

European Population Conference 2024

University of St Andrews, Edinburgh, Scotland, 12-15 June 2024

Abstract for Theme 2: Families and Households

Authors:

Leonie Kleinschrot¹, Martin Bujard, Felix Berth

¹presenting author. German Youth Institute, Nockherstr. 2, 81541 Munich, Germany;

kleinschrot@dji.de

Gender Ideologies now and then: Comparing the German Democratic Republic with contemporary East and West Germany

Introduction

In addition to the division of paid labour and care work within couples and its consequences, gender ideologies also play a crucial role in fertility (Andersen & Billari 2015). The reason for low fertility are socially unclear or contradictory beliefs about adequate gender role behaviour. Since the 1970s attitudes towards gender roles have been subject to a steady liberalization (Cotter et al. 2011), which however has not led to clear or consensual egalitarian gender ideologies. Recent findings from attitudinal research on these developments show, first, that, alongside the increase in egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles, there has been a greater diversification of belief patterns. And, second, that consistently traditional belief patterns have been replaced by heterogeneous ones, combining an endorsement of gender equality in the public sphere with varying degrees of support for gender equality in the private domain (Knight & Brinton 2017; Grunow et al. 2018; Scarborough et al. 2019).

All these findings apply to western democratic states and also to the (former) Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). When describing the change in gender ideologies in Germany, the period of 40 years of division in a state socialist East and capitalist West is often left out, although it can be consistently observed that people in East Germany have since been more egalitarian than those in West Germany (Ebner et al. 2020). In this study, we want to examine which patterns of gender ideologies were found under the socialist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and which are present in East Germany today, in order to describe the changes in the patterns of gender ideologies. In doing so, we like to work out how large the congruence between political framework conditions and gender ideologies is, and by comparing today's West and East

Germany we want to approach the question of the extent to which the ‘cultural legacy’ of the socialist policies can still be recognised today. Furthermore, we would like to examine which predictors of gender ideologies were relevant in the different eras and regimes.

The labour market and childcare policies of the GDR resulted in very high institutional childcare rates and labour force participation for mothers. In contrast, the policies of the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) supported the male breadwinner model (Rosenfeld et al. 2004). Still today, maternal employment, as well as the availability and acceptance of institutional childcare, is significantly higher in East Germany than in West Germany and people there still hold more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles than those in West Germany (Zoch 2021). In addition, reunified Germany has undergone a paradigm shift in family policy since the early 2000s towards de-familialistic policies (Bujard 2013). Various studies on Germany show that such policy changes have had an impact not only on gender role behaviour, but also on attitudes towards gender roles (Zoch & Schober 2018).

Data & Methods

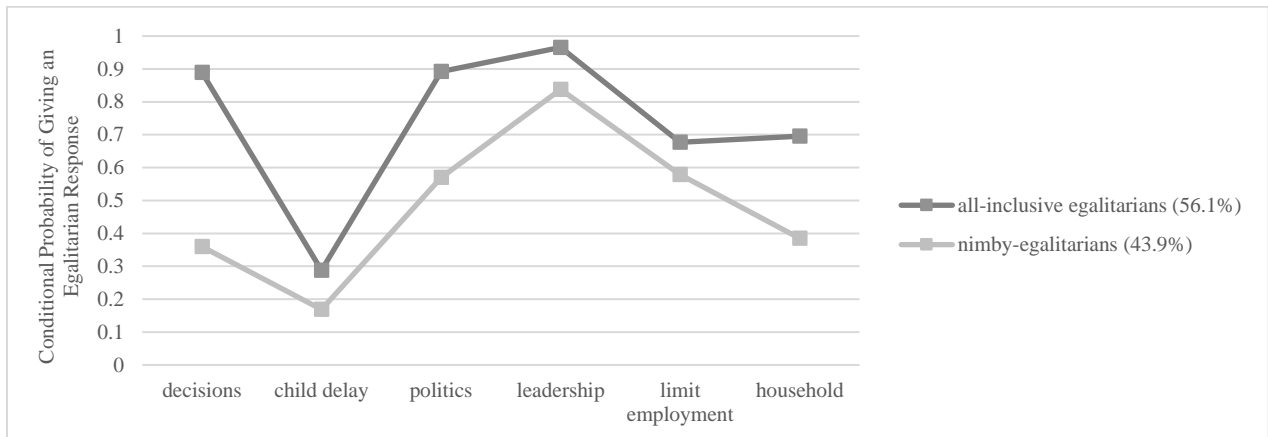
The data for the GDR analysis was collected by the Central Institute for Youth Research in 1984 and the non-representative sample includes 1511 persons between the ages 18 to 37 from the districts of Erfurt and Karl-Marx-Stadt. We can rely on six items on gender roles. Our analyses of contemporary Germany rely on the German ‘Family Research and Demographic Analysis (FReDA)’ wave 1 panel study from the end of 2021 (Schneider et al. 2021; Bujard et al. 2023). FReDA provides very recent data on eight gender role items for a representative German sample, and has a sufficiently large sample size to check for differences between people residing in East or West Germany. The samples include respondents being aged 18 to 49, living in East (N= 2,765) and in West Germany (N=15,765). For identifying gender ideology patterns, we apply latent class analysis (LCA) which estimates the size of gender ideology classes and respondents conditional probabilities for giving egalitarian responses on each indicator. We use theoretical considerations and model fit statistics to decide on the number of latent classes (Masyn, 2013). The investigation of predictors of gender ideology class membership (gender, age, marital status, whether the respondent has children, level of education, and employment status) will be done with multinomial logistic regressions by using the three-step approach implemented in Mplus (Asparouhov & Muthén 2014).

Findings

In the former GDR, we identify two gender ideology patterns (see Fig. 1). The ‘all-inclusive egalitarians’ were highly egalitarian as they were characterised by opposing male dominance in a relationship (decisions), by endorsing women’s participation in politics and leadership, by supporting full-time employment of mothers with children under the age of three (limit

employment) and by refusing a gender-traditional division of household labour (household). A second identified gender ideology profile was ambivalent. The ‘nimby-egalitarians’ endorsed male primacy in relationships, female responsibility for housework and that women should only become mothers when they have completed their professional development (child delay). Yet, concerning women in politics, leadership positions and full-time they had more egalitarian views. For nimby-egalitarians, this revealed an ambivalence: the support for gender equality in the public sphere was contrasted with less egalitarian attitudes in the private sphere.

Figure 1: Conditional probability of giving an egalitarian response and class size, GDR 1984

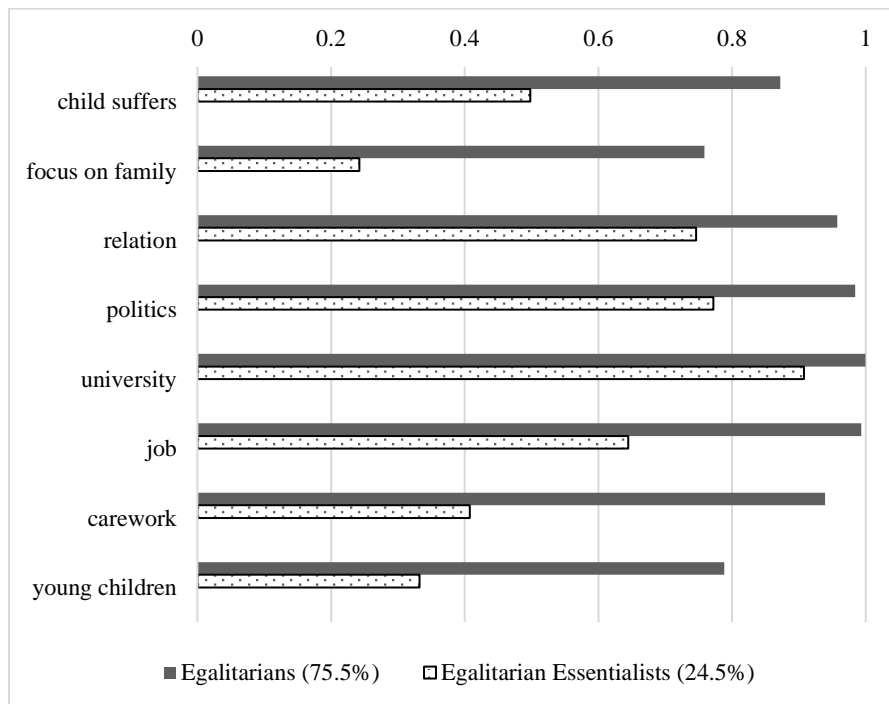


Note: Women’s Study 1984. N=1511.

This ambivalence can still be found in contemporary East Germany (see Fig. 2), as a quarter of respondents (and 21% of West German respondents) are assigned to the gender ideology class of egalitarian essentialists which is characterised by the belief that women should focus on family rather than on career (focus on family), that it is more important for women than for men to look after the home and children (carework), as well as that women are the better caregivers for young children (young children) and in East Germany they are not clear on whether negative consequences for children occur of mothers’ employment (child suffers), whereas in West Germany they do not expect children to suffer. But at the same time egalitarian essentialists endorse equality in politics, university access and employment participation (politics; university; job). Moreover, like in the GDR, an unidimensional egalitarian gender ideology is widespread in East Germany with three quarters of the sample (as well as in West Germany, 52%), that does not expect any negative consequences from maternal employment for children, supports gender equality in access to politics, university or employment, and rejects traditional gender roles concerning care work. There are two more gender ideology patterns identified in West Germany only. First, traditionals, who cover only 10% of the sample and endorse women focusing on family, and think women are better suited for care work and childcare. Traditionals also believe that children and the mother-child-relationship will suffer from maternal employment (relation), and that a job is less important for women than for men. Another ideology profile, intensive parenting endorsers, was found in West Germany only (containing 17% of the sample). They are characterized by the belief that mothers should prioritize children and family over employment

and career as well as that young children are bound to suffer because of maternal employment (they are ambivalent concerning the worsening of the mother-child-relationship). At the same time, they think that it is important for both parents to engage in housework and childcare, and that parents of both genders are equally suited for the care of young children – something that distinguishes them from the egalitarian essentialists. In this, the child-centeredness of this class becomes very clear.

Figure 2: Conditional Probability for Giving Egalitarian Responses by Classes, East



Note: FReDA W1, weighted data. N =2 765.

Discussion

The results show that while egalitarian gender ideologies were widespread among young people in the 1980s in the GDR, there was also a diversified gender ideology class which differed in its degree of egalitarianism towards the public and private spheres. From this, we would conclude a high congruence between socialist gender policies – aimed at reconciling family and employment for mothers without addressing the existing gender-unequal division of unpaid labour (Trappe, 1996) – and ideologies in the GDR. And we would further conclude that this “cultural legacy” of the GDR can still be found in contemporary Germany, because besides the widespread egalitarian gender ideology, in 2021 we (still) find a diversified belief pattern in East Germany. But also in West Germany we would conclude a congruence between policies and ideologies, as there were two gender ideology patterns, which specifically support intrafamilial care for children and the vital role mothers play in here.

This study shows that under both regimes or in both regions, a substantial proportion of the younger generation holds heterogeneous belief patterns and confirms previous international studies, that have shown that there is a diversification of belief patterns. Our further analyses will aim at strengthening the comparability between the datasets and regions. Furthermore, we want to investigate the individual and macro-level predictors of gender ideologies in both parts of Germany and discuss gender ideologies in light of recent family policy changes.