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Differences in Family Policies and the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce A Comparison between the former East and West Germany

Henriette Engelhardt
Heike Trappe
Jaap Dronkers

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Abstract

The intergenerational transmission of the risk of divorce is a well-known long-term effect of divorce that has been found in many Western societies. Less known is what effect different family policies and divorce laws have on the intergenerational transmission of divorce. In this paper, the division of Germany into two separate states from 1949 until 1990, with the consequent development of two very different family policies, is regarded as a natural experiment that enables us to investigate the effect of family policy on the mechanisms underlying the social inheritance of divorce. Data from respondents from the former East and West Germany participating in the German Life History Study are analyzed using multivariate event-history methods. The results indicate that the strength of the intergenerational divorce transmission, when adjusted for differences in divorce level, was lower in the East than in the West. Differences in religion, marriage age and timing of first birth, which are partial indicators of family policy, could explain this effect. Furthermore, we did find a tendency towards a reduction in the dynamics of divorce transmission over time, both in East Germany and in West Germany.

Author's affiliation

[Henriette Engelhardt](#)
Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, Germany
[Heike Trappe](#)
Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Germany
[Jaap Dronkers](#)
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands



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