

Social relations in the past:

Using historical data to test theories

Is Britain pulling apart?

Research seminar and workshop

Royal Statistical Society, London

Monday 13th May 2013

Richard L. Zijdeman

Utrecht University - IISH - Stirling University

richard.zijdeman@iisg.nl

Introduction

- Motivation to use historical data
- Types of sources
- Types of relations
- Example
- Take home message

Motivation

- Testing theories on their home ground
- Testing the universality of theories
- Gain insight in recurrent problems, e.g.:
 - women's work and childcare
 - elderly care

Sources

- tax registers
- parish registers
- birth, marriage and death certificates
- census records (individual level data)
- company archives (pay roll records)
- military records
- ...

Relations

- Parent-child
- Kin to non-kin
- Siblings (through linkage)
- Relationships over the life course

Example

Witness selection at marriage:

Strong and weak ties in municipality contexts

(Netherlands, 1851-1935)

Questions in this study

- **Descriptive:** what is the trend in choices of witnesses in the period 1851-1938?
- **Explanatory:** how can we explain the observed trend?

Context effects

- To explain the observed trend *in time*, we also study differences *between places*
- We improve upon earlier research by increasing regional variation (roughly 1,000 municipalities)

Theoretical approach

- Assumption: selection of witnesses depends on social network of available candidates
- Social network depends on:
 - individual characteristics
 - social context

Hypotheses: individual effects

- The higher the social status of the couple, the higher the likelihood that selected witnesses are kin
- The older the couple, the lower the likelihood that witnesses will be kin.

Hypotheses: context effects

- The more urbanized the municipality, the higher the likelihood that selected witnesses will be kin
- The more *in*-migration in the municipality, the *higher* the likelihood that selected witnesses will be kin
- The more *out*-migration in the municipality, the *smaller* the likelihood that selected witnesses will be kin

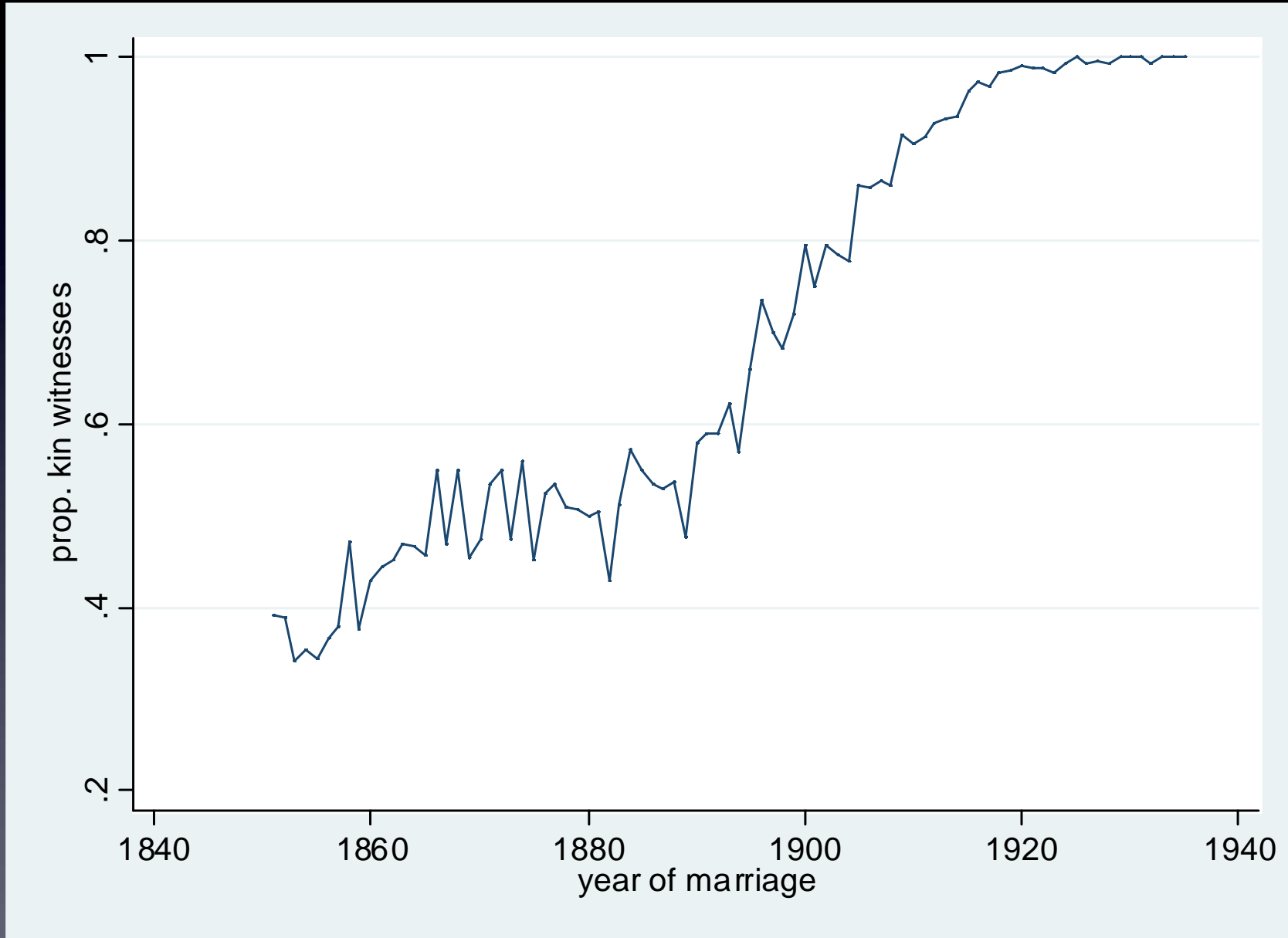
Methods

- Dependent variable: likelihood that a selected witness is kin
- Nested data: witnesses in marriages in contexts
- Method: logistic regression analysis with clustering correction (cluster = social context)

Data

- Historical Sample of the Netherlands ([HSN](#))
 - Representative sample of those born in the Netherlands (1811-1922)
 - Provides life course data
- HSN release used:
 - *Data Set Civil Certificates Release 2009.01*
 - N = 28,801 marriages

Is there a trend?



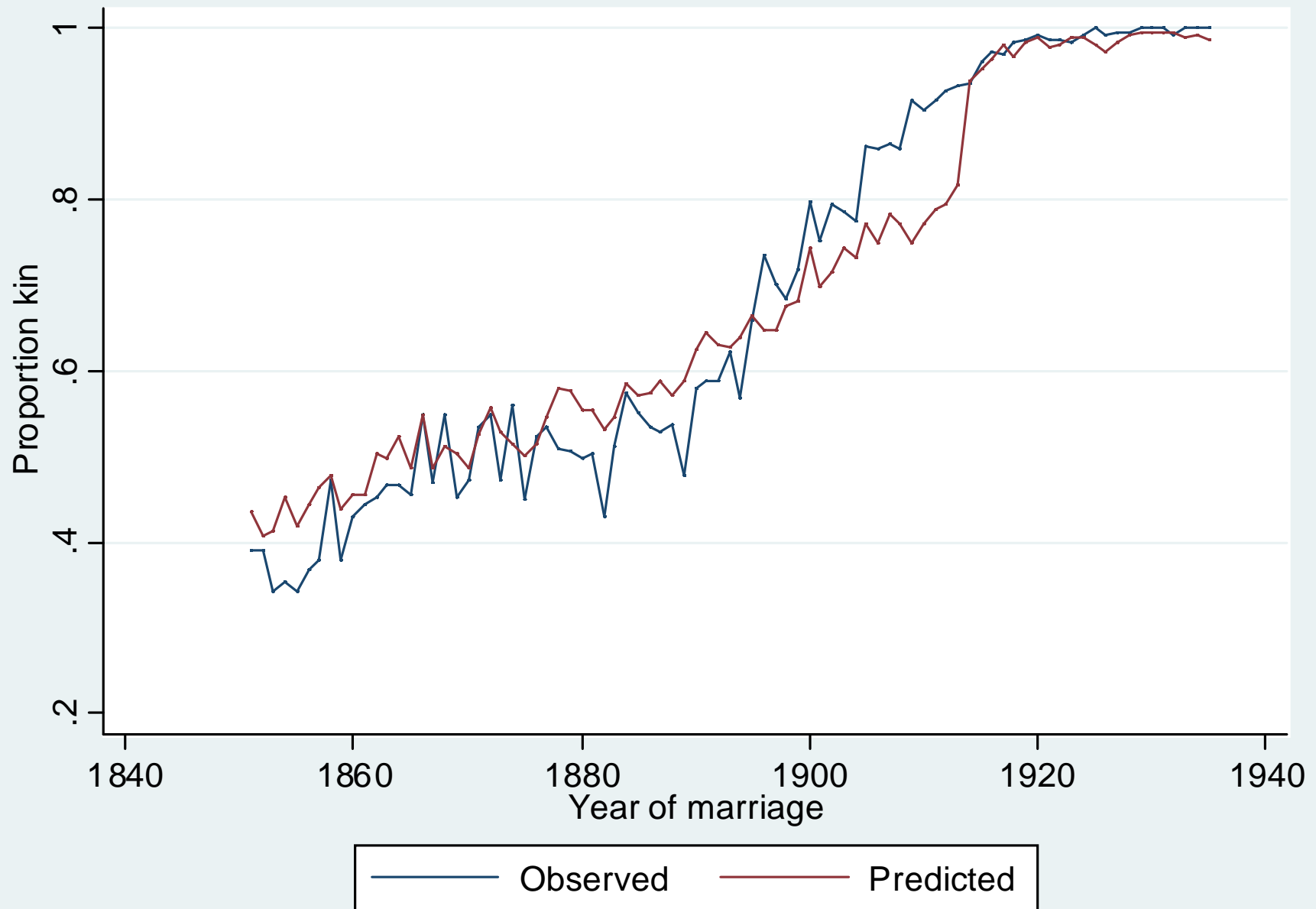
More on data

- Context information:
 - Historical Ecological Database:
 - contains characteristics of Dutch municipalities
 - urbanization, in-migration / out-migration
- Dataset:
 - Period: 1851-1935
 - N = 39,920 (witnesses)
 - Marriages: 14,025
 - Municipalities: 1,026
 - Contexts (municipality x year): 9,353

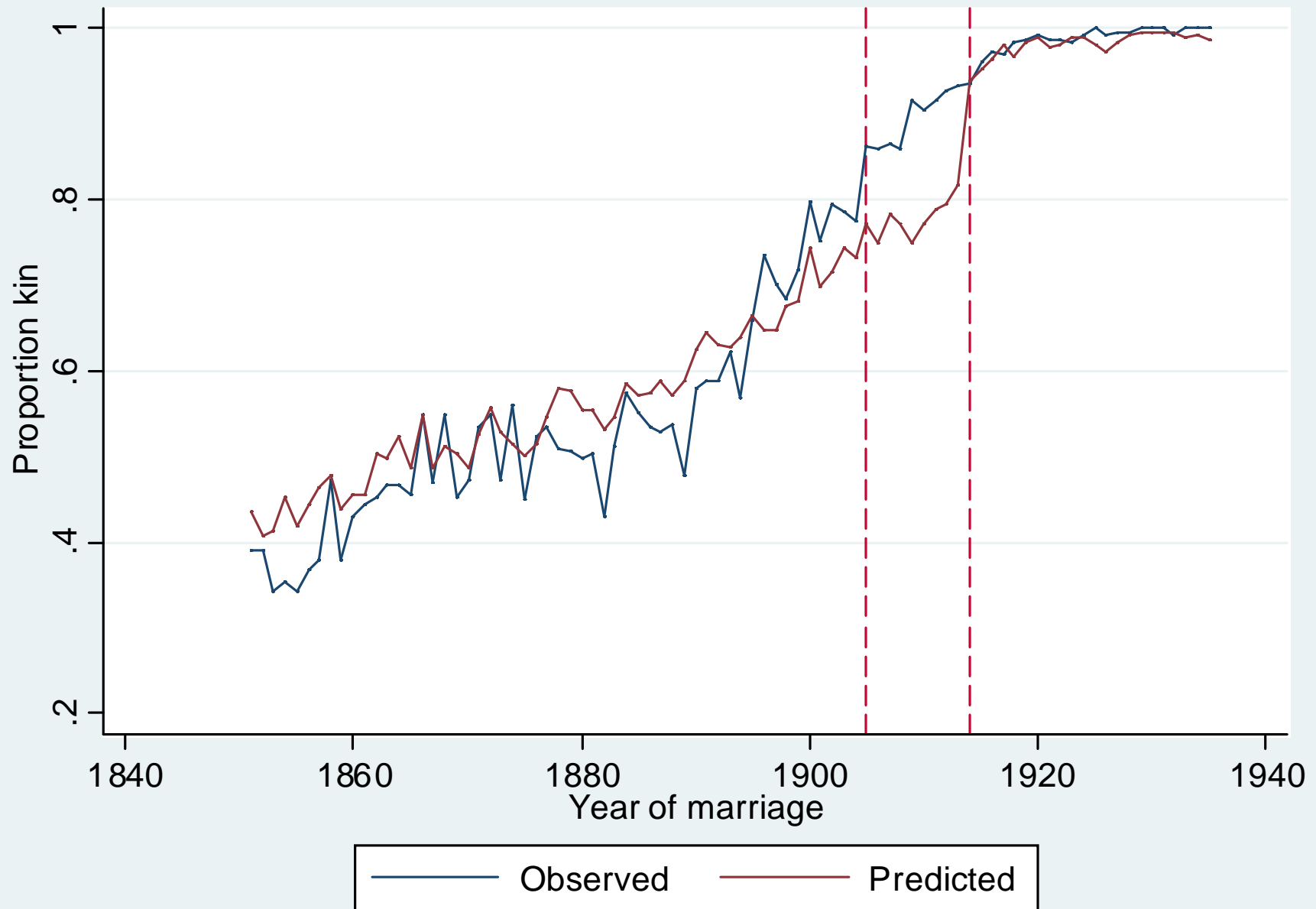
Regression results

Variable	Hypothesis	Effect
Occ status groom	+	+
Occ status bride	+	+
Literacy groom	+	+
Literacy bride	+	+
Age groom	-	-
Age bride	-	0
Father groom alive		0
Father bride alive		0
Mother bride alive		+
Mother groom alive		0
In-migration	+	+
Out-migration	-	0
Population	+	+
Number of witnesses		-
Year		+

Can we explain the trend?



Can we explain the trend?



Conclusions

- The proportion of kin related witnesses increased in the Netherlands since the 2nd half of the 19th century (especially around 1890)
- This shift from weak ties to strong ties can be explained as a:
 - confirmation of strong ties at the individual level in times of increasing uncertainty (migration, urbanization) on the contextual level, in combination with changes on the individual level

Take home message

Historical data are currently up to a level where they can contribute to contemporary debates in sociology and perhaps even will make us rethink the research questions we are posing