

Growing (Up) Apart? Parental Separation, Political Socialisation, and Young Adults' Political Party Identification

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Abstract

Parental separation has become increasingly common in contemporary societies, yet its implications for political socialisation remain poorly understood. This study examines how parental separation in childhood relates to the development of political party identification in young adulthood. Drawing on longitudinal data on mother-child dyads from the German Socio-Economic Panel (2000-2023), logistic mixed-effects growth models are estimated to capture emerging party identification between ages 18 to 25 (N = 2,746 individuals). The results indicate that mother-child transmission of partisanship and maternal education strongly predict identification, whereas parental separation modestly reduces it. However, effects are largely confined to predicting initial levels at 18 but not age-related change, pointing to early and persistent stratification. Crucially, parental separation substantially obstructs intergenerational transmission of partisanship, particularly when it occurs in early childhood. By contrast, separation has little additional impact on the low likelihood of party identification in children of apartisan mothers.

Keywords: political sociology; intergenerational transmission; political mobility; dyadic data; longitudinal analysis

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1. Introduction

Family life in many industrialised nations has undergone fundamental transformations since the 1970s, as life courses shifted away from institutionally tightly regulated and highly predictable trajectories towards more individualised arrangements (Kohli 1986; 2007; Macmillan 2005). In the family domain, this manifested in a rising prevalence of separation, which in turn prompted an extensive and often controversial debate on implications for children, since a substantial body of literature documents mostly negative associations with child outcomes (McLanahan 1985; 2004; Amato and Keith 1991). Notably absent from this debate are implications for children's political development, although family socialisation is widely recognised as fundamental to this development (Neundorf and Smets 2017).

At the heart of political socialisation research are studies of left-right ideology (Percheron and Jennings 1981), party identification (Jennings and Niemi 1968), and political participation (Verba et al. 2005). Among these, family socialisation is arguably most consequential for party identification, as it emerges at the earliest stages of political development as a largely affective component of political identity that children form by learning about politics from their parents (Campbell et al. 1960; Jennings et al. 2009). Because parental separation is a process that potentially affects the strength and quality of the parent-child relationship (Amato 2010; Amato and Cheadle 2005), it may alter the conditions under which political learning succeeds (Jennings et al. 2009; Weiss 2023). Furthermore, the life course perspective suggests that separation may affect children differently, depending, for example, on the age at which children experience the event (Fasang and Mayer 2020; Cavanagh and Huston 2008).

Related theories argue that political socialisation research places too much emphasis on within-family processes but insufficiently accounts for the unequal reproduction of social, human, and cultural capital that leads to a lack of 'political mobility' across generations, reflected in the growing stratification of party identification in the population (Brady et al. 2015; Putnam 2000; Dassonneville et al. 2012). In this view, parental separation may suppress party identification because it is linked to childhood deprivation and limited social mobility over the life course (McLanahan 1985; 2004; Tach 2015; Amato and Cheadle 2005). At the same time, part of this association may reflect selection, as separation is more common among parents who are already socio-economically disadvantaged (McLanahan et al. 2013; Rodríguez Sánchez 2022).

Because parental separation has become a common feature of children's life courses, an emerging literature examines its association with classic political socialisation outcomes,

particularly political participation (Flouri 2004; Sandell and Plutzer 2005; Van Ditmars and Bernardi 2023; Voorpostel and Coffé 2015). Only one study investigates young adults' party identification, which documents a negative effect of parental divorce and non-marital birth in the German context that is modest in magnitude but robust to selection (Hener et al. 2016). However, this study did not explicitly model the role of intergenerational transmission. Moreover, the sustained rise in non-marital births and cohabiting-parent families over the past two decades (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2024; 2025) suggests that analyses limited to divorce overlook a growing share of separations of unmarried parents.

This study seeks to address these gaps by answering three questions: (1) Is parental separation in childhood (ages 0-15) associated with a lower baseline probability of acquiring a political party identification during young adulthood (ages 18-25)? (2) Does parental separation affect intergenerational transmission? (3) If so, does this effect differ by children's age at separation? The analysis investigates presence rather than direction of partisanship. Furthermore, it focusses on the mother-child relationship because children usually remain with their mothers after separation (similar to Hener et al. 2016; Van Ditmars and Bernardi 2023), whereas fathers' involvement declines sharply (Haux and Platt 2021; Köppen et al. 2018), since shared custody arrangements are still very rare (Walper et al. 2021).

To capture both the formation and development of party identification over time – and crucially, how this is affected by parental separation – mixed-effects growth curve models are employed on 23 waves (years 2000-2023) of mother-child dyads based on longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). Germany is an interesting setting for this analysis, since the growing prevalence of separation has unfolded in an institutional framework that remains largely centred around nuclear families and a gendered division of labour (Seeleib-Kaiser 2016). This trend coincided with a steady decline in levels of partisanship, particularly among younger and disadvantaged populations (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). In representative democracies, partisanship links citizens and governments, making it a vital pillar of democratic stability and legitimacy. Therefore, implications of changing family behaviours for political development warrant a more thorough examination than the current literature offers.

2. The origins of party identification

2.1. Political socialisation and intergenerational transmission

The extensive and long-standing literature on the origins of party identification is dominated by political socialisation research, which understands *intergenerational transmission* from parent to child as the primary mechanism through which children acquire partisanship, while genetic predisposition or peer group influence play a subordinate role (Dalton 1982; Davies 1965; Harris 2009; Jennings and Markus 1984; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Kroh and Selb 2009; Langton 1969; Percheron and Jennings 1981). By way of social learning (Bandura 1977; see Grusec 1992 for an overview), children observe, internalise, and imitate their parents' political behaviours and attitudes. These early influences are thought to matter most during the 'formative and impressionable years' of adolescence and early adulthood, where they gradually manifest as observable attachments that are highly congruent with parental orientations (though not unchallenged, see e.g. Dinas 2014). By the mid-twenties, party identity is typically developed and characterised by considerable stability thereafter (Jennings et al. 2009; Kroh and Selb 2009). Consistent with this notion, political values in adulthood appear to be largely insensitive to major life transitions such as divorce or employment change (Keskinürk 2024; van Ditmars and Shorrocks 2024; Voorpostel et al. 2020).

Nevertheless, strength and consistency of political reproduction varies. In socialisation research, conditioning factors that either undermine or enhance transmission are referred to as 'transmission belts' (Roest et al. 2010; Weiss 2023). In their seminal work on intergenerational transmission, Jennings and colleagues (2009) evince that higher socio-economic status (SES) in parents, and especially higher education, is one of the most important transmission-enhancing factors because these parents more likely to be knowledgeable about politics and to regularly encourage political discussion at home, which increases the salience and consistency of learning cues for their children. Furthermore, they are more likely to cultivate normative expectations that frame political engagement as civic duties and markers of competence (Dalton 1982; Mustillo et al. 2004; Verba et al. 2005).

Lastly, a smaller strand of research highlights the role of family dynamics for political socialisation. Recent studies show that supportive and affectionate parenting within warm, secure relationships strengthens children's identification with their parents and foster their intrinsic motivation to engage with politics (Carlson and Knoester 2011; Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024; Tedin 1974; Van Ditmars 2023; Weiss 2023).

2.2. Social origin and political mobility

Population-level research finds that partisanship has become more stratified along social origin in many mature democracies and especially in younger cohorts (Abramson 1976; Costa Lobo 2014; Dassonneville et al. 2012; Hudde and Grunow 2025; Jennings and Markus 1984; Putnam 2000). Of particular interest is the study by Dassonneville et al. (2012), who discuss this development in the German context. The authors show that while social class was once a defining and stabilising feature of the German party system, party identification has increasingly concentrated among ‘classically privileged’ individuals – older, male, and highly educated citizens. This finding was mirrored in later research, and also in other European countries (Costa Lobo 2014; Hudde and Grunow 2025; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006), with one scholar concluding that “*general shifts away from parties are apparently facilitated by low involvement and little reflection – that is, they seem to concern a-political ‘floating voters’.*” (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006, 599).

Against this background, *social status transmission theory* posits that congruence in partisanship between parents and children is determined by their social origin (i.e., their parents’ SES) rather than a direct result of attitudinal transmission. However, parental affiliation is predictive of young adult’s identification net of SES controls in most accounts (Glass et al. 1986; Kroh and Selb 2009; Neundorf and Smets 2017).

In a similar vein, some scholars contend that political socialisation literature overlooks the ways in which families’ position in the social hierarchy determines their political dispositions, which cannot be captured by conventional indicators of parental SES such as education or income alone. The ‘political mobility’ framework proposed by Brady and colleagues (2015) argues that this is especially relevant for partisanship. Expanding on status transmission theory, this framework posits that partisanship is more than a function of parental SES – it reflects access to the social, human, and cultural capital that makes engagement with the conventional political system feel normal and attainable. Because these forms of capital accumulate over time and are reproduced across generations, partisanship increasingly concentrates within the same families, reinforcing stratification through intergenerational transmission (Brady et al. 2015; Pande 2020; Putnam 2000; Putnam et al. 1994).

These considerations have implications for the empirical conceptualisation of party identification. Much of the political socialisation literature examines *which* party children come to identify with and focuses on attitudinal congruence between parents and offspring. Typically,

analyses are either restricted to partisan respondents (e.g. Jennings et al. 2009) or blur structural differences between intergenerational congruence, ideological ambiguity, and ‘true’ apartisanship (e.g. Kroh and Selb 2009; Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024). While this work has yielded important insights into strength and direction of transmission, it is less well suited to capture why some individuals acquire *any* party identity in the first place and why others remain apartisan. Considering the ongoing decline of partisanship, clear analytical distinctions allow us to better understand how variations in family-based political capital contribute to political inequalities.

The first hypothesis aligns with these classic theories on the origins of party identification. Due to the focus on the mother-child relationship for reasons discussed at the outset of this article, *parental* background refers exclusively to *maternal* characteristics from here on out.

Maternal partisanship increases the likelihood that offspring develop party identification in young adulthood, net of maternal SES (*Hypothesis 1*).

3. Why parental separation matters to the development of party identification

Family socialisation theory, and to a lesser extent also social origin theses, have been extensively researched, but parental separation is an empirically neglected characteristic of family background that matters from both theoretical perspectives: The former suggests that parental separation is a transmission belt that may either enhance or obstruct transmission because it is closely associated with family dynamics (Amato 2010; Amato and Anthony 2014; Wagner et al. 2025). In turn, the latter view implies that parental separation may exert a direct influence on partisanship because it limits children’s opportunities to accumulate political capital. For this reason, the following section first discusses the potential direct association between parental separation and offspring partisanship before turning to the question of whether separation alters transmission processes.

3.1. Parental separation in the social-origin view

Although parental separation has become increasingly common and more widely accepted, the nuclear family remains the normative ideal for childrearing in many countries, particularly in more conservative institutional contexts such as in Germany (Lück and Ruckdeschel 2018). It was previously argued that this lack of normative approval is “*expected to reduce children’s life chances by isolating children from mainstream social institutions and by undermining society’s commitment to them*” (McLanahan 2004, 609). Indeed, separated mothers report disproportional shares of loneliness, marginalisation, and stigma (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) 2025, 105, 344–45; Jalovaara and Kreyenfeld 2020; Keim-Klärner et al. 2025; Robertson 2008). Similarly, children are less likely to participate in extracurricular and leisure activities upon separation, as parents initially prioritise children’s basic needs (Amato 2010; Leturcq and Panico 2019; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Furthermore, the transitions to parenthood and separation were shown to suppress women’s electoral participation, their voluntarism, and political activism, while men appear relatively unaffected (Voorpostel and Coffé 2012). Although neither *getting* married nor *getting* divorced directly suppresses partisanship in the same way, the state of *being* married is associated with significantly more steady party attachments, because prolonged exposure to stable relational contexts supports and reinforces identification (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). Therefore, children who experience parental separation may be more likely to grow up in a context where they have less opportunity to accumulate political capital and experience political participation as normal and accessible.

However, life course-informed research has become increasingly critical of a causal – and rather negative – view on parental separation. These studies have pointed out weak identification strategies in prior research and demonstrate that observed differences in child outcomes are almost entirely explained by cumulated disadvantage prior in the life course (McLanahan et al. 2013; Rodríguez Sánchez 2022; Härkönen et al. 2017). Statistical analyses focussed on the socio-economic gradient of family instability corroborate the selection argument: On average, deviations from the nuclear family model are more common among individuals with lower education and insecure employment because limited institutional support and precarious life conditions undermine the stability of partnerships (Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2019; Ilmakunnas et al. 2025; Jalovaara and Fasang 2020; Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2017; McLanahan 1985; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). In turn, even modest wealth substantially lowers separation risk, because financial reserves buffer economic stress and reduce conflict over money, but also

signal that parents meet normative expectations of economic stability and an ‘orderly’ life, which raises social and financial costs of separation (Killewald et al. 2023; Zimmermann and Konietzka 2018). Consequently, it could be assumed that parental separation is redundant once parental SES is accounted for. Finally, differences in political preferences were also shown to increase separation risk (Arpino and Di Nallo 2025), though heterogeneity in party preferences in parents does not seem to affect the likelihood that children develop a preference themselves (Nieuwbeerta and Wittebrood 1995).

The few studies that engage questions on consequences of parental separation for political outcomes connect to the broader line of argument from social origin theories (Hener et al. 2016; Sandell and Plutzer 2005; Voorpostel and Coffé 2015). Among these studies, only Hener and colleagues (2016) link parental divorce and non-marital childbirth with party identification in young adults (starting age 17 but upper end not specified), conceptualised as one of four dimensions of political and civic engagement. Based on the same data source as this present analysis but focussed on the years 1984-2009, cross-sectional estimations revealed that individuals who experienced parental divorce before age 16 or were born into a non-marital union have a 4 percentage points lower likelihood of democratic party identification (excluding radical-right parties). The authors further aimed to account for the aforementioned selectivity in divorce and non-marriage by employing siblings-difference estimation, in which the negative association persisted and doubled in magnitude. Estimates were also robust to sophisticated tests of omitted variables bias, leading the authors to conclude that observed differences in party identification by parental divorce and non-marriage are causal rather than a by-product of selection. Hence, the effect of parental separation can be plausibly expected to operate beyond its association with SES-based selection:

Experiencing parental separation in childhood decreases the likelihood of developing party identification in young adulthood, net of maternal partisanship and SES (*Hypothesis 2*).

3.2. Parental separation as transmission belt

A caveat of conceptualising parental separation solely as a direct effect is that such an argument heavily rests on its association with SES and social capital but tends to overlook how the transition may affect family dynamics. As parental separation has become more widespread

over the last two decades, implications have also become more heterogeneous and context-dependent (e.g. Amato 2010). Yet, where separation effects can most plausibly be interpreted as causal is in the socio-emotional and relational domain (McLanahan et al. 2013; Rodríguez Sánchez 2022). As discussed in the above, children's successful political learning in the family relies on stable relationships, emotional closeness, and consistent exposure. From a socialisation perspective, parental separation is therefore better understood as a transmission belt that can alter the conditions under which parental political orientations are effectively internalised by children.

As exposure to biological fathers declines following separation, children's opportunities for learning from them decline, as well. Thus, children's political socialisation hinges more strongly on maternal transmission. Decreased paternal involvement also creates asymmetric care arrangements that place a disproportional burden on mothers, which often entails high stress and task overload. The family stress model links increased stress in the context of separation to less consistent parenting, decreased emotional availability, and more conflictive mother-child relationships, while children are more prone to attachment insecurity and behavioural problems (Amato 2010; Amato and Anthony 2014; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Hence, separation may crowd out the type of mother-child interactions that normally facilitate successful socialisation into the political party system.

A contrasting perspective suggests that maternal transmission may be enhanced rather than weakened. In the transition to separation, mothers often seek to stabilise parenting activities, even as stress and deprivation increase in other domains (Leturcq and Panico 2019), whereas fathers' influence on children wanes as their involvement decreases. At the same time, children may strengthen bonds with one parent when relationships with the other parent deteriorate (Halligan et al. 2014). The limited evidence on parental separation and intergenerational transmission of political orientations such as left-right or gender ideology is broadly consistent with this proposition (Dalhouse and Frideres 1996; Van Ditmars and Bernardi 2023; Carlson and Knoester 2011). These insights may not readily be transferrable to the study of party identification. For example, children's gender ideology may change as they experience a restructuring of gender roles following separation (Philipp et al. 2023). By contrast, partisanship is less cognitive and more affective in nature. In the case of left-right ideology, studies often rely on survey measures that presuppose the existence of a substantive position and do not allow respondents to indicate disengagement. Yet, non-response in left-right ideology items was found correlated with lower education and political interest (Shell Deutschland 2025).

Although it bears stressing that adjustment to parental separation depends on a complex interplay of factors that shape how well families reorganise, most sociological evidence points to adverse consequences for the mother-child relationship. Furthermore, longitudinal analyses document declining maternal involvement over time (Leturcq and Panico 2019) and delayed onset of adjustment difficulties in children (Rodríguez Sánchez 2022) even when families appear initially unaffected. Based on these considerations, I derive the following hypothesis:

The effect of maternal partisanship on the likelihood of developing party identification is weaker among respondents who experienced parental separation in childhood than among those who did not experience separation in childhood (*Hypothesis 3*).

3.3. Timing of separation

A binary view on separation may obscure the complex interplay between political socialisation and family dynamics. Moreover, such a view risks carrying normative connotations that position nuclear families as the standard against which all other arrangements are implicitly judged as deficient. By examining if and to which extent the effect of parental separation on the intergenerational transmission of partisanship between mothers and children varies by timing of separation (i.e., age at exposure), we can assess whether there are sensitive developmental periods during which separation is more significant.

Evidence from parent-child partisan transmission in nuclear families highlights that mothers transmit their party leanings most effectively around the ages six to eight, because mothers spend more time and are emotionally closer with their children than fathers during this period (Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024). At the same time, separations that occur during these care-intensive early years are more challenging and were thus found to be more detrimental to child adjustment (Cavanagh and Huston 2008) and adolescents' attachment to their parents (Woodward et al. 2000). Furthermore, earlier dissolution of parental unions is linked to lower and less stable patterns of father-child contact over time, with frequent loss of contact altogether (Köppen et al. 2018; Walper et al. 2021). Earlier separation is also associated with higher numbers of family transitions (Jalovaara and Kreyenfeld 2020; Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2017), which may be more stressful than a single transition and thus more consequential to children's socio-emotional wellbeing (Lee and McLanahan 2015) and behavioural outcomes

(Cavanagh and Huston 2008), although re-partnering can also provide important emotional and material support (Leturcq and Panico 2019; Jansen et al. 2009).

The effect of maternal partisanship on the likelihood of developing party identification is weaker among respondents who experienced parental separation in early childhood compared to those who experienced separation in late childhood or those who did not experience separation in childhood (*Hypothesis 4*).

4. Research Design

4.1. Data and Sample

To advance understanding beyond descriptive associations, longitudinal analyses are needed to reveal the individual-level impact of childhood family characteristics on developmental trajectories of emerging party identification (Plutzer 2002; Neundorf et al. 2013). The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP; doi: [10.5684/soep.core.v40eu](https://doi.org/10.5684/soep.core.v40eu)) is a large-scale, nationally representative household panel that has followed individuals and families annually since 1984 in West Germany and since 1990 in East Germany. The GSOEP provides detailed retrospective and prospective information on family biographies, socio-economic conditions, and political attitudes, including annual measures of party identification (Goebel et al. 2019). Its household-based, multi-cohort design makes the data uniquely suited for the purpose of this study because it allows mothers and children to be observed jointly over extended periods of the life course. This structure makes it possible to link maternal characteristics measured during respondents' childhood to their reported party identification in young adulthood, even after respondents have left the family home.

Young adulthood is defined as the period between age 18, when individuals come of age in Germany and first gain voting eligibility, to age 25, when political identities are typically consolidated and childhood socialisation experiences matter less (Jennings et al. 2009; Neundorf and Smets 2017; Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Plutzer 2002). The analysis relies on information from biographical questionnaires to identify parental separation (SOEP Group 2025). These questionnaires retrospectively inquire respondents on their living arrangements

and parental constellation between the ages 0-15.² These questions were asked only from the year 2000 on. Therefore, the sample is limited to the years 2000-2023. Growth model identification requires that respondents contribute a valid observation on their partisanship at age 18 and at least four valid responses in the years thereafter up until age 25. The final sample additionally excludes respondents with missing information on maternal partisanship (ca. 9 % of individuals). This is because the mother participated in the GSOEP only before the respondent was born or after the respondent turned 18, or because most of her responses were invalid. Robustness checks are performed to check whether missingness in this variable biases the results (see section on robustness checks). After implementing these restrictions, the final analytical sample consists of 2,746 young adults completing 18,617 person-year observations (78.66 % non-separated and 21.35 % separated families; see Fig. A-1 in the Appendix for a visualisation of the sample selection process).

4.2. Variables

Outcome

The dependent variable is based on the following question in the GSOEP:

Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party?

The variable is dichotomous; it is coded 1 if respondents answer affirmatively to the first question (identification with any single political party) and 0 otherwise (no identification or ‘don’t know’). A peculiarity of the GSOEP in contrast to other comparable household panel studies in Europe that include indicators of political attitudes (e.g., SHP, UKHLS/BHPS) is that it refers to the concept of party identification rather than the potentially more volatile dimension

² Parental separation could alternatively be derived from mothers’ birth and partnership histories (as in Hener et al. 2016), but doing so would require detailed information on the timing of each birth relative to partnership formation and dissolution, as well as on children’s subsequent living arrangements. In blended families, maternal partnership histories alone cannot distinguish between children who were born and raised within the same intact parental union and siblings who were born into an earlier partnership and therefore experienced parental separation. Moreover, because parental separation is associated with increased panel attrition (Müller and Castiglioni 2015), measures based on maternal histories risk substantial and selective missingness. Indeed, in this sample, mothers who separated contributed one fewer wave, on average (see sample statistic in Table 1). Using respondents’ own biographical information therefore ensures that separation is measured consistently for the same individuals for whom partisanship is observed.

of party preference. In the context of this present study, this is an advantage, since identification with rather than preference for any given party is expected to be less sensitive to time-varying external cues such as single candidates, political campaigns, or contemporary public debate.

Childhood family characteristics

Maternal partisanship is measured using survey responses provided directly by mothers, collected during the years before the respondent reaches adulthood (ages 0-17). This variable is constructed similarly to the outcome variable but condenses all available responses into a single, time-invariant measure, following common practice in political socialisation research (Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024; Janmaat and Hoskins 2022; Van Ditmars 2023). Mothers are classified as ‘partisan’ if they ever identified with a political party throughout these childhood years and ‘apartisan’ if they never did (including ‘don't know’ responses). Cases where maternal partisanship in childhood was not available were flagged as ‘missing’ and excluded from analyses (ca. 8%, see Table 1). Main specifications are robust to missingness (see section on robustness checks).

I operationalise *maternal SES* over maternal educational attainment, following methodological guidance from Janmaat and Hoskins (2022) and consistent with prior studies indicating that education is the most relevant dimension of SES for political socialisation (Jennings et al. 2009; Verba et al. 2005) and partisanship (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). The main specification proves robust to including mean household income during ages 0-17 (see robustness checks). The indicator combines information on school and vocational/tertiary qualifications into a five-level scheme to account for Germany’s two-tier education system (Salikutluk et al. 2020): (1) General education on lower level without vocational education training (VET), (2) general education on lower level with VET, (3) general education on intermediate level without VET, (4) general education on intermediate level with VET, and (5) tertiary education.

Parental separation in childhood is operationalised both as a binary and a timing-specific attribute that distinguishes respondents who grew up with both biological parents between ages 0-15 from those who did not, excluding where this was due to father’s death or placement into institutional care or with extended family. Both variables rely on an item that asks respondents to recall for how many years they lived with both their biological parents or with a single mother between ages 0-15. If they indicated that they spent ages 0-15 entirely with both biological parents, they are classified as not having experienced parental separation. If they spent at least one year living with a single mother, respondents are classified as having experienced parental

separation. To examine whether the effects of parental separation vary by *timing*, separation experience is disaggregated by age at exposure. Respondents either did not experience parental separation before the age of 15 (77.65 %) or they experienced separation between ages 0-6 (13.67 %) or between ages 7-15 (7.66 %). These cut-offs are in line with research on age-specific parental influence in partisan transmission (Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024) and on timing effects of separation in child development more broadly (Cavanagh and Huston 2008).

Note that the data do not allow a distinction between children who never lived with their biological father and those born into living-apart-together arrangements from those whose parents separated before the child's first birthday. Although the former two situations differ in important ways from parental separation following prior co-residence and may involve distinct mechanisms, together these cases account for only 5.86 % of individuals in the analytical sample, and results are robust to their exclusion.

Control Variables

Age (centred at age 18) is included to model age-related development across early adulthood. Additionally, I control for standard socio-demographic background variables, such as *household region* (East/West Germany) and *location* (urban = small, medium, or large city/rural = countryside), *maternal age at birth* (below or at least 25), respondent *gender* (men/women), *migration background* (direct or indirect) as well as *birth cohort* that may relate to both predictor variables and outcome (Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2019; Kroh and Selb 2009; Pesthy et al. 2021). Models also include a variable that indicates if *federal elections* took place the year following a particular survey year because party identification tends to intensify temporarily in the lead-up (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024).

Prior analyses have often included further characteristics that are on the pathway between family background and political orientation such as offspring's own educational attainment (e.g., Van Ditmars and Bernardi 2023; Voorpostel and Coffé 2015). Reduced educational attainment is among the primary channels through which parental separation affects child outcomes (Bernardi and Boertien 2016; Bernardi and Radl 2014; Lersch and Baxter 2020), conditioning on education may absorb the consequences of separation for partisanship. For transparency, I replicate the baseline model including respondents' educational attainment (ISCED97 recoded into low/middle/high) (see section on robustness checks).

4.3. Analytical Strategy

Because partisanship typically crystallises over the transition from the late teenage years into the mid-twenties, an individual's probability of reporting party identification should gradually increase as they age during this period. However, some individuals are more likely than others to identify with a party already at an early age, while others develop a party identity only later on, or never. Once formed, partisanship is normally a highly stable characteristic of political identity, but a fair share of the population is considered 'shaky' because they fluctuate into and out of identification (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). Growth curve models are well suited to account for such variation and are therefore widely used in political socialisation research (Janmaat and Hoskins 2022; Kroh 2014; Neundorf et al. 2013). These models capture the average developmental trajectories in the population and to which extent these trajectories are associated with predictor variables (fixed effects) while additionally accounting for whether individuals differ in their initial level of the outcome (random intercepts) and in how the outcome evolves over time (random slopes). In this case, growth modelling allows us to test whether early-life influences explain who becomes partisan in the first place and how stable partisanship is over time.

Generalised linear mixed-effects models (GLMM) are a pragmatic and efficient alternative to latent growth models when both outcome and explanatory variables are single, observed measures rather than latent constructs (Curran et al. 2010; McNeish and Matta 2018). Given that the outcome of interest is a binary indicator of whether an individual reports any party identification at a given observation, I estimate GLMM with a logistic link function. The data have a hierarchical structure, with repeated observations over time t nested within individuals i , and individuals clustered within mothers m due to the presence of siblings in the sample.³ To account for this structure, the models are specified with random effects at two levels: A random intercept and a random slope for age at the individual level, capturing stable between-person differences in baseline partisanship and heterogeneity in age-related change; and an additional random intercept at the mother level, capturing residual similarity between siblings that is not explained by observed covariates. This three-level specification allows the model to separate within-individual developmental change from both between-individual differences and shared family-level influences.

³ 25 % of mothers have at least two children in the sample, who account for 44 % of total observations.

The trajectory equation refers to the unconditional growth model, which captures age-related change in the probability of party identification:

$$\text{logit}(P(y_{it} = 1)) = (\beta_0 + \zeta_{0i} + u_{0m}) + (\beta_1 + \zeta_{1i})\text{age}_{it},$$

where $\zeta_{0i} \sim N(0, \sigma^2\zeta_0)$ denote individual-level random intercepts and $\zeta_{1i} \sim N(0, \sigma^2\zeta_1)$ denote individual-level random slopes, and $u_{0m} \sim N(0, \sigma^2 u)$ denotes a mother-level random intercept shared by siblings. In this specification, the intercept β_0 represents the initial probability of being partisan at age 18, whilst ζ_{0i} represents each individual's deviation from this baseline. Put differently, substantial inter-individual variation in the intercept (high value of ζ_{0i}) can be interpreted as pronounced differences in the probability of entering adulthood as partisan. Relatedly, a high mother-level intercept variance u_{0m} implies that families generate strong baseline differences in partisan propensity that are shared by siblings. β_1 is the mean change in the probability of reporting partisanship with each one-year age increase, with individual-level deviations from this mean growth rate captured by ζ_{1i} . Here, a high value of ζ_{1i} would imply meaningful heterogeneity in the stability of partisan identification over time, i.e. that there is a sizeable subgroup of 'shaky' partisans that transition into and out of identification across early adulthood. Results are presented as Odds Ratios (OR) and, given rescaling of coefficients in non-linear probability models with interaction terms, are complemented by predicted probabilities (Allison 1999; Karlson et al. 2012; Mood 2010). Estimations rely on the *glmer* routine from the *lme4* package (Bates et al. 2015), using RStudio (version 4.4.2). The reference group are young men without migration background from households in rural West Germany, whose mother was a partisan in their childhood, obtained vocational qualification following intermediate general schooling, and was at least 25 years old at birth.

To examine if childhood family characteristics explain variation in this age-related development of party identification, we can add predictor variables (X_i) to the unconditional specification. The empirical analysis does this in three steps: First, I estimate baseline associations that capture the direct relationships between maternal partisanship and maternal education (H1), as well as parental separation (H2) with initial probability at age 18 and average change in this probability at each subsequent age, until age 25. Second, parental separation is interacted with maternal partisanship to assess whether intergenerational transmission differs between non-separated and separated families (H3). Third, the analysis disaggregates parental separation by timing to examine whether exposure at earlier developmental stages has stronger implications for transmission (H4).

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Results

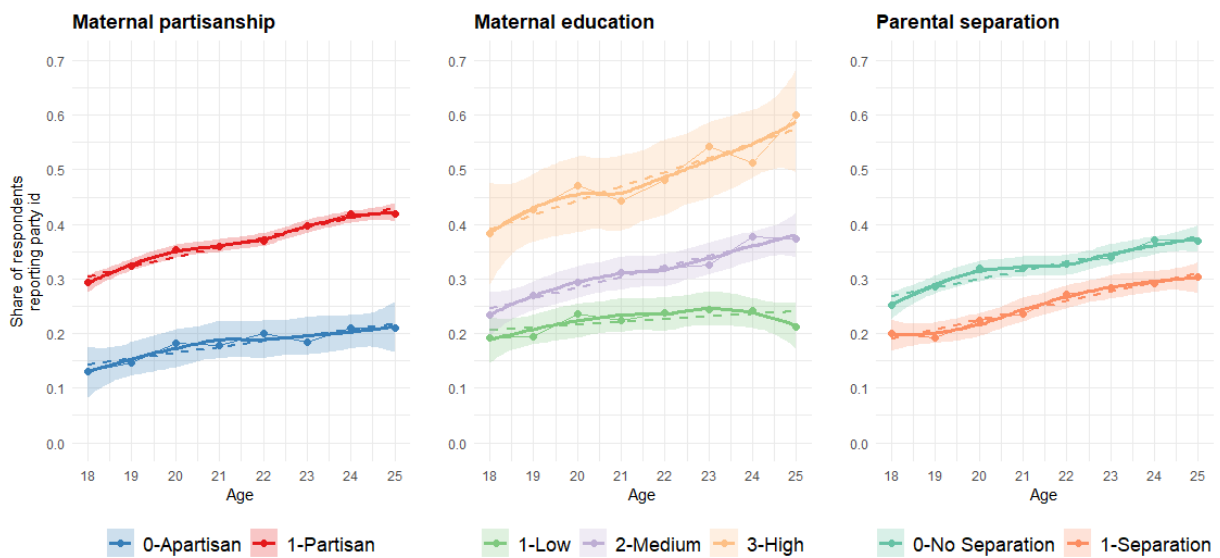
Table 1: Weighted sample statistics, column %

<i>Outcome Variable</i>	Overall	Parental Separation at ages 0-15			
		No Separation	Separation (Ever)	Separation Ages 0-6	Separation Ages 7-15
Partisanship					
Partisan	30.74	32.50	24.23	23.39	25.77
Apartisan	69.26	67.50	75.77	76.61	74.23
Explanatory Variables					
Mother: Partisanship					
Partisan	68.66	69.85	64.26	61.33	69.59
Apartisan	31.34	30.15	35.74	38.67	30.41
Mother: Educational attainment					
Lower general, no VET	7.27	6.76	9.13	9.96	7.62
Lower general, VET	18.98	18.78	19.70	22.03	15.47
Intermediate general, no VET	6.62	7.19	4.48	5.06	3.43
Intermediate general, VET	56.53	55.62	59.88	55.33	68.18
Tertiary	10.61	11.64	6.80	7.62	5.30
Control Variables					
Age, mean (sd)	21.51 (2.16)	21.52 (2.16)	21.47 (2.14)	21.44 (2.14)	21.52 (2.15)
Gender					
Men	52.05	52.26	51.30	54.12	46.16
Women	47.95	47.74	48.70	45.88	53.48
Birth Cohort					
1982-85	21.36	21.60	20.47	18.64	23.81
1986-89	28.98	28.23	31.75	31.39	32.42
1990-95	25.99	27.88	19.04	18.74	19.58
1996+	23.67	22.30	28.74	31.24	24.19
Migration Background					
Yes	19.90	19.87	20.01	24.61	11.64
No	80.0	80.13	79.99	75.39	88.36
Household: Region					
West Germany	81.48	82.25	78.61	79.41	77.14
East Germany	18.52	17.75	21.39	20.59	22.86
Household: Location					
Rural	59.13	61.88	48.99	44.11	57.88
Urban	40.87	38.12	51.01	55.89	42.12
Mother: Age at birth					
Below 25	27.62	24.46	39.28	44.19	30.33
25+	72.38	75.54	60.72	55.81	69.67
Mother: Number of matched survey waves, mean (sd)					
	8.80 (6.02)	9.08 (5.99)	7.77 (6.05)	7.55 (5.92)	8.18 (6.26)
<i>N (individuals)</i>	2,746	2,147	599	384	215

Note: Discrepancies due to rounding. Weighting corrects for survey design and baseline attrition.

The sample statistics in Table 1 reveal compositional differences both by parental separation status and timing. On average, young adults from separated families exhibit lower levels of party identification and are more likely to have apartisan mothers, who have achieved lower levels of formal education and were younger at the time of birth. Having experienced parental separation is also associated with higher shares of urban residence, East German origin, and migration background, with these differences being most pronounced where separations occurred in early childhood.

Figure 1: Trends in young adults' party identification in Germany, by family characteristics



Note: Dashed lines represent the linear growth assumption, solid lines represent the empirically observed distribution (LOESS smoothing). For visual clarity, maternal education is condensed into *low* = general education on lower level with and without VET or general education on intermediate level without VET; *medium* = general education on intermediate level with VET; *high* = tertiary education.

Figure 1 illustrates how maternal characteristics and parental separation in childhood descriptively relate to mean shares of partisanship ages 18-25. Aligning with the ‘impressionable years’ perspective, we observe a gradual increase in the share of partisans over age that follows an approximately linear trajectory, regardless of family background. That being said, respondents whose mothers ever identified with a party when they were children consistently exhibit higher rates of partisanship themselves compared to those whose mother was consistently apartisan. Maternal education also has a pronounced stratifying effect: Children of university-educated mothers display the highest levels of partisanship already at age 18. Gaps widen slightly over early adulthood but overall reflect persistent level differences rather than diverging growth rates. In turn, differences by parental separation are more modest but still persistent. Across all groups, level differences are statistically significant.

5.2. Individual-level impact of family characteristics on developmental trajectories of party identification across young adulthood

Having established mean descriptive differences in the distribution of partisanship by family characteristics, the formal analysis now proceeds to examine whether these differences are robust and significant. To this end, I present baseline associations of maternal partisanship and education (H1) as well as parental separation (H2) on young adults' propensity for partisanship in Table 1 in a first step, obtained from three-level logistic GLMM estimation (see Appendix, Table A-2 for estimation without mixed effects, which is equivalent to pooled logistic regression with standard errors clustered at the mother-level).

Confirming theoretical expectations aligned with family socialisation theory (H1), maternal partisanship emerges as the strongest predictor of party identification at age 18. Nonetheless, maternal education presents as almost similarly important, especially when mothers obtained college-level degrees – their children have around 2.6 times higher odds of being partisan at age 18 compared to children whose mothers are vocationally trained following intermediate schooling degrees, which translates to a 23 %-point higher probability. Similarly, the lowest level of maternal education is associated with a 21 %-point lower probability of offspring partisanship at age 18.

Parental separation has a relatively modest but still significant direct effect, leaving children to be around 10 %-points less likely partisan when they enter young adulthood and around 7 %-points when they have reached age 25, though this difference ceases to be significant at conventional levels. These findings broadly align with H2 and with prior estimates by Hener and colleagues (2016). Interestingly, family background plays a limited role in shaping age-related change. None of the parameters significantly alters age trajectories, with the exception of having a mother who completed intermediate schooling but no vocational training, which predicts significantly slower growth. Overall, these results imply that family background primarily determines whether individuals acquire party identities during their young adulthood at all, rather than whether this identification is stable. The random-effects estimates reinforce this interpretation: Substantial variation is observed in individual-level intercepts, indicating pronounced heterogeneity in likelihood of partisanship at age 18. By contrast, variance in individual-level age slopes is comparatively small, suggesting limited heterogeneity in developmental change. The negative correlation between intercepts and slopes further implies that respondents who already identify as partisan at age 18 tend to exhibit little subsequent

change, while those with low initial propensities do not display accelerated growth later on. Finally, the sizeable mother-level intercept variance points to meaningful residual similarity between siblings, net of observed characteristics. Together, these insights point to an early lock-in and persistent gaps rather than later convergence or substantial fluctuation into and out of partisanship, which underscores that family origin acts as a stratifying force in early politisation.

Table 2: Logistic GLMM estimates of the impact of family characteristics on initial levels and change in the likelihood of partisanship at ages 18-25 (Odds Ratios)

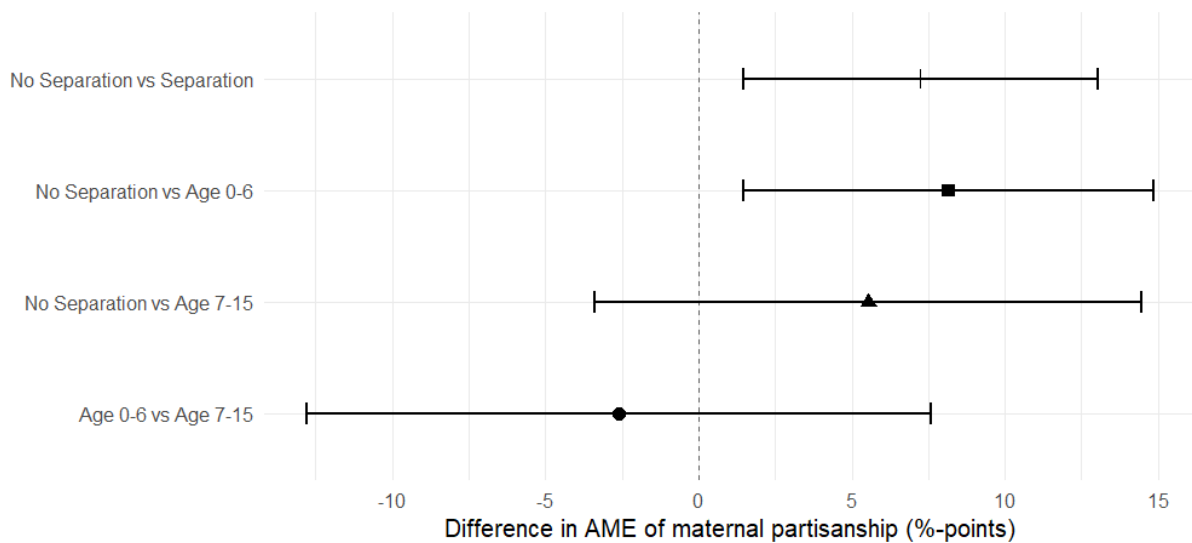
	Initial level (at age 18)	Effect on change (per year)
Partisan mother	3.905*** (0.668)	1.012 (0.034)
Maternal education		
General lower, no VET	0.274*** (0.096)	0.889 (0.064)
General lower, VET	0.597* (0.125)	0.957 (0.038)
Intermediate, no VET	1.877* (0.568)	0.816*** (0.047)
Intermediate, VET	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
Tertiary	2.572*** (0.571)	1.033 (0.044)
Parental separation	0.610** (0.110)	1.008 (0.036)
Variance intercept		2.070
Variance slope		0.373
Cor. Intercept x slope		-0.515
Variance intercept (mother)		1.684
RMSE		0.28
<i>N (individuals)</i>		2,746

Note: The model controls for age, pre-election year, gender, birth cohort, migration background, household region (East/West Germany) and location (urban/rural), as well as maternal age at birth. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance: + $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Against this background, can parental separation explain why some mothers transmit their partisan identity more successfully than others? The analysis now turns to investigate this question (H3). Given the limited heterogeneity in age-related change, the analysis does not model age-specific moderation effects but retains random slopes to maintain a consistent variance structure across model specifications. Thus, the following models estimate whether the association between maternal and offspring partisanship differs between separated and non-separated families, *averaging* across ages 18-25.

Figure 2 visualises that the marginal effect of having had a partisan mother in childhood on the predicted probability of party identification at ages 18-25 differs by parental separation status and timing: On average, having a partisan mother increases the probability of party identification by 17 %-points across young adulthood. In separated families, this ‘transmission gap’ is smaller, with mother-child transmission increasing the probability of own partisanship by only 10 %- points (difference in probabilities significant at $p < 0.01$). Accounting for the timing of parental separation adds further nuance: Among young adults who grew up with both biological parents, mother-child transmission raises the probability of partisanship by around 34 %-points. Transmission is substantially weaker among those experiencing early childhood separation (ages 0-6), where the probability for partisanship increases by only around 17 %. Separations occurring at ages 7-15 fall between these two. When formally tested, this moderation only appears significant when parental separation occurred during the early childhood years ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 2: Differences in the average marginal effect of maternal partisanship on the predicted probability of young adults identifying with a political party in Germany, by parental separation status and timing



Note: The contrast ‘No separation vs separation’ is derived from a model with a binary indicator of parental separation. All timing-specific contrasts are derived from a separate model distinguishing no separation at ages 0-15, separation at ages 0-6, and at ages 7-15. Both underlying models controls for age, pre-election year, gender, birth cohort, migration background, household region (East/West Germany) and location (urban/rural), as well as maternal age at birth. AME are population-average estimates that integrate over the random effects.

The analyses also reveal heterogeneity in the direct effect of parental separation: Irrespective of timing, separation has no discernible impact on children of apartisan mothers. This points to a ‘floor effect’ (Bernardi and Boertien 2016), whereby children have less to lose from parental separation if it occurs in a context of low political capital and thus, most likely, structural life-course disadvantage.

6. Robustness Checks and Additional Analyses

Missingness in maternal partisanship

As maternal partisanship is not observed for all respondents, excluding these cases may bias estimates if missingness is systematic. Including missing maternal partisanship as a separate category does not substantively alter the results. Offspring of partisan mothers remain significantly more likely to identify with a party than those of apartisan mothers, while respondents with missing maternal partisanship consistently occupy an intermediate position, indicating that missingness does not proxy genuine political disengagement but appears to capture a heterogeneous group. Estimates for parental separation and maternal education, as well as the absence of meaningful age interactions, also remain stable across specifications. Nonetheless, predicted probabilities slightly attenuate after including missing cases, which indicates that listwise deletion in the baseline model likely overstates absolute levels of partisanship but not relative differences.

Operationalisation of maternal partisanship

Not only any exposure to maternal partisanship but consistency of exposure matters to transmission. Hence, a more fine-grained operationalisation provides a stricter test of whether parental separation disrupts intergenerational transmission: If children's learning benefits from repeated and stable exposure, then separation should matter most where such signals are otherwise frequent and consistent. In differentiating between apartisan mothers (32.56 %) and occasionally (30.01 %), mostly (18.17 %), or always (19.26 %) partisan mothers⁴, estimations confirm this notion: In non-separated families, mostly or always partisan mothers increase the average probability of young adults' partisanship by ca. 21 and 32 %-points, whereas these marginal effects are markedly attenuated in separated families, to only 12 and 19 %-points (differences significant at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, respectively). By contrast, transmission from occasionally partisan mothers is weak to begin with and not significantly moderated by separation. Consistent with the main moderation analyses, the direct average marginal effect of separation on young adults' partisanship is only relevant in both magnitude and statistical significance where mothers were mostly and always partisan.

⁴ Categories are defined as: *apartisan* = non-identification in all available observations; *occasional* = partisan in at least one and up to half of all observations; *mostly* = partisan in more than half but not all observations; *always* = identification in all observations

Respondent education

Replicated models that additionally adjust for respondents' own educational attainment⁵ yield substantively similar results to the baseline specification. Predicted probabilities associated with maternal partisanship remain largely unchanged, while those associated with maternal education are modestly reduced in levels but remain clearly graded. By contrast, predicted probabilities associated with parental separation are more strongly attenuated, consistent with the interpretation that part of the separation penalty reflects more disadvantageous educational trajectories among children of separated parents (Bernardi and Boertien 2016 for an analysis of effect heterogeneity of parental separation on children's educational attainment).

Household Income

Income is inevitably lower in single-parent households than in two-parent households and is also closely correlated with education, which raises concerns of post-treatment bias and multicollinearity if included. On the other hand, loss of material resources is one of the main pathways through which parental separation affects child outcomes, especially in middle-class families (Bernardi and Boertien 2016). Accordingly, mean equivalent household income in childhood (averaged over ages 0-17, log-transformed and standardised)⁶ strongly and positively predicts the likelihood of offspring party identification, but probability estimates of main predictors are only modestly reduced and overall substantive patterns are substantively unchanged. Most notably changed is the effect magnitude of tertiary-educated mothers, with an attenuation of about 21 % compared to predicted probabilities obtained from the main specification.

7. Discussion

By integrating family sociological perspectives into established theories of political socialisation and social status, this study examined how maternal partisanship, maternal education, and parental separation in childhood as important attributes of family background relate to the development of partisanship during the 'impressionable years' of young adulthood. Results aligned with decades of research concluding that partisanship is primarily rooted in the intergenerational transmission of partisanship (H1), although maternal education still exerted a

⁵ 2,455 observations dropped due to missing information on education

⁶ 219 observations dropped due to missing information on income

pronounced and independent influence. Furthermore, family background characteristics strongly determined likelihood of entering adulthood with a party identity, while showing little association with age-related change across young adulthood. Variance components further confirmed that partisanship, once formed, is highly stable. Together, these findings highlight that early socialisation experiences create persisting gaps in partisanship that leave limited scope for later convergence (Alwin and Krosnick 1991).

Beyond confirming established insights, the analysis extends the literature in important ways: Replicating and expanding earlier evidence on parental divorce from the German context (Hener et al. 2016), parental separation of both marital and non-marital unions in childhood was associated with a lower likelihood of partisanship by age 18, although this direct association was modest in size and attenuated over time (H2). Given that the data do not distinguish divorce from non-marital union dissolution, this finding likely reflects a broader process of family instability rather than a marriage-specific effect, though divorce may still account for a substantial share of the association.

The central contribution of this study lies in its examination of intergenerational transmission under conditions of parental separation. The results show that parental separation weakens the average association between maternal and offspring partisanship across young adulthood (H3). In non-separated families, maternal partisanship translates into a substantially higher probability of offspring partisanship. Among individuals who experienced parental separation, this association is markedly reduced, indicating that separation disrupts the conditions under which maternal orientations are successfully internalised.

The analysis further demonstrates that the timing of parental separation matters. As expected (H4), separations occurring in early childhood are associated with a substantially stronger attenuation of maternal transmission than separations occurring later, consistent with evidence identifying early childhood as a sensitive period for maternal influence (Fitzgerald and Bacovsky 2024) and suggesting that disruptions during this phase are particularly consequential for political development. Notably, moderation analyses revealed a more complex picture regarding the direct association of parental separation and partisanship: Results indicated that separation interrupts processes of political reproduction that would otherwise sustain partisan attachment across generations. By contrast, where families have an already marginal relationship to mainstream political institutions, separation adds little else. In this sense, parental separation contributes to political inequality not by generating disengagement universally, but by obstructing transmission in families with at least some political capital.

As with all research, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. As in all longitudinal surveys, structural attrition in the GSOEP is a concern, particularly given that attrition is associated with separation and lower SES (Müller and Castiglioni 2015). Although robustness checks addressing missing maternal partisanship yield consistent results, attrition may still lead to conservative estimates. However, separation-related attrition is much more pronounced for the parent who moves out of the survey household, which is often the father. Hence, young adults from separated families lack systematic information on fathers' partisanship (> 50 % missingness). Additionally, we lack information on (post-separation) childcare and contact arrangements as well as family climate, which prohibits a more direct test of the mechanisms at play. Likewise, the analysis does not account for influences from other caregivers or socialising agents such as stepparents, extended kin, or neighbours.

In addition, parental separation is a heterogeneous experience that intersects with other life-course processes. More specifically, maternal partisanship, maternal education, and parental separation are endogenously related and form part of a broader constellation of cumulative advantages and disadvantages unfolding over the life course (Fasang and Mayer 2020; Dannefer 2003), which jointly structure opportunities for political socialisation in and outside the family. While these interdependencies cannot be fully disentangled empirically, the model specification accounts for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity and includes a theory-driven set of controls to mitigate concerns. Nonetheless, estimates should be interpreted as conditional associations, not causal effects. Relatedly, it is important to be aware that many children adapt well to separation, particularly when parents maintain low inter-parental conflict, stable parenting practices, and economic security (Clarke-Stewart et al. 2000; Amato 2010). Yet, while parenting styles that are generally more conducive to political socialisation are linked to parental SES (Mikus et al. 2021; Lareau 2003), these parents are also more prone to conflict post-separation (Kalil et al. 2011). Future research should therefore examine effect heterogeneity more explicitly, particularly across socio-economic strata, to better understand when and for whom separation disrupts political socialisation.

Despite these limitations, the findings carry important implications. When certain childhood contexts systematically depress engagement with established democratic institutions such as political parties, the political preferences of disadvantaged groups are less likely to be articulated and represented in electoral democracies (Pande 2020). Declining attachment to established parties and lack of political representation may also contribute to the rise of populist or extremist actors, a development already documented in the German context (e.g.,

Klingemann and Wattenberg 1990; Siedler 2011). Policies that support families before and after separation may help prevent this (see *Zehnter Familienbericht 2025* for a detailed report on policy recommendations on separation and parenthood in Germany). However, findings also caution against policy approaches that focus narrowly on reducing the prevalence of parental separation. Newer evidence highlights that prolonged exposure to conflict, relational dysfunction, or violence within nuclear families can be more harmful to child development than separation (Härkönen et al. 2017 for an overview), which may hurt political socialisation in a similar or worse fashion than separation-related stress, for example by damaging interpersonal and institutional trust (Paquin et al. 2025). Instead, measures that reduce inter-parental conflict, expand access to affordable childcare, or promote family-friendly employment arrangements can reduce the risk of family instability while simultaneously strengthening political engagement. Investments in civic education, youth programmes, and community initiatives may further limit the extent to which family structure and parental resources determine young people's access to the world of politics. Since the impact of parental SES on adolescents' and young adults' political engagement varies across national contexts (Hoskins and Janmaat 2019), comparative research could examine whether the effects of parental separation on political socialisation similarly differ in institutional settings that are less familistic than Germany, such as Sweden or France, where families tend to experience this transition as less disruptive (Hampden-Thompson and Pong 2005).

Appendix

Figure A-1: Sample selection process

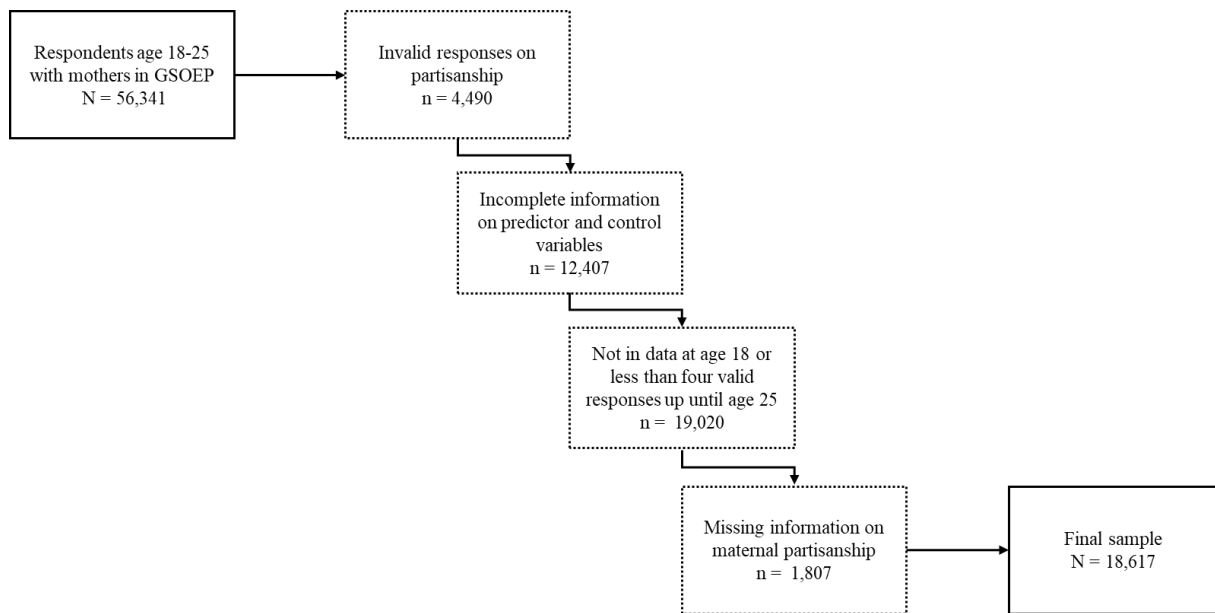


Table A-2: Logistic regression estimates of family characteristics on initial levels and change in the likelihood of partisanship at ages 18-25 (Odds Ratios)

	Initial level (at age 18)	Effect on change (per year)
Partisan mother	2.158*** (0.220)	0.993 (0.019)
Maternal education		
General lower, no VET	0.458*** (0.102)	0.925+ (0.041)
General lower, VET	0.795+ (0.100)	0.972 (0.021)
Intermediate, no VET	1.378* (0.220)	0.898** (0.031)
<i>Intermediate, VET</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
Tertiary	1.587*** (0.195)	1.017 (0.024)
Parental separation	0.704*** (0.073)	1.015 (0.025)
RMSE		0.44
<i>N (individuals)</i>		2,746

Note: The model controls for age, pre-election year, gender, birth cohort, household region (East/West Germany) and location (urban/rural), as well as maternal age at birth. Standard errors in parentheses, clustered at mother-level. Significance: + $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Data Availability

The data used in this study are from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP; doi: [10.5684/soep.core.v40eu](https://doi.org/10.5684/soep.core.v40eu)) and are available to the scientific community through the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) subject to data use agreements. Replication code will be made available upon publication.

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