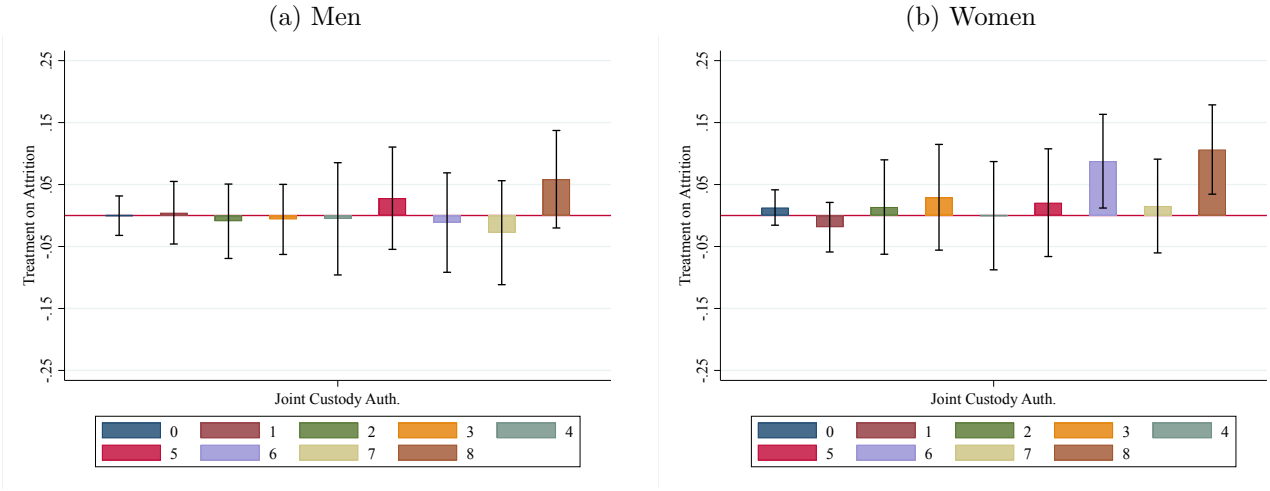
Notes: The figure shows the fraction of men and women reporting that the likelihood of them changing their expected labor supply under joint custody versus maternal sole custody disaggregated by their current custody arrangement. Respondents could also express that there would be no significant difference in their labor supply by custody regime. 95% confidence intervals provided.
Source: Authors' survey conducted in July 2025.

Table A.8: CPS-CSS summary statistics restricted to people who answered legal agreement/any agreement/separation date

	Custodial mothers	Custodial fathers
Age	35.52 (8.10)	39.52 (8.29)
College degree	0.16 (0.37)	0.19 (0.39)
Employed	0.72 (0.45)	0.83 (0.38)
Hours conditional on l.f.p.	32.72 (16.30)	37.96 (17.80)
Earnings (CPI adj.) cond. on l.f.p.	33516.49 (35802.32)	60010.37 (64324.55)
Nr. cust. child.	1.82 (0.95)	1.64 (0.81)
Married	0.21 (0.40)	0.23 (0.42)
Divorced	0.40 (0.49)	0.52 (0.50)
Widowed	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.09)
Separated	0.16 (0.37)	0.13 (0.33)
Never Married	0.22 (0.42)	0.11 (0.31)
Joint legal custody	0.24 (0.43)	0.37 (0.48)
Joint physical custody	0.16 (0.36)	0.30 (0.46)
Child support received	3132.95 (5639.95)	1612.71 (4260.38)
Father lives in same state	0.76 (0.43)	0.78 (0.41)
Days with other parent	56.30 (83.04)	75.83 (89.49)
Weeks with other parent	8.04 (11.86)	10.83 (12.78)
Positive weeks with other parent	0.69 (0.46)	0.78 (0.41)
Any agreement or separation year	1999.03 (8.33)	1999.48 (8.69)
Any legal agreement year	1998.67 (8.10)	1999.30 (8.81)
Any agreement year	1998.92 (8.15)	1999.47 (8.80)
Observations	30317	6128

Notes: The table reports summary statistics for custodial parents, defined as those living with a child under 16 whose other biological parent resides elsewhere, who also answered any of the questions about legal agreement/any agreement or separation date with the child's other parent. Earnings and child support variable is adjusted using Consumer Price Index. For men, we observe 5,571 non-missing values for both hours and earnings, and 2,799 and 2,993 for legal agreement year and any agreement year, respectively. For women, the corresponding counts are 23,822, 23,822, 21,290, and 23,442. Source: CPS-CSS 1994-2018. In 2020 survey, the first year the child support agreement was made legal (PES259) is wrongly coded and also people are not asked about the most recent divorce date (variable name is PES705 for the previous waves). Therefore, 2020 survey is excluded. For the remaining years, around half of never married and one fifth of married eligible parents were not asked questions about legal agreement/any agreement/separation date. Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

Figure A.3: Treatment Effect of Joint Custody on Panel Attrition



Notes: The figure reports the magnitude of the coefficient regressing sample attrition after divorce on residing in a state where joint custody is authorized before divorce. The sample consists of individuals who divorce/separate from their child's other parent between PSID waves. The explanatory variable of interest, "Joint Custody Auth.", equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. Dependent variables are indicators for being tracked in the survey in each year from the divorce/separation year through year 8. Included controls are denote divorce-year fixed effects, fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence, and indicators for college graduation, age, age-group of the oldest child at divorce, number of children, and whether the individual worked positive hours in the year prior to divorce. Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. Standard errors are clustered at the pre-divorce state level. Bars display coefficient estimates; line segments represent 95% confidence intervals.

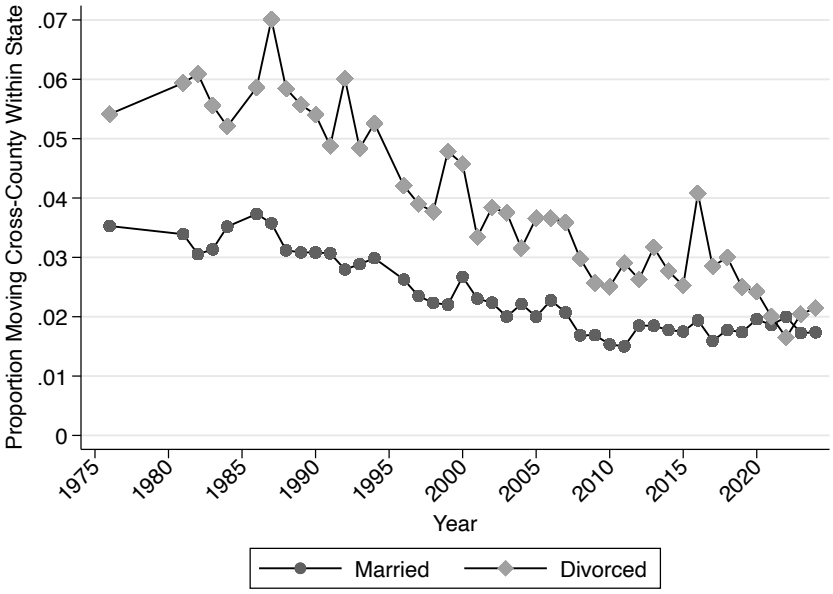
Table A.9: Pre-Trend in Outcome Variables: Outcomes at 4-Years Before Divorce

	Same State		Annual Hours		Wages	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Men						
Joint Custody Auth.	-0.0038	-0.0209	97.3063	155.2461	0.0473	-3.5572
	(0.0388)	(0.0418)	(91.7327)	(96.4142)	(2.6546)	(2.5898)
Observations	1083	931	1045	899	998	858
Control Mean	.8996	.8996	2044.3973	2044.3973	25.6893	25.6893
Panel B: Women						
Joint Custody Auth.	0.0325	0.0454	199.9952*	178.3719*	2.4713	2.6501
	(0.0304)	(0.0279)	(104.1279)	(96.0770)	(1.7359)	(1.7410)
Observations	1276	1114	1247	1099	968	843
Control Mean	.8889	.8889	886.3262	886.3262	15.7269	15.7269
State FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Demographics	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes

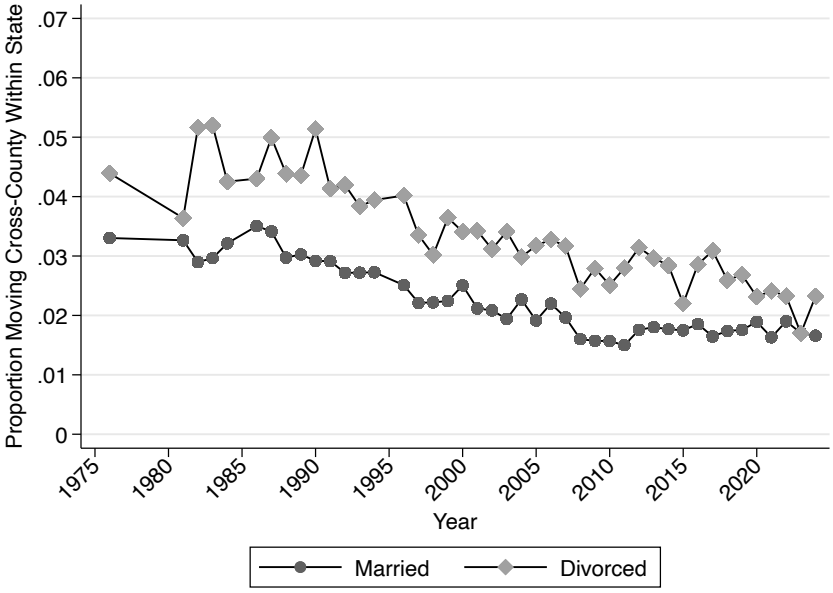
Notes: The table reports the coefficients for regressions of interstate mobility, annual hours and wages 4 years before divorce/separation on joint custody authorization, for men and women who divorce/separate from their child's other parent between PSID waves. "Joint Custody Auth." equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. "Same State" equals 1 if the individual is observed in the same state of residence as the last pre-divorce/separation observation 4 years before divorce, and 0 otherwise. "Annual Hours" and "Wages" correspond to hours and wages 4 years before divorce. "Year FEs" denote divorce-year fixed effects, and "State FEs" denote fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence. Demographic controls include indicators for college graduation, age, age-group of the oldest child at divorce, number of children, and whether the individual worked positive hours in the year prior to divorce. Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. Standard errors, clustered at the pre-divorce state level, are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure A.4: Proportion Moving Across Counties within State By Marital Status and Gender

(a) Men

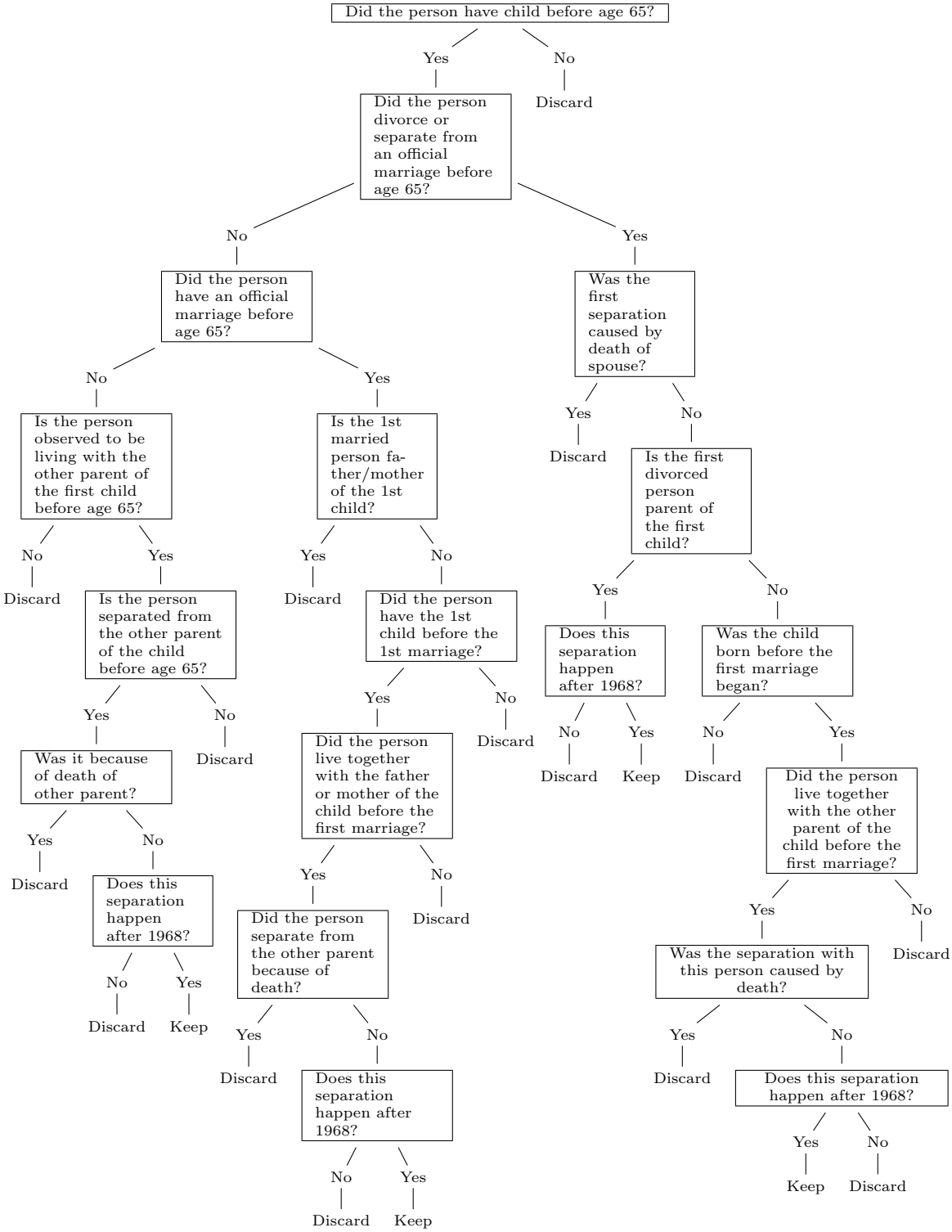


(b) Women



Notes: The figure illustrates the trend in within states and across counties migration by marital status and gender for individuals aged 21–65. We drop observations with unknown or abroad migration status. Year 1995 is excluded because the migration question is not comparable to other years. For 1996–2005, we drop imputed migration responses, following Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl (2012). Source: CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) version prepared by IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2025), covering years 1964–2024.

Figure A.5: Construction of the PSID Analysis Sample



Notes: The figure shows the step-by-step process for determining the PSID analysis sample. Only individuals who experienced separation/divorce (not due to death) after 1968, and who meet the parenthood and marital/cohabitation criteria described in the tree, are retained in the sample.

Table A.10: Staggered Difference-in-Differences: Additional Results

	Men		Women	
	TWFE	Timing Robust	TWFE	Timing Robust
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Joint Custody Auth.	-0.0974**	-0.1020*	-0.0141	0.0159
	(0.040)	(0.076)	(0.056)	(0.061)
Observations	592	246	687	300
State FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FEs	yes	yes	yes	yes

Notes: The table reports the coefficients for regressions at the state-year level of interstate mobility on pre-divorce state, year of divorce fixed effects, and joint custody authorization. "Joint Custody Auth." equals 1 if joint custody was authorized in the state of residence in the last year the individual is observed before divorce/separation, and 0 otherwise. "Year FEs" denote divorce-year fixed effects, and "State FEs" denote fixed effects for the pre-divorce state of residence. To implement the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) approach, we collapse observations to the state-year level and calculate the average interstate mobility rates for divorces happening in that cell. Columns (1) and (3) report results from two way fixed effect regressions run on observations collapsed to the state-time. Columns (2) and (4) report the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) average of treatment-timing cohort treatment effects with a not-yet-treated control group (we have no never treated units). Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), waves 1968–2021. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.