

Is There a Participation Penalty to Parenting? The Transitions to First and Second Birth in Midlife and Their Consequences for Political Participation and Volunteering

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Family transitions shape who we become at every stage of life. Among these transitions, becoming a parent is a particularly significant one that reshapes resources, priorities, social roles, and relationships. Previous studies have revealed significant relationships between parenthood and the two forms of civic participation.

The analysis employs longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which tracks individuals' family structures and civic participation over time. The study uses data from 1985 to 2019. The analytical sample includes women aged 14-50 and men aged 14-65. Overall, $N = 23,387$ individuals were observed in $N = 135,889$ person-years. Parenthood is modeled in two ways: (a) transition to first parenthood, and (b) transition to second birth. The data set includes 5,765 first births and 2,778 second births. To estimate within-person changes over time, fixed-effects models are employed, controlling for unobserved individual heterogeneity and time-invariant characteristics.

Initial results suggest that the transition to parenthood is linked to a decrease in volunteering. The birth of a first child, on average, leads to a 0.07 unit decrease in volunteering frequency ($p < 0.001$). Second births, however, are associated with an increase in volunteering frequency ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding political participation, however, I found no significant effect of the transition to parenthood, but I did find a significant positive effect of second parity on political participation ($\beta = 0.027$, $p < 0.001$).

The transition into parenthood for the first time can be overwhelming and substantially alters individuals' available time, their habits and responsibilities. However, time resources, habits and responsibilities do not appear to further limit volunteering after second birth. In the next steps, I

thus plan to investigate how the parenthood effect evolves over time as children grow older using a non-linear time trend implemented as a FE model with an impact function.