

# Family Formation Processes in Eastern and Western Germany How Important Are Regionally Diverse Values?

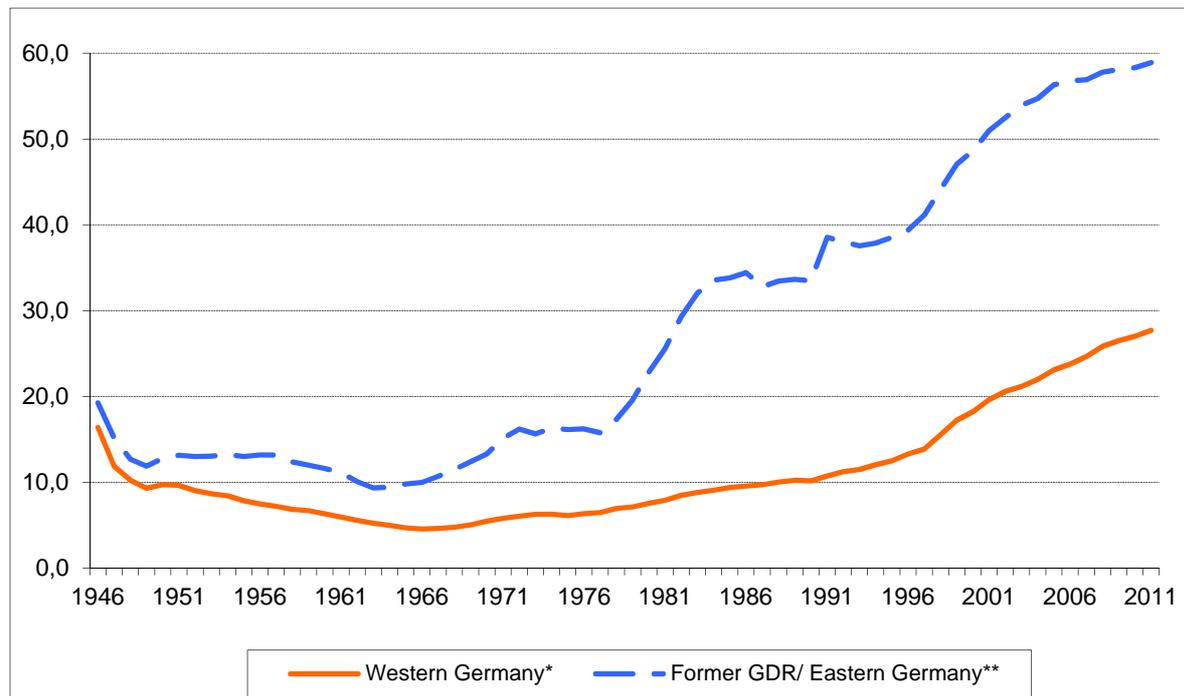
## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

This paper seeks to explain major differences in demographic trends and developments that can still be found in Eastern and Western Germany today. We focus on family formation processes, namely the formation and institutionalisation of a relationship as well as the birth of children. We assume that the different patterns can be traced back to different family-related values and attitudes that can be found within society. We further suppose that these – we call them *leitbilder* - have a strong influence on people's decisions and behaviour with regard to family formation.

When looking at the share of children born out of wedlock, one will discover distinct differences between Eastern and Western Germany. The differences even increase over time and seem to manifest itself within both parts of Germany. In 2011 the share of children born by unmarried mothers is almost twice as high in the East compared to the West.

**Figure 1: Share of children born out of wedlock compared to all live births, 1946 to 2011 (in %)**



\* since 1990 without Berlin

\*\* since 1990 Berlin included

Source: Federal Statistical Office (Destatis), calculations by the BiB

## Research Questions

How important is marriage when it comes to children?  
How important is the employment situation of the mother for family formation processes (irrespective of the father's employment situation)?  
In which way do Eastern and Western Germany differ when looking at these aspects? Are there still two different patterns or is there any kind of convergence between both German regions when controlling for different secondary variables?

## Theory and Hypotheses

In our analyses, we focus on different dimensions of the family formation process. We are interested in the "perfect" timing when to have children as well as in the "ideal" order of events. To analyse these aspects, we are first looking at the *leitbild* that is related to marriage and its influence on family formation. This dimension measures the importance of marriage for family formation and its institutional character. We further analyse the importance of the employment situation of the mother as a necessary condition for family formation. Here, we try to isolate the effect of the mother's employment situation.

Our main hypothesis focuses on the importance of family-related *leitbilder* for family formation processes. We assume that different *leitbilder* can be identified in Eastern and Western Germany and that these differences lead to diverse patterns when looking at family formation. By *leitbilder* we mean sets of collectively shared and pictured conceptions of guiding role models that are widely spread, socially expected and/or personally desired. These principles should have an influence on people's thinking and their behaviour. *Leitbilder* are internalised during socialisation processes, first of all within the nuclear family and later on within the extended family, the school and social networks. This implies that *leitbilder* are passed on from one generation to the next and are thus relatively stable within society.

Since Germany has been divided after the Second World War, people experienced two different political systems with different values – also regarding the family. We assume that some of these values and *leitbilder* are still valid today. The political system in the Eastern part of Germany put, for example, much more weight on female employment whereas the traditional single-earner family was emphasized and supported in the West which leads us to our hypothesis that the *leitbild* regarding female employment is much stronger for parents in Eastern Germany. Marriage could be seen as an expression of higher economic dependence of females on their husbands in Eastern Germany.

Marriage has also been less pronounced in the East compared to the West. Therefore, we assume that marriage has a weaker influence on the birth of children in the East than in the West.

We believe that part of the differences between Eastern and Western Germany can be explained by these cultural differences that can also be found in the younger generations.

Further we suppose that *leitbilder* regarding family formation are more important than individual socio-economic characteristics.

## Data and Methods

We test our hypothesis by applying different multivariate models which include our *leitbilder* as well as individual socio-economic characteristics. The place of

socialisation is also included into our models. Our analyses are based on the representative survey about family-related *leitbilder* conducted by the German Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) in 2012. The survey includes 5000 respondents between 20 and 39 years and covers a wide range of family-related topics such as ideal relationship/marriage, conditions for children, childlessness, large families, ideal number of children, parent-child relationship, gender role models, parental role models as well as ideal childcare provisions.

Our dependent variable measures family formation processes. Here, we focus on births out of wedlock and premarital first births. When analysing the first phenomenon mentioned, we look at parents who still cohabit, in the second case, we focus on parents who are now married but whose first child had been born earlier.

Our set of independent variables can be divided into four categories: The first one only includes control variables such as gender, age and place of socialisation. In the second category the items measure the influence of socio-economic characteristics. The third category covers the *leitbild* regarding marriage and parenthood. And the last one contains the *leitbild* of female employment in the familial context.

We estimate two different multinomial regressions – one for Western and one for Eastern Germany. We then stepwise integrate our different categories of independent variables into the regression.

### Expected Results

First, we expect differences in patterns of family formation processes between Eastern and Western Germany that can be explained by different *leitbilder*. First descriptive results for example show that the share of children born out of wedlock is much higher in Eastern Germany.

**Table 1: Leitbild concerning parenthood and marriage, as well as *leitbild* of female employment by different family formation histories (agreement in %)**

	Western Germany			Eastern Germany		
	Parenthood (both partners), unmarried	First child born while biological parents unmarried	First child born while biological parents married	Parenthood (both partners), unmarried	First child born while biological parents unmarried	First child born while biological parents married
Condition for having children: "The couple should be married."	5,4	14,3	25,3	4,0	12,9	30,0
Mothers should pursue a profession in order to be independent of their husbands.	77,2	78,9	70,9	86,3	87,0	74,0

Source: BiB, Survey on family-related *leitbilder* (FLB) 2012

Further results also show differences in the *leitbilder* regarding marriage and parenthood as well as female employment. Eastern German respondents agree to a larger degree to the statement that mothers should pursue a profession in order to be independent of their husbands. Compared to the figures for Western Germans, agreement is stronger irrespective of the family formation history. Although the agreement of parents whose first child was born when they were already married drops by more than ten percentage points. Despite the different levels of agreement in both German regions, there also seems to be a common pattern: The idea of independence of the mother seems to be more important to parents who had children/their first child when they were still unmarried.

Analysing the *leitbild* of marriage and parenthood, one will discover that married parents show the highest level of agreement to the statement that couples should be married when planning to have children, and agreement is the lowest when looking at unmarried parents. This is true for both German regions, but comparing the levels of agreement we again find differences. The importance of marriage as a condition for having children is, as expected, less pronounced in the East than in the West except for married couples. Here, agreement is almost 5 percentage points higher among Eastern German respondents.