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Individualism and working from home

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Abstract

We show that culturally transmitted individualism is an important determinant of working from home (WFH). Using individual-level data from the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) and the European Social Survey (ESS), we compare immigrants and their descendants from different cultural backgrounds residing in the same location. A 10-point increase in country-of-origin individualism (0–100 scale) increases the likelihood of WFH by 3.9 percentage points and WFH hours by 1.12 per week in the CPS, and frequent WFH by 2 percentage points in the ESS. Individualism appears to affect WFH partly through higher educational attainment and occupational selection.

KEYWORDS
culture, epidemiological approach, individualism, working from home

JEL CLASSIFICATION
J20, J61, Z13

1 | INTRODUCTION

The rapid adoption of remote work has been one of the most significant transformations to working life in recent years. Advances in digital communication and collaboration tools have reduced the need for physical office presence, and the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a large-scale shift toward working from home (WFH). Even though some firms subsequently tightened their remote work policies,[1] WFH remains a central feature of labor markets worldwide (Aksoy et al., 2023; Özgüzel et al., 2023). In the United States, for example, the share of paid full days worked from home has been stable at approximately 30% since mid-2022 (Barrero, Bloom, Buckman, et al., 2025). In short, WFH is here to stay (Bloom et al., 2023).

The rise of remote work has important implications for productivity (e.g., Angelici & Profeta, 2024; Bloom et al., 2015; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024) and the well-being of workers (e.g., Choudhury et al., 2024; Goux & Maurin, 2024; Hill et al., 2024). Employees value the possibility of WFH at approximately 5%–25% of their wages (Aksoy et al., 2023; Cullen et al., 2025), and firms offering remote work have access to more diverse and experienced talent pools (Bloom et al., 2024; Hsu & Tambe, 2025). Given these wide-ranging impacts, it is crucial to understand what

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; GDP, gross domestic product; SD, standard deviation; WFH, working from home.

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drives WFH adoption. While industry and occupation clearly matter—caregiving and certain manufacturing jobs, for example, cannot easily be performed remotely—substantial variation in WFH exists even among employees within the same firms and occupations. This suggests that individual-level factors play an important role in WFH adoption, yet empirical evidence on these factors is very limited.

In this paper, we investigate how individualism, a key dimension of culture (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010), affects individuals' propensity to work from home.[2] Individualism captures the extent to which people prioritize personal freedom, autonomy, and independence over collective interests, and people from individualistic cultures prefer jobs that leave sufficient time for personal and family life. WFH aligns closely with these preferences: it offers reduced direct supervision, thereby increasing autonomy in decision-making, and allows workers more control over their schedules, including reductions in commuting time. Our focus on individualism is further motivated by recent evidence from Zarate et al. (2024), who document a strong correlation between individualism and the extent of WFH at the country level.

The main empirical challenge in analyzing how individualism affects WFH is disentangling the effect from the influences of other, correlated institutional and economic factors. We address this challenge by using the epidemiological approach (e.g., Fernández, 2011; Fernández & Fogli, 2009). This method builds on the idea that individuals who migrate from one country to another leave behind their original institutional and economic contexts but largely retain their native culture, which they also transmit to their children. Therefore, we can isolate the influence of individualism by comparing the extent of WFH among immigrants and their descendants from different cultural backgrounds residing in the same location (and thus facing the same institutional and economic environment).

We implement the epidemiological approach using individual-level data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the United States, collected between October 2022 and February 2024, and the European Social Survey (ESS), collected between September 2020 and August 2022. Both datasets provide detailed information on the extent to which respondents work from home, as well as on their own and their parents' country of birth. To measure individualism, we rely on the widely-used index developed by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010), which ranges from 0 to 100. We restrict our samples to first- and second-generation immigrants and attribute to each respondent the level of individualism in their (parents') country of origin. We regress WFH on individualism and control for state-of-residence (CPS) or country-of-residence (ESS) fixed effects, which ensure that we compare individuals with different levels of country-of-origin individualism but facing the same local economic and institutional conditions.

The results suggest that culturally transmitted individualism significantly increases the likelihood and extent of WFH. Specifically, we find that a 10-point increase in country-of-origin individualism is associated with a 3.9 percentage point (pp) higher likelihood of having worked from home in the past week, and an increase of 1.12 WFH hours, in the CPS. Similarly, a 10-point increase in individualism is associated with a 2 pp increase in the likelihood of WFH several times a week or every day in the ESS. These estimates are economically meaningful: for example, our CPS estimates suggests that if immigrants from Spain, a country with moderate individualism, were as individualistic as people from the United States, they would be 13.2 pp more likely to work from home.

We corroborate our main results through a wide range of sensitivity and robustness checks. First, we present evidence that our findings are unlikely to be driven by unobserved individual heterogeneity, such as selective migration or differences in the timing of migration. Among other things, we demonstrate that our estimates remain robust when controlling for the decade of immigration, when including occupation fixed effects,[3] and when restricting the sample solely to second-generation immigrants. Second, we show that the estimates are robust to including controls for other country-of-origin characteristics, such as gross domestic product (GDP) and additional cultural traits. Third, we confirm that our main findings hold when using several alternative measures of individualism. Finally, we address remaining concerns about endogeneity using an instrumental variable (IV) strategy that exploits genetic differences across populations, following Gorodnichenko and Roland (2017) and Hartinger et al. (2024). The IV estimates are highly similar to our main results.

We also explore potential mechanisms through which individualism might affect WFH. While part of the relationship is likely direct—individualism, by definition, captures job preferences closely aligned with remote work—educational attainment and occupational choice are potential indirect channels. In line with this, we first show that higher country-of-origin individualism significantly predicts a greater likelihood of holding a college degree. Since highly educated workers are more likely to work from home (e.g., Barrero et al., 2023), education may partially mediate the effect of individualism. Similarly, immigrants from individualistic cultures are more likely to work in occupations classified as “teleworkable” by Dingel and Neiman (2020). However, we find no evidence that individualism increases the likelihood of self-employment, although self-employed workers generally have higher rates of WFH (Barrero

et al., 2023). Taken together, these results suggest that individualism shapes WFH partly through its influence on human capital accumulation and occupational sorting.

Our paper relates to two growing strands of research. First, it contributes to the literature on WFH. While a number of studies document the incidence of WFH and its implications (e.g., Adams-Prassl et al., 2022; Bick et al., 2023; Bloom et al., 2024; Gibbs et al., 2024; Kossek et al., 2021; Matheson et al., 2024), little is known about the determinants of WFH in the post-pandemic era. An exception is Gill and Nordström Skans (2024), who examine managerial characteristics and find that managerial trust at the country, region, and region-by-industry levels is associated with both the extent and intensity of individual workers' WFH. We take a complementary approach by focusing on a worker-level characteristic—individualism—as a key determinant.[4] In another recent contribution, Zarate et al. (2024) use data from 34 countries to explore factors underlying the large international variation in WFH. Their country-level regressions reveal that while other factors, such as industry mix, contribute to WFH levels, cultural individualism emerges as the primary explanatory factor. However, this cross-country correlation comes with the caveat that individualism likely correlates with omitted country characteristics influencing the prevalence of WFH.[5] We address this issue using the epidemiological approach, which allows us to separate individualism from correlated economic and institutional factors.

Second, our findings contribute to the literature on how cultural traits shape economic outcomes. Cultural traits have been shown to predict labor market participation (Fernández & Fogli, 2009), educational attainment (Figlio et al., 2019; Hanushek et al., 2022), fertility (Fernández & Fogli, 2006), and financial market participation (Ek et al., 2023), among other outcomes. Individualism, in particular, predicts innovation and economic growth (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2011, 2017), as well as skill formation and wages (Hartinger et al., 2024). We extend this literature by demonstrating that individualism also explains variation in one of the most significant changes to working life in recent years: the rise of remote work.

2 | EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

The main empirical challenge in analyzing how individualism affects WFH is disentangling the effect from the influences of other, correlated institutional and economic factors. We address this challenge using the epidemiological approach (Fernández, 2011; Fernández & Fogli, 2009). This method builds on the idea that individuals who migrate from one country to another leave behind their original institutional and economic contexts but largely retain their native culture. Therefore, we can isolate the influence of culture by comparing the extent of WFH among immigrants from different cultural backgrounds residing in the same location (and thus facing the same institutional and economic environment). Since culture is transmitted from parents to their children (Bau & Fernández, 2023; Bisin & Verdier, 2001), any potential effect of individualism on WFH should also be evident among second-generation immigrants.

We implement the epidemiological approach by focusing on samples of first- and second-generation immigrants and estimating regressions of the following form:

$$WFH_{iost} = \beta Individualism_o + \mathbf{X}_{iost}'\gamma + \theta_s + \omega_t + \varepsilon_{iost}. \quad (1)$$

where WFH_{iost} is a measure of the extent that individual i from country of origin o residing in location s works from home at time t. $Individualism_o$ is the degree of individualism in the country of origin of the individual (for first-generation immigrants) or their parents (for second-generation immigrants). $\mathbf{X}_{iost}$ is a vector of individual-level controls, θ_s is a set of location-of-residence dummies, and ω_t is a set of month-by-year dummies.[6] We estimate regressions by ordinary least squares and cluster standard errors at the country-of-origin level.

The regression in Equation (1) disentangles the influence of individualism from that of correlated institutional and economic factors by comparing migrants from countries with different levels of individualism. By including location-of-residence dummies, it controls for all common determinants of WFH in the current place of residence. The regression also avoids the issue of reverse causality, as individual outcomes in the country of residence cannot plausibly affect the culture in the country of origin, especially if culture is measured beforehand. Finally, our regressions estimate reduced form associations between individualism and WFH. While we aim to identify individual preferences for WFH, the estimates may also capture preferences for occupations that systematically differ in their teleworkability. In a robustness analysis, we therefore add occupation fixed effects and show that our results hold when other occupational characteristics are held constant.

Despite these advantages, two broad identification challenges remain. First, there is the question of whether the regression in Equation (1) indeed focuses on individuals who are comparable aside from their culture. This might not be the case if, for example, migrants from high- and low-individualism countries are differentially selected from the population in their country of origin, and if this selection is related to WFH. Second, individualism could be confounded by other correlated country-of-origin characteristics, such as other cultural traits. In Section 4, we address these challenges by presenting estimates from a large number of alternative regressions that demonstrate that our results are unlikely to be driven by these issues.

3 | DATA AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

3.1 | Individual-level data from the CPS and ESS

We use individual-level data from two large-scale surveys: the CPS of the United States (Flood et al., 2023) and the ESS (ESS ERIC, 2023a, 2023b). The CPS has collected information on WFH in its basic monthly surveys since October 2022, and we utilize data from all available rounds up to February 2024. The ESS asked respondents about WFH in its 10th round of data collection, which took place in 31 European countries between September 2020 and August 2022. We use the latest available public use files for this 10th round. Importantly for our empirical approach, both the CPS and the ESS include detailed information on respondents' and their parents' country of birth.

Our main outcome variables measure the extent of WFH. In the CPS, respondents who were employed and working during the previous week were asked whether they teleworked or worked from home for pay at any time during that week. If they responded affirmatively, they were also asked how many hours they teleworked or worked from home. From these responses, we construct two variables: a dummy variable indicating any WFH and the number of WFH hours, which we code as zero for respondents who did not engage in WFH. In the ESS, respondents who were in any paid work at the time of the survey were asked how often they worked from home or another place of their choice during their regular working hours. Answers were recorded on a six-point scale: every day, several times a week, several times a month, once a month, less often, and never. Based on the answers, we construct two variables: a dummy variable indicating any WFH and a dummy variable for WFH at least several times a week.[7]

To examine potential mechanisms behind our main results, we construct three additional outcome variables. First, we create a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent holds a college degree. Second, we construct a dummy variable for whether the respondent is self-employed. Third, using the classification of occupations by Dingel and Neiman (2020), we define a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent's occupation is teleworkable. An occupation is considered teleworkable if it can be performed entirely from home, taking into account factors like social interactions and physical work conditions (see Supporting Information S4: Appendix A for details). Finally, we also extract the following demographic characteristics from the data: age, gender, and race (the latter available only in the CPS).

3.2 | Country-level data on culture

Our main independent variable is the index of individualism developed by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). This index is based on international surveys of IBM employees conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as later replications and extensions. It is constructed from a factor analysis of questions related to respondents' job preferences. The index loads positively on being free to choose one's own approach to the job and having a job that leaves enough time for personal and family life. Conversely, it loads negatively on having a good physical work environment and having training opportunities. The index ranges from 0 to 100 and measures the average level of individualism in a country. We use the latest available version of the data, which include individualism scores for 70 countries.[8]

In additional analysis, we use supplementary country-level data to test the robustness of our results. First, we use three alternative measures of individualism: measures of affective and intellectual autonomy from Schwartz (1994) and a measure constructed from the integrated World Values Survey following Kramer (2023). Second, we examine whether our results hold when we add controls for other cultural dimensions and preferences that could be related to WFH. These include Hofstede's masculinity index and uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede, 2001), as well as measures of

prosociality and risk preference from the Global Preferences Survey (Falk et al., 2018). Third, we assess the sensitivity of our estimates to controlling for country-of-origin GDP and country-of-residence pandemic policies in place at the time of the interview (Hale et al., 2020). We also control for geographic and linguistic distance between sending and receiving countries as well as for migrant selectivity in terms of educational attainment. Supporting Information S4: Appendix A presents details on all country-level measures.

3.3 | Construction of the samples

Motivated by our empirical approach, we restrict our analysis to first- and second-generation immigrants in the CPS and ESS. We define first-generation immigrants as individuals born in a country other than their current country of residence, and second-generation immigrants as individuals who were born in their current country of residence but have at least one parent born in a different country. We merge individualism scores and other country-level variables to these individuals using information on the country of birth. For first-generation immigrants, we use the individualism score of their own country of birth. For second-generation immigrants, we use the individualism score of the country of birth of their foreign-born parent. If both parents are foreign-born, we use the average individualism score of the countries of birth.

We impose two further restrictions on our samples. First, we drop individuals for whom individualism scores are unavailable for their country of birth.[9] Second, we drop individuals for whom we do not have information on WFH, typically because they are not working in the reference period.[10] Our final CPS sample contains 155,006 individuals from 63 different countries of origin, of whom 98,288 are first-generation immigrants and 56,718 are second-generation immigrants. Our final ESS sample contains 3337 individuals from 65 different countries of origin, of whom 1731 are first-generation immigrants and 1606 are second-generation immigrants. Supporting Information S4: Table A2 shows the number of individuals by country of origin included in each of the samples.[11]

3.4 | Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents summary statistics for our samples. In the CPS, 20% of respondents reported engaging in any WFH during the last week, with an average of 5.82 WFH hours across all respondents. In the ESS, 48% of respondents engaged in WFH, with 28% indicating that they worked from home several times a week or every day. These higher figures in the ESS compared to the CPS may be due to the ESS question not referring to a specific time frame, unlike the CPS, which refers to the last workweek. Additionally, the ESS data collection partly overlapped with WFH mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially contributing to the higher WFH rates. Panel a of Figure 1 shows the full distribution of frequency of WFH in both the CPS and the ESS sample. Regarding individualism, CPS respondents come from countries with an average individualism score of 35, whereas ESS respondents have an average individualism score of 51. Panel b of Figure 1 illustrates the full distributions of individualism scores, showing a similar range in both samples, from approximately 10–90.[12]

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Country-level evidence

Before turning to our main results, we provide motivating correlational evidence of the relationship between individualism and WFH at the country level. Figure 2 displays a scatter plot of the share of individuals who work from home several times a week or every day against the individualism score for 27 countries in the ESS with available data.[13] The figure reveals a positive relationship: a 10-point higher individualism score is associated with a 3 pp higher share of individuals who frequently work from home. The *R*-squared indicates that individualism explains 33% of the variation in country-level WFH; this finding is very similar to Zarate et al. (2024), who document that individualism explains 30% of the variation in WFH in their larger sample of 34 countries from around the globe. While this evidence is intriguing, the relationship could be confounded by institutional and economic factors correlated with WFH. Therefore, in the remainder of this section, we present estimates based on the epidemiological approach, which addresses this issue.

TABLE 1 Summary statistics.

	CPS		ESS	
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Socio-demographic characteristics				
Female	0.45	0.50	0.51	0.50
Age	40.32	12.45	42.60	12.20
College degree	0.41	0.49	0.43	0.50
Race[a]				
White	0.66	0.47		
Black	0.04	0.19		
Asian	0.26	0.44		
Other	0.04	0.20		
Individualism				
Individualism	35.02	19.48	51.04	20.22
Working from home and occupation				
Any WFH[b]	0.20	0.40	0.48	0.50
WFH hours	5.82	13.22		
WFH sev. times a week			0.28	0.45
Occupation teleworkable	0.40	0.49	0.48	0.50
Self-employed	0.10	0.30	0.11	0.31
Sample information				
No. of individuals	155,006		3337	
No. of first-gen. immigrants	98,288		1731	
No. of second-gen. immigrants	56,718		1606	
No. of countries of origin	63		65	

Note: The table shows means and standard deviations of key variables in the CPS and ESS samples.

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

[a]Information on race is not available in the ESS.

[b]The reference period underlying this dummy variable differs between the CPS and the ESS, with the CPS referring to the last workweek and the ESS not referring to a specific time frame.

4.2 | Main results

Table 2 shows our main results and suggests that culturally transmitted individualism substantially increases the likelihood and extent of WFH. Column 1 indicates that a 10-point increase in country-of-origin individualism is associated with a 3.9 pp increase in the likelihood of having worked from home in the past week in the CPS. Column 2 shows that, correspondingly, WFH hours rise by 1.12 h. Similarly, columns 3 and 4 indicate that a 10-point increase in individualism is associated with a 3 pp higher likelihood of WFH, and a 2 pp increase in doing so at least several times a week, in the ESS.[14] These estimates are economically meaningful: for example, the coefficient in column 1 suggests that if immigrants from Spain, a country with moderate individualism (score of 51), were as individualistic as people from the United States (score of 91), they would be 13.2 pp more likely to do any WFH, which corresponds to 66% of the sample mean.

Taking advantage of the individual-level and international nature of our data, we examine heterogeneity in the relationship between individualism and WFH. Figure 3 shows that the associations are somewhat larger for men than for women and for middle-aged workers than for young and old workers. Furthermore, the associations materialize both for recent immigrants and for those who arrived in their current country of residence several decades ago. Finally,

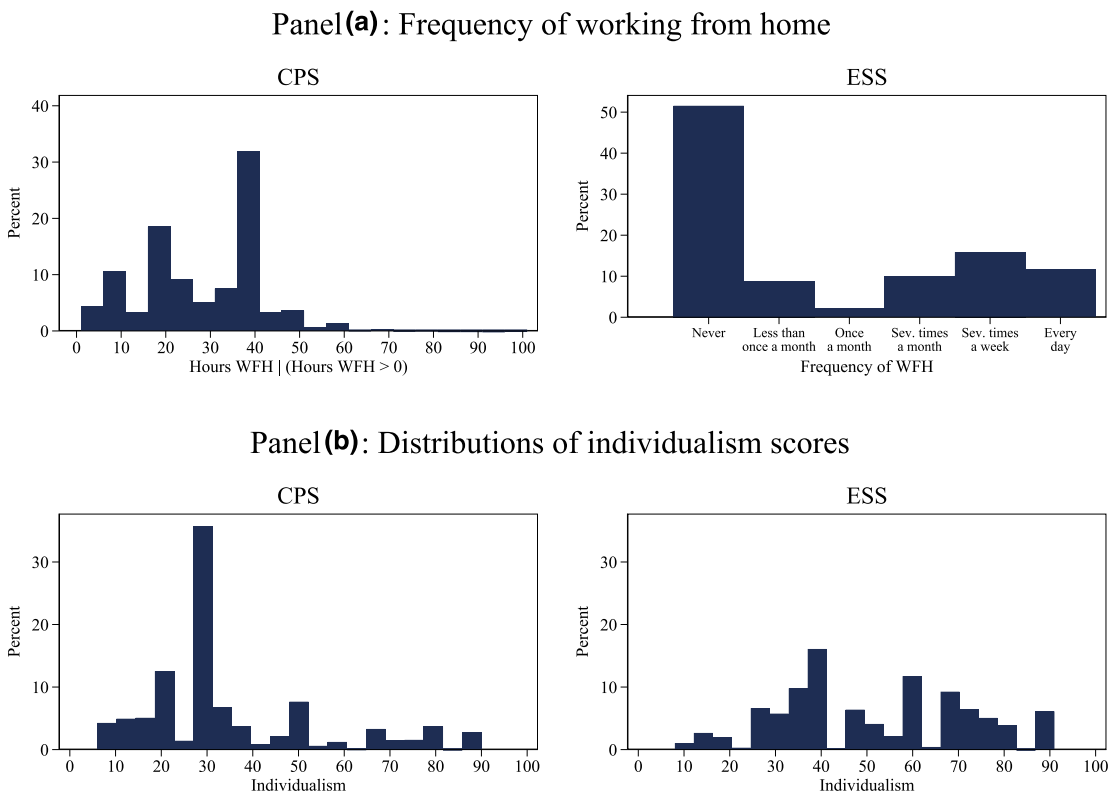

FIGURE 1 Frequency of working from home and distribution of individualism. Panel (a) of the figure shows the distribution of hours worked from home, given that the respondent reported any WFH, in the CPS and the distribution of frequency of WFH in the ESS. Panel (b) of the figure shows the distributions of individualism scores in the CPS and ESS. CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

Supporting Information S4: Figure B2 reveals that the relationship does not differ by the level of individualism in the current country of residence. Overall, the picture is therefore one of remarkable consistency, with higher individualism associated with more WFH among all of the subgroups of individuals we consider.

4.3 | Robustness: Unobserved individual heterogeneity

Table 3 present results from robustness tests which address the concern that our main estimates may be biased because of unobserved individual heterogeneity. A first set of estimates tackles the issue that our results might reflect selective migration patterns. Note that migrant selectivity that is the same across countries of origin for a given country of residence is not problematic; rather, the threat is that selectivity is related to individualism. In Panel A, we address this threat by adding continent-of-origin fixed effects to our regressions, ensuring that we only compare individuals stemming from the same continent. Panel B instead recognizes that immigration often occurs in waves and introduces decade-of-immigration-by-state (CPS) and decade-of-immigration-by-country (ESS) fixed effects. This modification accounts for potential unobserved differences between immigrant waves, such as varying economic conditions or immigration policies at the time of arrival. In Panel C, we control for the geographical distance between the country of residence and the country of origin. This extension tackles the issue that migrants from more distant countries tend to be more positively selected than those from closer countries (Hanushek et al., 2017). Across Panels A–C, our estimates are robust to these modifications.

Panel D of Table 3 presents results from specifications which add occupation fixed effects as controls. Occupational choice is of course endogenous—indeed, we show further below that workers from more individualistic countries are more likely to work in teleworkable occupations—making this a "bad control," and we emphasize that these results need to be interpreted with caution. However, by focusing on individuals working in the same occupation, we arguably control for many of the remaining sources of unobserved individual heterogeneity that the robustness checks in Panels

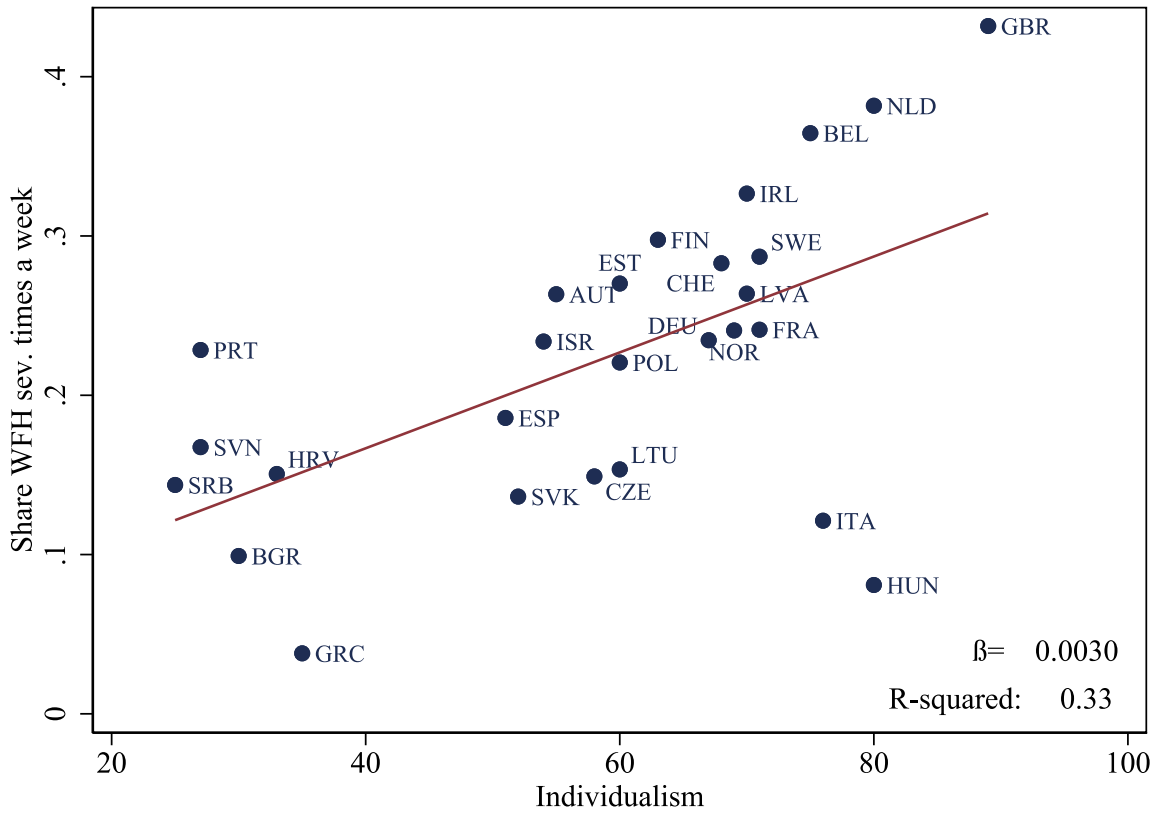

FIGURE 2 Country-level correlation between individualism and WFH. The figure shows the relationship between WFH and individualism at the country level for 27 countries of residence in the ESS. For this figure, we computed the share of all individuals, including non-immigrants, who reported working from home at least several times a week. The reported beta coefficient of 0.0030 comes from a country-level regression of this WFH measure on individualism. ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

TABLE 2 Individualism and WFH, main estimates.

	CPS		ESS	
	Any WFH (1)	WFH hours (2)	Any WFH (3)	WFH sev. times a week (4)
Individualism	0.0039***	0.1116***	0.0030***	0.0020***
	(0.0005)	(0.0155)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)
Observations	155,006	155,006	3337	3337

Note: The table shows estimates of regressions of WFH, measured using the variables indicated in the column headers, on individualism. All regressions control for month-by-year dummies, state-of-residence (CPS) or country-of-residence (ESS) dummies, and the individual characteristics age, gender and race (CPS) as shown in Table 1. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by country of origin (63 clusters in the CPS and 65 clusters in the ESS).

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

A–C cannot account for. The fact that individualism continues to predict WFH in these specifications (although coefficients are smaller, likely due to the fact that we rule out occupational sorting) is therefore reassuring.

In Supporting Information S4: Appendix B, we present results from some further robustness checks aimed at addressing potential bias due to selective migration. In Supporting Information S4: Table B2, we show that our findings are unaffected when we control for linguistic distance, which is a proxy for migration costs. We also show that estimates are robust to controlling for migrant selectivity in terms of educational attainment, as measured by comparing the average attainment of migrants to the average attainment of the population in their countries of origin (see Supporting Information S4: Appendix A for details on this measure). Finally, following Hartinger et al. (2024), we investigate whether migrants on average are more individualistic than non-migrants by generating two person-level individualism measures using the ESS data (see Supporting Information S4: Appendix A for details). We first establish that these

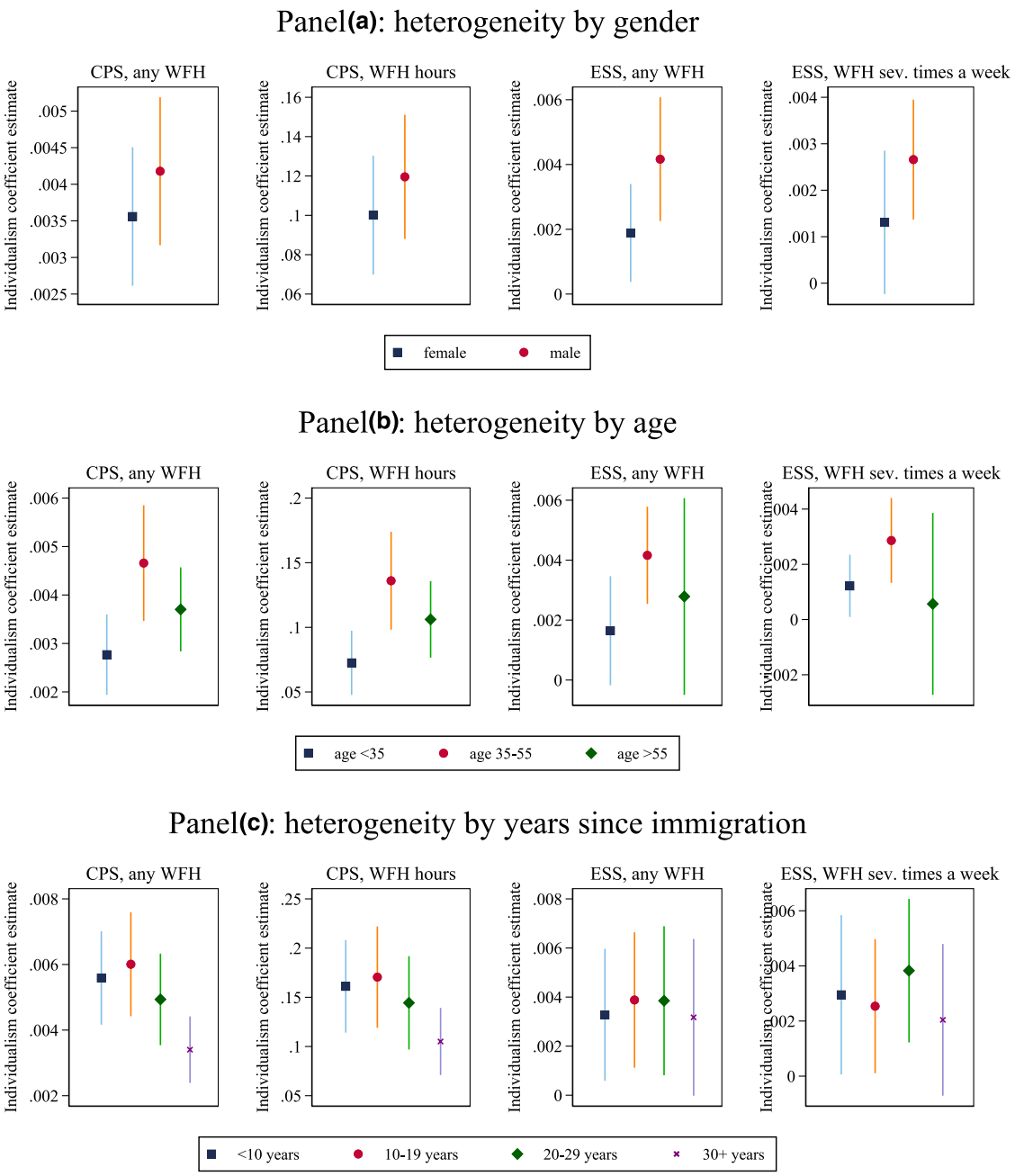

FIGURE 3 Individualism and WFH, heterogeneity by individual characteristics. The figure shows point estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals from regressions of WFH on individualism separately by gender (Panel a), age group (Panel b), and years since immigration (Panel c). Regressions are based on the specifications in Table 2. The same estimates are displayed in table format in Supporting Information S4: Table B1, which also includes information on sample sizes. WFH, working from home.

person-level measures are highly correlated with the country-level individualism scores from Schwartz (1994), on which they are based (Supporting Information S4: Figure B3). We then show that the distributions of individualism of natives and emigrants from the same country of origin are largely overlapping, suggesting that there is no selective migration by individualism (Supporting Information S4: Figure B4). Taken together, our results suggest that selective migration is unlikely to bias our results much.

As a final exercise to address unobserved individual heterogeneity, Panel E of Table 3 shows results for the subsample of second-generation immigrants, who were born in the current country of residence. This has the advantage that we can fully disentangle individualism from economic and institutional experiences in the country of origin. However, because culture is only partly formed through intergenerational transmission, these individuals likely have assumed more of the local culture, reducing the influence of country-of-origin individualism. In line with this idea, the

TABLE 3 Individualism and WFH, addressing unobserved individual heterogeneity.

	CPS		ESS	
	Any WFH (1)	WFH hours (2)	Any WFH (3)	WFH sev. times a week (4)
Panel A: Continent-of-origin fixed effects				
Individualism	0.0031***	0.0869***	0.0036***	0.0023***
	(0.0008)	(0.0229)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)
Observations	155,006	155,006	3337	3337
Panel B: Decade-of-immigration-by-state/country fixed effects				
Individualism	0.0036***	0.1038***	0.0031***	0.0021***
	(0.0005)	(0.0166)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)
Observations	155,006	155,006	3337	3337
Panel C: Geographic distance				
Individualism	0.0038***	0.1063***	0.0038***	0.0026***
	(0.0005)	(0.0153)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)
Observations	155,006	155,006	3337	3337
Panel D: Occupation fixed effects				
Individualism	0.0013***	0.0341***	0.0012**	0.0007
	(0.0002)	(0.0066)	(0.0005)	(0.0004)
Observations	155,006	155,006	3337	3337
Panel E: Only second-generation immigrants				
Individualism	0.0016***	0.0416***	0.0021**	0.0007
	(0.0004)	(0.0121)	(0.0009)	(0.0008)
Observations	56,718	56,718	1606	1606

Note: The table shows estimates of regressions of WFH, measured using the variables indicated in the column headers, on individualism. All regressions control for month-by-year dummies, state-of-residence (CPS) or country-of-residence (ESS) dummies, and the individual characteristics age, gender and race (CPS) as shown in Table 1. Each panel shows results from variations of this specification that include additional controls or sample restrictions as indicated in the panel heading. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by country of origin (63 clusters in the CPS and 65 clusters in the ESS).

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

estimates in Panel E are smaller than the main estimates in Table 2: for example, in the CPS, a 10-point increase in individualism is now associated with a 1.6 pp increase in doing any WFH. The ESS estimates are similarly reduced, with a 10-point increase in individualism being associated with a 2.1 pp increase in doing any WFH. Overall, however, these more demanding specifications confirm our finding that individualism predicts WFH.

4.4 | Robustness: Correlated country characteristics

Individualism is correlated with other country-of-origin characteristics, including other cultural dimensions and economic performance: for example, the country-level correlation coefficient between individualism and GDP is 0.72.[15] This raises the question of whether our results are indeed driven by individualism, or by one of these correlated factors. We address this question by adding country-of-origin controls for the most prominent potential confounders to our regressions one by one. While this allows us to disentangle the influence of individualism, a caveat with this strategy is that culture "comes as a package" and as a result, a rise in individualism holding other country-level variables constant usually lacks a real-world counterpart.

We start by adding controls for masculinity and prosociality. Masculinity is one of Hofstede's six cultural dimensions and measures the extent to which a society emphasizes achievement versus quality of life, among other things (Hofstede, 2001). Prosociality combines altruism, reciprocity, and trust and shapes human interactions. As such, both variables may influence individuals' decision to work from home. Second, we control for uncertainty avoidance and risk preference. Uncertainty avoidance, another Hofstede cultural dimension, measures the extent to which members of a society tolerate ambiguity (Hofstede, 2001). Both uncertainty avoidance and risk preference may affect individuals' perception of the risks associated with coming to the workplace, and in particular the risk of becoming sick, which was a main driver of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bick et al., 2023). Third, we control for country-of-origin GDP in 1995, which accounts for differences in the economic environment in the country of origin that might influence the adoption of WFH.

Figure 4 presents our findings. Each panel shows results for one of our four outcomes. The dashed line in each panel indicates the corresponding main estimate from Table 2. The controls are indicated on the horizontal axis, and the plots show point estimates and 95% confidence intervals when the respective control is included in the regression. Overall, our estimates are robust to controlling for other cultural dimensions: point estimates are mostly very similar to the main estimates and never statistically different. However, when we control for GDP, our estimates become much less precise, and in the ESS only, the coefficient on individualism drops substantially. This is not surprising given that previous research has shown that individualism causes growth (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2017); the resulting close correlation between individualism and GDP makes it difficult to disentangle the relative influence of these factors. Taken together, there is little evidence in Figure 4 that suggests that our results are driven by country-of-origin characteristics other than individualism.

4.5 | Robustness: IV estimates

While our main results and robustness checks do suggest that the association between individualism and WFH reflects a causal effect, we cannot possibly account for all potential sources of bias in the epidemiological approach. Therefore, as an alternative empirical strategy, we now present results from an IV approach that leverages international differences in individualism driven by genetic heritage. In particular, following Gorodnichenko and Roland (2017) and Hartinger et al. (2024), we use the frequency of G allele in polymorphism A118G in the μ-opioid receptor gene as an instrument for individualism. G allele carriers are more sensitive to social exclusion, leading to higher stress levels and stronger neural responses to rejection (Way et al., 2009). As a consequence, populations in which A118G is more prevalent form more collectivistic (and less indvidualistic) cultures that provide psychological protection from social rejection (Way & Lieberman, 2010). We confirm that this relationship holds in our samples: Supporting Information S4: Figure B5 shows that there is a strong negative relationship between the Hofstede individualism measure and the frequency of A118G at the country-level for the origin countries in our samples.

The IV results in Table 4 confirm our main estimates in a qualitative sense: for example, in the CPS, a 10-point increase in individualism is estimated to raise the likelihood of doing any WFH by 6.4 pp and weekly WFH hours by 1.86. While these estimates rely on strong assumptions, in particular the exclusion restriction,[16] they provide corroborating evidence of individualism as a driver of WFH.

4.6 | Robustness: Additional tests

We perform a variety of additional robustness checks to confirm the validity of our findings. The results from these analyses are presented in Supporting Information S4: Tables B3 and B4 and summarized in what follows. First, we check whether our results are driven by particularly large or small groups of immigrants in our samples. To this end, we drop the largest groups of immigrants—those of Mexican origin in the CPS and those of Russian origin in the ESS—from the sample. Alternatively, we exclude immigrants from countries with fewer than 100 respondents in the CPS and fewer than 10 respondents in the ESS. Second, we restrict our sample to individuals with both parents born outside their current country of residence. This restriction addresses the concern that individuals with one native-born parent might differ significantly from those with two foreign-born parents in terms of identity and cultural practices. Third, since the ESS survey responses were partly collected during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, contemporaneous policy responses, such as guidelines for remote work, could influence our estimates. To address this, we use information on

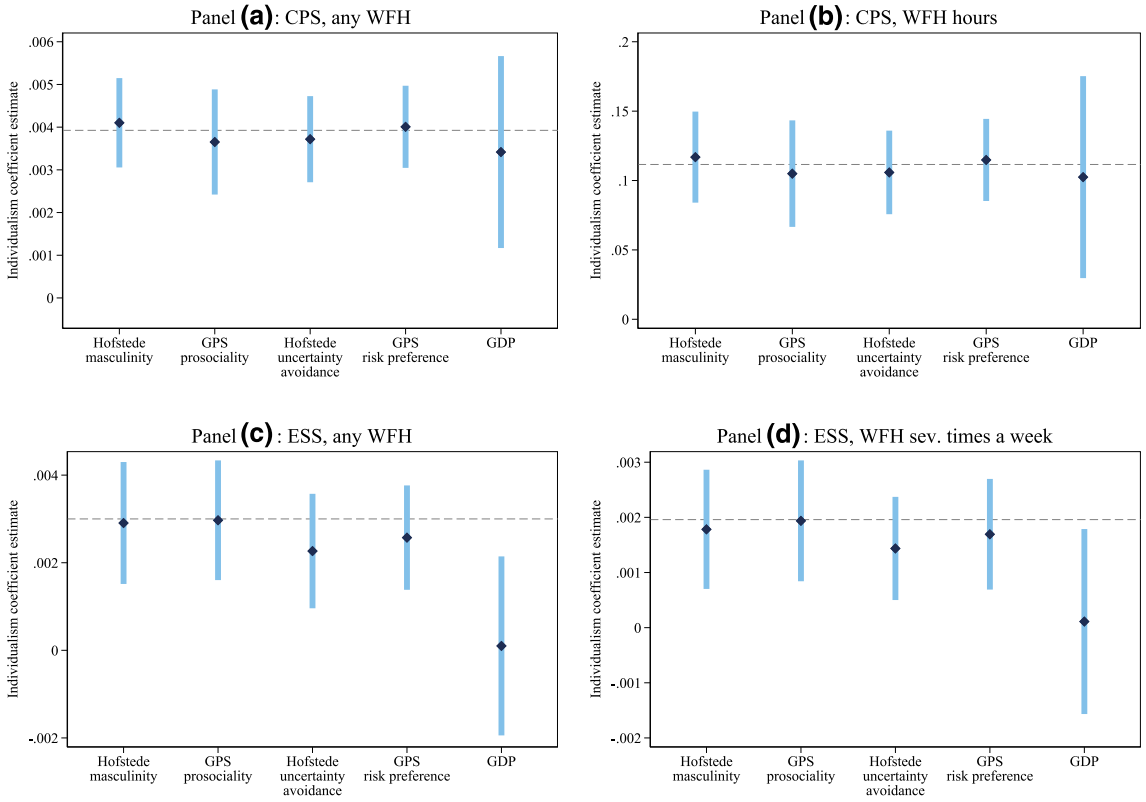

FIGURE 4 Controlling for other country-of-origin variables. The figure shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for individualism when other country-of-origin characteristics are added as controls to our main specification. Each panel presents results for a different outcome, indicated in the panel heading. The dashed line in each panel represents the main estimates from Table 2. The horizontal axes indicate which control is added to the main specification.

TABLE 4 Robustness: Instrumental variable estimates.

	CPS		ESS	
	Any WFH (1)	WFH hours (2)	Any WFH (3)	WFH sev. times a week (4)
Individualism	0.0064***	0.1858***	0.0016	0.0009
	(0.0011)	(0.0311)	(0.0016)	(0.0009)
Observations	112,155	112,155	2042	2042
First-stage *F*-stat	15.4	15.4	36.5	36.5

Note: The table shows estimates of instrumental variable regressions of WFH on individualism. Individualism is instrumented using the prevalence of G allele in polymorphism A118G in the μ-opioid receptor gene (see Supporting Information S4: Appendix A for details on these data). Regressions otherwise follow the specifications in Table 2. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by country of origin (55 clusters in the CPS and 44 clusters in the ESS).

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey; WFH, working from home.

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

the exact interview date in two ways: we control for country-of-residence-by-quarter fixed effects, ensuring that we compare individuals residing in the same country at the same time and thus affected by the same policies. Alternatively, we directly control for pandemic policies in effect at the time of the interview. Fourth, we account for survey weights in our estimations. Our results are robust to all of these tests.

Finally, we test the robustness of our results using alternative measures of individualism: the two measures of affective and intellectual autonomy from Schwartz (1994) and the measure constructed from the integrated World Values Survey following Kramer (2023). The results show that these alternative measures of individualism also predict the prevalence and frequency of WFH, consistent with the notion that individualism is generally stable across different measurement approaches (Oyserman et al., 2002).

TABLE 5 Mechanisms: College attainment, occupational sorting, and self-employment.

	CPS			ESS		
	College degree (1)	Occupation teleworkable (2)	Self-employed (3)	College degree (4)	Occupation teleworkable (5)	Self-employed (6)
Individualism	0.0059***	0.0055***	0.0001	0.0008	0.0025***	0.0009*
	(0.0009)	(0.0007)	(0.0002)	(0.0007)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)
Observations	155,006	155,006	155,006	3313	2877	3337

Note: The table shows estimates of regressions of the variables indicated in the column headers on individualism. Specifications like in Table 2. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by country of origin (63 clusters in the CPS and 65 clusters in the ESS).

Abbreviations: CPS, Current Population Survey; ESS, European Social Survey.

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

4.7 | Mechanisms

We now explore potential mechanisms behind the relationship between individualism and WFH. We emphasize that part of the relationship is likely direct, since individualism by definition captures job preferences closely aligned with remote work. In Table 5, we test potential additional, indirect channels for the effect. First, we examine whether individualism predicts having a college degree. Recent research suggests that individualism relates to better educational outcomes, including more years of schooling and adult educational activities (Hartinger et al., 2024), as well as better school performance (Ehrl & Alves, 2024). Additionally, highly-educated workers are more likely to work from home (Barrero et al., 2023). In line with this evidence, we find that a 10-point increase in individualism is associated with a 5.9 pp higher likelihood of having a college degree in the CPS (column 1). A smaller and statistically insignificant association of 0.8 pp is evident also in the ESS (column 4). Thus, education appears to be a pathway for part of the relationship between individualism and WFH.[17]

Second, we explore whether our main results could be due to occupational selection. Occupations differ widely in the extent to which WFH is possible (Dingel & Neiman, 2020), making this a potential channel. Indeed, columns 2 and 5 show that individualism predicts having an occupation that is teleworkable in both the CPS and ESS. In columns 3 and 6, we further investigate this potential channel by testing whether individualism predicts being self-employed. Self-employed workers are much more likely to work from home (Barrero et al., 2023). However, our results show no association between individualism and self-employment in the CPS, and only a small and marginally statistically significant association in the ESS.[18]

In summary, our analysis suggests that the relationship between individualism and WFH is partly mediated by educational attainment and selection into teleworkable occupations, but not by selection into self-employment.

5 | CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has become a fundamental aspect of the "new normal" for many workers globally. Despite its growing prevalence together with heightened expectations for flexible work arrangements, in turn altering workplace dynamics and redefining employer-employee relationships (Kossek et al., 2023), there remains limited knowledge about the determinants of remote work adoption.

We establish a relationship between individualism and workers' likelihood and extent of WFH. By isolating cultural influences from economic and institutional factors through a comparative analysis of immigrants residing in the same location, we demonstrate that individualism plays a crucial role in explaining individual variation in remote work. Our headline estimate based on the CPS implies that if immigrants from Spain, a country with moderate individualism, were as individualistic as people from the United States, they would be 13.2 percentage points more likely to work from home. These estimates are robust to a wide variety of alternative specifications and sensitivity tests. We also provide suggestive evidence that individualism influences WFH partly through higher educational attainment and occupational selection, as immigrants from individualistic countries are more likely to have a college degree and work in occupations that accommodate remote work.

Research suggests that individualistic societies are characterized by social structures in which people are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families, rather than relying on relatives or members of a specific in-group for support (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). In line with this, research has found that individualistic workers prioritize themselves and their immediate families over their firms (Tatliyer & Gur, 2022). Our finding of a positive relationship between individualism and WFH is consistent with this evidence, as remote work allows workers to better balance their work responsibilities with personal interests and family time (Aksoy et al., 2023; Choudhury et al., 2024). Furthermore, our result indicates that individualism is associated with higher educational attainment and occupational choices that facilitate remote work, such as roles in knowledge-intensive sectors. This aligns with previous findings that more individualistic societies emphasize personal achievement (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2017). Remote work can provide a goal-oriented environment in which individuals can focus on their tasks without the distractions of a traditional office, enabling high achievers to meet their personal and professional goals more effectively.

Using data from diverse groups of workers in several developed countries across a wide range of occupations, we provide evidence that culture is a determinant of remote work adoption. Our results connect to the broader literature on the implications of WFH. Flexible work arrangements, particularly those that remove constraints on work location and scheduling, have been linked to broadened recruitment (Bloom et al., 2024; Hsu & Tambe, 2025), improved work-life balance and well-being (e.g., Choudhury et al., 2024; Goux & Maurin, 2024) and productivity (e.g., Angelici & Profeta, 2024; Bloom et al., 2015; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024), which are key objectives for modern organizations. While cultural traits are deeply rooted and difficult to alter, recognizing their influence can inform policy discussions and organizational strategies. By aligning work practices with the cultural attributes of both employers and employees, such awareness may potentially yield positive economic effects and enhance overall workplace satisfaction. Future research could further explore how cultural dimensions interact with economic and institutional factors to shape work practices, providing a richer understanding of the global shift toward flexible work arrangements.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in open ICPSR (Bietenbeck et al., 2025).

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ENDNOTES

[1] Among others, Amazon, PwC, and Goldman Sachs recently increased the number of days that employees are required to come into the office (The Economist, 2024).

[2] Individualism is one of six dimensions in the multi-dimensional model of culture developed by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede et al., 2010). The five other dimensions are masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, long-term orientation, and indulgence.

[3] Occupational choice is endogenous, rendering occupation fixed effects a "bad control." However, it is reassuring to see that individualism continues to predict WFH even in this narrow comparison of workers in the same location and occupation.

[4] Individualism could also affect WFH via the supply side or institutional channels, for example, by influencing labor market regulations (Ang & Fredriksson, 2018). However, our regressions rule out prominent supply-side and institutional channels by including location-of-residence fixed effects, and our estimates thus most likely reflect worker-level factors.

[5] Zarate et al. (2024) also present results from individual-level regressions. However, since they cannot measure individualism at the individual level, these regressions do not directly test whether individualism affects WFH.

[6] The location-of-residence dummies control for country fixed effects in the ESS and state fixed effects in the CPS. More detailed geographical information is available at the level of metropolitan area in the CPS and subnational region in the ESS, but only for subsamples. We confirmed for these subsamples that controlling for metropolitan area fixed effects in the CPS and subnational region fixed effects in the ESS yields qualitatively and quantitatively very similar results.

[7] A general issue in the literature is how to measure WFH accurately. Recent research for the US examines how survey design and time influences estimates of WFH. Buckman et al. (2025) suggest that the CPS underestimates WFH rates in relation to other surveys, likely due to the wording of the questions and respondents' interpretation of what constitutes "home." Moreover, Barrero, Bloom, Bonney, et al. (2025) suggest that CPS respondents' interpretations of the WFH question seem to have evolved as the pandemic receded. In our empirical analysis, these potential biases matter only if mismeasurement of WFH is systematically related to individualism. In addition, time fixed effects account for potential trends in WFH, and our reliance on two distinct data sets significantly reduces the likelihood that our results are driven by survey-specific measurement issues.

[8] The latest version of the data is dated December 8, 2015, and is available on Geert Hofstede's website: https://geerthofstede.com/research-and-vsm/dimension-data-matrix/.

[9] Greece and Sweden do not provide information on respondents' exact country of birth in the ESS public use files. Therefore, we drop respondents residing in these two countries from the sample.

[10] Individualism does not predict working in the reference period: in a regression of an indicator for working in the reference period on individualism, the coefficient is 0.0001 (standard error 0.0002) in the CPS and 0.0005 (standard error 0.0004) in the ESS.

[11] Information on some control variables is missing for some individuals in our samples. To avoid reducing sample size unnecessarily, in all regressions in this paper we impute missing values in controls at the sample mean and include separate dummies for missing values on each control variable. Results are virtually identical if we instead drop individuals with missing information from the samples.

[12] Supporting Information S4: Table A2 lists the individualism scores for all countries of origin included in our analysis, and the map in Supporting Information S4: Figure A1 illustrates the distribution of individualism across the world.

[13] Cyprus, Iceland, Macedonia, and Montenegro drop out of the sample because no individualism scores exist for them.

[14] Supporting Information S4: Figure B1 shows binned scatter plots of these regressions reveals that the associations are roughly linear in individualism.

[15] This correlation coefficient is based on the sample of 65 countries of origin present in the ESS sample. Correlation coefficients of individualism with other cultural dimensions considered below are: 0.13 (masculinity), −0.01 (prosociality), −0.27 (uncertainty avoidance), and 0.15 (risk preference).

[16] The exclusion restriction is that the A118G frequency affects WFH only through individualism. Reassuringly, there is no evidence that A118G affects any potentially confounding variables. In particular, exploratory genome wide association studies (GWAS) find no relationship between A118G and education, intelligence, or related variables (e.g., Okbay et al., 2016).

[17] Zarate et al. (2024) show that individualism predicts WFH among college graduates at the country level. When restricting our samples to college graduates, we similarly find positive associations between individualism and WFH both at the country level and using the epidemiological approach. However, given that individualism predicts educational attainment, restricting our samples in this way likely implies selection on an outcome, which is why we do not discuss these results in further detail.

[18] Another possible mechanism relates to the type of employer an individual chooses to work for. Immigrants may be more likely to be employed by multinational companies headquartered in their countries of origin. If these companies have established remote work policies reflecting workplace norms in the country of origin, these practices may also be standard in their operations abroad, increasing WFH among these workers. We cannot test this potential mechanism since neither the CPS nor the ESS contain the necessary information on employers.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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