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Chi vuole il doppio cognome in Italia? Un'analisi empirica di preferenze e comportamenti[1]

Abstract

La sentenza della Corte Costituzionale n. 131/2022 ha abolito la trasmissione automatica del cognome paterno ai figli, riconoscendo ai genitori piena libertà di attribuire il cognome del padre, della madre o entrambi nell'ordine preferito. Tale decisione rappresenta una potenziale rivoluzione simbolica in termini di parità di genere. Tuttavia, poco si sa su come il nuovo quadro normativo abbia influito sulle pratiche e preferenze effettive dei genitori. Questo articolo presenta i risultati di uno studio originale che combina dati di una survey nazionale online condotta su 3000 rispondenti con dati amministrativi tratti dai registri di nascita della città di Torino. I risultati mostrano che genere, istruzione e orientamento politico sono predittori significativi delle preferenze dichiarate a favore del doppio cognome, così come la percezione della normatività del cognome paterno. Anche le scelte effettive, sebbene meno innovative rispetto alle intenzioni, riflettono l'influenza del contesto educativo e politico, e rivelano un uso particolarmente elevato del doppio cognome tra le coppie miste (madre italiana e padre straniero), dove esso funge da indicatore di doppia identità e può contribuire a ridurre il rischio di discriminazione. Questi risultati offrono nuove prospettive sul modo in cui i cambiamenti simbolici nel diritto di famiglia interagiscono con valori individuali, norme sociali e dinamiche culturali più ampie.

[1] This preprint reflects the final, peer-reviewed version accepted for publication by the journal's editor. Please quote as: Renzo Carriero, Giulia M. Dotti Sani (2025). Who Wants the Double Surname in Italy? An Empirical Analysis of Preferences and Behaviors, *Polis, Ricerche e studi su società e politica*, 3/2025, 349-373, DOI: 10.1424/118537

Keyword: Doppio cognome; Norme di genere; Cambiamento sociale; Italia.

Who Wants the Double Surname in Italy? An Empirical Analysis of Preferences and Behaviors

Abstract

The 2022 ruling by the Italian Constitutional Court (no. 131/2022) abolished the automatic transmission of the father's surname to children, granting parents full freedom to assign either the father's, the mother's, or both surnames in the order of their choosing. This decision marked a potentially symbolic revolution in terms of gender equality. Yet little is known about how the new legal framework has affected parents' actual practices and preferences. This article presents the results of an original study combining data from a nationwide online survey of 3,000 respondents and administrative birth records from the city of Turin. The findings indicate that gender, education, and political orientation are key predictors of stated preferences in favor of the double surname, along with the perceived normativity of the paternal surname. Actual naming practices, while less innovative than stated intentions, similarly reflect the influence of education and political context, and reveal a particularly high use of the double surname among mixed couples (Italian mother and foreign father), where it serves to convey dual identity and potentially mitigate discrimination. These results provide novel insights into how symbolic changes in family law interact with individual values, social norms, and broader cultural dynamics.

Keywords: Double surname; Gender norms; Social change; Italy.

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Who Wants the Double Surname in Italy? An Empirical Analysis of Preferences and Behaviors

1. *Introduction*

Ruling no. 131/2022 by the Italian Constitutional Court laid the groundwork for what could become a veritable symbolic revolution. By declaring the automatic transmission of the father's surname to children unconstitutional, and granting parents full discretion to assign both surnames (paternal and maternal, in whichever order they prefer[2]), the ruling removed a significant obstacle to parental equality and promoted gender equality in this domain. The ability to transmit one's surname—whether to one's spouse or to one's children—has historically been a male privilege[3], which persists even as more substantive rights (such as voting) have long been extended to women. Although the issue of surnames is mainly symbolic, it is not without consequence. Along with the given name, the surname is a constitutive element of an individual's personal and social identity (Finch 2008), and the absence of the mother's identity in the child's surname signals the inferior social status of women in society. The ability to transmit the maternal surname, alongside or even in place of the paternal one, is thus an indicator of gender equality in terms of status—a "barometer of women's position in society" (Noack and Wiik 2008, 507).

Italian society is often portrayed as conservative on issues related to family. The late introduction of laws on divorce and abortion, the limited prevalence of cohabitation before or instead of marriage, and the still rigid gender division of family roles all support this conservative image. However, even if lagging behind other European or Western countries, Italian society is evolving—often ahead of how it is represented in the media or by political actors seeking to capitalize on nostalgia for some mythical traditional identity. On the issue of children's surnames, one may therefore expect a more positive (or at least less negative) reception than this stereotypical portrayal would suggest.

At present, however, we know little about how the ruling has affected Italian parents' actual practices regarding surname assignment. The limited information available (ISTAT 2024) does not suggest an impending revolution—nor would it be reasonable to expect one. Changes of this kind typically occur over long time horizons. A centuries-old and deeply meaningful practice such as the paternal surname is unlikely to change overnight, especially in the absence of an implementing law clarifying how the double surname will be transmitted to future generations. Nonetheless, to assess whether the ruling has landed on fertile ground—activating a latent societal demand—or on hostile terrain—seeking to impose a little-welcomed innovation—it is not enough to look at how many parents have taken advantage of the double surname. It is also necessary to examine stated preferences, not just behaviors. Preferences reveal what people *want*, and when compared to behaviors, can help uncover what prevents those desires from being realized.

This article presents the findings of a study investigating both stated preferences and actual choices regarding the double surname, using data from an original survey of 3,000 respondents in Italy and data from birth records in the city of Turin. The survey highlights the importance of gender, education, and political orientation in shaping preferences for the double surname, as well as the

[2] Yet, the double surname is not compulsory: after the 2022 ruling, parents can still give their child a single surname, either maternal or paternal, if they both agree.

[3] As noted by Barbara Risman (1998, 38): "no husband is expected to change his name".

perceived normativity of the paternal surname. The analysis of actual registered surnames—significantly fewer than one would expect based on stated preferences—confirms the role of education and political leanings in shaping naming choices. It also reveals the particular meaning the double surname assumes in the case of mixed couples (Italian mother and foreign father), where it serves to convey dual identity to children and may function as a tool against discrimination.

The presentation of the findings is preceded by a brief historical and sociological overview of the significance of surnames, followed by the definition of the research questions and hypotheses, and a description of the data used. The article concludes with a discussion of the possible future trajectories of the double surname reform and its broader implications.

2. *The historical and sociological meaning of surnames*

The surname, understood as an onomastic element passed down from generation to generation, has not always existed in the form we know today. In Europe, it was introduced by the Normans following the conquest of England in the 11th century, but it took several centuries before it became a stable element of personal identification across generations. What proved especially decisive was the need for clear individual identification, which enabled nation-states (and also religious authorities) to exert full control over their citizens. In Italy, the use of second names—very often patronymics—as surnames began spreading after the 11th century, but it was not until national unification that practices around surname transmission become uniform (Bizzocchi 2014). This historical development—reinforcing the point made in the introduction—illustrates the lengthy and complex processes required to change a deeply ingrained practice such as surname inheritance.

Intergenerational transmission has traditionally followed the paternal line, but not uniformly nor everywhere. In England, during the medieval period and beyond, it was not uncommon for women to transmit their birth surname. However, the increasingly strict implementation, from the late Middle Ages onward, of the legal principle of *coverture*—under which a married woman was effectively the property of her husband and could not own assets—also entailed the symbolic loss of her surname (Anthony 2016). In Italy, the rule of paternal surname transmission found a notable exception in certain parts of Sardinia near Nuoro, where in the 17th century daughters took their mother's surname and sons took their father's. This practice was linked to the differential transmission of family property: houses to females, livestock to males (Bizzocchi 2014, 168–169). Yet these remain exceptions, albeit significant ones, to a general rule. Additional exceptions include a few matronymic surnames, mostly found among lower social classes rather than the nobility.

Today, as is well known, Spain and most Spanish-speaking countries follow a double-surname system: children receive both the father's and the mother's surnames. While this system is more gender-equal in that it gives visibility to the maternal line, the fact remains that children tend to transmit only one surname—typically the paternal one—to their own offspring, with some exceptions[4]. It is also worth noting that the Spanish system did not always exist in its current form

[4] Among the most notable cases are those of former Spanish Prime Minister Luis Zapatero and the painter Pablo Picasso, both widely known by their maternal surnames, despite—like all Spaniards—having a double surname (Rodríguez Zapatero in the first case, Ruiz Picasso in the second).

uniformly across Spain; rather, it evolved gradually and was only fully institutionalized from the late 19th century onward (Ryskamp 2012).

In other European countries, current regulations on surname transmission tend to be more liberal. In France and the United Kingdom, for instance, parents can choose to give the surname of the father, the mother, or both (Feschet 2009). Recent legal reforms in Germany and the Netherlands have also introduced the possibility of a double surname—not only for reasons of gender equality but also to accommodate the traditions of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups who maintain different naming systems from their countries of origin[5]. In Italy, following the 2022 Constitutional Court ruling, there are no legal obstacles to assigning a double surname. In theory, it should now be the default rule, but in practice there is no automatic mechanism: the choice is left entirely to the parents[6].

In countries where surname assignment is governed by rules allowing parental choice, the use of the paternal surname still tends to prevail, though systematic comparative studies are lacking. None of the major international surveys—such as the European Values Study, the European Social Survey, or the Generations and Gender Survey—include questions on children's surnames.

From a sociological perspective, the surname, its usage, and the rules surrounding its transmission carry substantial significance. Finch (2008), building on Elias, notes that the phrase "first name and surname" symbolically reflects two dimensions of identity: the individual (first name) and the social (surname). While parents generally have wide latitude in choosing the first name, surname assignment is subject to legal and social constraints. The surname signals a person's connection to a network of family relationships. Its hereditary nature—typically along the paternal line—is the most visible expression of its ability to publicly map close kinship ties, especially those of descent. However, the surname cannot fully represent all relevant family connections. For instance, children of divorced and remarried parents often have meaningful relationships with people who do not share their surname. The same holds true for women who take their husband's surname upon marriage.

Surnames may also carry ethnic or religious connotations. Finch (2008) cites the examples of African American political activist Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little) and boxer Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali—both of whom changed their surnames to publicly reject their enslaved heritage and, in the latter case, to signal conversion to Islam. Ultimately, the ability to assign or choose a surname is a powerful symbolic resource—historically a male prerogative—that contributes to shaping an individual's social identity. It is also worth noting that in immigration-receiving societies, foreign surnames are easily identifiable and linked to the country of origin[7].

[5] https://www.government.nl/topics/registering-a-birth-and-name-of-child/question-and-answer/which-surname-can-i-choose-for-my-child
https://www.bmj.de/DE/themen/gesellschaft_familie/namensrecht/namensrecht_node.html

[6] In fact, an implementing law is still lacking; as a result, parents may, if they so choose, assign both surnames to their child in whichever order they prefer. However, they may also continue to give only the paternal surname—or, at least in theory, opt to assign only the maternal one.

[7] Not coincidentally, experiments on discrimination against immigrants in the labor market often use foreign-sounding surnames to signal the (fictitious) candidate's ethnic origin. Some scholars, however, argue that foreign surnames convey not only ethnic background but also signals related to social class (Crabtree et al. 2022).

Sociological attention to the issue of surnames has been limited and focused mainly on the practice of women adopting their husband's surname upon marriage. Married women who reject the practice of surname change typically do so for reasons related to gender role attitudes, racial/ethnic identity, or the desire to maintain professional continuity (Pilcher 2017).

The issue of marital surnames is of course linked to that of children's surnames. It is unsurprising that children receive the father's surname when the mother has already adopted it. But in societies where cohabitation is more common than marriage—or, as in Italy, where married women are not legally required to take their husband's surname nor is it common to do so—the naming of children becomes an independent issue. Still, deviations from the social norm of the paternal surname remain rare, even in countries that legally permit other options. As Nugent (2010) argues, going against the norm can result in social backlash, such as conflicts with partners or extended family. MacEacheron (2024) has even argued that patrilineal surname transmission may serve as a means to encourage paternal kin involvement, since paternal grandparents may be more inclined to invest resources in a grandchild who shares their name. Even parents who ideologically support gender equality may have practical or social concerns about how a non-traditional surname could affect their child. These concerns include the potential confusion of having different surnames within the family unit, fear of appearing "different," or the perceived threat to family cohesion. Nugent (2010) suggests that resistance among heterosexual couples to giving children a surname other than the father's stems from "moral dilemmas" involving a trade-off between the mother's personal interest in preserving and transmitting her identity, and the well-being of the child, partner, and family unit.

Other studies have shown that those who challenge the prevailing norm of paternal surname assignment tend to be younger, more educated, and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Johnson and Scheuble 2002; Li et al. 2021). Johnson and Scheuble (2002) also demonstrated that attitudes toward gender roles, political liberalism, religiosity, feminist identification, and educational attainment all influence women's choices to transmit (either solely or jointly) their birth surname to their children. However, even among self-identified feminist academics interviewed by Eshleman and Halley (2016), the overwhelming majority still gave their children the father's surname—indicating that feminism alone is not sufficient to prompt counter-normative surname choices.

To our knowledge, no sociological research on surname transmission has yet been conducted in Italy. An ISTAT report (2024) on births in 2023 indicates that the double surname remains relatively uncommon overall (6.2%), although it is more frequent in the Center-North (7%) than in the South (4%). The double surname is also more common among first-born children (9.1%), children of unmarried couples (8%), and especially among children of mixed couples with an Italian mother and foreign father (14.2%)—a pattern we return to in relation to the case of Turin.

3. Research questions and hypotheses

The lack of sociological studies on children's surnames is likely due to the fact that the paternal surname rule is so deeply ingrained and taken for granted as to be almost "transparent"—that is, nearly invisible until an unexpected event brings it into focus. In the Italian case, the unexpected event in question is the Constitutional Court ruling, which gave new parents the opportunity to make a choice different from the traditional paternal surname. The primary aim of this study is therefore

exploratory and descriptive in nature, with the objective of addressing the following overarching research questions:

- How widespread is the preference for the double surname in Italy?
- What are the main reasons that discourage the adoption of the double surname?
- Which socio-demographic characteristics are associated with the preference for the double surname?
- To what extent do actual surname choices reflect stated preferences, and what factors are associated with these choices?

To answer these questions, we carried out two types of investigation—a nationwide online survey and an analysis of birth records from the municipality of Turin—described in detail in the next section. The survey allows us to explore stated preferences for the double surname among adult individuals—not just parents or those "at risk" of becoming parents—because our interest lies in understanding the general societal reception of an innovation related to gender equality.

Drawing on the existing literature and the empirical studies reviewed, we hypothesize that preference for the double surname will be associated with gender, education, political orientation, and religiosity. In particular, we expect women to be more likely than men to favor the double surname (Intons-Peterson and Crawford 1985; Lockwood et al. 2011; Pilcher 2017), as they have a personal stake in being able to pass on their own surname. For reasons linked to egalitarian and non-traditional value orientations, we also expect more educated individuals, those with left-leaning political preferences, and those who are not religious to be more supportive of the double surname (Johnson and Scheuble 2002; Li et al. 2021). The same should hold for individuals who express progressive attitudes toward gender roles. Finally, since choosing the paternal surname—when a viable alternative is available—represents adherence to a social norm, we hypothesize that support for the double surname will be higher among individuals who perceive the paternal surname as *less* socially normative.

The perceived normativity of the paternal surname is also the focus of an embedded survey experiment designed to explore whether preference for the double surname depends on the available alternative (i.e., the paternal surname, which is the normative option, versus the maternal surname, which is strongly counter-normative) and on the "quality" of the double surname. We expect preference for the double surname to be stronger when the alternative is counter-normative and when the double surname is "high quality" (i.e., composed of two short surnames). Conversely, we expect that when the double surname is "low quality" (i.e., composed of two long surnames), the effect of the counter-normative alternative (maternal surname) will be reduced.

While the analysis of stated preferences, motivations, and hypothetical scenarios is informative, it is limited if not complemented by the analysis of actual behaviors. For this reason, we examined data from birth records in the city of Turin. Although geographically limited, this data source is valuable because it allows us to answer questions that a survey could only address at high cost or with limited reliability. A survey can provide information on reported behavior, but not on behavior directly observed. Moreover, even assuming that declared behaviors closely align with actual ones, studying surname choices would require a highly specific and narrow sample (new parents from the past two years), with significant costs and logistical challenges. By analyzing birth records, we can show the actual distribution of the phenomenon under study, albeit within a specific geographic context.

Furthermore, we investigate the influence of some of the same factors mentioned above (especially education and political orientation) on real-life choices, thus allowing for a kind of indirect validation of the survey data.

4. *Data and method*

The survey was conducted between December 2024 and January 2025 on a sample of 3,000 individuals recruited through online panels managed by the company Qualtrics. The sample reflects quotas for gender, age group, and education level, consistent with the adult Italian population using the internet. While it is not a probability-based sample (as is the case with most online panels), it is very well balanced not only on the variables used for quota control but also in terms of region, municipality size, employment status, political and religious orientation (see Table 1). The questionnaire, with an average duration of five minutes, focused exclusively on the issue of children's surnames, along with socio-demographic variables and attitudes toward gender roles.

The preference (or propensity) for the double surname was measured through the following question: *"If you were to have a son or daughter today, would you give them a double surname?"* Responses were recorded on a scale from 0 (certainly not) to 10 (certainly yes), and this scale was treated as a cardinal variable in the subsequent analyses. Political orientation was assessed using the standard 0–10 left-right scale, later recoded into four categories: left (0–3), center (4–6), right (7–10), and undeclared (Huber 1989). Religiosity was measured using a typology based on religious affiliation and frequency of attendance at religious services, resulting in three main categories (practicing Catholics, non-practicing or "cultural" Catholics, non-religious), plus a residual category including individuals affiliated with other religions or those who preferred not to respond.

To capture attitudes toward gender roles, we used two Likert items drawn from the European Values Study: *"It is all right for women to work, but what most women really want is a home and children,"* and *"On the whole, men make better political leaders than women."* These were combined into a summative index and recoded into four categories: traditional, mixed, egalitarian, and undeclared (for respondents who answered "don't know" to one or both items).

To assess perceptions of the paternal surname as a social norm, we used a specific question on normative expectations: *"In your opinion, how many people in Italy think it is right to give only the father's surname to their children?"* (response options: all or almost all, many, about half, few, none or almost none, don't know). As for the reasons that might discourage the use of the double surname, we asked the following two questions: *"In general, what do you think is the most important reason for NOT giving children both surnames?"* and *"And what is the second most important reason?"* The answer options included nine items related to practical, normative, aesthetic, and relational concerns (see results section for details).

To analyze the association between preferences and socio-demographic characteristics, we estimated a series of nested linear regression models in which age group, geographical area, and municipality size were included as control variables in all models. The first model includes gender and education as the main independent variables. Subsequent models add—one at a time, and finally all together—socio-cultural variables such as political orientation, religiosity, gender role attitudes, and perceived normativity of the paternal surname. Some models also introduce interaction terms to assess whether certain associations are moderated by other variables. Due to

space constraints, we report only the results of selected models in the main text; full models are available in the Appendix.

To further explore the reasoning behind surname choices, the same sample of respondents was also administered a survey experiment in which interviewees were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios. With a total sample of 3,000 respondents evenly distributed across four conditions[8], the study has 80% power to detect a minimum difference of approximately 7 percentage points between groups (Cohen's h = 0.145) at the 5% significance level. In each version of the scenario, a couple is expecting a child and must decide which surname to give them: either a double surname vs. the paternal one (versions A and C), or a double surname vs. the maternal one (versions B and D). The scenarios differ further based on the length of the proposed surnames: one pair of short surnames—Costa and Mori (versions A and B)—and one pair of long surnames—Antonelli and Simoncelli (versions C and D). Table 2 reports the question text and surname options presented to respondents, as well as sample sizes for each group.

Tab. 1. *Distribution of variables in the survey on the double surname*

Variable	Value
Mean (SD)	
Propensity for double surname (0–10)	5.95 (3.45)
Male	49.52%
Female	50.48%
Low education (up to middle school)	34.61%
Medium education (high school diploma)	44.17%
High education (university degree or higher)	21.22%
18–24 years	9.46%
25–34 years	15.14%
35–44 years	18.64%
45–54 years	22.12%
55–64 years	17.88%
Over 64 years	16.77%
Northwest	31.91%
Northeast	16.91%
Center	18.04%
South	21.72%
Islands	11.43%
Municipality ≤5,000	14.57%
Municipality 5–10,000	14.47%
Municipality 10–30,000	23.05%
Municipality 30–100,000	22.05%
Municipality 100–250,000	9.42%

[8] Random assignment to the experimental conditions was performed using Qualtrics' built-in randomizer function. Respondents were automatically assigned to one of the four experimental scenarios with equal probability. The randomizer ensured that assignment was independent of any respondent characteristics, and group sizes were approximately balanced, as expected. Table A1 in the Appendix shows that the groups resulted balanced in size and characteristics.

Municipality ≥250,000	16.44%
Political position: Left	21.75%
Political position: Center	24.29%
Political position: Right	25.93%
Political position: Undeclared	28.03%
Practicing Catholics	18.38%
Non-practicing Catholics	48.41%
Non-religious	21.35%
Other/Undeclared religion	11.86%
Gender roles: traditional	10.29%
Gender roles: mixed	26.60%
Gender roles: egalitarian	51.89%
Gender roles: undeclared	11.23%
Perceived normativity of paternal surname:	
All	21.72%
Many	40.83%
About half	18.94%
Few/none	11.73%
Don't know	6.78%
N	2993

Tab. 2. *Text of the experiment on the choice between double, paternal, or maternal surname*

		For all respondents: We now ask you to put yourself in the following situation and express your opinion.	*N*
Surname length	Short	**[Scenario A]** Mr. Costa and Ms. Mori are expecting a child and must decide which surname to give the baby. They are considering the following two options: – *Costa Mori* (i.e., the double surname) – *Costa* (i.e., the paternal surname)	746
		[Scenario B] Mr. Costa and Ms. Mori are expecting a child and must decide which surname to give the baby. They are considering the following two options: – *Costa Mori* (i.e., the double surname) – *Mori* (i.e., the maternal surname)	752
	Long	**[Scenario C]** Mr. Antonelli and Ms. Simoncelli are expecting a child and must decide which surname to give the baby. They are considering the following two options: – *Antonelli Simoncelli* (i.e., the double surname) – *Antonelli* (i.e., the paternal surname)	760
		[Scenario D] Mr. Antonelli and Ms. Simoncelli are expecting a child and must decide which surname to give the baby. They are considering the following two options: – *Antonelli Simoncelli* (i.e., the double surname) – *Simoncelli* (i.e., the maternal surname)	747

		For all respondents: If you were in this situation, which option would you prefer?	

The underlying logic is that the probability of choosing the double surname increases depending on: a) the nature of the alternative, and b) the length of the surname. We expect a higher likelihood of choosing the double surname when it is short and, especially, when the alternative is the maternal surname, as this option is perceived as even more counter-normative than the double surname itself. Including the maternal surname as the sole alternative is useful because it allows us to test one potential mechanism driving surname choices: if people avoid the double surname purely for practical reasons (e.g., too long, administratively complex), then they should opt for the maternal surname, especially when the double surname is long. If, however, they still prefer the double surname even in such cases, this would suggest that maintaining the paternal surname in the child's lineage holds greater salience than considerations of practicality—pointing to a latent adherence to traditional and patriarchal values. Analytically, the experiment results are analyzed using contingency tables, including Chi-square tests and Cramér's V coefficients.

The birth record data from the City of Turin refer to registrations made between January 2022 and December 2024 and were obtained through an agreement between the municipality and the Department of Culture, Politics, and Society at the University of Turin. The dataset contains 16,479 anonymized individual records. Records up to May 2022 (before the ruling) include only the type of surname assigned (paternal, paternal and maternal, maternal only, other) and the newborn's sex. These data are used solely for comparison with post-ruling data. Records from June 2022 onward also include the nationality (Italian or foreign) and marital status of both parents, the date and location of registration (hospital or civil registry), and the postal code of the newborn's residence. This last piece of information is crucial because it allows for the identification of the family's neighborhood and the linking of contextual-level variables[9].

In particular, we were able to merge in neighborhood-level data on: the percentage of residents with a university degree (source: 2021 Census; mean = 22.46%, SD = 10.29); the average declared income in 2022 (source: Ministry of Finance; mean = €29,976, SD = €12,028); and vote shares received by different political parties in the 2022 general election (source: Pinto 2023). From these electoral data, we focused specifically on the percentage of votes for right-wing parties (Lega + Fratelli d'Italia; mean = 26.71%, SD = 5.50). Although these are technically contextual variables—and we are aware of the risks of ecological fallacy—we interpret them in the analyses that follow as if they reflected individual-level characteristics. The rationale is that if parents reside in a neighborhood with a high percentage of university graduates, they themselves are more likely to hold a degree.

Tab 3. *Distribution of variables in the analysis of birth records*

	N	%	% valid
Type of surname			

[9] In the city of Turin, there are 33 different postal codes (CAP) that roughly correspond to the city's historical neighbourhoods. Some of the information linked to each neighbourhood comes from sources with a lower level of aggregation (electoral precincts and census tracts). The matching was carried out through spatial interpolation using a procedure kindly provided by Gabriele Pinto (see Pinto 2023).

	Paternal	11714	84.54	84.54
	Double	1656	11.95	11.95
	Maternal	340	2.45	2.45
	Other	146	1.05	1.05
Sex of the newborn				
	Male	7008	50.58	50.58
	Female	6848	49.42	49.42
Citizenship of newborn				
	Foreign	3704	26.73	26.73
	Italian	10152	73.27	73.27
Parents' marital status*				
	Married	5262	37.98	50.29
	Unmarried	3460	24.97	33.07
	Other	1742	12.57	16.65
	Missing	3392	24.48	
Citizenship of parents**				
	Both Italian	6536	47.17	61.38
	Both foreign	2801	20.22	26.31
	Italian mother, foreign father	568	4.1	5.33
	Italian father, foreign mother	743	5.36	6.98
	Missing	3208	23.15	
Postal code of residence				
	Indicated	12870	92.88	92.88
	Missing	986	7.12	7.12
Record registration				
	Registry office	5041	36.38	36.41
	Hospital	8804	63.54	63.59
	Missing	11	0.08	

Note: Statistics refer to birth records registered between June 2022 and December 2024 (N = 13,856).
*: Variable created by combining the parents' marital status; the 'Other' category includes unknown status for one or both parents, as well as other combinations
**: Variable created by combining the parents' citizenship

5. *Results*

The data in Table 1 show that, on average, the sample expresses a generally favourable attitude toward the double surname (mean propensity = 5.95, with 41% of respondents scoring between 8 and 10), though with significant heterogeneity (std. dev. = 3.45).[10] Anticipating a potential gap between stated intentions and actual behaviour, we asked respondents to indicate possible reasons for *not* giving a child a double surname (Table 4). The most commonly cited reasons were practical: "It creates confusion about which surname the children will pass on in turn" (18.8%) and "It may

[10] This result confirms the findings of a previous survey carried out by the authors. Results published here: https://lavoce.info/archives/100031/nel-nome-del-padre-parita-di-genere-e-doppio-cognome/

lead to bureaucratic complications" (17.7%). Normative reasons ("According to tradition, children should only have their father's surname"; "Children have always been given only the father's surname") were mentioned less frequently (12.7% and 11.6%, respectively). Aesthetic reasons (length, poor euphony, or perceived pretentiousness) and relational concerns ("It generates arguments or disagreements about which surname to place first"; "It creates a disparity with older siblings who only have the father's surname") followed. In total, practical reasons—including those who believe that the double surname has only symbolic value and little practical use—were cited as the most important by nearly half of the sample (47.2%). Normative or traditional reasons gathered about a quarter of the responses (24.3%). Interestingly, while support for practical reasons does not vary significantly by socio-demographic characteristics, support for normative reasons is more prevalent among people with lower education levels, politically right-leaning respondents, those with traditional or mixed views on gender roles, and those with a lower propensity toward the double surname.

Tab. 4. *Reasons for not giving children a double surname*

Reasons	Most important (%)	Most or second most important (%)
Creates confusion about which surname the children will pass on in turn	18.81	35.63
May lead to bureaucratic complications	17.72	34.5
Children have always been given only the father's surname	12.75	24.34
According to tradition, children should only have their father's surname	11.56	20.35
It is too long or sounds awkward	11.46	21.38
It is a purely symbolic gesture with little practical value	10.69	20.35
It generates arguments or disagreements about which surname to place first	6.96	18.88
It creates a disparity with older siblings who only have the father's surname	6.19	14.69
Sounds aristocratic and pretentious	3.86	9.46

Regarding the association between socio-demographic, socio-cultural characteristics and preferences for the double surname, the regression models in Table 5 show, first of all, that identifying as female is associated with a stronger preference for the double surname, confirming our initial hypothesis. The difference is not trivial—about a third of a standard deviation of the dependent variable—and the association remains consistent across all subsequent models.

Higher education (particularly a university degree) is positively associated with a preference for the double surname, again confirming expectations and previous research. However, it is interesting to note that this association is virtually absent among men and is almost entirely driven by women.

Preference for the double surname is significantly lower among respondents who identify as centrist, right-wing, or who do not disclose their political orientation, compared to those who identify as left-wing. Once again, this association is not uniform across genders. Among men, the relationship is stronger and tends to be linear (the further right they lean, the less favourable they are). Among women, however, there is no difference between those identifying as left- or right-wing; only those identifying as centrist or not declaring a political orientation are less favourable compared to both left- and right-leaning women.

Contrary to expectations, neither religiosity nor attitudes toward gender roles showed a significant influence. In line with our hypothesis, however, the data confirm that the more the paternal surname is perceived as the social norm, the less likely individuals are to support the double surname. Here, too, a significant interaction with gender emerges: this association is largely driven by men and is weaker among women. This means that women, given their personal interest in passing on their surname, feel less influenced by the social norm.

Tab. 5. *Propensity toward the double surname: multiple linear regression models*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 4		Model 8	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Gender (ref: man)								
Woman	1.14	0.000	0.75	0.000	0.93	0.000	1.07	0.000
Education (ref: low)								
Medium	0.24	0.105	-0.01	0.944	0.17	0.258	0.02	0.912
High	0.77	0.000	0.32	0.212	0.66	0.000	0.46	0.015
Woman × Medium ed.			0.48	0.088				
Woman × High ed.			0.85	0.014				
Political position (ref: Left)								
Center					-0.56	0.026	-0.52	0.006
Right					-0.75	0.003	-0.25	0.175
Undeclared					-0.82	0.003	-0.47	0.011
Woman × Center					-0.14	0.711		
Woman × Right					0.73	0.043		
Woman × Undeclared					0.24	0.503		
Religiosity (ref: Practicing Catholics)								
Non-practicing Catholics							-0.26	0.133
Non religious							0.23	0.254
Other or undeclared							0.10	0.677
Gender Role Attitudes (ref: Traditional)								
Mixed							-0.23	0.302
Egalitarian							-0.06	0.800
Undeclared							-1.02	0.000
Perceived normativity of the father's surname (ref: All)								
Most							0.96	0.000
About a half							1.56	0.000
Few/none							1.05	0.000
Don't know							0.43	0.114
Costant	4.71	0.000	4.89	0.000	5.35	0.000	4.57	0.000

Adjusted R^2	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.07
N	2993	2993	2993	2993

Note: All models include controls for age group, geographical area, and municipality size (coefficients not shown). Full models available in the Appendix.

To conclude this section on survey findings, Table 6 reports the results of the experiment on surname choices for children. In general, we observe that the probability of choosing the double surname always exceeds 50%, regardless of the alternative. This supports the generally favourable stance toward the double surname already observed. Moreover, the probability of choosing the double surname is much higher when the alternative is the *maternal* surname rather than the *paternal* one (83.19% vs. 55.51%), indicating a stronger preference for preserving the father's surname over the mother's. Surname length, by contrast, does not seem to weigh heavily on the choice when the alternative is the father's surname—in these cases, the probability of choosing the double surname remains consistent (around 55–56%). When the alternative is the maternal surname, however, the probability of choosing the double surname is slightly lower if the surname is long (80.59%) rather than short (85.77%). This suggests that practical considerations, operationalized here as surname length, do play a role—but only when the alternative is the maternal surname. Furthermore, the share of the sample that opts for the counter-normative maternal surname remains low (fewer than 20% of responses), confirming the expectation that respondents prefer a long double surname rather than "losing" the paternal surname.

Tab. 6. *Results of the surname choice experiment for children*

Length of proposed double surname	Alternative to double surname	Surname chosen		
		Single	Double	
Short (1)	Paternal	43.97	56.03	100
	Maternal	14.23	85.77	100
Long (2)	Paternal	45.00	55.00	100
	Maternal	19.41	80.59	100
Total (3)	Paternal	44.49	55.51	100
	Maternal	16.81	83.19	100

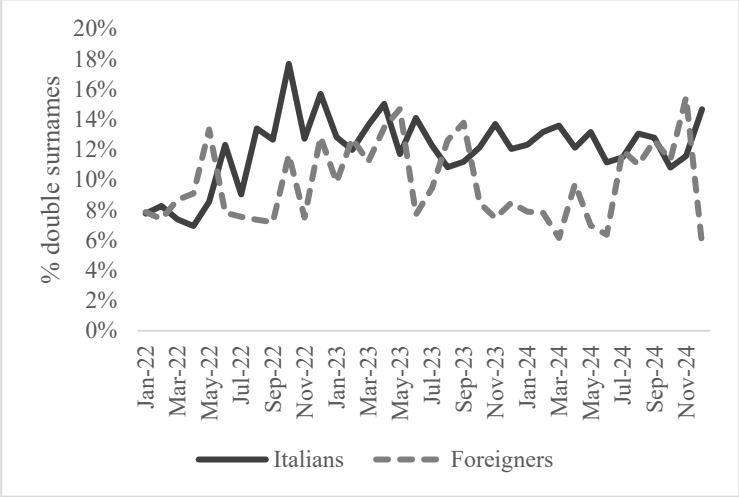
1): Pearson Chi square=160.7 p value=0.000 V di Cramer=0.33
2): Pearson Chi square=112.8 p value=0.000 V di Cramer=0.27
3): Pearson Chi square=270.6 p value=0.000 V di Cramer=0.30

Moving on to the analysis of surname choices made in Turin, Figure 1 shows that, prior to the Constitutional Court ruling, the share of Italian newborns with a double surname in the period between January and May 2022 ranged between 4% and 8%. After the ruling, the share increased significantly, peaking at 17.7% in October 2022, and then stabilizing at around 13%—a figure well above the national average (6.2%) and even higher than the average in the Centre-North (7%, cf. ISTAT 2024). Among foreign newborns, the percentage of double surnames is lower than that of

Italian newborns, with erratic variation (partly due to the smaller monthly case numbers). Clearly, then, there is a significant gap between intentions (which tend to favour the double surname) and actual behaviour. Moreover, among newborns who received a double surname, in 92% of cases the father's surname comes first.

The (unfortunately limited) individual-level information available from the birth records confirms some of the findings from the previously mentioned ISTAT report (2024). The double surname is chosen much more frequently by unmarried parents (15.3%, nearly twice as often—see Table 7). This suggests that parents less bound to traditional norms are more inclined to adopt the more gender-equal practice of using both surnames. Furthermore, when analysing surname choices by parental citizenship, we see the same pattern observed in the ISTAT report.

Figure 1. *Trend of double surnames in Turin, by newborns' citizenship*



Beyond the greater prevalence of the double surname among couples where both parents are Italian (12.8%) compared to couples where both are foreign nationals (10.4%), it is notable that in mixed couples, the double surname is far more common when the mother is Italian and the father is foreign (18.1%) than in the reverse case (9.6%). This can be explained by the fact that, if they followed the tradition of using the father's surname, the children of such couples would have a surname perceived as foreign. By adding the mother's surname, the children assume a mixed ethnic identity. This can serve both a symbolic function (honouring both national origins) and a strategic one, conferring a partially Italian identity that may aid integration or counteract discrimination.

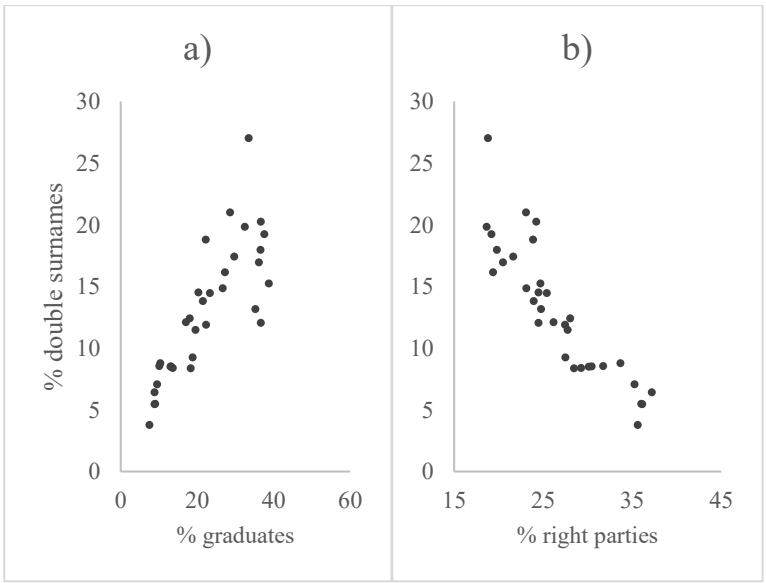
Tab. 7. *Distribution of double surnames in Turin, for 100 newborns with the same characteristics*

		% double surname
Newborn sex	Male	11.63%
	Female	12.28%
Newborn citizenship	Foreign	9.83%
	Italian	12.73%

Parents' marital status	Married	8.42%
	Unmarried	15.29%
	Other	16.70%
Parents' citizenship	Both Italian	12.76%
	Both foreign	10.39%
	Italian mother, foreign father	18.13%
	Italian father, foreign mother	9.56%
Registration location	Registry office	11.76%
	Hospital	12.06%

At the aggregate level, the prevalence of double surnames in Turin varies widely from one neighbourhood to another (ranging from 4% to 27%, data not shown), with higher rates in wealthier, higher-income neighbourhoods, often located in the city centre but not exclusively. However, the strongest and most interesting correlations are observed with the percentage of residents holding a university degree and with the percentage of votes for right-wing parties (Lega and Fratelli d'Italia) in the most recent national elections (Figure 2). Both correlations are very strong: positive in the first case (+0.82) and negative in the second (−0.90). These findings confirm the survey data: individuals with right-wing political orientations and lower education levels are significantly less likely to favour the double surname. Thus, both stated preferences and actual behaviours are associated with education and political orientation. These associations are confirmed by two multilevel logistic regression models (not shown here but available in the Appendix), which include the individual-level variables previously discussed, the average neighbourhood income, and one of the two contextual variables—education or political orientation—in each model (as both are too highly correlated to include simultaneously).

Figure 2. *Neighbourhood-level correlations (N=33) in Turin between the percentage of double surnames and (a) the percentage of university graduates, and (b) the percentage of votes for right-wing parties*



6. *Conclusions*

This study offers four main takeaways, which we summarize here along with their implications. First, the survey shows that, on average, there is a favourable (stated) attitude toward the double surname, but actual behaviours do not yet reflect this attitude. We interpret this not as a refutation of verbal intentions, but rather as a typical manifestation of the fact that social innovations require time to spread widely. A number of conditions must be met before a majority of the population adopts a new practice (Rogers 1962).

Second, the most frequently cited reasons *against* the double surname are of a practical nature, related to its everyday use and to uncertainty about how it will be passed on in the future. This confirms that there is no widespread ideological opposition to the double surname, and reinforces the urgency of a piece of implementing legislation—already urged by the Constitutional Court in the rationale for its ruling. However, whether practical reasons truly underlie these choices and preferences is debatable, as shown by the experiment involving the maternal surname (see below).

Third, the profile of those who express a preference for or actually adopt the double surname is quite telling. While the roles of education and political orientation are strongly supported—both in the survey and in the analysis of birth records—the survey also reveals that gender plays a crucial role in moderating these associations. For instance, the gap in support for the double surname between low- and high-educated individuals is much wider among women than among men. Conversely, left- and right-leaning women are equally supportive of the double surname, unlike men, among whom support drops steadily as political orientation shifts rightward. All this means that education makes women aware of a personal interest in acquiring the ability to pass on their surname, while for men, who have an interest in *maintaining* this privilege, education is not enough. A political orientation inspired by values of justice and equality is necessary to convince them.

Finally, our findings support the idea that paternal surnames are still governed by strong normative expectations, which appear to influence men more than women. However, the experiment involving the maternal surname showed that this option is widely rejected by both men and women. Taken together, these findings suggest that surnames are not just a simple convention—a rule that can be changed overnight by decree or mutual agreement, like driving on the right instead of the left. Instead, surnames carry deep symbolic and identity-related meanings (Finch 2008). The double surname, while perceived as counter-normative, is legitimized by the desire to recognize the mother's identity in the child's surname. The exclusive use of the maternal surname, by contrast, is not accepted, precisely because the surname is not merely a neutral identifier—reversing the privilege of transmission does not make it a better practice.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, while the survey was designed to ensure diversity along key sociodemographic dimensions, it is not nationally representative, and caution should be used in generalizing the findings to the broader Italian population. Second, the sample was not restricted to individuals of childbearing age, which may affect responses, as attitudes toward surname transmission could differ between those facing the decision directly and those reflecting on it more abstractly. Third, personal experiences with one's own surname—such as whether individuals would have preferred to carry the paternal, maternal, or both surnames—may also shape attitudes toward reform. This psychological and identity-based dimension was not captured in our design. Finally, due to space constraints and the absence of strong theoretical expectations, we did not include interactions between the experimental treatments and individual

characteristics (such as gender, education, or region), a research gap that could be fruitfully addressed in future studies.

In light of our findings and considering the historical trajectory of surnames in Europe, it seems unlikely that the double surname will spontaneously become widespread. Without strong institutional support, this outcome appears improbable. On the other hand, a law that established the double surname as the automatic default (along the lines of the Spanish model), unless an explicit choice is made for a single surname, would have a better chance of promoting its adoption. This would serve two functions. First, it would provide institutional backing for a currently rare behaviour, encouraging those hesitant for practical or normative reasons to make the leap. Second, the sudden increase in double surnames that would likely follow would begin to erode the perception of the paternal surname as "normal," thus making the innovation more acceptable and sparking a process of diffusion.

What questions should future research address? We believe two research goals are particularly relevant—one short-term, one long-term. In the short term, studies should explore the consequences of the double surname for children, especially in terms of how they are perceived by peers and teachers. Just as certain first names carry perceived ideological connotations, double surnames may signal progressive or political identities. If this perception persists, some parents might avoid them to prevent stigmatization or peer discrimination against their children. Over the long term, it will be important to determine whether the ability for women to transmit their surname actually contributes to greater gender equality. In other words, we must assess whether the double surname has a tangible impact in other areas of life (such as work or family life), or whether it simply reflects—and makes visible—a level of equality already achieved through other means. In the first case, the surname would become a policy tool; in the second, it would confirm its role as a "barometer of women's status in society" (Noack and Wiik 2008, 507).

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