

# Electing parents

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*Abstract:* During campaigns, politicians often highlight the importance of their family, in particular their children, for their lives and the development of their political positions and values. In this paper, we investigate the rationale behind this behavior. Our central question is: do voters prefer candidates with children once parental status information is made available on the ballot sheet? Conducting several independent election experiments within an exit poll of German voters in 2014, we show that candidates with children indeed enjoy an electoral advantage in low-information elections. Furthermore, this “children bonus” is particularly strong for candidates with at least two children. Complementary analyses shed light on some of the most likely mechanisms behind these findings, suggesting that voters prefer candidates with children because they appear more trustworthy and more altruistic than childless ones.

Keywords: Parents as candidates, information cues, voting behavior, field experiment, difference-in-differences

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## 1. Introduction

It is a wide-spread phenomenon that politicians with children present themselves as dedicated parents, especially during electoral campaigns. This suggests that being a parent is perceived as a competitive edge among political actors, possibly signaling a certain likeable characteristic or fitness for office childless individuals lack. A look at the official websites of the 100 senators at the beginning of the 115th U.S. congress (2017/2018) supports that impression. Out of 92 senators who have at least one child according to Wikipedia, 85 mention this fact in their personal profile page, a share of 92.2%. This ranges in the same league or even higher than the fraction of senators revealing information about their educational background (87 of 100), their profession (86 of 100), or their marital status (87 of 92, or 94.5% of those who are married). By contrast, only 25 of the senators include their year of birth in their profile page. Thus, having children obviously seems to be an important personal attribute for politicians. It is not clear, however, whether being a parent actually yields any advantages on Election Day and if it does, why this may be the case.

This paper aims at answering this question. In particular, we test whether including the family status of candidates on the ballot leads to changes in voting behavior in low-information settings in which the voters know nothing or hardly anything about the candidates and cannot use party affiliation as decision shortcut. This includes all situations in which individuals are supposed to select their preferred choice(s) out of a list of candidates from the *same* party (e.g., primary or open-list elections), from candidates from different parties when the voter is generally *undecided* about which party to support, or in elections for *non-political* positions. In all three cases, the voters need to rely on other criteria to distinguish between the candidates if they want to make a meaningful choice. The literature on the use of available information cues in this context shows that individuals turn to whatever is available to them to facilitate this task, be it the order of candidates on the list (Brockington 2003; Esteve-Volart and Bagues 2012; Shue and Luttmer 2009), their profile pictures (Banducci et al. 2008; Johns

and Shepard 2007), gender (McDermott 1997; Koch 2000), ethnicity (McDermott 1998), age (Sigelman and Sigelman 1982), or profession (McDermott 2005; Mechtel 2014). The impact of information on the candidates' family status, on the other hand, has not been examined so far, despite its prominent role on the campaign trail (Murray 2015).

The present paper aims at filling this gap. To this end, we conducted an exit poll with a built-in choice experiment at the simultaneous elections to local councils and the parliament of the European Union in Germany in 2014. It was carried out in 28 polling stations across 15 cities and communities in the states of Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen. Respondents were asked to participate in a hypothetical open-list election in which they should choose their six preferred candidates of a list of 30 candidates from the same party. In the main experiment, participants faced two different information treatments. In the benchmark case, the hypothetical ballots only contained the standard information about the candidates' rank number and full names. In the treatment version, on the other hand, they additionally display the candidates' family status, i.e., legal status and the number of children. Since participants were randomly allocated to the two groups, they form credible counterfactuals for each other. Thus, we can directly compare the probability of individual candidates to get a vote between the two groups and examine whether there is a systematic advantage for those with child(ren) once that attribute is revealed.

The analysis suggests two main results. First, if voters know about the family status of the candidates in a low-information setting, they are more likely to select those with children. The size of this effect is substantial. Candidates with children gain on average around 6.5 percentage points in the probability to get a vote, which represents an increase of almost 34%

relative to the overall average probability in our sample of 19.2%.<sup>1</sup> This confirms that voters strongly prefer candidates with children and that politicians act rationally when they emphasize their families. Second, when we look at the individual effects of different family sizes, this "child bonus" only materializes with two or more children.

In the final part of the paper, we additionally examine three possible explanations for the existence of the child bonus. First, we test whether it is driven by voters with children who vote for candidates who are as similar to themselves as possible. We find that similarity is indeed a significant factor, but it explains only a share of the overall effect. Second, we show that having children does not only serve as signal for other potentially more important characteristics like experience, maturity, and education. To do this, we run the same election experiment again including additionally information about the year of birth and profession of the candidates on the hypothetical ballot. This reduces the effect of parenthood somewhat, but it remains strong and statistically significant. And third, we conduct an additional survey experiment in the spirit of Campbell and Cowley (2014) and Vivyan and Wagner (2015) to examine whether individuals perceive the same candidates differently depending on whether they have children or not. We find significant improvements in the assessment of their trustworthiness and altruism. Thus, all three channels seem to explain some part of why voters prefer candidates with children.

The remainder of the article starts with a discussion on whether and how parenthood of candidates may affect the decision-making of voters in an election in section 2. Then, section 3 describes the setup of the experiment and the way we identify the effect of parenthood in more detail. Section 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the participants

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<sup>1</sup> If all participants had cast the maximum number of six votes in our experiment, the average probability of each of the 30 candidates to obtain a vote would be 20%. As some respondents chose not to allocate all their votes, the overall probability is a bit lower.

and shows that the random allocation into the experimental treatments led to very similar groups. In section 5, we present the results of the empirical analysis and discuss their robustness. Section 6 examines possible channels of influence, in particular, similarity between voters and candidates and changes in perceived personal attributes due to parenthood. Finally, we conclude in section 7 and suggest several directions for further research on this topic.

## **2. Parenthood and politics**

To understand how the simple fact of having children may affect the electoral success of candidates, we need to answer three separate questions: First, how does becoming a parent typically change a person's life and attitudes? Second, what kind of signal may parenthood therefore send to voters? And third, in which electoral situations could this signal be actually relevant for the choice of voters? In this section, we discuss each of these issues in turn. Based on these insights, we then develop our hypotheses on how we expect voters to react to the information that certain candidates have children.

### *2.1 The effect of parenthood on individuals*

Becoming parent is generally considered as one of the most important moments in the life of an adult, comparable in the magnitude of its effects only to entering or exiting the workforce and getting married. This view is reflected in the works of both sociologists and psychologists (e.g. Andersen and Cook 1985; Elder and Greene 2007; Greenlee 2010) and can be observed in several different areas.

To start, parenthood may affect the overall *happiness and well-being* of individuals in two competing ways. On the one hand, raising children produces considerable distress due to the large amount of additional tasks and challenges involved with parenting, like conflicts

between work and family responsibilities or difficulties in finding adequate child-care (see Elder and Greene 2006; McLahanan and Adams 1987; and Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003). On the other hand, it is also common sense that parenting offers unique rewards. Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003), for instance, find that becoming a mother significantly increases women's psychological well-being, especially if they are married. They suggest three factors explaining this result: First, having a child significantly increases the rate of social integration, i.e., they get to know many more new people due to child-related additional contacts. Second, caring for others leads to a growth in self-esteem and self-efficacy. And third, being a parent means successfully filling an adult role expected by society at large (see also Greenlee 2010).

Interestingly, there does not seem to be a significant effect on the happiness of married fathers. This is especially noteworthy, as almost all of the additional *household work* is done by mothers. While wives already spend more time doing household work than their husbands without a child, this gap widens with the arrival of the couple's first child and keeps increasing with every additional one (see Baxter et al. 2008; Sanchez and Thomson 1997; and Warner and Steel 1999). On the *labor market*, the same studies show that getting children leads mothers to reduce their work hours to half the amount of the fathers on average, which fosters the nurturing position of women. Men, on the other hand, still largely fulfill the classic breadwinner role and even react to becoming father by increasing their work efforts (Lundberg and Rose 2002).

Furthermore, there is also evidence that parenthood alters individuals' *political attitude*, both because of concern for their children's future and through reciprocal attitude transmission (e.g., Glass et al. 1986). While the literature is ambiguous with respect to the impact of having children on their parents' party identification in general,<sup>2</sup> they are likely to

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<sup>2</sup> A study by Oswald and Powdthave (2010) shows that daughters lead to more support for left-wing parties in the UK, whereas having sons causes a move into the opposite direction.

exert an influence on their stance on specific policies. In particular, having daughters seems to increase parents' support for pro-gender policies, both as citizens and holders of public office (see Warner, 1991, and, Warner and Steel, 1999, for the former, and Glynn and Sen, 2015, and Washington, 2008, for the latter). Additionally, Elder and Greene (2007) and Greenlee (2010) show that mothers in the US express stronger support for redistribution via the welfare state than childless women. This effect cannot be found for the fathers, however, demonstrating again that men are generally less affected by children than women.

Taken together, parenthood seems to alter adults' behavior and attitudes significantly in many different ways and depending on the gender of the parent, with consequences both in the private and public sphere. In the next subsection, we therefore discuss how this could affect the chances of candidates with children at the polls.

## *2.2 Parenthood and electoral chances*

There are several potential mechanisms through which being a parent may lead to a boost in electoral chances. Some of them are direct consequences of the impact of getting children on the parents' life and attitudes as described above, while others simply relate to the status of parenthood. Similarly, some can be assumed to increase the candidate's chances with the broad electorate, whereas others may only work for certain subgroups.

To start, being a parent may serve as a signal that the respective person has undergone the changes described above and has acquired several *positive personal characteristics* in the process which are considered as necessary or at least helpful for being an effective representative in general. These could be traits like strength, assertiveness, and organizational skills, obtained by having successfully endured the stress of raising children and managed to

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Lee and Conley (2016a, 2016b), however, reconsider the topic and cannot confirm these results.

overcome the personal and organizational challenges associated with it. At the same time, having children may also let them appear as more approachable, open-minded, and down-to-earth, in short, more likeable. Campbell and Cowley (2014), for instance, show for the case of the UK that small changes in the description of candidates have a large effect on the assessment of their personality and abilities. In the case of parents, this may give voters a better feeling when they cast their ballot for such a candidate.

Next, voters may assume that candidates with children may have *different positions* on a number of issues than childless ones. Most importantly, they are most likely well-acquainted with the typical challenges a family faces and committed to working on them, like providing high quality and affordable child-care and education. This could be a crucial aspect for voters who think that providing more support to families is important, either because they have a family themselves or because they are worried about the future of the country in general. Likewise, being a parent may be taken as having a longer time-horizon than individuals without children. For instance, references to one's children and grandchildren and the desire to make the world a better place for them seem to belong to the standard toolkit in political rhetoric today. Similarly, most theoretical models aiming at incorporating long-run developments to explain today's decision-making use the children of individuals and their future offspring as tool to overcome the limitations of a finite life. Good examples for this tendency are the literature on inheritance taxation (see the overview in Kopczuk 2013) and standard overlapping-generations models (described, for instance, in Blanchard and Fischer 1989 or Romer 2001). If voters look out for representatives who they believe care about the future and do their best to enact long-run solutions, candidates with children may thus appear attractive to voters.

Finally, parenthood may be perceived as a *contribution to society* at large. Historically, getting children and nurturing them has been cherished by governments as adding to the strength of a nation. Although this interpretation of how children contribute to

the society has changed significantly over time and now rather focuses on ensuring the long-run sustainability of public finances and our social security systems,<sup>3</sup> parenthood may still be seen as a positive trait in general (e.g., Elder and Greene 2006; Glassman and Kenney 1994).

Summing up, there are various possible channels for a positive impact of having children on the electoral chances of a candidate. Thus, it does not surprise that candidates are eager to exploit their family status during electoral campaigns in the hope of gaining some additional votes.

### *2.3 Relevant electoral framework*

In which cases could a favorable opinion towards candidates with children actually play a role for the decision of voters about whom to support? After all, parliamentary elections are usually about which party gains or keeps power, so the personal attributes of individual candidates have a backseat compared to the importance of party affiliation (see, for instance, Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Miller et al. 1996). Nevertheless, there are several situations in which information about the candidates' family status may influence the result, both in majority systems and those with proportional representation.

Figure 1 depicts these situations. To start, the crucial factor in the case of a (simple) majority system, as used in the US, the UK, or France, is whether voters can influence who is on the ballot in the first place. If the party leadership or a small circle of activists determine the single candidate of a party like in the UK, the existence and number of children of the eventual candidates on the ballot may only matter for a small number of actual swing voters, i.e., individuals without fixed party loyalty who decide anew in each election whom to

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<sup>3</sup> Economically, the positive fiscal externality provided by parents is estimated to be about 217,000 US\$ for each child over its lifetime (Wolf et al. 2011). This figure already takes all child- and family related subsidies and public support programs into account.

support. If the candidate for each party is determined by the supporters of that party in a primary election as in the US, on the other hand, then we are in a situation in which all alternatives we are facing are from the same party and other factors than partisan affiliation become relevant.

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Next, we turn to systems of proportional representation in which each party runs a list of candidates in multi-member districts and obtains roughly as many seats as corresponding to its share of the total vote. This way of electing a parliament or council is most frequently used in continental Europe, albeit in different adaptations from one country to another. Typically, a party convention decides in these cases upon who enters the party's list of candidates for a parliament or council and in which position. Thus, the decisive criterion for whether personal attributes could be important at all is the degree of openness of the lists in the election itself. If voters can only choose between different lists, there is no possibility to select individual candidates and hence no need to look at them more closely. By contrast, the more influence voters possess on the final ranking of the candidates, the greater the importance of personal attributes (see Mechtel 2014; Sajons 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, there are several relevant situations and countries in which the family status of candidates, and in particular whether they have children or not, could have a serious impact on their electoral chances.

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview on the different degrees of openness in elections with party lists, see Farrell and McAllister (2006).

## 2.4 Hypotheses

Combining the insights from the previous sections, we can derive several testable hypotheses for those cases in which personal attributes of candidates may matter.

**Hypothesis 1:** If voters are aware of the candidates' family status, they are more likely to choose candidates with children than those without.

This is the central hypothesis of the present paper. It follows directly from the discussion of the changes parenthood brings along and what this may signal to the voters. Finding an average advantage for candidates with children, however, does not tell us anything about the reasons why voters favor them. As different explanations may lead to different conclusions, we therefore examine the three most likely channels in our view more closely. They are summarized in the following three hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 2a:** The child bonus is the consequence of a majority of voters with children who vote for candidates who are similar to them.

There is plenty of evidence that voters have a preference for candidates who are similar to them in some ways (see Sigelman and Sigelman 1982 or Cutler 2002, for instance). If the majority of voters has children, becoming aware of this similarity with certain candidates may be enough to ensure them an electoral advantage over their childless alternatives. In this scenario, the magnitude of the child bonus would directly depend on the share of parents relative to voters without offspring.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Having children serves as a proxy for other more important characteristics.

On the other hand, the child bonus may not actually be about having children, but about other relevant characteristics that may be positively correlated with it, like age, professional

experience or success. If voters become aware of these other features, whether or not a candidate has children may therefore turn irrelevant. In political terms, it may hence be the case that touting one's own parenthood may only promote one's own electoral chances in the absence of other information.

**Hypothesis 2c:** Voters assess the personal characteristics of otherwise unknown candidates more positively if the candidates have children.

Lastly, it is possible that revealing the parenthood of a candidate changes his or her public perception. Previous work by Campbell and Cowley (2014) suggests this may easily be the case in electoral situations in which the voters do not know the respective candidates well. If voters perceive candidates with children more positively, this may make them more likely to select them rather than their childless alternatives.

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Figure 2 summarizes and illustrates our hypotheses. The first aims at the direct effect of providing information about parent status on the electoral success of candidates with children. In the present paper, we focus primarily on this relationship in order to explain why showcasing ones children is done so frequently by political candidates. Thus, the next sections will be dedicated to examining the existence and robustness of the child bonus for candidates. Once this is done, we return to hypotheses 2a to 2c when we discuss the potential channels for the effect in section 6. Due to methodological limits, we will not be able to directly test all the relationships in this part, as depicted by the dashed arrows in figure 2, but we will provide enough evidence to get a feeling for the respective relative relevance.

By testing these hypotheses, we provide the first systematic evidence on the importance of having children for the electoral success of political candidates and how voters

perceive these candidates in comparison to those without children. Additionally, we contribute to the literature on the use of information cues by adding another piece to the list of potentially important ones.

### **3. Experimental design**

#### *3.1 Identification strategy*

In actual elections, information cues about the candidates' family status are not provided on the ballot. In situations with more than two relevant candidates like primary or open list elections, voters are therefore often unaware of this information. Thus, it would not provide relevant insights to gather data on the number of children for all candidates in these situations and correlate that with their success at the ballot box, as it would be impossible to determine whether a statistical relationship may be due to informed voters, the influence of important omitted variables, or simply coincidence. In the following, we therefore describe how we identify the *causal* effect of information about parenthood on the probability to get a vote. Throughout the remainder of the paper, we will use the framework of open list elections for this task, but our approach would similarly apply to a system with primaries.

Our strategy is simple: we conducted an exit-poll of voters at the day of the joint elections for the EU Parliament and municipal councils in the two German federal states of Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen in May 2014 and let respondents unknowingly participate in an election experiment with randomized treatment and control groups. That is, after several questions about the actual election, participants faced a hypothetical list of 30 candidates, which they should assume to run for their preferred party.<sup>5</sup> Every participant was

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<sup>5</sup> For the exact wording of the questions (in German), see the example of the treatment group questionnaire in Appendix A.1.

allowed to vote for 6 out of these 30 candidates. To identify the effect of having children, participants were randomly selected into two groups. In one of them, the respondents received ballots which explicitly included the candidates' family status (both legal status and the number of children), while this information was concealed in the other one. As everything else remained identical, in particular, the ballot position and the names of the candidates, the two groups form credible counterfactuals to each other. Thus, we measure the causal effect of parenthood by comparing the probability of candidates with children to get a vote in the treatment and control version of the ballot. Similar experimental designs have been used by McDermott (2005) to study the impact of profession information on the ballot and Sajons (2016) to evaluate whether different information cues on the ballot affect the satisfaction of voters with the electoral process and the candidates.

Econometrically, we implement our approach with the "difference-in-differences" method as depicted in figure 3. First, we calculate the difference in the likelihood of candidates to obtain one of the six votes of a participant in the treatment version depending on whether they have children or not (the right-hand branch of figure 3). This gives us the average electoral advantage or disadvantage of candidates with children when this information is available. As it could be that candidates with children are systematically or accidentally placed on more or less attractive ranks, or have more or less appealing names for some reason, we additionally calculate the same difference for the candidates in the control group (the left-hand branch of figure 3) and subtract it from the value in the treatment group. Thus, we obtain the causal effect of revealing the "parent" characteristic to the voters controlling for any influence of the candidates' names and positions on the list.

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We chose the two federal states Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen due to their size (they are home to around one third of German voters) and because their electoral systems differ. Thus, we can investigate the effect of specific information cues starting from different information baselines. In Baden-Württemberg, local elections employ open lists which already provide some information about candidates, most importantly their profession. Each citizen has as many votes as seats to be filled in the local council. They can be allocated freely across parties and candidates, independent of their respective rank on the list. Nordrhein-Westfalen, on the other hand, uses a single-vote mixed-member system. That is, citizens only possess one vote with which two decisions are made simultaneously. The first is about the direct representative for their local electoral district. Here, the voters face one candidate per party and a simple majority determines which of them gets elected. At the same time, the party of the candidate a person voted for receives a vote as well. The overall proportion of party votes in the community or city then determines the total number of seats for each party. As in Baden-Württemberg, the ballot sheets in Nordrhein-Westfalen contain some information about the candidates, such as year of birth and occupation. Thus, although people in Nordrhein-Westfalen have no experience with open lists, they are used to being briefly informed about candidates. Hence, we are able to investigate the effect of family status under substantially different voting systems.

### *3.2 The hypothetical candidates*

Table 1 presents the list of hypothetical candidates used in the election experiment and their respective characteristics. It is important for the experiment that the hypothetical candidates appear as realistic as possible. For this reason, we used old ballots of local elections in other places in Germany to obtain a sample of original German names, in which female and male first names were equally represented. We randomly rearranged first and family names such that the new ones did not resemble any real candidate anymore. We also removed any double

names and Doctor titles to prevent any influence of these German particularities.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the resulting names were checked for coincidental similarities with any regional or national celebrity. If this was the case, we changed the name further to obtain completely unknown candidates. With respect to family status, table 1 shows that 12 out of our 30 hypothetical candidates appear as single, while the remaining 18 persons are either married, widowed or living in a civil partnership, the legal status for same-sex couples in Germany at the time. In terms of children, 12 candidates are childless, whereas the other 18 have at least one child.

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#### 4. Descriptive statistics

The experiment was conducted in 28 polling stations in 15 different cities and rural municipalities. The interviewers were instructed to ask every third person leaving the polling station for their willingness to take part in the exit poll. About half of the contacted agreed to do so. Overall, this produced 465 fully completed questionnaires. As described in section 3, about half of these questionnaires contained only the names of the candidates on the hypothetical ballot, whereas the other half additionally informed about their family status (marital status and number of children), forming control and treatment group, respectively.

Table 2 summarizes the distribution of gender, age groups, education level, marital status, number of children, party preference, and regional characteristics of the respondents across the two samples in columns (1) to (4). Overall, about 43% of respondents were female

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<sup>6</sup> Since doctoral degrees are an official part of a person’s name in Germany, they would also appear on the ballot.

and the age distribution was about one third each for the ranges of 16-35, 36-55, and older than 55. Roughly the same holds for the distribution of participants over the different educational attainment levels, with about 34% having passed either lower or middle secondary education (which both do not permit to go to college), a bit more than 29% with a general university-entrance qualification, and roughly 36% having obtained some kind of college or university degree. With respect to the respondents' family status, around 53% were currently married and about the same percentage had children. Among the latter, around 75% stated to have one or two of them. The reported party preference in the real election showed support for the two main parties in Germany at around 53% together. Although this share appears to be very low, numbers like these are fairly common on the local level, since there are many more parties and independent candidates running for office than in state or federal elections. Finally, a bit more than half of the respondents were interviewed in larger cities (>100,000 inhabitants) compared to smaller ones and rural areas, while the regional distribution was almost even between the two states of Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen.

In all these observable characteristics, we do not observe any statistically significant difference between treatment and control group, both at the standard 5% level and even at the less stringent 10% one. This is shown in columns (5) and (6), reporting the numerical difference between the two groups and the p-value of the corresponding test for statistical significance, respectively. This demonstrates that the randomization of participants over the two different ballot versions was successful in forming very similar comparison groups. It also means we can reasonably assume that these two groups do not deviate much in potentially important *unobservable* characteristics as well. The treatment indicator should therefore be completely uncorrelated with the error term, i.e., be truly exogenous.

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## 5. Results

The central research question of this study is: Do the electoral chances of candidates increase if the voter knows that they have children (hypothesis 1)? To obtain a first impression of the answer, we display the average probability to get a vote for candidates with children and those without in figure 4, separated by ballot version. It reveals an interesting pattern for the two versions. When we focus on the baseline version of the ballot without any information about the candidates' family status (the control group), we see that candidates *with* children have a lower average probability to get a vote from the survey participants compared to those *without* (17.2% vs. 22.4%). As the number of children of the candidates cannot influence the respondents' choice in any way in this baseline case, this difference indicates that their ballot positions and names are on average significantly less attractive to the respondents.

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Looking at the bars on the right-hand side of figure 4, however, we see how the situation changes among respondents who faced a ballot in which the family status of candidates was revealed (the treatment group). In this situation, candidates with children enjoy an electoral advantage of almost the same magnitude as their disadvantage before (20.9% against 16.2% of the childless candidates). The swing of 9.9 percentage points (from -5.2 to +4.7 percentage points) in the relative position of parents is highly statistically significant and suggests a large electoral advantage for candidates with children if the voters are aware of that fact.

These statistics may be overstating the effect of informing voters on the ballot about the number of children of the candidates, however, as the treatment ballot also reports the legal status of the candidates, i.e., whether they are single, married, in a civil union, or widowed. Since being married with children and being single without children often go hand in hand (among the 30 hypothetical candidates in this study, this happens in 13 and 9 cases, respectively), we need to disentangle the two effects from each other in order to isolate the individual impact of parenthood. Therefore, we use the following econometric equation that models the probability of candidate  $j$  to get a vote from survey participant  $i$ :

$$\begin{aligned} Prob(vote_{ij} = 1) = & \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 KIDS_j + \alpha_2 INFO_i + \alpha_3 (INFO * KIDS)_{ij} \\ & + \alpha_4 MARRIED_j + \alpha_5 (INFO * MARRIED)_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

All variables in this regression are binary indicators for a certain state of the world. To start, *KIDS* equals 1 if candidate  $j$  has at least one child and 0 otherwise, independent of whether the survey respondent knows about this or not. Likewise, *INFO* denotes whether participant  $i$  faces a ballot with information on the family status or the simple version containing only the name of the candidates. The interaction *INFO\*KIDS* therefore marks candidates who have children and the survey participants know about it. Its coefficient  $\alpha_3$  represents the difference in chances to get a vote for candidates with children between the two ballot versions. In other words, it shows the swing in the relative electoral position of candidates once the voters get to know that they have children. Additionally, equation 1 controls for the potential impact of the candidates' marital status. Here, the variable *MARRIED* indicates whether he or she is currently married or in a civil union with a same-sex partner, and the interaction *INFO\*MARRIED* signals whether this is known to the respective respondent. Finally, we cluster the standard errors in this regression on the level of the individual participant, since voting for one candidate simultaneously reduces the probabilities of the others to get selected from the same person.

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3 presents the results of this analysis in column (1).<sup>7</sup> We can see from the estimate for *INFO\*MARRIED* that voters react very positively to married candidates (+6 percentage points). Nevertheless, the effect of revealing whether a candidate has children or not remains strong and statistically significant (+7.1 percentage points), indicating that candidates with children have a sizable advantage at the voting booth even if we separately control for the positive signal of being married.

Columns (2) and (3) further elaborate on this key insight. First, we test whether there is a difference in the magnitude of the child bonus depending on whether the candidate is currently married or single. To do this, we interact both *KIDS* and *INFO\*KIDS* with the indicator for being married to obtain a fully interacted model. This allows us to evaluate the impact of having children separately for single and married parents, where the estimated coefficient of *INFO\*KIDS* is the effect for the former, while the coefficient of *INFO\*KIDS\*MARRIED* represents the additional effect on the latter. The results in column (2) suggest that married candidates with children fare slightly better with the voters than single ones, but the size of the difference is small (+1.4 percentage points) and statistically insignificant. This shows that being married and having children each possess an independent effect. Given this result, we focus our further discussion on the effect of having children and use marital status only as a control variable (in both groups separately), but not its interaction with *INFO\*KIDS*.

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<sup>7</sup> Including further controls for the individual characteristics of the respondents and the place of the interview does not change any result in this table substantially. The respective results are available from the authors upon request.

Second, we examine whether the actual number of children matters for the existence and size of the child bonus. For this purpose, we replace the binary variable *KIDS* by three indicator variables for having one, two, and three or more children, respectively, and interact each of them with the indicator for the treatment version (*INFO*). This way, the coefficients of these interactions report the average change in the probability to get a vote between control and treatment version for candidates with this number of children compared to the benchmark of being childless. Looking at the results in column (3), we see that having a single child seems to be insufficient to trigger the child bonus. Although the corresponding interaction (*INFO\*1 CHILD*) is positive (+2.8 percentage points), it is much smaller than the child bonus reported in column (1) and statistically insignificant. On the other hand, the indicators for the effect of 2 and 3 or more children are very large (+9.8 and +9.1 percentage points, respectively) and highly significant. This suggests that being a parent per se does not trigger the child bonus, but there is a significant boost in the chance to get elected for those with at least two children. This advantage does not seem to increase for higher numbers of children, indicating that the effect of children is highly non-linear.

#### *Heterogeneous effects*

In the next step, we take a look at whether the effect of parenthood varies between different subgroups of voters. The ability to do this is one of the great advantages of our data, as we have detailed information about the participants in our election experiment and therefore do not have to rely on aggregate data to draw inference about which group of voters may have voted for certain candidates. Thus, we evaluate potentially heterogeneous effects of the child bonus along five different dimensions: By state of residence (Baden-Württemberg versus Nordrhein-Westfalen), gender, age (younger or older than 45), education (possessing a

university entrance qualification<sup>8</sup> or not), and whether the respondents themselves have children, too.

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Insert figure 5 here  
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Figure 5 presents the respective results. Each column depicts the estimated coefficient for the DiD interaction *INFO\*KIDS* in a separate regression of equation (1) for the respective subgroup of participants. We can see that there are hardly any differences in the effect of parenthood with respect to age, education, and federal state of residence. The latter is particularly interesting, as it shows that people react to this information in the same way even if they are used to very different electoral rules and procedures. This gives us confidence that the results obtained in our experiment hold in various other electoral regimes as well.

At the same time, figure 5 also highlights certain differences in the impact of parenthood information. The first is that female respondents reacted more strongly to the information treatment than male ones. While the respective DiD estimate is positive for both subgroups alike, its size is much larger and only statistically significant for female participants (+12.0 percentage points compared to +3.1). The same applies to respondents with and without own children, where we obtain an insignificant coefficient of +2.5 percentage points for childless voters compared to +11.1 percentage points for those having children. This suggests that at least a part of the child bonus effect may be driven by a desire of family-oriented individuals to vote for someone similar to themselves. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section together with other possible ways through which the parent status of candidates may influence voters' choice.

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<sup>8</sup> Roughly equivalent to having a high-school degree.

## 6. Channels of influence

As illustrated in figure 2, there are three potential mechanisms which may explain the finding of an electoral child bonus for candidates: (1) The tendency to select candidates who are similar to oneself, (2) the use of information about children as signal for other more relevant characteristics, and (3) a change in the way voters perceive candidates if they have children. We will now discuss each of these channels of influence in turn.

### *6.1 Similarity between voters and candidates*

If individuals are unaware of the differences between candidates, they have a tendency to choose those who are similar to themselves (Cutler 2002; Sigelman and Sigelman 1982). This notion is supported in our finding that the effect of information about the parenthood status of candidates is stronger among individuals with children than for those without. To examine whether our main finding is primarily driven by the influence of similarity between candidates and voters (Hypothesis 2a), we include a number of variables into our empirical model which explicitly take different dimensions of being alike into account. More specifically, we control for whether voter and candidate share the same gender, marital status, and parenthood status.

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Insert table 4 here  
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The results are reported in table 4, with column 1 showing the benchmark estimates without similarity controls to facilitate the comparison. In column 2, we directly look at the central issue of whether controlling for the same parental status captures the effect of stating the information about the candidates' children. To this end, we include an indicator for whether candidate and voter have either both children or none, as well as its interaction with the ballot version including the information about family status. This way we can account for the impact

of same parental status separately for the treatment and control ballot versions. The estimate for the control group (*SAME PARENTAL STATUS*) is close to 0 and insignificant. This is as expected, since the participants in this group did not have the relevant information to deduce this feature of the candidates.

By contrast, the corresponding coefficient for the respondents in the treatment group (the interaction *INFO\*SAME PARENTAL STATUS*) reveals a strong and highly statistically significant correlation between sharing the same parenthood status and voting for these candidates (+3.8 percentage points). Interestingly, this does not seem to affect the estimate for the child bonus (*INFO\*KIDS*), however. It hardly changes its size (from +7.1 to +6.8 percentage points) and remains statistically significant at the 1% level. This suggests that the electoral advantage for candidates with children exists independently from the desire to have representatives who are similar to oneself.

Adding controls for other dimensions of similarity in column 3 further reaffirms this finding. When we include indicators for the same gender and the same marital status as well as their respective interaction with the treatment dummy, this leaves the coefficient of interest completely unchanged.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we conclude that similarities between voters and candidates do not explain the general attractiveness of candidates with children.

## 6.2 Parenthood as proxy for other important characteristics

Another possibility how information on the parenthood status of candidates may influence the voting decision is that voters use this information as a proxy for other important

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<sup>9</sup> The significant estimate for *SAME GENDER* means that men are more likely to vote for male candidates, while women are more likely to do so for female ones. This is the case for the control group in particular, since the gender of candidates can be deduced from their names in that version as well and there are hardly any other cues available.

characteristics which they value in their representatives (Hypothesis 2b). For instance, it could be that voters prefer to have representatives with a certain degree of maturity and professional experience. If that is the case, the child bonus would actually represent an experience bonus that would vanish if information like year of birth or professional position become available. As this type of information is often stated on real open list ballots, it is important for the interpretation of our findings to evaluate whether having children affects the likelihood of candidates to get a vote even if these other cues are available.

In order to test this, we conducted an additional election experiment similar to the one presented above at the same day and locations, but with different participants. It was carried out exactly similar to the main experiment, i.e., all participants were recruited directly after having voted in the actual election and faced the same questionnaire with the same election experiment including the same 30 candidates in the same order. The respondents were also randomly allocated into treatment and control group with and without the information about the candidates' family status. The only difference to the main experiment lies in the information baseline for both experimental groups. While the ballots in the main experiment only stated the candidates' name before adding their family status as treatment, they also include their year of birth and profession in this add-on.<sup>10</sup>

This approach allows us to measure the effect of providing information about parenthood when the voters already know about these two other potentially important characteristics. If the coefficients are comparable in size and statistical significance, we can conclude that number of children does not (only) serve as proxy for age and professional status. If they are significantly lower or insignificant, however, we cannot claim the reverse,

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<sup>10</sup> The exact content of the treatment version ballot can be seen in Appendix A.2. Likewise, the descriptive statistics of treatment and control group in this second experiment are reported in Appendix B.1.

because it would be impossible to precisely disentangle it from the simultaneous possible effects of "information overload" or "voter fatigue". These phenomena may arise if individuals have to process too many pieces of information and decide to stop paying attention to any of them in order to save time and effort (see Augenblick and Nicholson 2016; Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

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Insert figure 6 here

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Figure 6 depicts the results for the additional experiment in light grey next to the baseline results in dark grey. The columns on the left hand side display the estimated DiD coefficients for *INFO\*KIDS*, i.e., the average effect of having children versus being childless. Here we see that although having additional information on the ballot reduces the child effect from 7.1 to 4.2 percentage points, it is still positive, statistically significant at the 1% level, and politically relevant (+22% relative to the average probability to get a vote of 19.1%). The same pattern appears on the right hand side of figure 6, where we report the estimated effect of having children differentiated between parents with one child, two children, and three and more children (*INFO\*1CHILD*, *INFO\*2CHILDREN*, and *INFO\*3CHILDREN*, respectively). Again, the coefficients obtained in the additional experiment in which the participants were aware of the candidates' year of birth and profession are smaller than those from the main experiment without additional information, but they are still sizable and relevant and show the same finding of a child bonus starting with the second child. We take this as a clear indication that voters care about the candidates' family status itself and not only as a proxy for other possibly more relevant characteristics.

### 6.3 *Attributing desirable characteristics to parents*

The third potential channel we want to examine is that voters may ascribe certain positive features to parents, i.e., that the information that a particular candidate has children changes the perception of him or her (Hypothesis 2c). This line of reasoning is supported by previous research by Campbell and Cowley (2014), who demonstrate that small changes in the description of otherwise unknown candidates may lead to large swings in how people picture them. Thus, parents could be considered as more reliable, competent, stress resistant, and more able to organize multiple tasks, but also more altruistic and empathetic (e.g. Glynn and Sen 2015). These features are most likely desirable in a representative, so this could explain why voters become more inclined to support candidates with children once they get to know this piece of information.

To test whether and how perceptions of candidates change with their number of children, we conducted a complementary survey experiment on December 17, 2016, in the city of Freiburg, Germany. Over three hours and located at three different spots, we distributed questionnaires which asked respondents to assess hypothetical candidates for the city council on a number of characteristics. There were two different versions of the survey, which were randomly handed out to the respondents.<sup>11</sup> Both versions introduced the same three candidates with identical names, profession and age. The only difference was embedded in the candidates' family status. While their respective marital status was held constant across version, they differed in the number of children stated. For each candidate, one version displayed a higher number of children than the other, with changes from no child to one, none to two, and one to two. Due to the random allocation of respondents to the two groups,<sup>12</sup> this

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<sup>11</sup> One version of the questionnaire (in German) is included in Appendix A.3.

<sup>12</sup> The summary statistics for the respondents in both groups are reported in Appendix B.2. The statistical tests for differences in means show that this is not the case in any of the observed categories (gender, age, marital status, children, education, and voting record).

design enables us to identify how changing the number of children of candidates affects their average perception. Figure 7 presents the description of the candidates over the two questionnaire versions and the experimental variation in the number of children.

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 Insert figure 7 here  
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With respect to the characteristics considered, the participants were asked whether they perceive the candidates as: (1) assertive, (2) organized, (3) oriented towards long-term solutions, (4) open-minded, (5) willing to help others, and (6) trustworthy. Answers could be given on a five-point scale ranging from “1 = not at all” to “5 = very much”. In total, 155 individuals participated in this survey, providing us with a bit more than 400 person-candidate observations on average for each character trait.<sup>13</sup>

We use a linear regression model to check whether the assessment of candidate  $j$  by participant  $i$  in a certain category  $s$  ( $SCORE_{ijs}$ ) depends on whether the participant faced a questionnaire in which the respective candidate is either presented with children rather than without or with more children than in the other one ( $MORE_{ij}$ ). Additionally, we condition on several common socio-demographic controls of the participants (gender, age groups, educational attainment, and marital status) as well as an indicator for whether the individual is a regular voter. The latter is defined as 1 if the respondent reported to have voted in the last local election in his or her home town or at least to usually vote. Thus, the model is specified in the following way:

$$SCORE_{ijs} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MORE_{ij} + \gamma CONTROLS_i + \epsilon_{ijs} \tag{2}$$

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<sup>13</sup> Some participants ended the interview at some point, while others skipped individual categories.

The resulting estimates for our parameter of interest,  $\beta_1$ , are displayed in figure 8. Starting with the results for all respondents in dark grey, we observe the following pattern: parents receive higher scores than non-parents on all six features, but the effect sizes are only large and statistically significant for the categories "willingness to help others" and "trustworthiness" (almost +0.6 and a bit more than +0.3, respectively). The change in perceptions thus seems to be concentrated on characteristics that are not directly related to competent and efficient work as representative, but show the human side of the candidate and probably make him or her more likable.

The results hardly change if we restrict the analysis on the subsample of regular voters, i.e., survey respondents who either stated to have voted in the last local election in their place of living or that they did not, but had normally voted in previous elections. The estimated coefficients of *MORE* for this subgroup are depicted in figure 8 in light grey. We can see that they are almost the same as for the whole group of survey participants both in direction and magnitude. This suggests that the effect of children on the perception of candidates is roughly similar for voters and non-voters. The only noticeable difference is that the positive impact on the perceived assertiveness of the candidates becomes a bit stronger and statistically significant (at the 5% level). Thus, having (more) children additionally seems to raise regular voters' assessment of the candidates' ability to get things done.

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Insert figure 8 here

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Overall, we conclude that having at least one child (more) seems to significantly increase the attractiveness of a candidate among voters. Contrary to what we speculated above, this is most likely primarily due to heightened expectations about the candidates' social behavior rather than perceptions of greater competence or long-term orientation. While we cannot directly prove that this translates into more votes cast for these candidates, these

results nevertheless suggest that changing perceptions of the candidates may be an important reason behind the child bonus we observe.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper examines why politicians regularly point out that they have children during election campaigns. The results of our survey experiment indicate that the answer is very simple: promoting information about one's own parent status pays off by attracting more votes, at least in elections in which party affiliation is not the decisive factor. When survey participants are provided with information about the number of children of the candidates, those with children strongly improve their position relative to those without. This child bonus is not uniform across family sizes, however, but seems to require having at least two children. Testing the three most likely channels for our main result provides evidence that it is not a mere artifact of having a majority of parents in our sample who select similar candidates. Nor did participants only use the information about the parent status of the candidates as proxy for possibly more important characteristics like age and profession. While explicitly providing this additional information does reduce the magnitude of the child bonus, it remains strong and relevant. Finally, complementary analysis reveals that individuals consider parents as more altruistic and trustworthy than childless candidates. Among regular voters, they are additionally perceived as more assertive, i.e., more effective in pursuing their agenda. As these are important characteristics for a representative, these changes in perceptions seem to be the most likely explanation for our finding of a child bonus.

Although we undertook great efforts to make the results of this study as generalizable as possible, there are a number of possible limitations for their external validity. The first is that voting in a survey experiment cannot be incentivized, since there is no optimal behavior.

This may have caused some participants to act according to what they believed they were supposed to do instead of revealing their true preferences. Another limiting factor is the selected sample of voters in our exit poll. As only a bit more than half of the eligible voters actually went to the polls for the simultaneous elections to the local council and the EU parliament, the composition of the electorate may differ in other elections that draw a higher turnout, as for instance a federal election. Lastly, the decision situation and the candidates were only hypothetical. In real elections, the voters may know at least some candidates and their positions, which may reduce the relevance of information cues such as family status.

Despite these limitations, this paper contributes to the literature by providing the first rigorous analysis of the effect of children on a candidate's chances and perception. Several issues remain to be investigated, however. First of all, it would be interesting to find out the reason for the described “two kids minimum” effect in the main part of this paper. Second, studying the effect of children on the voters' perception of the actual political positions of candidates, or in other words, whether voters believe that candidates with children have different policy preferences than childless ones, may reveal more insights into this most likely source for the observed child bonus. And finally, examining whether elected parents indeed possess the features ascribed to them would shed light on whether posturing with one's children is just for show or whether there is an actual difference behind parents and childless candidates.

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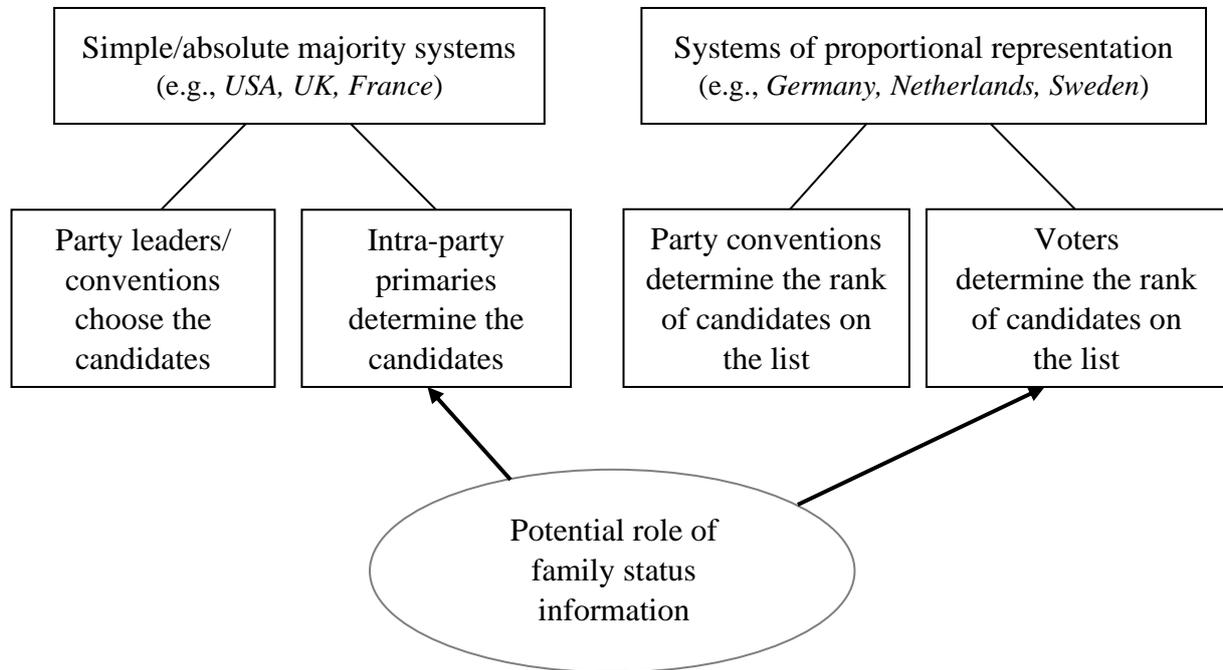
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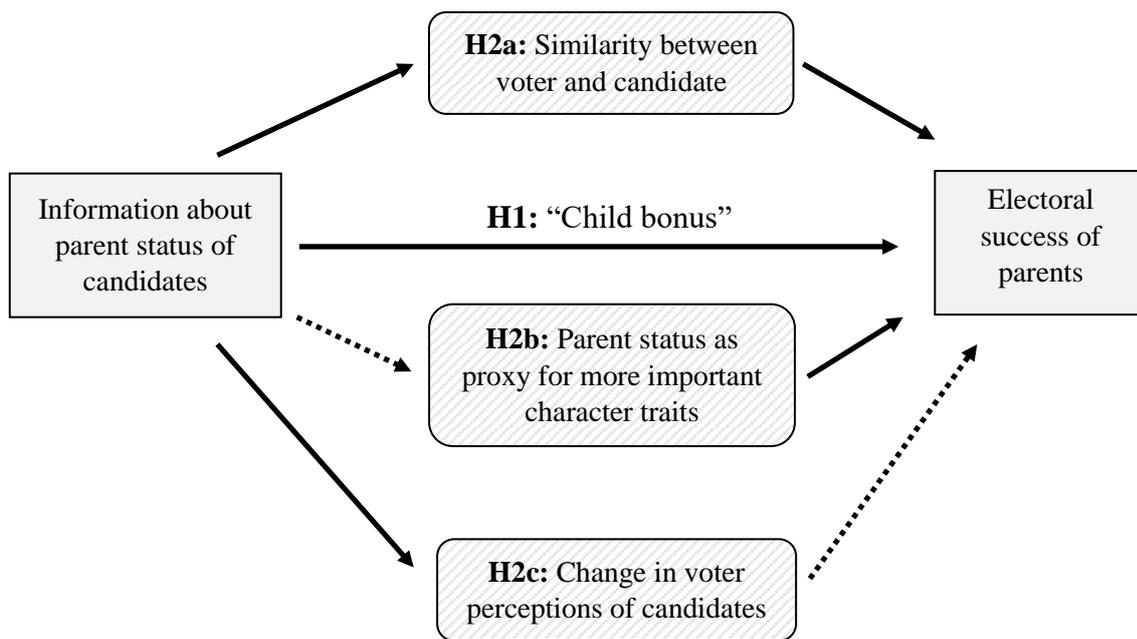
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## Tables and figures

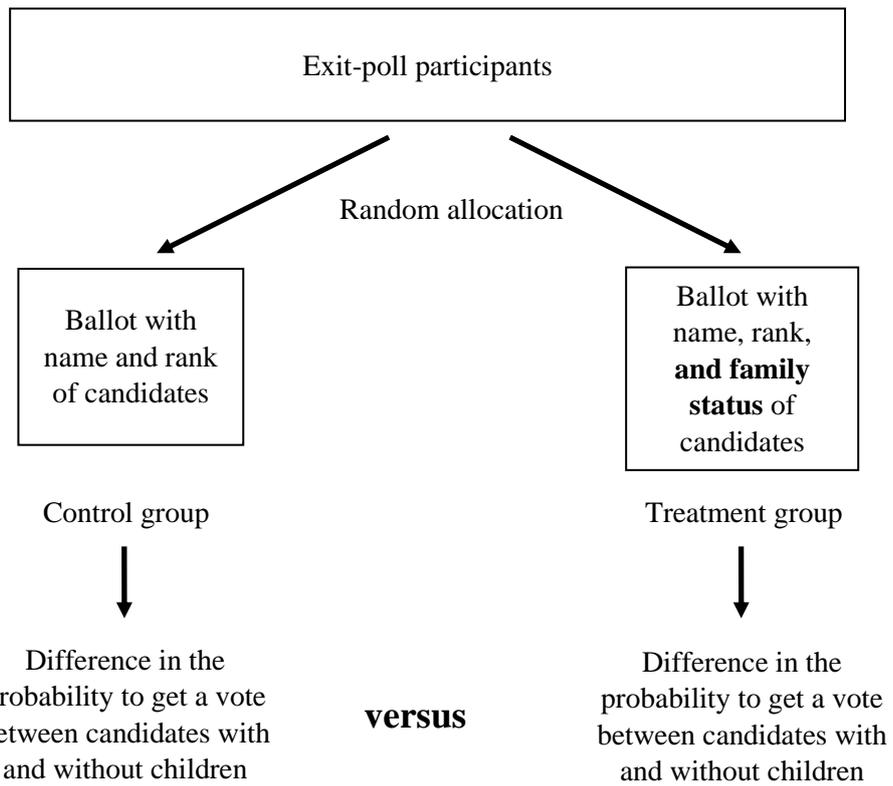


*Fig. 1. Different election systems and the potential influence of family status information*



*Fig. 2.* Potential effects of stating the candidates’ family status on the ballot

Note: Dashed lines represent relationships that we cannot test directly within the scope of this paper.



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*Fig. 3.* Identifying the effect of stating the family status of candidates

*Table 1*  
Information on the hypothetical ballot

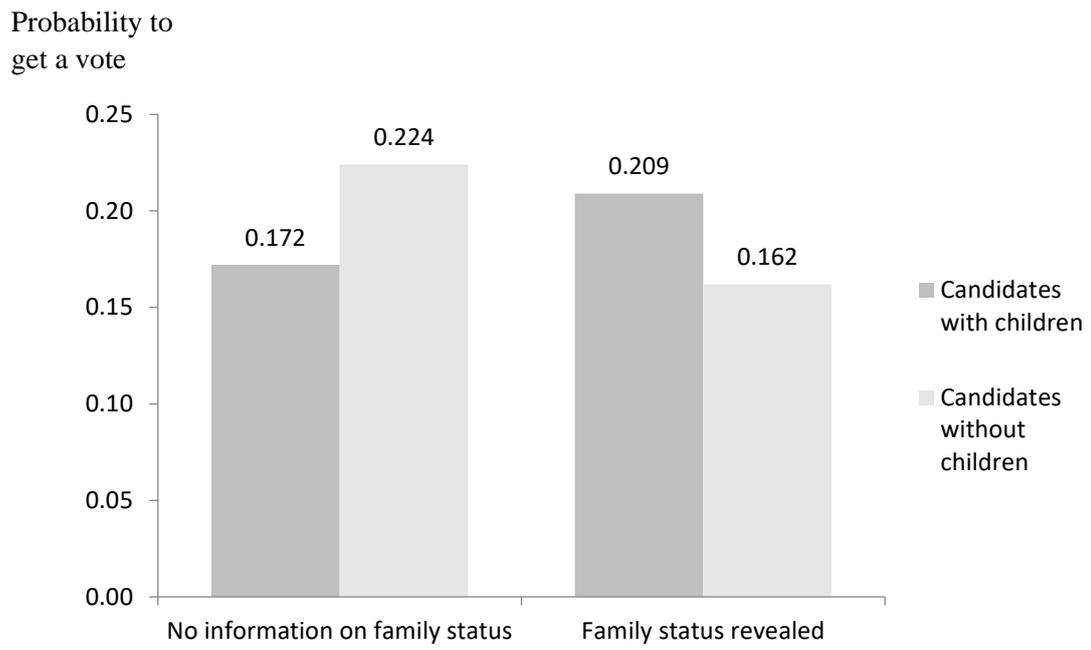
Rank on the list	Candidate	Family status
1	Gillen, Arnold	Married, 1 child
2	Heyer, Regina	Married
3	Amrein, Karl	Single
4	Tesch, Iris	Widowed, 3 children
5	Höhne, Otto	Married, 2 children
6	Lötz, Margarete	Single
7	Peters, Bernd	Single, 2 children
8	Gussmann, Ute	Married, 3 children
9	Kilic, Mehmet	Married, 2 children
10	Kunde, Hildegard	Single
11	Berger, Martin	Civil union
12	Silbernagel, Marianne	Single
13	Gorges, Hans-Peter	Married, 4 children
14	Kleine, Erika	Single
15	Bernsen, Karl-Heinz	Single, 1 child
16	Block, Silke	Married, 3 children
17	Weber, Daniel	Single
18	Schenzer, Bärbel	Married, 2 children
19	Lütticken, Reinhardt	Married, 1 child
20	Propach, Inge	Married, 2 children
21	Altenburg, Jürgen	Single, 1 child
22	Greiner, Waltraud	Single
23	Leisen, Walter	Widowed, 2 children
24	Benz, Barbara	Married, 3 children
25	Schüttke, Heinrich	Married, 2 children
26	Rudnick, Julia	Single
27	Nawak, Thomas	Married, 1 child
28	Block, Christiane	Married
29	Usleber, Johannes	Married, 1 child
30	Lochner, Susanne	Single

*Notes:* Each candidate appears at the same position and with the same name in both ballot version. The candidates' family status, on the other hand, is only revealed in the treatment version.

*Table 2*  
Descriptive statistics by ballot version

	Only names (Control)		Family status (Treatment)		Difference	p-value
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.		
Sample size	223		242			
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Female	0.472	0.500	0.397	0.490	-0.075	0.110
Age 16-25	0.188	0.392	0.188	0.391	0.000	0.994
Age 26-35	0.161	0.368	0.192	0.395	0.032	0.382
Age 36-45	0.183	0.388	0.144	0.352	-0.039	0.262
Age 46-55	0.165	0.372	0.166	0.373	0.001	0.982
Age 56-65	0.197	0.399	0.157	0.365	-0.040	0.269
Age 66+	0.106	0.308	0.153	0.361	0.047	0.136
Lower second. educ.	0.102	0.303	0.123	0.329	0.021	0.485
Middle second. educ.	0.227	0.420	0.232	0.423	0.006	0.889
Upper second. educ.	0.301	0.460	0.285	0.452	-0.016	0.715
College degree	0.370	0.484	0.355	0.480	-0.015	0.741
Currently married	0.544	0.499	0.518	0.501	-0.026	0.580
Having children	0.532	0.500	0.524	0.501	-0.008	0.868
1 child	0.143	0.351	0.145	0.353	0.002	0.955
2 children	0.249	0.433	0.250	0.434	0.001	0.978
3 children	0.083	0.276	0.101	0.302	0.018	0.514
4 or more children	0.028	0.164	0.022	0.147	-0.006	0.699
<i>Party preference and regional characteristics</i>						
Vote for SPD	0.305	0.454	0.257	0.426	-0.048	0.248
Vote for CDU	0.246	0.426	0.269	0.443	0.023	0.577
Large city	0.516	0.501	0.545	0.499	0.030	0.522
Baden-Württemberg	0.516	0.501	0.517	0.501	0.001	0.986

Notes: (1) The sample excludes participants who only answered the survey as partners of the actual target person, did not vote in the election experiment, or assigned more than 6 votes. (2) The p-value reported comes from a two-sided test of differences between the means of the two samples.



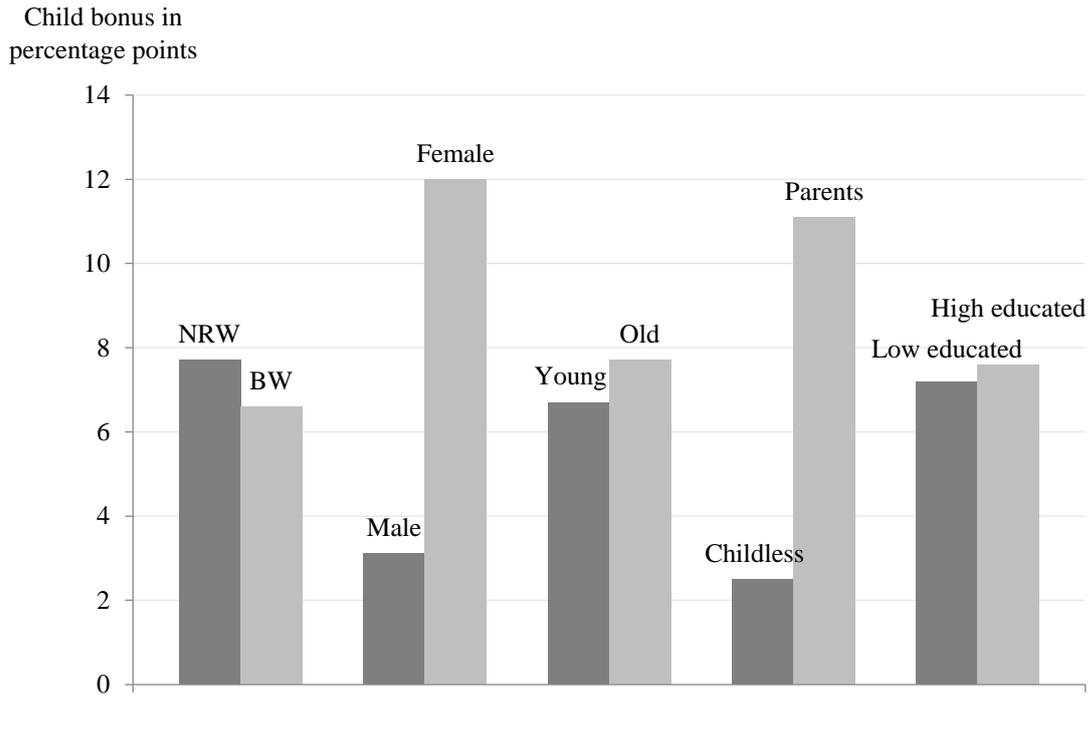
*Fig. 4.* The effect of stating the number of children on the ballot on electoral success

*Table 3*  
Average effect of having children on a candidate's probability to get a vote

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Kids	-0.048*** (0.011)	-0.019 (0.014)	
Info	-0.077*** (0.011)	-0.075*** (0.011)	-0.076*** (0.011)
Info*Kids	0.071*** (0.016)	0.065** (0.021)	
Married	-0.008 (0.011)	0.034 (0.018)	-0.012 (0.011)
Info*Married	0.060*** (0.015)	0.051* (0.025)	0.056*** (0.015)
Kids*Married		-0.068** (0.023)	
Info*Kids*Married		0.014 (0.033)	
1 child			-0.061*** (0.014)
2 children			-0.065*** (0.012)
3 or more children			-0.001 (0.015)
Info*1 child			0.028 (0.018)
Info*2 children			0.098*** (0.019)
Info*3 or more children			0.091*** (0.026)
Constant	0.226*** (0.006)	0.215*** (0.007)	0.227*** (0.006)
N	13950	13950	13950
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.005	0.006	0.011

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* = significantly different from 0 at the 5%, 1%, or 0.1% level, respectively.

Notes: (1) The coefficients are estimated with a linear probability model. (2) Clustered standard errors on the voter level are reported in parentheses.



*Fig. 5.* The magnitude of the child bonus by subgroup of voters

Notes: Each column represents the estimated coefficient of *INFO\*KIDS* in a regression following equation (1) for a different subgroup of survey participants. Respondents are counted as "young" if they are 45 years or younger, and as "low educated" if they have not obtained at least the university entrance qualification ("Abitur").

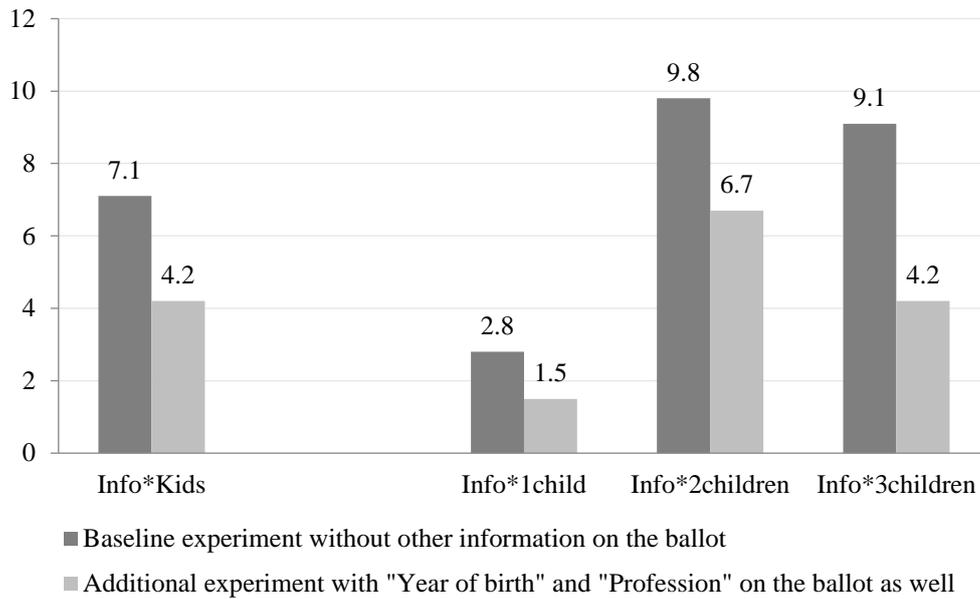
*Table 4*  
Similarity between voter and candidate

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Kids	-0.048*** (0.011)	-0.048*** (0.011)	-0.050*** (0.011)
Info	-0.077*** (0.011)	-0.095*** (0.013)	-0.088*** (0.014)
Info*Kids	0.071*** (0.016)	0.068*** (0.016)	0.068*** (0.016)
Married	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.012)
Info*Married	0.060*** (0.015)	0.060*** (0.016)	0.053** (0.017)
Same parental status		-0.003 (0.009)	0.003 (0.010)
Info*Same parental status		0.038** (0.015)	0.031* (0.015)
Same gender			0.042*** (0.010)
Info*Same gender			-0.025 (0.015)
Same marital status			-0.018 (0.011)
Info*Same marital status			0.027 (0.016)
Constant	0.226*** (0.006)	0.228*** (0.008)	0.211*** (0.008)
N	13950	13350	13290
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.005	0.006	0.008

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* = significantly different from 0 at the 5%, 1%, or 0.1% level, respectively.

Notes: (1) The coefficients are estimated with a linear probability model. (2) Clustered standard errors on the voter level are reported in parentheses.

Estimated treatment effect in percentage points



*Fig. 6.* The effect of parenthood when other information is on the ballot

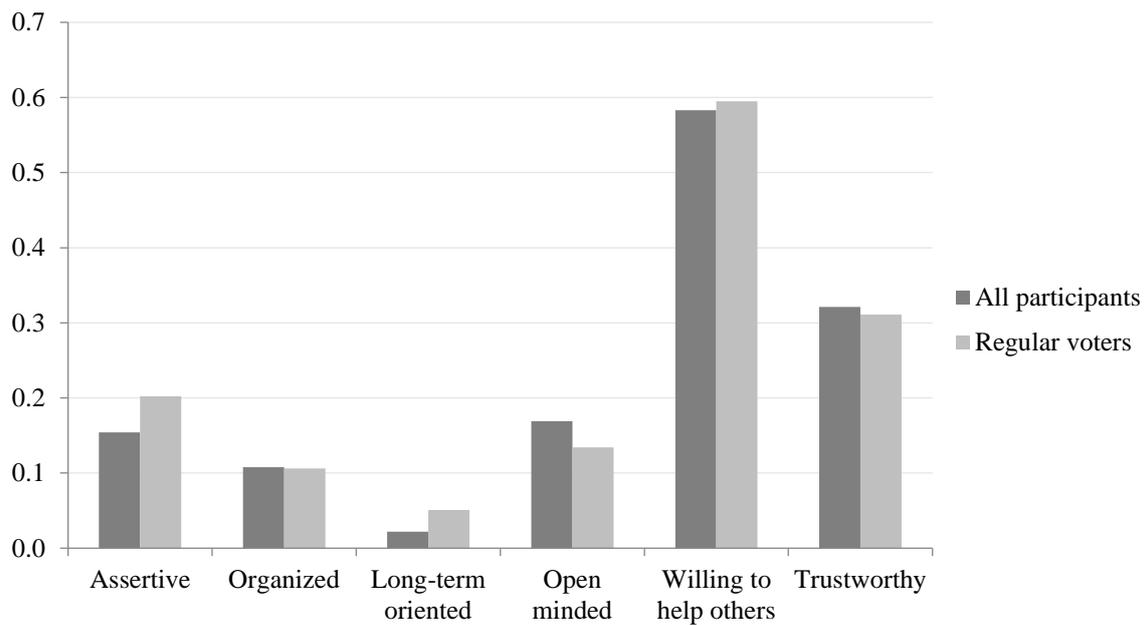
Notes: The columns report the size of the respective estimates in 4 different regression specifications. The two on the left hand side are obtained from estimating equation (1) and measure the average electoral bonus for candidates with any number of children (*INFO\*KIDS*). The results of the baseline experiment without other information on the ballot are presented in dark grey, those of the additional one with information on the year of birth and the profession of candidates in light grey. The columns on the right hand side represent the results of a finer regression differentiating the effects of three different numbers of children (*INFO\*1CHILD* to *INFO\*3CHILDREN*), again for the two cases without and with further information on the ballot.

<u>Questionnaire version 1</u>	<u>Questionnaire version 2</u>										
<u>Candidate A:</u>											
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Arnold Gillen</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">58 years</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>1 child</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Physicist</td></tr> </table>	Arnold Gillen	58 years	Married	<b>1 child</b>	Physicist	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Arnold Gillen</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">58 years</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>Childless</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Physicist</td></tr> </table>	Arnold Gillen	58 years	Married	<b>Childless</b>	Physicist
Arnold Gillen											
58 years											
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Married											
<b>Childless</b>											
Physicist											
<u>Candidate B:</u>											
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Silke Block</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">55 years old</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>Childless</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Dentist</td></tr> </table>	Silke Block	55 years old	Married	<b>Childless</b>	Dentist	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Silke Block</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">55 years old</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>2 children</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Dentist</td></tr> </table>	Silke Block	55 years old	Married	<b>2 children</b>	Dentist
Silke Block											
55 years old											
Married											
<b>Childless</b>											
Dentist											
Silke Block											
55 years old											
Married											
<b>2 children</b>											
Dentist											
<u>Candidate C:</u>											
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Otto Höhne</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">43 years old</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>2 children</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Metal worker</td></tr> </table>	Otto Höhne	43 years old	Married	<b>2 children</b>	Metal worker	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td style="padding: 2px;">Otto Höhne</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">43 years old</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Married</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;"><b>1 child</b></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Metal worker</td></tr> </table>	Otto Höhne	43 years old	Married	<b>1 child</b>	Metal worker
Otto Höhne											
43 years old											
Married											
<b>2 children</b>											
Metal worker											
Otto Höhne											
43 years old											
Married											
<b>1 child</b>											
Metal worker											

*Fig. 7.* Description of candidates in the survey experiment

Note: The experimental variation between the two questionnaire versions is highlighted in bold letters.

Change in perception



*Fig. 8.* The effect of (more) children on the assessment of candidates' characteristics

Notes: (1) Each column represents the estimated average difference in the assessment of a certain character trait between respondents with a questionnaire version in which the respective candidate is described to have the lower number of children (0 or 1) and those in which he or she is stated to have a higher number (1 or 2). (2) All characteristics are measured on a 1-5 scale from 1 "Not at all" to 5 "Very much". (3) Controls include indicators for being female, different age groups, different education groups, being currently married, and voting regularly. (4) Standard errors clustered on the participant level. (5) The subsample of "regular voters" only includes those respondents who reported to have voted in the last local election (around 71% of respondents) or that they did not vote, but usually do so (7.7%).