

Having children makes parents more conservative, study finds

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Researchers in a new Tulane University study found that parents or those with parenting-type motivations were more drawn to socially conservative values. (Photo by Shutterstock)

Does becoming a parent make people more likely to become conservative?

Yes, according to a new Tulane University [study](#), which detected the association across different countries and cultures and found that it became even stronger the more children people had.

“Becoming a parent may have psychological effects that you don't expect,” said senior study author Damian Murray, associate professor of psychology at Tulane University School of Science and Engineering. “We commonly talk about how parents are going to shape their children's attitudes, but we also need to acknowledge how simply having children shapes their parents' attitudes.”

Researchers sought to understand how attitudes on divisive issues including abortion, immigration and sexual behaviors arise. They conducted surveys to find out if those who were already parents, along with those who had more parenting-type motivations, were more likely to be drawn to more conservative values.

They surveyed 2,610 people in 10 countries and found that people who are already parents or who had greater parenting motivations scored higher in social conservatism. Another part of the investigation using archival data from over 400,000 individuals in 88 countries similarly supported this parenting-conservatism link. Finally, a set of experiments revealed that participants who wrote about positive interactions with children subsequently reported greater social conservatism than those who were asked to write about other types of social interactions.

“Given that socially conservative values ostensibly prioritize safety, stability and family values, we hypothesized that being a parent or being more invested in parental care might make socially conservative policies more appealing,” said corresponding author Nick Kerry, PhD, a Tulane alumnus who is now a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. “Parental status and parental care motivation were robustly associated with social conservatism in many diverse countries, from Lebanon to Japan.”

The study also dispelled a common belief that people get more conservative with age. When researchers statistically controlled the effects of parenthood among participants, they found older childless people were no more conservative than younger ones.

Murray realizes that the study's findings may have skeptics — especially among parents who may not identify as conservative.

“This is, of course, a large claim, and large claims require large amounts of evidence,” he said. “We've now tested this possibility across multiple investigations and have tried to prove the idea wrong in innumerable ways. We've controlled for

any variables we, or others, could think of that might account for the parenthood-social conservatism link. But the relationship remains. We're currently doing further research to better understand all the diverse ways in which our parenting motivations manifest.”

The multi-study paper, *Experimental and cross-cultural evidence that parenthood and parental care motives increase social conservatism*, was co-authored by Tulane alumni Jimmy Moran, PhD, Riley Loria and Gregory Chauvin. It was published in the journal [*Proceedings of the Royal Society B*](#).