

How Do Tech-Workers' Values and Politics Evolve? A Panel Study

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Abstract

People working in the tech industry, the "coding elite", are increasingly recognized as a distinct social group with disproportionate influence over digital infrastructures of contemporary society (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021). A growing body of scholarship in the US relates these occupations to a unique ideological stance characterized by liberal, anti-establishment political preferences (Broockman et al., 2019; Selling & Strimling, 2023). Recent empirical work has confirmed that, in the European context, tech-workers, especially developers, possess a distinct value profile and political alignment compared to other occupational elites and their US-based counterparts (Be'ery et al., 2025; Be'ery & Epstein, 2025). However, this expanding literature relies primarily on cross-sectional data, leaving a critical causal question unanswered: Are these distinct orientations the result of *self-selection* into the field, or *socialization* through education and work?

To address this gap, we leverage the longitudinal structure of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) in a pre-registered study (Be'ery et al., 2026). Values are operationalized using SOEP's "Goals in Life" module, alongside measures of political party preference. Individual fixed-effects models are used to examine how tech workers' values and ideology evolve over time, relative to other occupational elites, while also distinguishing between software developers and other ICT specialists. We examine respondents at three critical career stages: (1) pre-entry into higher education, (2) post-entry to higher education, and (3) entry and tenure in the labor market.

By isolating the effects of educational and occupational socialization from pre-existing value and political dispositions, this paper provides one of the first longitudinal studies on how the "spirit" of the tech elite is formed.

References

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