Value coalitions in Policy Change: The Impact of Gendered Patterns of Work, Religion, and Partisanship on Childcare Policy across German States

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Abstract: Since the 2002 Barcelona summit, Germany has been seen as a regional leader in achieving European states’ shared commitment to increase state-funded childcare. Yet Germany’s childcare success has not been homogenous across its Länder; rather, it has shown remarkable subnational variation, with considerable differences in spending, policy design, and coverage. Using panel data analysis and historical narratives, this paper provides an explanation for variation in provision of state-financed childcare for children under three years of age. We argue that competing visions of childcare at the subnational level – driven by the demands of differing numbers of women in the workforce and religious beliefs, and channeled by local government partisanship – have served as powerful constraints on convergence. Left partisanship and increased participation of women in the labor force are associated with higher provision of under-three childcare, while larger Catholic populations are correlated with less extensive state-funded childcare.

Key words: Social policy, childcare, partisanship, convergence, Germany
In recent years, family policies in advanced industrial economies have experienced dynamic change and growth. In contrast to well-established social policies such as pensions and unemployment, which have seen downscaling reforms across Europe, family policies have experienced a trajectory of expansion in the region. Among European countries, Germany, Netherlands and the UK have been particularly hailed as “path shifters,” for “devoting considerably greater resources to childcare than in the past” (Morgan, 2013: 73).

A growing body of literature has sought to explain the recent expansion of family policies (Williamson and Carnes 2013; Morgan 2013; Leitner 2010; Knijn and Saraceno 2010; Daly 2010; Mätzke 2010; Bonoli 2005; Henninger et al. 2008; Hantrais 1999). One strand of this new work, which might be called the “partisan convergence” approach, argues that parties with divergent ideological orientations have adopted overlapping policy goals regarding non-staple issues – such as family policy – due to the emergence of an increasingly dealigned female vote (Morgan 2013). This approach provides particular insight into national-level family policies. However, it sidelines the political conflict that may occur in the implementation phase at the subnational level, leaving the link between ideologically convergent issue adoption and observed policy outcomes underexamined. Its embrace of a “post-partisan” approach to policymaking obscures significant, value-driven political contestation that occurs, especially at the subnational level.

This paper finds a social and political explanation for variation in the expansion of family policies across Germany’s Länder – rooted in what we call “competing childcare visions” – despite that country’s national level commitment to a systematic expansion of its childcare for children under three. By adopting a subnational focus, we control for differences in national level political and economic institutions, and are better able to detect the ongoing, value-led
competition that happens within and between social actors and political parties. Further, by concentrating on under-three childcare policy, we isolate an outcome that has won increasing cross-partisan support at the federal level, but has been contested at the Länder level.

Germany provides an ideal test-case for examining subnational political constraints on policy implementation. Within Europe, it has attracted particular attention for undergoing a “paradigm shift” and a “real revolution” in its commitment to childcare; ambitiously, it now promises all “young children a right to a place in daycare by 2013” (Henninger et al., 2008; Wiliarty, 2010:180; Morgan, 2013). However, even in this regional leader, progress toward meeting the national-level goals is remarkably uneven. The Eastern Länder currently reach twice the share of young children with their under-three childcare services as do the Western Länder. In addition, wide variation characterizes the performance of Länder in both East and West. What explains these persistent differences?

We argue that the divergences in under-three daycare service availability across German Länder emerge from value-driven alliances promoting competing childcare visions, rooted in changing patterns of female labor force participation and religious-driven preferences regarding family life. These factors create and maintain significant divergences in policy implementation in spite of a federal commitment to universal provision of under-three childcare. We test these propositions on a dataset including all sixteen Länder over a period of seven years. We find that higher percentages of women in the workforce and lasting patterns of Social Democratic party control at the regional level bolster the level of daycare services, while large Catholic populations have a dampening effect on the extent to which these services are available.
The paper proceeds as follows: a first section provides background on childcare policy in Germany, highlighting the variation in levels of under-three daycare services provided across the German Länder. Next, we formulate a set of explanatory hypotheses that call attention to the political and social factors that shape competing visions of the family, and as a result, of childcare policy – most notably, the participation of women in the workforce, the influence of religious affiliation, and Land-level government partisanship. We submit our hypotheses to two sets of empirical tests. First, a quantitative analysis examines the determinants of under-three childcare services from 2005 to 2011 across all the Länder using the Betreuungsquote (attendance rate) indicator as a dependent variable. Second, a series of four historical narratives examines the pathways through which political contestation has produced the diverse outcomes observed at the Land level. Finally, we conclude by suggesting implications of the analysis for future study of childcare policy in Germany and the study of the welfare state more generally.

**Background: Under-three Childcare in Germany**

In 2002, at the Barcelona summit, the European member states agreed to harmonize childcare services to a coverage target of 33% of the population of children under three (European Council 2002). Two years later, in 2004, the Red-Green dominated Bundestag adopted this goal for Germany, mandating the expansion of childcare services to 35% by the year 2013 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006: 3). Under the Christian-Democratic led coalition government, at the first “under-three childcare summit”, in 2007, the Bund, Länder and local authorities reaffirmed their commitment to the 35% target (subsequently raised to 39%) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2012: 5).
Germany’s efforts built on two decades of institutional harmonization, a process which included the integration of East German institutions into their West German counterparts. Länder autonomy was limited by design, with each Land being expected to implement federal laws. Nevertheless, each Land was left free to provide additional funding and legislation beyond federal provisions. Financing responsibility was divided between the Bund, the Länder and the local administration.

Despite these efforts toward institutional harmonization and the adoption of a shared policy target, considerable regional differences in policy implementation persist. The Eastern Länder, with their legacy of Communist social policy institutions, far exceed their Western counterparts in the provision of under-three childcare services (see Table 1 below). In 2011, Länder in the East provided daycare services for 49% of their children under three years of age, while those in the West reached only 22.3% of their children.

Yet, the cross-regional differences are not confined to an East-West divide. Rather, variation within East and West is also highly pronounced, and the recent trajectories in daycare service provision are highly heterogeneous. In Western Germany, at the end of 2011, the difference between the highest and lowest Länder – Hamburg and Nordrhein-Westphalia – amounted to 17.7 percentage points. Strikingly, this disparity between Western Länder has grown since 2002, when concerted efforts toward the shared target began to take shape. Similarly, among the Eastern Länder, at the end of 2011, the difference between the highest and the lowest providers of under-three daycare services amounted to 14.9 percentage points (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2012).
Overall, there is a trend of persisting differences among Länder, despite an all-around movement toward expansion. Länder providing higher levels of childcare services tend to remain generous providers, while Länder offering lower levels of availability tend to remain relative laggards. Because it started at the lowest levels, the West has grown most quickly, but it has never caught up with East.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

**Theory: Evolving Visions of the Family and the Politics of Childcare Policy**

We argue that persistent differences in under-three daycare services across German Länder are the product of two competing “childcare visions” which shape the policies advanced by major political parties: one which emphasizes at-home care and another that favors institutional care. As a result, partisan convergence observed at the national level is constrained by political coalitions advancing distinct childcare visions at the subnational level.

These coalitions can be traced to the significant changes in patterns of work and “ideals of care” within the family that have occurred in advanced industrial economies in recent decades (Kremer 2007). Historically in Germany, a “traditional” model of a “homemaker mother” predominated (Hochschild 1995: 332), favoring stay-at-home care by the female. But as “increasing numbers of women [have been] entering the labor market,” there has been a concomitant “erosion of the male breadwinner model” that underwrote the traditional mode of childcare (Lewis 2001:153), introducing new pressures for policy change. Thus, a new vision of “modern” childcare, which looks to state-run or private institutions to provide either full-time or part-time care of the young, has received increasing attention and support (Hochschild 1995: 332).
Consequently, we trace the demand for under-three childcare in Germany to a demographic factor: the rise of women’s participation in the workforce. As women go out into the workforce, their need for daycare services outside the home is likely to increase, and we therefore hypothesize that they will subsequently make demands for state supported childcare. These demands may be articulated through voting choices, through civil society organizations, or through campaigns that raise awareness and promote working women’s vision. In international comparisons of welfare states, female labor force participation has been associated with an expansion of social spending (Huber and Stephens, 2000, 2001). Moreover, in work on childcare, “modern” childcare arrangements have been shown to be more common where “the economy is dependent on female labor” and where interest groups – often made up of women – are “stronger and more coordinated” (Hochschild, 1995, 342). Indeed, in the West German context, as women increase their weekly working time, children are more likely to attend institutional care (Spiess et al., 2002; Coneus et al., 2007).\(^3\)

However, the entry of women into the workforce does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it occurs in the context of existing cultural and ideological values. Among these influences, religion is a particularly important source of values and norms shaping family life; churches frequently act as societal veto players, heavily constraining policy development (Fink 2009). Further, cross-national research indicates that “conservative religious figures and right wing politicians” have been the main advocates of the “traditional” model of childcare (Hochschild 1995: 338). Thus, while the modern vision of childcare has been embraced by many women as they enter the workforce, it has been challenged by the traditional vision, as nurtured by individual religious commitments and collective activity by churches and their leaders. Indeed, in Germany, the Catholic Church has opposed the expansion of childcare services (Hageman 2006),
giving preferential support to home-based childcare for children under three.\textsuperscript{4} As Catholic voters in Germany tend to be quite motivated by their faith (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008: 9-10), we hypothesize that where they predominate, the “traditional” view is likely to retain prominence, and may inhibit the adoption of institutionalized under-three childcare.

Finally, political parties play a crucial role in channeling both of these visions of childcare into the design and implementation of policy. Parties respond to new social patterns, such as the demographic rise of female employment, but they also have a strong affinity for their historical bases and ideological programs (Bonoli 2005, 2001; Häusermann 2006; Esping-Andersen 1999a, b; Kitschelt 1994; Huber and Stephens 2001, 2012; Williamson and Carnes 2013). In particular, leftist parties have long been associated with the expansion of social welfare spending and services, and conservative parties have tended to resist such expansion. Previous work has emphasized how left parties favor the ideal of individual independence in society, and thus they pursue expansive state-provided social services, especially those that free parents (and women, specifically) to engage in the labor market. They seek childcare policy that will “preemptively socialize the costs of familyhood” (Esping-Andersen, 1990:28). Huber and Stephens (2001) argue that this effect is most pronounced when Leftist parties govern for sustained periods of time.

Literature specific to Germany has emphasized the role played by partisanship in shaping social policy outcomes, such as education, parental leave and childcare policy (Leitner, 2010; Turner, 2011). Over the last decade, Social Democrats (SPD) have consistently called for expansion of under-three childcare services, while Christian Democrats (CDU) have generally favored policies that would support mothers who wish to stay at home with their young children.
Nevertheless, due to electoral competition, the German political landscape at the federal level has undergone change in recent years, with traditional parties from the right “stealing” policies from their leftist competitors (Morgan 2013). In particular, the Christian Democrats have increasingly accepted some role for state-provided childcare centers. But at the Land level, they have sought to slow expansion of childcare services, especially in cases where they assumed power from Social Democrats (Turner 2011). Thus, we hypothesize that differences in childcare visions may remain more salient at the Land level, such that government by parties on the Left increases the likelihood of greater expansion of under-three childcare.

In short, then, our account emphasizes how (a) demographic changes may raise demand for under-three childcare, (b) religious convictions can shape or inhibit institutionalized childcare expansion, and (c) partisan leadership from the left, especially over a longer time period, may increase the likelihood of under-three childcare expansion.

**Empirical analysis**

We present two econometric models to test the hypothesized relationships between the variation in levels of childcare services and the demographic and political variables discussed above. This analysis requires us to simplify complex causal processes into single measures for each variable, so we subsequently provide four illustrative case narratives to better show the role played by hypothesized causal factors in particular Länder.

**Dependent variable**

*Percentage of children under three enrolled in daycare services*
The “Betreuungsquote” is a commonly used measure for the provision of publicly funded daycare services. Since 2006, the measurement is collected annually by the statistical offices of the Länder and published by the German Federal Statistical Office. The indicator calculates the percentage of children enrolled in daycare services in the general population of children under three in every Land.\(^5\)

Daycare services in Germany are offered by both public and nonpublic providers, in a proportion of roughly one-third to two-thirds, respectively. This division of administrative competencies, however, belies a much more unified funding structure. Nonpublic providers – which include religious and welfare organizations, unions and parents’ associations – receive public financing of up to 90% percent of their incurred costs. In addition, while public funding for private, commercial providers is not anchored in federal law, Länder have the legal right to offer subsidies to them. Currently, six Länder have such additional financing provisions in place.\(^6\) Still, this private for-profit sector is very small. The Betreuungsquote indicator covers all these categories of providers, and thus makes a very good indicator of both coverage and public spending on childcare services.

**Independent Variables**

*Female Labor Participation*

This variable measures the percentage of females between 15 and 65 years of age who are engaged in the labor market out of the entire population of a Land. It includes full-time and part-time employees and women undergoing apprenticeships, as well as those actively looking for employment (German Federal Statistical Office).\(^7\)
A complication in using female labor participation as a predictor of levels of provision of daycare services is the possible feedback effect between the availability of daycare services outside the home and the incentive to go out into the workforce. To mitigate this concern, we lag the variable by one year, and we present our results regarding this variable with caution.

*Religious affiliation*

This variable measures the percentage of Catholic Church members in the population by Land. The data was drawn from the *Kirchenmitglieder* publication series of the Evangelical Church of Germany and corroborated with data received from the German Bishops’ Conference.

*Left parties’ control of the Landtag*

The data for this variable was drawn from the website http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/ which compiles election results for state and federal level since the second half of the 19th century according to the publications of the various statistical offices of the states. We code left party dominance cumulatively for every additional year that left parties have been in a position to name the head of the Land government, as a reflection of the vote shares attained in Land elections. The parties we code under the left label are the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), the Die Linke (The Left) party and the Buendnis 90/ Die Gruennen (Alliance 90/ The Greens). We begin the year count in 1991, the first year after the reunification.

*Control Variables*

*The Cold-War Legacy*

Due to the historical legacy of Germany’s division during the Cold War, the levels of daycare services coverage differ markedly between the Länder of the two former German states.
To account for these structural differences and distinguish them from the effect of the variables presented here, we include a variable that specifies the geographic location of the Länder within either the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) or Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). We code the variable as a binary variable, setting the value to one to represent a Land that was a part of the former FRG and zero otherwise.

**Latent Demand**

The size of the cohort of children under three provides a measure of the latent demand for expansion of childcare services. Accordingly, we control for the under-three population, by year, in each Land (logged to avoid distortions driven by the significant range in values). We draw the data from the *Kindertagesbetreuung regional* publication series of the Federal German Statistical Office.

**Economic development**

The size of a Land’s economy can have a significant impact on decisions regarding financing an expansion of daycare services. We therefore also include a variable representing the gross state product per capita generated by each Land for each year under analysis. The variable is logged, following conventions in the literature. The data was collected from the 2010/2011 edition of the *Volkswirtschaftliche Gesamtrechnungen der Länder* publication of the Statistical Office of the Länder.

**Estimation technique**

The analysis is based on a strongly balanced panel with 112 Land-year observations and 7 panels. We have opted for an OLS regression for cross-sectional time series with clustered
robust standard errors. Based on a diagnostic Hausman test, we also specify the model to control for time-invariant, Land-specific effects.

**Results**

We present two econometric models to examine the relationship between the variation in levels of daycare services for children under three across German Länder and percentage of women in the workforce, the size of the Catholic population, and Social Democratic Party control. Model 1 presents our model using fixed effects. All three of our main independent variables show statistically significant results in the hypothesized directions. Greater proportions of working women are correlated with higher levels of daycare services, while larger populations of Catholics are correlated with lower levels of daycare services for children under three. Greater left parties’ dominance is also correlated with higher levels of availability of daycare services. Among the control variables, the size of the population aged under three and the revenue per capita do not exhibit statistically significant effects.

Model 2 evaluates the importance of the East-West geographic control variable representing the historical legacy of the German division. This model confirms the results of our first model, with the exception of the Catholic population variable, which no longer has a significant effect. This may be an artifact of the geographic concentration of the Catholic population in the West. In 2011, Länder of the former West Germany averaged a Catholic population of 30.7 percent, while former East German Länder only averaged 5.1 percent Catholics.

[TABLE 2 HERE]
Estimating substantive effects with the Clarify statistical package (Tomz et al. 2001) on the pooled OLS model we find that, when holding all other variables constant at their mean, one standard deviation increase in the cumulative Left parties variable (from 9.28 to 15.76 years, out of 21 years) raises the levels of under-three daycare services by 2.03 percentage points. In 2011, this increase corresponds to a move from laggard Saarland to Schleswig-Holstein, the Land with the third highest level of under-three daycare services among the Western Länder. Similarly, a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of working women (from the mean of 69.79 to 74.32) amounts to a 7.01 percentage points increase in daycare services, equivalent to a move from Saarland to Rheinland-Pfalz, the Land with the second highest levels of under-three daycare services. Finally, a one standard deviation in the percentage of Catholic church members (from 21.63 to 41.62) corresponds to a drop of 1.97 percentage points in the level of under-three daycare services, roughly a move from Hessen to Saarland.

**Robustness Checks**

In the models above, we code left parties’ control using a cumulative count of the number of years in which these parties have been in power since reunification in 1991. This follows Huber and Stephens (2001) who emphasize that longer-governing parties have greater opportunity to enact their preferred policies and to establish a ‘well-oiled’ bureaucratic machine for delivering those policies. However, it is possible that our coding artificially inflates the importance of left parties’ influence by including party control prior to the 2005-2011 period. As robustness checks, we conduct two additional sets of analyses using alternative codings of the left parties’ variable; the results are presented in Table 3.
Model 3 and 4 employ a measure of left parties’ control that counts cumulative years of power only from 2005 to 2011. As can be seen, the results in Model 3, which employs fixed-effects, are unchanged. However, in Model 4, which includes the East-West variable, the left parties’ variable loses significance, indicating that longevity and legacy matter in producing higher levels of childcare services; shorter-lived and more recent governments from the left have less effect than their long-standing peers. The Catholic variable also loses significance, but again this seems to be driven by the geographic concentration of Catholics in the West.

Up to this point, the cumulative measures observed the relationship between the total number of years for which left-parties had governed up to year \( t \) and the level of under-three care in year \( t \). Models 5 and 6 code left-parties control in a binary fashion, with a value of one assigned in years when left parties are in power in a particular Land. This allows us to see the contemporaneous relationship between left-parties control in year \( t \) and the level of children in under 3 daycare in year \( t \). Models 5 and 6 find further support for our findings about partisanship, even in this contemporaneous framework, while the percentage Catholics variable again loses significance once the geographic control is introduced.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

**Qualitative evidence**

To better understand the dynamics behind the relationships detected in the quantitative models, we turn to historical analyses of four Länder. These schematic case studies allow us to observe factors that do not lend themselves to quantification – such as the activity of women’s organizations, statements by local church leaders, and the positions of political parties at the Land level – and better discern the hypothesized causal processes at work.
Our four cases have been chosen for their variation on two of our main hypotheses: levels of women’s participation in the workforce and the duration that left parties have been in power. Secondarily, we chose representative Länder from both the former East and West Germany. We have restricted our cases to non city-states to ensure similarity in institutional structures.

Table 4 below presents the four cases selected for analysis, and Figure 1 displays them in the context of all the Länder in 2011. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern represents a case of high female labor participation and high left-party control. Sachsen displays high levels of women in the workforce but low SPD governance. Both are former East German Länder. Rheinland-Pfalz presents a combination of lower workforce participation by women and high SPD control. Finally, Saarland exhibits low values on both our independent variables of interest. These last two Länder are drawn from the former West Germany.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

**Party platforms and party preferences**

Prior to examining the cases, we present key elements of the national-level party platforms of the SPD and CDU, to lay out the differences in their conception of the family and their preferred childcare policy options.

Since 1989, the Social Democratic Party’s platforms have emphasized the party’s commitment to expanding childcare in the mold of the “modern” vision, calling “Kindergarten schools and all day schools … the prerequisites which make work and family compatible for women and men” (21). The 2007 platform went even further, stating that “The state has to make
sure that … every person has the right to claim an educational path free of charge from crèche and kindergarten through to university” (35). The SPD thus articulates demands for childcare policy that is feeless for parents, publicly subsidized from birth, delivered in the context of formal institutions, and extensively available rather than on the basis of need.9

During the same period, the Christian Democratic Party platforms made a very different set of demands for childcare from those espoused by the SPD, emphasizing the traditional family as the constitutive unit of society and main provider of social services. They stated that, “the right and the duty of bringing up a child are first and foremost the prerogative of the parents. The state cannot and should not replace parents in and assistance for child upbringing” (2007: 31). Further, while allowing for the expansion of “the network of childcare facilities for children of all age groups,” they put forth a medium-term demand for “a subsidy for parents, who look after their children at home and do not claim a place in a daycare institution” (2007: 31). Thus, the CDU’s discussion of childcare services is overshadowed by a preference for family members as the primary providers of social services. A note of skepticism toward institutionalized childcare prevails, and is reflected in the emphasis on parental choice in selecting among childcare options.

Nevertheless, at the federal level, the CDU has recently shown a movement toward acceptance and promotion of under-three childcare outside the family. Morgan (2013) documents in detail this process of ‘social-democratization’ of the CDU since the 1990s. She attributes this shift to the “unprecedented electoral volatility” (89) in the wake of the German Reunification, the “diminishing influence of traditional core groups” at the national level, and “worries about eroding female support” as determining factors. In order to compete for national office, the Christian Democrats pursued a strategy of “reaching out to disaffected voters with new policies
and ideas” (90) in federal matters. Yet, as we document in the following case studies, their traditional preference for in-home family care remained strong at the Land level.

High female employment and left parties’ control: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a national frontrunner

A former Eastern Land, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has the fifth highest rate of female labor participation in the country and is home to the second smallest population of Catholic Church members (2011 figures). With five successive cabinets under Social Democratic leadership (after the first eight years of Christian Democratic leadership following the Reunification), it presents a striking illustration of how all three of our identified factors contributed to a high adoption (and regular expansion) of under-three daycare services.

In the early 2000s, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern already displayed a strong embrace of the “modern” childcare vision, with high levels of childcare services by comparison to both Western and Eastern Länder, but it was struggling with high levels of indebtedness and unemployment. Nevertheless, in 2004 a proposal was brought forward to expand the childcare system using Land funds.

Women’s organizations representing the female labor force played an important role championing the law. Gathered under the umbrella association of the Landesfrauenrat (Landwide Women’s Council) of Mecklenburg, they kept a close eye on the development of the law, putting forth suggestions in advance of its adoption and demanding further improvements afterward. The demands included the extension of the legal entitlement starting at age one, increased funding for trained daycare personnel, and flexible hours to accommodate growing patterns of female employment in services, hospitality, tourism, healthcare and telemarketing
(jobs which require flexible hours and pay low wages, making non-publicly funded daycare arrangements unfeasible) (Landesfrauenrat Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2010).

In contrast, the Catholic bishops in Berlin and Hamburg, between whose jurisdictions Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is divided, advocated stronger financial support for family-based childcare options. Yet, the extremely small Catholic population of the Land made it impossible for them to mount serious challenges to the legislative proposals.

The Social Democrats dominated leadership at the time of the law’s consideration, and were able to shepherd it to passage with Left Party support. Later, when in coalition with the CDU, they oversaw a 2010 amendment of the law that further increased the Land’s commitment to childcare, assigning additional funds toward the participation costs of local authorities in support of daycare institutions, and extending the legal entitlement to childcare for disadvantaged children or those with unemployed parents. Thus, between 2005 and 2011, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern retained its position as the second highest provider for childcare services in the East and in the country – 53.6 percent – and underwent a robust 24 percent increase in under-three daycare services.

*Long standing center-right influence in the East: Sachsen’s restrained expansion*

Sachsen, another former Eastern Land, boasts the second highest rate of female labor participation in the country, and has among the smallest Catholic populations in the country; politically, it has been under Christian Democratic leadership since the reunification. According to our theory, this makes it ripe for calls for childcare expansion, yet perhaps more constrained in its legislative activity due to the CDU’s traditional preference for in-home childcare.
During the period following 2002, the CDU-led approach to childcare services in Sachsen – which closely followed the “traditional” vision – emphasized fiscal restraint and an expanded role for the family in care giving. The Land increasingly relied on parental fees and contributions from local authorities to fund the expansion of its daycare services. Contributions at the Land level diminished, particularly after 2005. Public funding was directed to private, for-profit providers, as well as to parents who, after the federally mandated period of parental leave, chose not to engage in full-time work but instead cared for their child at home (rather than making use of a daycare center).

The Saxon Women’s Council repeatedly protested against projected cuts in funds that might have a negative impact on gender equality in the Land (Landesfrauenrat Sachsen 2010). In 2007, the female leader of the Green Party parliamentary group in the Saxon Parliament, joined by other female leaders from finance and industry, also proposed amending existing tax law to reduce taxes paid by women in order to compensate for the low levels of disposable income they were left with after childcare costs (Spiegel Online 2007). These efforts, however, met with little success given the Land’s CDU leadership. The Land’s Catholic population was a further base of support for the CDU policy, expressing strong support for its emphasis on family-based childcare (Council of the Diocese of Dresden-Meissen 2007).

In sum, Sachsen’s CDU dominance meant that state-provided childcare coverage was limited, the lowest among the Eastern Länder in 2005. Subsequent calls from working women for daycare expansion produced significant gains – the most rapid in the East, at a 39 percent increase – but by 2011 Sachsen still remained the second lowest provider of daycare services for children in the former Eastern Länder.
Religious influence vs. strong Left partisan control of the Landtag: Rheinland-Pfalz as a rapid expander and regional leader

Rheinland-Pfalz, in the West, has a moderate rate of female labor participation and the country’s third highest Catholic population. Further, it is one of the most left-dominated states in Germany, having been controlled by an SPD-led social liberal coalition until 2006, and then experiencing an SPD absolute majority and a subsequent Red-Green coalition led by the SPD. As a result, the Land presents less favorable demographic and cultural influences on its family policies, but strong partisan leadership in favor of childcare expansion.

The working women of Rheinland-Pfalz have shown strong support for the expansion of “modern” under-three childcare services, both before and after 2007, when the law mandating expansion was adopted at the federal level. In a 2006 conference, the Women’s Council from Rheinland-Pfalz concluded that “Early education is a priority” and that “Money shortages should not be an excuse” (Women’s Council Rheinland-Pfalz 2006). Similarly, in 2009 the Association of Social Democratic Women of Rheinland-Pfalz called on the federal government to “invest the money in the number and quality of places in daycare, instead of paying so that necessary services supply of the state not be utilized” (Association of Social Democratic Women Rheinland-Pfalz 2009).

Catholic voices espoused a contrary position during the period, arguing that “better compatibility between career and family should not be limited exclusively to the expansion of childcare opportunities” (Diocese of Mainz 2006). Cardinal Lehman of Mainz echoed this view, stating that “state support for children under-three should not lead to a dominance of the state in early childcare” (Diocese of Mainz 2007).
SPD leadership throughout the period moved Rheinland-Pfalz’s childcare policy toward greater fee-exempt provision of daycare, and provided more extensive subsidies for institutional daycare provision. In 2005, the Land increased its financial contribution to staffing costs for under-three education and extended financial support for a new curriculum program for training crèche and kindergarten teachers. In addition, it mandated a legal right to daycare (by 2010) for children of two years of age – a year earlier than the federal minimum, simultaneously eliminating costs for parents.

As a result, Rheinland-Pfalz saw a remarkable 187 percent expansion of under-three daycare services between 2005 and 2011. Its dominant SPD governance was undeterred by skeptical Catholics, leading to the state’s achievement of the highest daycare provision rate for a Western non-city Land.

Center right policy preferences vs. few competing influences: Saarland as a regional and national laggard

Saarland, another Western Land, is home to the lowest percentage of working women and the largest Catholic population in Germany. Further, it has been under Christian Democratic leadership since 1999, with the same minister president for the entire period and a strong preference for “traditional” childcare in the family. In terms of our theory, it presents the least likely combination of factors for under-three childcare expansion.

Before the Land-level election in 2009, the Women’s Council of Saarland promoted discussion of the compatibility between work and family, the gender wage gap, and incentives for men to assume increased family responsibilities. However, the dominant Christian Democrats – in contrast to all other political parties – chose not to respond to the organization’s
request to present a position paper on women’s issues for the upcoming mandate 2009-2014. Meanwhile, Catholic representatives decried a “unilateral focus of the financing debate on childcare outside the home, which disregards the fundamental right and duty of the parents to child-rearing” (Council of Catholics of the diocese of Trier 2007).

The 2008 CDU-formulated Childcare and Education Law side-stepped the issue of Land-level financing for early childcare personnel and facilities, leaving these details to a later decree (SPD Saarland n.d.). By 2010, the government invoked fiscal constraints to freeze financing for the construction of new Kindergarten facilities (SPD Saarland 2010), which in the Land had been housing many new daycare openings for children under three.

In sum, Saarland’s CDU dominance, low levels of women in the workforce, and high number of Catholics, presented a highly unlikely environment for significant expansion of under-three care. Coverage did grow between 2005 and 2011 – at the relatively high rates that would be expected of the late-starting Western Länder – but Saarland saw the second slowest expansion in the West, and remained one of the three lowest childcare providers in the country.

Summary

The historical analysis above shows that government partisanship is highly important in shaping under-three childcare coverage, either lending pivotal support to demands expressed by working women or acting against them. When in power, leftist parties proposed, introduced, and enacted policies that promoted the expansion of under-three daycare services. In turn, those from the right slowed such expansion. Länder under legislative control of parties of the left moved toward increasing Land-level support for institutional daycare services for children under three, as well as toward the reduction of parental contributions for these services. Conversely, weak
patterns of control of the state legislature by the left parties, coupled with low proportions of working women, led to the strongest dampening effect on the availability of these services. These effects were further accentuated by the pressures exercised by large Catholic populations.

**Conclusion**

This paper has provided a political and social explanation for advances – and in turn persistent differences – in levels of daycare services for children under three across Germany. We have provided evidence that variation in childcare provision across the German Länder is the result of competing visions of the family held by political parties, working women and religious segments of the population at the subnational level. These political and social actors’ alignment along a divide between modern and traditional, family-centric values shapes the divergence in policy outcomes, in spite of the partisan convergence of positions on service expansion at the federal level.

The evidence presented here suggests that European-level and federal-level policy makers face an uphill battle in their efforts to raise and harmonize childcare provision. Social actors and parties continue to assert divergent policy preferences and channel their competing values in society, especially at the local level. As the results of our analysis show, rather than imposing a uniform trend toward upward convergence in spending levels on under-three childcare services, the federal structure of the German state opened up the space for partisan differences. This party-driven variation is most visibly manifest in a cross-sectional overview of daycare services availability levels across Germany, but it is also discernible in the diverging rates of expansion over the period. Our subnational analysis thus highlights that even though parties have begun to converge in their views on childcare policy at the national level, their
remaining differences in preferences over policy design have important effects at the local, Land level.

Our analysis also highlights the role of working women in shaping this area of childcare policy. Higher percentages of working women are associated with higher levels of daycare services. As women enter the workforce at all levels in growing numbers, relegating traditional images of working mothers as “Rabenmütter” to the past, their demands for “modern” daycare are likely to become stronger and more specific to their employment situation.\textsuperscript{11}

Our third finding suggests that higher levels of Catholic religious affiliation are negatively correlated with levels of daycare services for children under three. Our case studies, however, suggest that religion is rarely able to be a decisive influence on policy decisions. Rather, it relies on coordination with political parties and local leadership to see its preferences enacted.

While the results of the study successfully explain the variation in levels of under-three daycare services, further research is warranted. The paper has proposed a simple model of under-three childcare politics, testing alternative hypotheses reflecting the political and social factors that shape policy expansion. As further data points become available, a more sophisticated model could look at the interactions between these and other variables. In addition, closer examination of the role played by Christian right parties in the provision of childcare is needed, in order to tease out the specific ways that their preference for traditional family structures shape state-financed daycare services for children under three.

More broadly, this analysis shows that the pursuit of coordinated social policy proposals faces significant challenges from local politics. In Germany, despite a highly integrated federal
structure and two decades of coordinated planning since the country’s reunification, the harmonization of under-three childcare is still an elusive goal. Efforts at the European level are likely to be subject to similar, and perhaps more intractable, political pushback. We have highlighted three factors affecting policy coordination: partisan ideology, workforce participation by women, and religious belief. As politicians pursue coordination on technical goals to improve social outcomes, they would be wise not to ignore these factors that may enhance – or undermine – their efforts.
Table 1. Variation in levels of under-three daycare services by region in 2011 (% children under three in daycare)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land/Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>% change from 2005 level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>West</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordrhein-Westfalen</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saarland</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niedersachsen</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
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<td>Baden-Württemberg</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hessen</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schleswig- Holstein</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheinland-Pfalz</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>187</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsen</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thüringen</td>
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<td>37.5</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandenburg</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsen-Anhalt</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2: Determinants of Under-Three Childcare Provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) % children under three in daycare</th>
<th>(2) % children under three in daycare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative years of left parties’ government</td>
<td>0.538 (0.261)</td>
<td>0.303 (0.118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics (% population)</td>
<td>-1.617*** (0.514)</td>
<td>0.0756 (0.0470)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female labor force Participation (% total EAP)</td>
<td>1.636*** (0.323)</td>
<td>1.831*** (0.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td></td>
<td>-21.13*** (2.482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log under-three population</td>
<td>-11.46 (19.40)</td>
<td>-2.073** (0.971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log GSP per capita</td>
<td>0.958 (8.424)</td>
<td>6.826** (2.870)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>63.38 (222.9)</td>
<td>-138.0*** (27.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.779</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses

*p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01
Table 3: Robustness Checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(3) u3indaycare</th>
<th>(4) u3indaycare</th>
<th>(5) u3indaycare</th>
<th>(6) u3indaycare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative years of left parties government since 2005</td>
<td>0.516* (0.263)</td>
<td>0.317 (0.236)</td>
<td>3.898*** (0.774)</td>
<td>3.563*** (0.657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left parties in power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.898*** (0.774)</td>
<td>3.563*** (0.657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female labor force participation (% total EAP)</td>
<td>1.634*** (0.323)</td>
<td>1.854*** (0.153)</td>
<td>1.728*** (0.270)</td>
<td>1.925*** (0.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics (% population)</td>
<td>-1.634*** (0.518)</td>
<td>0.0335 (0.0536)</td>
<td>-1.538** (0.512)</td>
<td>0.0381 (0.0626)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>-17.45*** (2.519)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-16.83*** (2.539)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log under-three population</td>
<td>-11.23 (19.35)</td>
<td>-2.694** (1.138)</td>
<td>-3.657 (15.14)</td>
<td>-2.374* (1.274)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log GSP per capita</td>
<td>1.365 (8.392)</td>
<td>5.036* (2.951)</td>
<td>4.298 (7.672)</td>
<td>5.327 (3.461)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>61.43 (222.9)</td>
<td>-113.3*** (27.34)</td>
<td>-63.86 (175.5)</td>
<td>-126.1*** (33.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>0.800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Table 4: Case selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High rate of female labor participation</th>
<th>Low rate of female labor participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High leftist parties control</td>
<td>Low leftist parties control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High U3 daycare; steady expansion</td>
<td>Medium U3 daycare; fast expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern</td>
<td>Sachsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low U3 daycare; slow expansion</td>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low rate of female labor participation</td>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium U3 daycare; fast expansion</td>
<td>Low U3 daycare; slow expansion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low rate of female labor participation</td>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium U3 daycare; fast expansion</td>
<td>Low U3 daycare; slow expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsen</td>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
<td>Rineinland-Pfalz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: 2011 Childcare Outcomes and Qualitative Case Selection

% children u-3 in day care by Bundesland in 2011

West
- NordrheinWestfalen
- Bremen
- Saarland
- Niedersachen
- Bayern
- BadenWürttemberg
- Hessen
- SchleswigHolstein
- RheinlandPfalz
- Hamburg

East
- Berlin
- Sachsen
- Thüringen
- Brandenburg
- MecklenburgVorpommern
- SachsenAnhalt
References


Evangelische Kirche in Deuthschland (Various years). *Kirchenmitgliederzahlen*. Available at: http://www.ekd.de/downloads.


Spd-saar.de (n.d.). *Kinderbetreuungsgesetz: SPD legt umfassende Gesetzesänderung vor*. Available at: www.spd-saar.de/index.php?id=751&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=5&tx_ttnews%5Btt+news%5D=50088&tx_news%5BblackPid%5D=10&cHash=a78c53a19b.
The analysis here focuses on the period from 2005 to 2011, as changes in the German Statistical Office’s data collection methodology makes previous observations un-comparable with more recent years.

Given the divided administrative jurisdiction between the Federal German Republic and the German Democratic Republic, Berlin can also be seen as a hybrid case.

Of course, there is also the possibility of reverse causality. It may be that women are induced to work outside the home in greater numbers where state-subsidized childcare is more available. Nevertheless, previous work has found that “In general, even in the Nordic countries, the expansion of child services and the adoption of generous parental...
leaves followed, rather than predated, the upward trend in mother’s employment and then reinforced these trends” (Morgan, 2013, 83). Empirically, we seek to limit the likelihood of reverse causality by using a lagged measure of the share of women in the workforce.

4 By way of comparison, the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany expressed “full and complete support” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2010) for federal under-three daycare expansion plans, and actively opposed a subsidy for parents who stay home to take care of their child (EKD, 2009).

5 The indicator is used by the Federal Statistical Office as a measure of supply rather than demand due to the fact that the demand calculated by the institution considerably exceeds enrollment in existing daycare options. The demand figure is under constant reevaluation and is not published as a yearly time series by Land, making it unsuitable for use in the present analysis.

6 The six Länder that provide additional financing provisions (for private, commercial providers) are Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Berlin, Brandenburg, Saarland, Sachsen.

7 Women’s full-time employment is somewhat higher in the Eastern than in the Western Länder, but the difference in average hours worked between West and East declined steadily over the period, standing at only 4.2 hours in 2011 (http://www.sozialpolitik-aktuell.de drawing on Federal German Statistical Office, Microcensus data). This difference does not fundamentally change our expectation about enrollment rates in childcare services between East and West. Moreover, we implicitly control for this structural difference in our models 2, 4, and 6 in Tables 2 and 3, by including a dummy for the West.

8 All quotations are drawn from the official English version of the platform, as provided by the party.

9 The SPD also opposed proposed tax reforms related to the taxation method of “Ehegattensplitting” (tax break for married couples), which had been widely criticized for discouraging married women from pursuing gainful employment, due to the high tax rates on the second income of married couples. The SPD thus expresses a clear preference for the dual income-earner family model.

10 Still, while party-driven variation is important, it is far from absolute, as in the West, the three Länder with the highest increases in daycare enrollment had Christian Democratic governments.

11 The term “Rabenmütter” is used derogatorily to refer to working mothers. In recent debates, it has been used to invoke the image of ravens, whose chicks abandon the nest even before they can fly (implying that their mothers must not be providing them with adequate care in the home).