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The Effects of Wall: Gender Attitudes and Political Gender Gaps in Unified Germany

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Abstract:

Why are women less politically involved than men? We exploit Germany's separation and reunification to examine the relationship between gendered state policies, gender role attitudes, and political gender gaps. Using the German General Social Survey (1991-2012), we compare citizens' attitudes towards gender and the impact of these attitudes on political involvement across birth cohorts from East and West Germany. We find that cohorts socialized in the East hold more progressive gender attitudes than West Germans. Importantly, these attitudinal differences explain gender gaps in political interest and party membership; traditional gender attitudes are negatively correlated with women's political involvement. This finding holds when instrumenting for gender attitudes. We conclude by examining the effects of two gendered state policies—increasing women's educational attainment and workforce participation—on citizens' gender attitudes. Together, our findings reveal an important barrier to gender equality and inform debates about the persistent gender gap in political involvement..

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Diana Z. O'Brien is an Associate Professor of Political Science and studies the causes and consequences of women's political representation in established democracies and across the globe. Her research examines gender and political parties, executive branch politics, citizen's responses to women's presence in politics, and research methods.
