

More work, less politics: The gendered impact of working time increase on political interest

Raúl Villegas Santana

CSIC/University Carlos III of Madrid

Abstract

This paper explores whether increasing working hours can diminish the level of political interest among individuals, with a special focus on differences by gender. The core idea is that time is a necessary but not sufficient condition for political engagement. Its decrease acts as an inhibitor, increasing the mental load and making the cognitive costs of politics unaffordable, especially for women, who usually have less and poorer quality time available than men. To test this, the study draws on panel data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) to track the trajectories of public sector employees, employing a quasi-experimental Difference-in-Differences design to analyse a 2005 reform that exogenously increased the weekly working time for federal public employees in western German states while leaving the rest of public workers in the same states unaffected. The results show that those who experienced an increase in working time reduced their interest in politics. This effect is driven almost entirely by women, confirming the gender gap hypothesis. These findings challenge the idea that political interest is fixed in adulthood and suggest that exogenous changes in everyday life can make people less likely to engage with politics. The study also highlights that having less time available can increase the gender gap in political interest.

Keywords: Political interest, Gender gap, Working time, SOEP, Diff-in-Diff