

Secular Values and Unmarried Parenthood – The Cohorts 1971-83 in East and West Germany

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Extended Abstract

Motivation

Before unification, East and West Germany radically differed in patterns of nonmarital childbearing. These differences were largely attributed to East German family policies that gave privileges to unmarried mothers. At unification, East German family policies were abolished in favor of the West German regulations and the expectation at that time was that the East German nonmarital birth ratio - which was one of the highest in Europe at that time - would soon fall to the low West German levels. It came as a great surprise when nonmarital fertility increased even further in the aftermath of unification. Today, 20 years after unification, East and West German still radically differ in behavior. The share of unmarried births is only about 25 percent in the Western states while more than 60 percents of all births are to unmarried women in the East. Regional analyses confirm that these differences closely follow the former border of the two Germanies (Klüsener and Kreyenfeld 2009).

Theoretical Underpinning

In this paper, we explore this persisting East-West-divide in non-marital childbearing behavior. Particular attention is given to the question how differences in rational-secular values help to understand the contrasting family behaviour in the East and the West. We base our argumentation on value change theory which stipulates that secularization dismantles the role of the church and decreases the significance of religious values. At the same time, it predicts a decline in the importance of marriage and the family in individuals' lives (Inglehart/Welzel 2005). East Germany is nowadays the most secularized society with one of the highest shares of atheists in the world (Pollack 2002; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009). This is not the case for Western Germany. Despite the fact that Western Germany is a rather secularized society, the large majority of individuals still have a religious affiliation and religious ceremonies (such as church weddings or baptisms) have remained a widely accepted part of cultural practices. Against this background, it seems reasonable to assume that differences in secular values and religious practices explain some of the East-West differences in marriage patterns and unmarried parenthood in contemporary Germany.

Data, Method and First Results

Data for this analysis comes from the PAIRFAM-project. PAIRFAM is a longitudinal panel study that includes about 12,000 individuals of the birth cohorts 1971-73, 1981-83 and 1991-93. Respondents are surveyed on an annual basis. The first round of this panel has been conducted in 2008/2009. In this study, we additionally draw on an oversample of 1,400 East Germans which have been added to the PAIRFAM project to enable profound East-West investigations. In the investigation, we mainly draw on event history modeling to study the

transition to first unmarried parenthood. First results are displayed in Table 1. The table gives the results from a model on the transition to an unmarried birth. The process starts at age 15 and includes all childless and single women. The process ends with an unmarried birth. Cases are censored at interview or marriage. The table supports the idea that religious affiliation and very frequent church attendance is related to a low risk of unmarried parenthood. However, East-West-differences remain strong even after controlling for religious characteristics.

References

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Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika, Uta Karstein, and Thomas Schmidt-Lux. 2009. *Forcierte Säkularisierung*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus.

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Table 1: Results from Event History Model, Transition to Unmarried Parenthood

	Modell1	Modell2	Modell3
Region			
West Germany	1	1	1
East Germany	3.00***	2.45***	2.67***
East to West migrant	1.93***	1.61***	1.72***
General Schooling			
Hauptschule	1	1	1
Realschule/POS	0.51***	0.50***	0.51***
Abitur	0.24***	0.24***	0.25***
Religious Affiliation			
Catholic		1	
Protestant		1.23**	
No religion		1.44****	
Other		0.62***	
Church Attendance			
Very frequent			1
Frequent			2.28***
Seldom			2.06***
Never			2.69***

Note: Results are from a piecewise constant model with age as process time. Cases have been censored at interview or marriage.

*** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.10