

# Smoking Bans and Political Outcomes: Evidence from a Natural Experiment

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## Abstract

This paper uses German SOEP data to investigate whether public smoking bans have an effect on political outcomes. During 2007 and 2008 smoking bans were implemented in all of Germany's sixteen federal states to prohibit smoking in bars, restaurants and dance clubs. However, the states introduced the smoking bans on different dates between 2007 and 2008, which provides the opportunity to identify causal effects of public smoking bans on different outcomes.

The implementation of smoking bans led to a strong opposition from the beginning. The German hospitality union (Dehoga) feared a loss of sales and the demise of numerous pubs. As a consequence, bar owners filed a constitutional complaint against the bans in two states. Since the implementation of smoking bans not only influenced the German hospitality industry but also individuals' personal lives, we investigate the effect of smoking bans on political outcomes. We exploit the variation across states in the introduction of smoking bans to estimate difference-in-differences models.

The results show that being exposed to a smoking ban increases political interest in West Germany and decreases the probability to support the federal state government in East Germany. A subgroup analysis reveals that in particular female and male smokers in West Germany score higher in political interest and are more likely to support a specific political party than no party at all, following the ban. Regardless of gender, smoking status or age, East Germans are by roughly 20 percentage points less likely to support the party or coalition in power. Furthermore, young female smokers in East Germany report a strong increase in interest in politics and have a higher probability to switch party preferences if they are exposed to a smoking ban. Overall, the results suggest that the introduction of smoking bans had a strong impact on political outcomes, although the effects vary across subgroups of the population.

**Keywords:** Smoking bans, political interest, party identification, treatment effects.

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