

Intimate Structures, Public Divides: How Changing Families and Identities Shape Society

Talks &
Discussion

Paulus Wagner

Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow & Part-Time Assistant Professor

European University Institute | Department of Political and Social Sciences

Changing Family Structures and Political Alignments: a Silent Cleavage?

Every third marriage across advanced democracies is divorced, yet we lack debate on how this informs political alignments. Socio-structural shifts being known to feed into partisan realignment, we argue that changing family structures may inform contemporary political divisions in two ways: (1) by contributing to a gendered cleavage between ‘new left-wing’ and ‘new right-wing’ platforms, and (2) by fueling support for radical and populist platforms among losers of modernization. Empirical results from cross-sectional ESS data show support for both hypotheses. On the one hand, divorce predicts a gendered political cleavage along the ‘cultural’ dimension of party competition (known as ‘new politics’). On the other hand, we find an even stronger and more robust association of divorce with voting for populist parties, irrespective of gender. Disentangling mechanisms, we find the latter effect to be driven by generalized distrust and dissatisfaction deriving from negative experiences with social environments and public policies (retirement, health, childcare). Strikingly, while divorcees report economic and social policy-related worries, this does not seem to translate into an economic vote, but into one for populist platforms. These findings contribute to our understanding of how a changing social structure impacts politics and of the social background of contemporary democratic challenges. This paper’s empirical analysis continues with the analysis of household panel surveys from chosen advanced democracies, employing event study models to scrutinize the causal direction of effects.

Lisa de Vries

Postdoctoral Research Associate

German Institute for Adult Education Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning | Department „System and Policies“

Sexual and Gender Diversity in Work and Family

Sexual and gender minority people have historically and globally faced significant marginalization, legitimized by societal and legal norms. Social exclusion, discrimination, and violence appear in several life domains affecting for example (mental) health and well-being. Even if more and more countries introduced anti-discrimination laws and rights regarding family recognition (e.g., same-sex marriage), there are still several barriers and disadvantages regarding the participation and equality of sexual and gender minority people in working and family life.

This contribution examines the direct and indirect effects of discrimination on the work and family lives of sexual and gender minority people in Germany. Based on different data sources (e.g., Socio-Economic Panel, LGBielefeld, Microcensus), career opportunities and outcomes, job preferences, and family and job characteristics are examined. The results highlight differences between sexual and gender minority people and the majority population in the context of discrimination as well as differences within the LGBTQI*-Community. Moreover, data limitations, challenges, and opportunities in surveying sexual and gender minority people are discussed in light of current developments.

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Department of Sociology, Seminar Room 3

Coordination: Anna Karmann, Valeria Bordone, Nadia Steiber
Department of Sociology, Rooseveltplatz 2, 1090 Wien