

Do intergenerational relationships and the grandparent role matter for party preferences?

Tobias Wiß, Valeria Bordone and Gerrit Bauer

Presentation at the 30th Annual Meeting of the
Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE),
Doshisha University Kyoto (Japan), 23-25 June 2018

We know from the literature that political preferences vary by gender and family role, what has major implications for social policy and political institutions. Although we already have gained insights for differences between men and women, parents and people without children as well as older and younger cohorts, we lack knowledge about differences within the group of older people. Increasing longevity and decreasing fertility have resulted in an ageing process that is becoming a global phenomenon. As a consequence, population ageing is dominating current debates on social policies that often consider older people as a homogenous group. However, the population of older people is increasingly heterogeneous.

Older people are of great interest in the study of political preferences, as their share of the electorate is rapidly increasing in ageing countries. Drawing on previous theoretical and empirical research on the association between parenthood and political preferences as well as on the socio-demographic literature on the effects of grandparenthood, we explore whether grandparents differently support the various political parties in Germany as compared to grandchildless individuals aged 50 and over. Therefore, we contribute to the existing literature by focussing on the heterogeneity of the older population and by investigating the intergenerational transmission effect, upward the generational line.

Using cross-sectional models with robust clustered standard errors for data from the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) as well as fixed effects models for data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), we find that becoming a grandmother increases the preference for pro welfare parties and becoming a grandfather increases the preference for conservative parties. Moreover, among grandparents, descriptive and multivariate analyses consider the role of grandparental childcare and the age of grandchildren. As the result, grandparents engaged in grandparental childcare show a higher preference for conservative parties and grandparents with teenage or young adult grandchildren are more likely to report a preference for the left party. In sum, family and intergenerational relationships have an effect on the party preferences of grandparents.

These results provide important knowledge on aspects that so far have not been investigated, but that need to be understood in ageing contexts, where older people are becoming the largest part of the voter group. Party manifestos and family policy need to consider the heterogeneous preferences of older people. Party preferences are also more in general indicating the importance that people give to aspects such as family and the environment and may reflect individuals' behaviours.

Authors:

Tobias Wiß, Johannes Kepler University, Linz (tobias.wiss@jku.at)

Valeria Bordone, Institut für Soziologie, University of Munich (valeria.bordone@lmu.de)

Gerrit Bauer, Institut für Soziologie, University of Munich (gerrit.bauer@lmu.de)