

Family Transmission of Party Preference in a Long-Term Perspective

Urs Grob
University of Zurich
Switzerland

Theoretical background

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- Research on political socialization started as research on parental influences.
- Some absolutization of the parents socialization power in early theoretical models
- Theoretical critique and empirical relativization regarding the parental influences
- Counter reaction: potential underestimation of parental influence

Theoretical background

- Life stage models in political socialization (e.g. Wasburn, 1994; Visser & Krosnick, 1998)
 - ▶ Primary socialization in family of origin; model learning processes (Bandura, 1979) lead to a certain amount of naive and uncritical internalization of parental values and attitudes.
 - ▶ Secondary socialization in new contexts (school, peers, friendships, media etc.) (Claussen & Geissler, 1996) provides new experiences of discrepancy, alternative views, and plurality.
 - ▶ During adolescence increasing autonomy and emerging critical thinking may cause a certain distancing from parental positions (Fend, 1991).
 - ▶ In early adulthood social and vocational transitions, new contexts and new roles bring about some transformation of concepts and values (Steckenrider & Cutler, 1989)

Theoretical background

- There are strong theoretical arguments for the special role of parents in political socialization.
 - ▶ Early experiences may have a special impact, because they influence and preform later experiences ("assimilation", "primacy principle", "structuring principle", cf. Sears 1990; Wasburn, 1994; Visser and Krosnick, 1998).
 - ▶ Besides cognitive assimilation there may also be a higher degree of proactive selection of contexts and of social contacts *based on existing values* giving early learning more weight.
- There is a much evidence for the influence of parents in political socialization compared to other "agents" (Wasmund, 1982; Geissler, 1996; Hopf & Hopf, 1997; Fend & Grob, 2007).
- Some of the strongest parental influence (transmission rates/ transmission power) can be found with regard to the party preference (Tedin, 1974: **.48**; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2001: **.56 / .38**).
 - ▶ What makes party preference so susceptible to transmission?

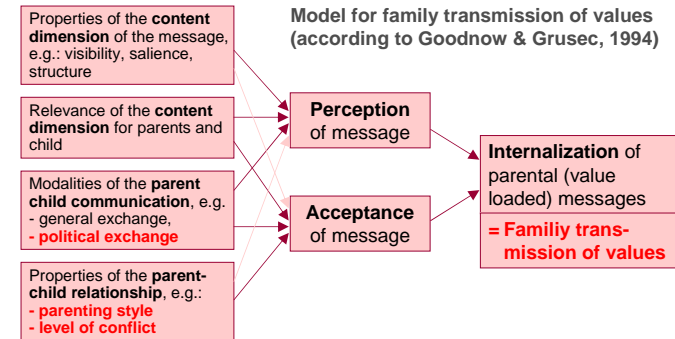
Theoretical background

Properties of the party preference that increase its intergenerational transmission (Tedin, 1974; Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2001; Becker & Mays, 2003)

- Party preference
 - ▶ has a simple structure
 - ▶ is highly salient and visible
 - ▶ generally is of a relatively high relevance

Theoretical background

- Following Goodnow and Grusec (1994) the effectiveness of parental value-loaded „messages“ (that is **value transmission**) can be traced back to two factors: accuracy of **perception** and level of **acceptance**.



Empirical evidence

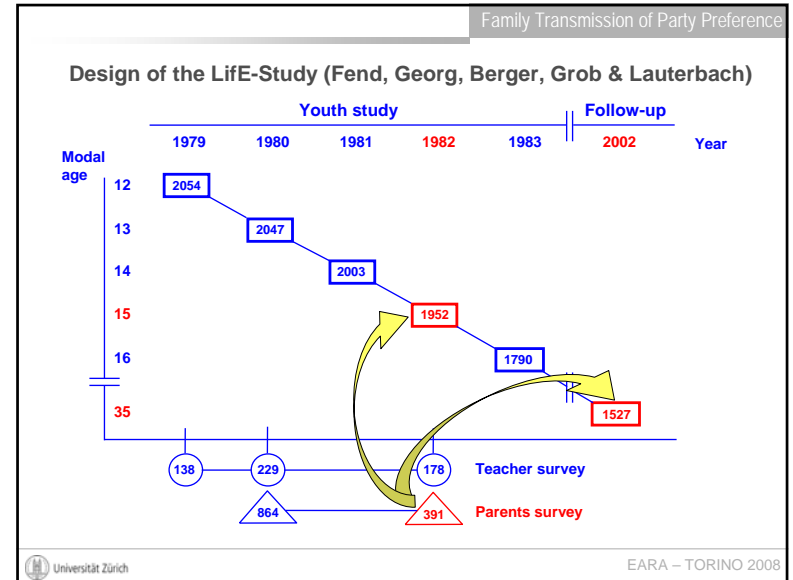
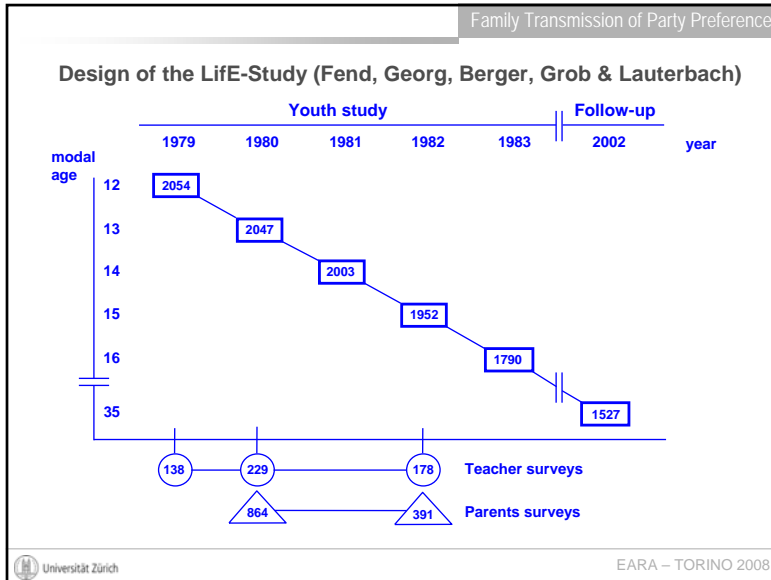
Positive evidence with regard to moderation effects on family transmission of party preference and political values:

1. Parenting style (authoritarian vs. democratic) and parent-child relationship (Tedin, 1974; Brody, Moore & Gleib, 1994; Schönplflug, 2001; Grob, 2005)
2. Intensity of political exchange between parents and child (Schmid, 2001; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2001)

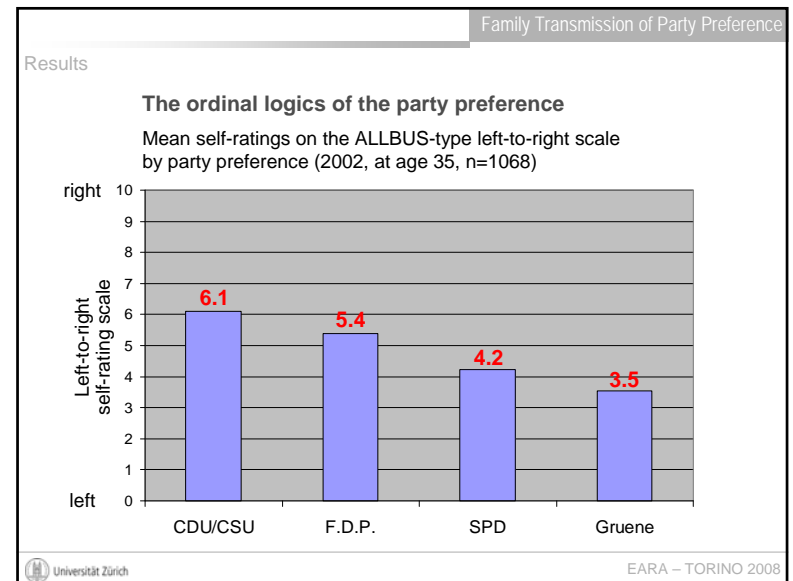
Research questions

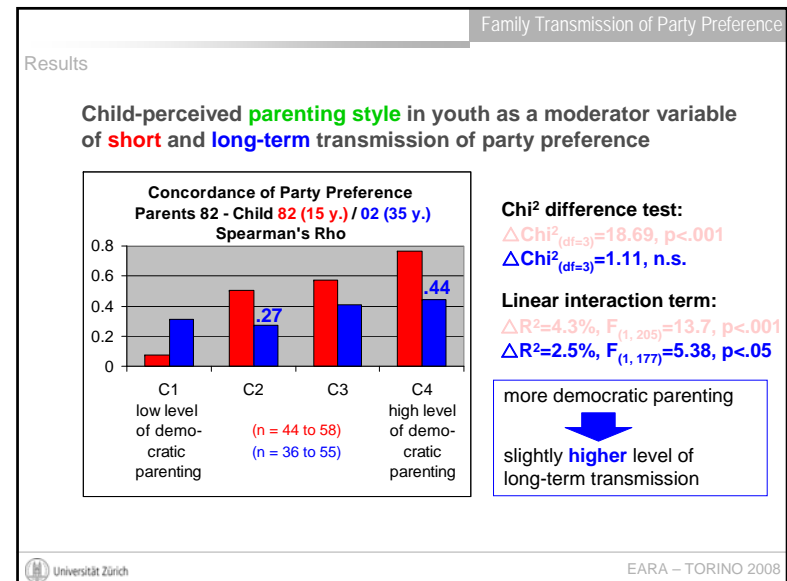
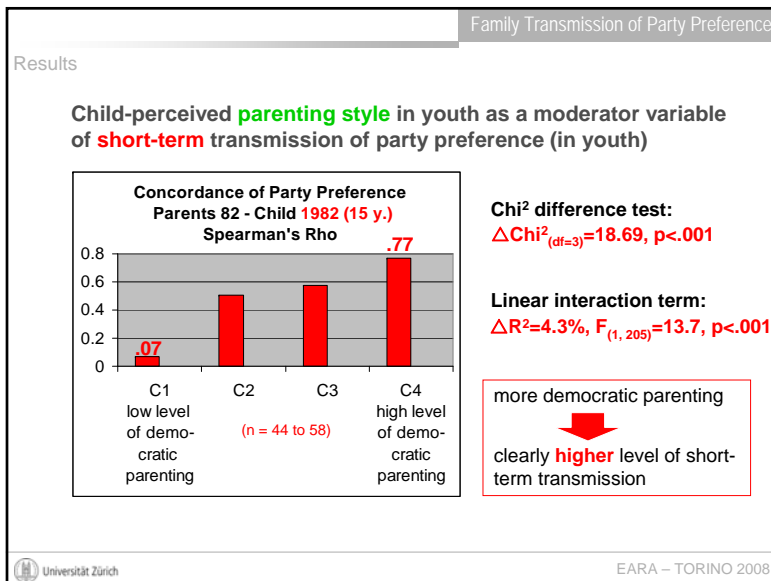
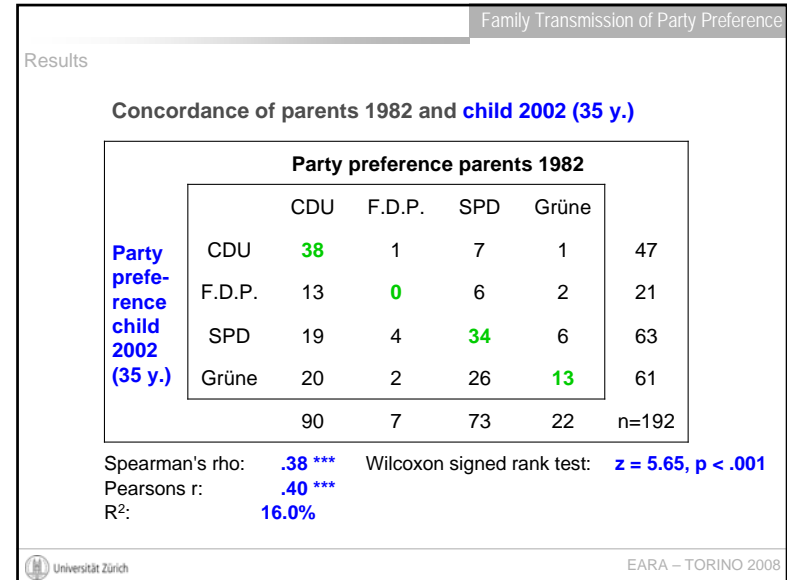
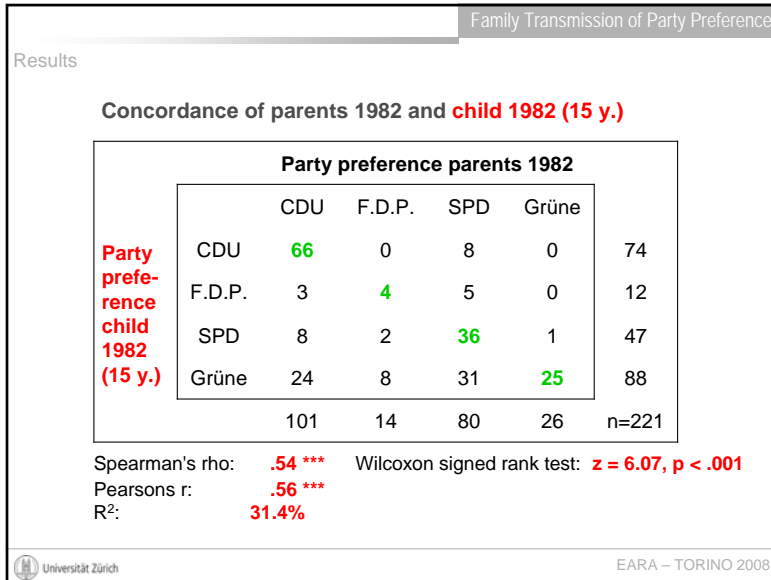
Research questions

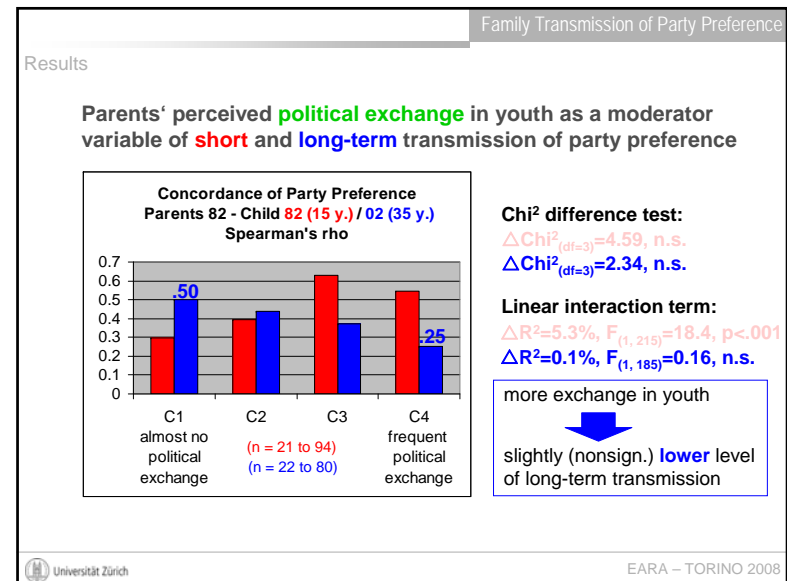
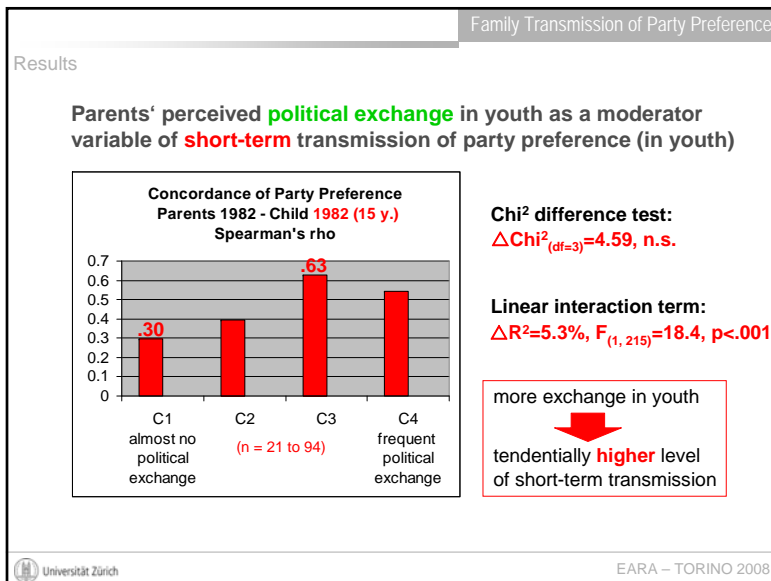
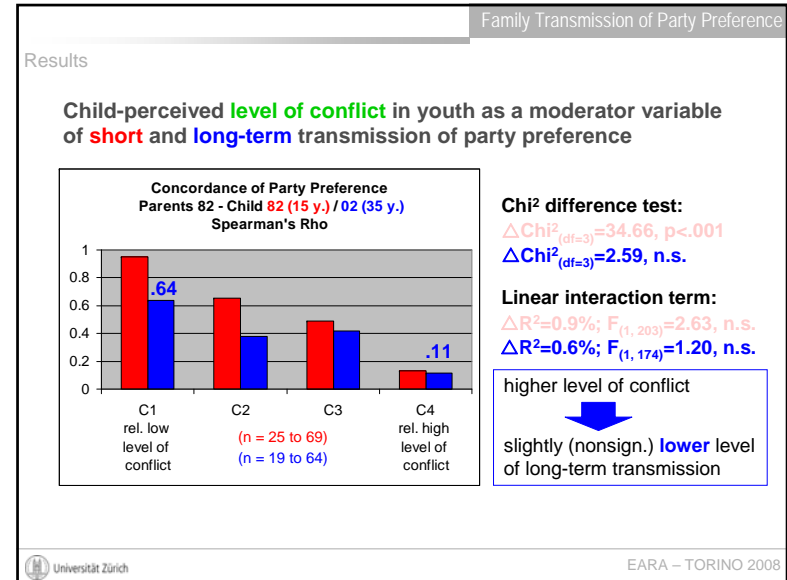
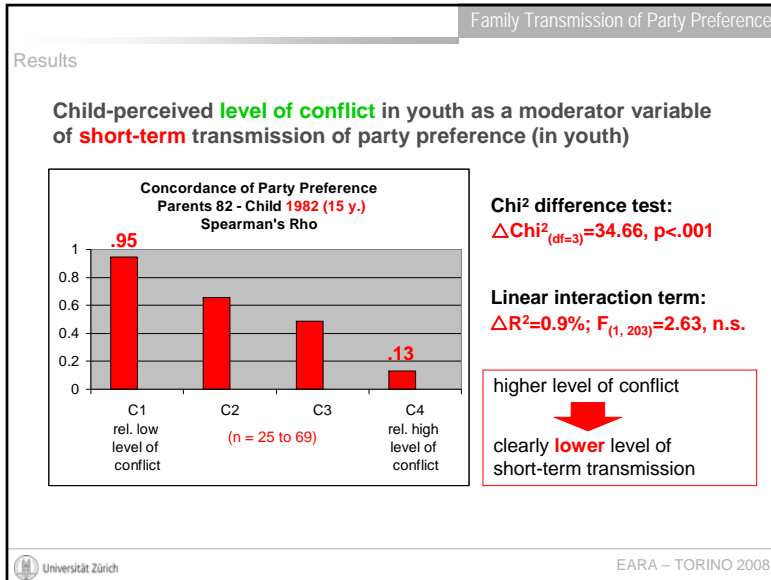
1. How relevant are the parents with regard to political party preference, in a short-term and especially in a long-term perspective (in Germany)?
2. Does the parental transmission power of party preference depend on the following factors...
 - parenting style
 - parent-child relationship (conflict level in adolescence)
 - intensity of political exchange between parents and child (in adolescence)
 ...in the short and in the long run?



- Family Transmission of Party Preference
- ### Measures
- Measures**
- ▶ **Party preference** (parents; child at age 15 and 35):
 - Single item with given parties to choose from (ALLBUS-Format)
 - ▶ **(Democratic) parenting style** (as perceived by the child at age 15, 1982):
 - Scale based on 8 items, Alpha= .85
 - ▶ **Level of conflict** (as perceived by the child at age 15, 1982):
 - Single item with 5 response categories asking for the frequency of conflicts
 - ▶ **Level of exchange about political issues** (as perceived by the parents at child's age of 15, 1982):
 - Single item with 4 response categories asking for the frequency of talks about politics with the child
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Some caveats and open questions

- By the chosen instruments and approach, the overall level of parental value transmission may be somewhat **overestimated**, due to the higher than average political interest of parents and children.
- On the other hand, the parental transmission may be **underestimated** insofar as the (adult) child's party preference is being compared to the one of the parents 20 years ago.
- Causal direction of the **main effects** of transmission?
- Causal direction of the **interaction/moderation** effects?

Conclusion (in a nutshell)

1. The parents are relevant agents and actors in political socialization – also in the long run.
2. "Parents have an inherent potential for successful transmission" Tedin, 1974, p. 1592).
Parents can increase their influence by a democratic parenting style, that is by adaptively granting autonomy and avoiding unproductive conflicts.
3. Is it desirable that the children do have the very same values as their parents? The central "developmental task" of political socialization is to gain *an own* political identity.
Parents can foster the political identity development by providing for and stimulating political exchange in youth.

Thank you for your interest!

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