

## **DemoDiff: A Dataset for the Study of Family Change in Eastern (and Western) Germany**

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### **1. Motivation for Conducting the Study**

Researchers who study family and fertility view Germany as unique among countries. West Germany is a forerunner in trends towards very low fertility, high childlessness and low transition rates to higher order births in Europe. Furthermore, the particular demographic situation in East Germany represents an exceptional case. In 1990, a new institutional framework, that of West Germany, was implemented in East Germany. At reunification, it was generally expected that eastern Germans would quickly adopt western German behavioral patterns. While this did occur in many areas, marked East-West differences in behavior and attitudes remain more than 20 years after reunification (Krause/Ostner, 2010). In the realm of family life, pronounced differences between East and West in fertility and nuptiality patterns persist (Goldstein/Kreyenfeld, 2011). Marital behavior differs sharply between the two previously separate German states, as unmarried parenthood is very common in the East, where more than 60% of children are born to unmarried mothers. In addition to a large East-West gap in nuptiality patterns, eastern and western Germans differ sharply when it comes to women's employment patterns and attitudes towards maternal employment, and these differences have been found to persist even among the generation of eastern and western Germans who were born and raised after reunification (Bauernschuster/Rainer, 2012).

This ongoing gap in family and fertility patterns suggests that women and men do not mechanically adjust their behavior to new constraints, but that attitudes have their own dynamics, and are resistant to change even under new economic and institutional conditions (Huinink et al., 2012). In this sense, eastern Germany can be seen as a 'natural experiment' (Mayer/Solga, 2010; Witte/Wagner, 1995) that allows us to study the interplay between attitudes, economic constraints, and institutional contexts. For demographic processes like marriage and fertility, we have so far been unable to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of why certain patterns converged rapidly in eastern and western Germany, while in other domains of family life large differences have persisted.