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ABSTRACT

Washington (2008) finds that, controlling for total number of children, each additional daughter makes a member of Congress more likely to vote liberally and attributes this finding to socialization. However, daughters' influence could manifest differently for elite politicians and the general citizenry, thanks to the selection gradient particular to the political process. This study asks whether the proportion of female biological offspring affects political party identification. Using nationally-representative data from the General Social Survey, we find that female offspring induce more conservative political identification. We hypothesize that this results from the change in reproductive fitness strategy that daughters may evince.

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Introduction

Contact theory suggests that social exposure to individuals of a given group generally makes us more sympathetic to the culture, tendencies, needs and so on of said group. Support for this exposure effect on values and beliefs has been found in any number of contexts—such as neighborhoods and dorm rooms—and across many demographic dimensions—ranging from race to age (Deutsch and Collins 1951; Wilner et al. 1955; Caspi 1984; Herek and Capitanio 1996; Desforges et al. 1991; Werth and Lord 1992). The family is no exception to this rule: If we have family members of different groups (race, gender, and so on), we should, ostensibly, be more favorably disposed toward other individuals in those groups. Likewise, socialization effects aside, we should expect that individuals' incentives are at least somewhat aligned with those in their family. Indeed, on a range of political and social attitudes, within family correlations are high (Glass et al. 1986; Niemi et al. 1977).

For both of these reasons, we might expect that men and women who spend much of their lives cohabiting with women—sisters, daughters, and others—should have political views that are more in line with those of national political women's organizations as compared to those who do not. Indeed, several studies before us have found that the more daughters or sisters an individual has, the more "progressive" his/her views on women's issues. For example, some research finds that daughters increase parents' feminist views (Warner 1991) and preference for gender equalizing policies – including work, education, and childcare/leave policies (Warner and Steel 1999). However, this research is limited by the use of a local sample and a blunt measure of presence or absence of daughters as opposed to a finer scale indicating the proportion of daughters.

More recent research by Oswald and Powdthavee (2006) based on the nationally representative British Household Panel Survey (1991 to 2004) finds that, other things held constant, each additional daughter increases a parent's intention to vote liberally (for the Labor or Liberal Democrat Parties as opposed to the Conservative Party) by about 2 percentage points. They exclude those intending to vote for smaller parties, such as the Green or Scottish National Party, and those who are undecided. They argue that daughters make parents subconsciously more sympathetic to liberal policies. However, the data are limited to children who live at home, do not include information on those who have left home, and include step-children. Non-biological children could drive their results since they are not randomly "assigned" so to speak. The same is true for adult children not covered by the household census since they may selectively migrate out of the parental home in response to parental gender attitudes.

Washington (2008) estimates the effect of number of daughters on Congressional voting, controlling for total number of children. She finds that daughters promote liberal voting among Senators and members of the House of Representatives and attributes this effect to socialization: Daughters make their parents (mostly their fathers) more sensitive to women's issues, she claims. However, the effect of daughters on congressional voting could also result from selection. Namely, liberal individuals who have daughters might be particularly motivated to ascend the political ladder as compared to liberal individuals who only have sons. Or, it could be the case that liberal voters tend to elect politicians who have daughters while conservative voters are more likely to elect politicians who have sons. Given the extent to which politicians use their families as "props" to send signals about their views and character, this seems plausible. On the other hand, among the general citizenry there is no selection gradient to filter out the less-motivated from the super-motivated in simply expressing their political preferences.

Given stark differences between a highly-selected group of politicians and the general population, the effect of daughters on political preferences may be very different between the two groups. (At the very least, there may be heterogeneous treatment effects even if selection is not at work.) Further, Washington (2008: 7) gleans her data on child gender from the *Congressional Directory* or, in case of gender-ambiguous names, from on-line public biographies or telephone conversations with the member's office or a newspaper in their district. She therefore examines the sex of children without distinguishing between adopted, step, and biological offspring. (Washington [p. 5] explicitly notes that, of the 828 congressional representatives for whom she has data, 75 experienced a change in number of children from 1997 to 2004 due to birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, or death.) Here selection is an even more direct problem: While the sex of biological offspring may be random, the sex of adopted (or even step) children is most certainly not.

Despite existing evidence (and relevant theory) suggesting that additional daughters should lead to more liberal attitudes, there is reason for pause.[1] Conservative policies—anti-abortion, pro-traditional family structure and so on—seem to constrain the freedom of women. So why would parents of daughters want to hem in the life choices of their offspring? In fact, the rise of women's rights has been attributed elsewhere to the shift from men's interests in constraining their wives in favor of their interests in preventing their daughters from being exploited as property (Fernandez 2009). However, if one takes an evolutionary perspective on parental sexual conflict, the opposite predictions ensue. Namely, female and male offspring

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[1] The evidence does not all go in the direction of additional daughters leading to more liberal views. For instance, research using national survey data from the National Survey of Families and Households found that sons increase the egalitarian views of married women with children ages 3 to 18 in the home (Katzev, Warner, and Acock 1994). However, this study focuses on explaining mothers' perception of marital instability, with traditional family roles as a mediator, and it studies the effect of offspring sex on traditional gender roles in the family – such as the appropriateness of mothers' employment, marriage, divorce, and cohabitation – rather than opinions about broader gender roles that are more relevant to political views and policy.

evince divergent reproductive strategies. Since sons can potentially generate high numbers of grandchildren, they may induce preferences for more libertine social norms and policies—ones where paternal investment is low and restraints on male fecundity are minimal. Meanwhile, daughters may elicit grandparental preferences for a world in which male sexuality is constrained and paternal investment in offspring is greater. In summary, in contrast to previous research (and Washington [2008] in particular) we hypothesize that daughters may increase conservatism among general citizens. Indeed, our findings support this hypothesis: controlling for gender, religion, age, education, and marital status, the proportion of girls significantly increases Republican Party identification in the United States.

Methods

In a society where antenatal sex-selective abortion is rare, the sex of a particular biological child is a random variable. This study uses nationally representative data from the 1994 General Social Survey to estimate the effect of the proportion of daughters on political views. To increase internal validity, the sample excludes individuals without children and limits analysis to biological children (although results are robust to including non-biological children). Control variables include gender, religion, age, education, and marital status.[2] Findings suggest individual interests, not socialization, explain the effect of girls on political views. Results hold with no controls, controlling for total number of children, and whether party identification is measured as a dummy variable or on a scale (called Republican Scale

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[2] Marital status is a potential confounding factor. Early work by Morgan et al. (1988) found that sons decrease the likelihood of divorce, conditional on total number of offspring. Research by Lundberg and Rose (2003) and Dahl and Moretti (2004) also argues that sons reduce the risk of divorce and increase the likelihood that single parents will marry. Lundberg and Rose (2002, 2004) attribute this to higher leisure time fathers spend with families when they have a son, and the higher utility received from those marriages by fathers. Marital status is controlled in all models below but, given endogeneity concerns, results are similar when excluding it.

below) from strong Democrat (-3) to strong Republican (3) with Independents in the middle (0).

Results

  The association between daughters and political identification is illustrated in Figure 1. It shows the proportion identifying as Republican or Democrat by proportion of female children for a two-child, three-child, and four-child family. Table 1 shows results for linear probability models predicting party identification. Having a higher proportion of daughters consistently and significantly increases the probability of Republican Party identification and reduces the likelihood of Democratic identification. Compared to those with no daughters, parents with all daughters are 14% less likely to identify as a Democrat. This holds with or without controls for gender, religion, age, education, and marital status. Similarly, parents with all daughters are 10% more likely to identify as a Republican compared to those with no daughters (11% without controls in the model).

  Specifying Republican identification as a continuous measure gives similar results. Republican identification for those with all daughters is half a point higher than those with none. This would push borderline independents to be Republicans. Daughters significantly strengthen conservative identification. This relationship holds when controlling for total number of children or using an alternative specification of no or all daughters. Meanwhile, deploying Washington's method – that is, estimating the effect of number of daughters while controlling for total children – yields the same results, although the effects are smaller and total number of children has a significant independent effect (in the opposite direction of number of daughters). Results are also consistent when including non-biological children. In summary, regardless of model specification, daughters consistently increase conservative party

identification in the United States.

Discussion

Results contradict both Washington (2008) and Oswald and Powdthavee (2006). If daughters affect political views by socializing parents, the effect of daughters should be similar for both politicians and general citizens. On the other hand, if daughters affect parents' political views by changing their individual interests, daughters may increase conservatism among the general population but serve as a selection gradient among successful liberal politicians (and vice versa for conservative politicians). We find support for the latter interpretation and, by extension, for evolutionary theories of inclusive fitness.

If individuals seek to maximize their chances of passing on genes to future generations ("inclusive fitness"), they may desire more conservative policies when they have more female genetic kin. There is an inherent conflict between parents that is particularly acute in species that invest heavily in offspring (so-called K-strategy organisms). Males' optimal reproductive strategy is to sire many offspring with a range of mates and push the parenting requirements onto the mothers. Meanwhile, the mother seeks to maximize not only the genetic fitness of the sire, but also to induce more post-conception investment in rearing the offspring from the father. Seen in this light, more conservative policies that increase the cost of promiscuity—particularly for males—will enhance the reproductive bargaining power of women. If individual interests lie in genetic endurance, those with more daughters should hold more conservative political views. The conservative emphasis on family, traditional values and gender roles, and pro-life/anti-abortion sentiments all stress investment in children – for both men and women. Conservative policies mirror the genetic interests of women, writ large. They attempt to

promote paternal investment in offspring. Further, they stress investment in conceived offspring – "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." In short, Conservative policies support the genetic fitness of women by capitalizing on each pregnancy, reducing male promiscuity, and increasing paternal investment in children.   Such policies may impinge on the freedom of parents' immediate offspring, but they increase the expected number of grandchildren via daughters.

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Table 1: Effect of Daughters on Party Identification – Linear Probability Models

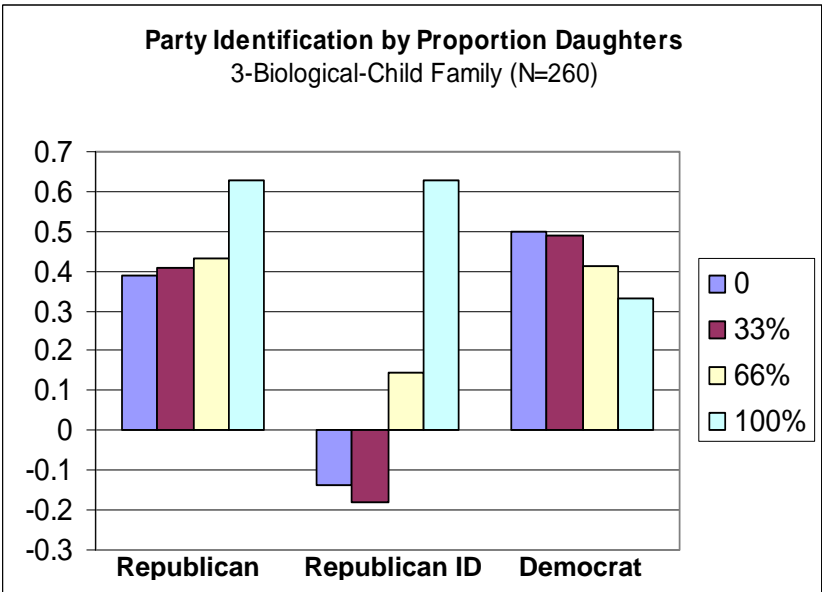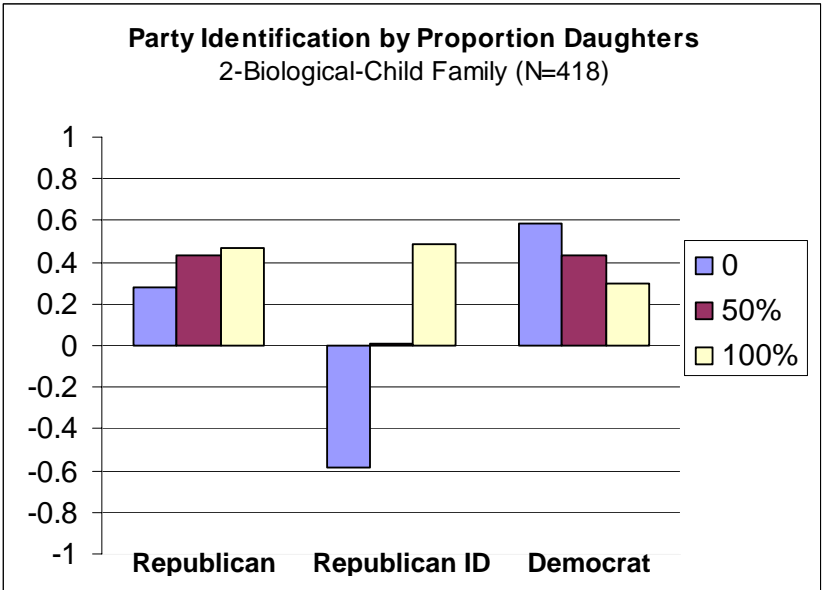| VARIABLES	(1) Democrat	(2) Republican	(3) Republican Scale	(4) Democrat[@]	(5) Republican[@]	(6) Republican Scale[@]
Proportion Female	-0.146**	0.110**	0.532**	-0.140**	0.099*	0.493**
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.172)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.171)
Constant	0.548**	0.330**	-0.444**	0.943**	-0.275**	-2.548**
	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.103)	(0.099)	(0.095)	(0.404)
Observations	1076	1076	1062	1072	1072	1058
R-squared	0.011	0.007	0.009	0.038	0.054	0.048

** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.1$
Standard errors in parentheses

[@]Controls for: Female; Protestant; Age; Education; Married
All models are un-weighted, limited to those with biological children, and the proportion of female children excludes non-biological children. There is no significant interaction between gender and proportion girls.

Results are the same when using Washington's methods – including number of girls and controlling for total number of children as opposed to using proportion girls. However, the magnitude is smaller; the coefficient on number of girls is about half that of proportion girls in each model. Number of biological children is significantly associated with Democratic identification and may be endogenous.

Figure 1: Observed Party Identification by Proportion Girls: 2-Child, 3-Child and 4-Child
Families

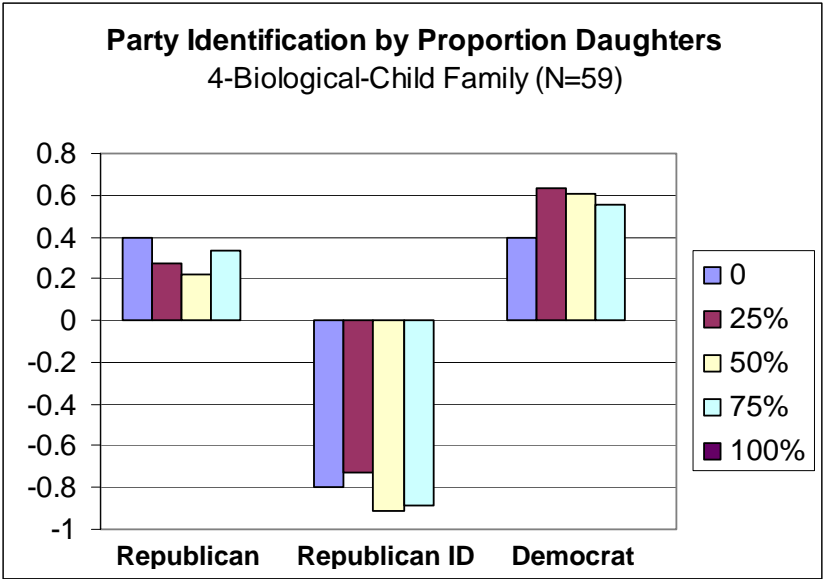**Party Identification by Proportion Daughters**
2-Biological-Child Family (N=418)

Party Identification by Proportion Daughters
3-Biological-Child Family (N=260)

Party Identification by Proportion Daughters
4-Biological-Child Family (N=59)

Table S1. Descriptive Statistics: GSS 1994

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Republican	1076	0.38	0.49	0	1
Democrat	1076	0.48	0.50	0	1
Republican Scale*	1062	-0.19	2.05	-3	3
Female	1092	0.62	0.48	0	1
Protestant	1091	0.63	0.48	0	1
Age	1091	49.29	16.22	18	89
Education	1090	12.87	2.92	0	20
Married	1092	0.61	0.49	0	1

The sample excludes those without any biological children.

* Republican scale excludes 14 individuals (with biological children) who identified with a party other than Democrat, Republican, or independent. These individuals are coded as 0 in the Democrat and Republican indicators.

Table S2. Correlation Matrix

	Republican	Democrat	Republican ID	Female	Protestant	Age	Education
Republican	1						
Democrat	-0.75*	1.00					
Republican ID	0.89*	-0.89*	1.00				
Female	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	1.00			
Protestant	0.09	-0.06	0.07	0.08	1.00		
Age	0.08	-0.03	0.05	0.00	0.12*	1.00	
Education	0.13*	-0.08	0.12*	-0.02	-0.12*	-0.18*	1.00
Married	0.12*	-0.12*	0.13*	-0.19*	-0.02	-0.10*	0.15*