Politico-Economic Regimes and Attitudes: Female Workers under State-Socialism

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Abstract

We investigate the extent to which attitudes are affected by political regimes and government policies, and the channels of influence. We focus on gender-role attitudes and female attitudes toward work, exploiting the imposition of state-socialist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe, and the fact that the new regimes encouraged women’s employment, for both ideological and instrumental reasons. We use two different identification strategies and datasets. First, we take advantage of the German partition into East and West after 1945 and restricted-access information on place of residence to execute a spatial regression discontinuity design. We find more positive attitudes toward work in the sample of women who used to live in East Germany. In terms of channels, we find evidence that the experience of employment, arguably one of the very few positive aspects of living under state-socialism in East Germany, changed women’s attitudes. We do not find similar evidence for the role of propaganda. Second, we employ a difference-in-differences strategy that compares attitudes formed in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) and Western European Countries (WECs), before and after the imposition of state socialism in CEECs. Gender-role attitudes formed in CEECs during the state socialist period appear to be significantly less traditional than those formed in WECs. Overall, our study addresses previous identification and data limitations and finds that attitudes are profoundly affected by politico-economic regimes [with M. Serafinelli].

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