

Study: Parenthood makes moms more liberal, dads more conservative

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Parenthood is pushing mothers and fathers in opposite directions on political issues associated with social welfare, from health care to education, according to new research from North Carolina State University.

"Parenthood seems to heighten the political 'gender gap,' with women becoming more liberal and men more conservative when it comes to government spending on social welfare issues," says Dr. Steven Greene, an associate professor of political science at NC State and co-author of the study. Greene and Dr. Laurel Elder of Hartwick College used data on the 2008 presidential election from the American National Election Studies to evaluate the voting behavior of men and women who have children at home. Parents who have grown children were not part of the study.

"Basically, women with children in the home were more liberal on social welfare attitudes, and attitudes about the Iraq War, than women without children at home," Greene says, "which is a very different understanding of the politics of mothers than captured by the 'Security Mom' label popular in much [media coverage](#). But men with kids are more conservative on social welfare issues than men without kids." Men with kids did not differ from men without kids in their attitudes towards Iraq.

Greene also notes that, "despite media speculation that Sarah Palin, given her status as a self-proclaimed 'Hockey Mom' and working mother of five, would be effective at attracting the votes and admiration of

parents, especially mothers, the research showed no evidence of a 'Sarah Palin effect' (between parents and non-parents), even when looking exclusively at Republicans." Greene explains that this means there was no difference in how parents viewed Sarah Palin versus how non-parents viewed Sarah Palin.

The researchers evaluated the effect of parenting on voting behavior because parenthood has become increasingly politicized in recent decades. For example, Greene says, the Republican party identified itself as the "family values" party during the 1990s.

Greene and Elder had previously looked at similar data for elections going back through 1980, and their new research shows that the trend is strengthening for men with children to become more conservative, while the trend for moms to become more liberal is holding steady.

"It appears that the Democratic position, that government has a role in addressing social problems, appeals to women with children," Greene says, "Whereas men with children are drawn to the Republican arguments that government should not play a major role on social welfare issues."

More information: Greene presented the research, "'Mortgage Moms' and 'More Responsible Fathers': [Parenthood](#) and Issue Attitudes in the 2008 Presidential Election," at the American [Political Science](#) Association's annual meeting in Toronto, Sept. 5.

Source: North Carolina State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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