



Family & Politics

The enduring influence of the parental home in the development and transmission of political ideology

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Abstract

How does the family influence citizens' political ideology, and what role do family dynamics and structure play in this process of political socialization? As society and family forms are changing, this research provides new insights in political socialization research by investigating how gender dynamics in the family, parental separation, and intergenerational social mobility affect the transmission and development of citizens' political ideology in multiparty systems in Europe. The German Socioeconomic Panel and the Swiss Household Panel are the most important data sources. The first empirical chapter provides a descriptive account of the level of transmission of left–right ideology, showing that the similarity of parental ideology and a higher level of parental education and socioeconomic status favour this process. Chapter 3 addresses gender effects in political socialization, showing that the political ideology of both parents equally influences the ideology of their children, irrespective of their gender. In Switzerland, moderate left-wing effects of the presence of an older sister are found for females, and in families of a centrist ideology. For males, however, having a female eldest sibling has a right-wing effect. Chapter 4 investigates the ideological consequences of parental divorce, showing with pan-European data that adults whose parents separated during childhood hold a more leftist ideology. Longitudinal analysis using Swiss data shows that this is partially caused by the mother becoming more left-wing after separation from the partner. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses how vertical and horizontal intergenerational social mobility affect the ideological transmission process from parents to children, showing that especially the upwardly mobile are less influenced by the parental ideology. However, it is demonstrated that self-selection into social mobility plays an important role herein. The overall conclusion is that the family is important in shaping voters' political ideology until in adulthood, not only in terms of intergenerational transmission, but also in terms of direct effects of family experiences and structure.



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Bio

Mathilde M. van Ditmars is a doctoral researcher (PhD candidate) in the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute in Florence. During the past years, she has been a visiting researcher at the Gesis EUROLAB in Cologne, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) in Berlin, and at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS) in Lausanne. Before joining the EUI, Mathilde completed the research master in Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, and was a lecturer in the Political Science Department of the same university. Her research interests are founded in political behaviour and its intersection with sociology. Broadly, Mathilde's work investigates how citizens' political and policy preferences are developed and structured; how they relate to the preferences of political actors; and which consequences this has for political representation.