

New Research Says Daughters Turn Parents to Left of Centre Parties

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New research by economists Professor Andrew Oswald at the University of Warwick, and Dr Nattavudh Powdthavee at London University's Institute of Education, reveals that the more daughters a family has the more likely the parents are to vote for left of centre parties. Sons, by contrast, make people more right-wing.

The researchers examined the data in the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) - a nationally representative sample of British households containing over 10,000 adult individuals. Individuals were tracked in each year from 1991 to 2004. Left of centre was measured by using individuals' support for the Labour Party or Liberal Democrat Party, and the researchers measured right of centre by counting those who expressed support for the Conservative Party.

The researchers found that 66% of British people with 3 sons and no daughters vote Labour or Liberal Democrat, but that figure increases to 78% among parents with 3 daughters and no sons.

Even after factoring out other characteristics, such as parents' income, education and age, the researchers found that having a daughter was likely to turn political allegiance from right to left of centre parties. They observed 539 switches from Labour /Liberal to Conservative and 802 switches in support from Conservative to Labour/Liberal.

On average, each daughter raises the likelihood of left-wing voting by 2% percentage probability points.

The researchers also looked at similar longitudinal data for Germany -- measuring left of centre as support for the Social Democratic Party rather than the Christian Union Party or Christian Social Democrats. Here they found that for every daughter that a German man has, he is approximately 2.5% probability points more likely to vote for the left.

The researchers believe there are subconscious reasons behind the observed voting decisions. Women, they argue, are inherently collectivist while men are individualistic. They point out that because there is pay discrimination against women, and females put greater importance on public spending on issues like community safety, females are thus intrinsically more left-wing than males. As men acquire female children, those men gradually shift their political stance and, through subconscious concern for their daughters, become sympathetic to the 'female' desire for more public spending and thus a steeper income tax schedule. Similarly, a mother with many sons becomes sympathetic to the 'male' case for lower taxes and a smaller supply of public goods.

The researchers also point out that these results are reflected in the current political complexion of current female Members of Parliament in Great Britain. At the time of writing, there are nearly 130 women in the House of Commons, which is the main legislative body. Of those, less than 20 are Conservative. Approximately 100 of the women MPs are Labour or Liberal Democrat. This contrasts with an approximately equal split among male politicians.

University of Warwick Professor Andrew Oswald said: "These findings are really intriguing. They may be telling us that, even in the privacy of the ballot box, we are all moulded by primitive evolutionary forces that we are barely aware of. It has been a longstanding idea in western society that parents influence the behaviour and psychology of their offspring. This work reverses that habit of thinking. It suggests that children shape their parents."

Source: University of Warwick

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