The Emerging Structure of Political Preferences in Childhood*

Turgut Keskintürk† Christopher D. Johnston‡ Stephen Vaisey§

June, 2026

Research on political development has largely overlooked the opinions children form before adolescence, and paid even less attention to their views on specific issues. In this article, we present an original survey of children aged 10 to 12, conducted in 2024–2025, that measures children's opinions on several policy issues alongside evaluations of the 2024 presidential candidates and the two major parties. To situate children's responses in context, we benchmark children against one of their parents, surveyed concurrently, and against the 2024 American National Election Study. We find that children express policy opinions more often than they identify with a party, that these opinions organize along the same left-right axis as adults, if less tightly, and that evaluations of candidates and parties anchor this emerging structure. These findings suggest that children form issue opinions far earlier than scholars have assumed, calling for renewed attention to childhood as a formative and consequential site of political development.

Introduction

When do children develop meaningful political opinions? What kinds of opinions come first? How much ideological structure is present in these opinions? We know very little about these questions. While seminal research looked to childhood as a key period of political development (Greenstein 1967; Hess and Torney 2006), subsequent work focuses more on adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Beck and Jennings 1991; Carlos 2021; Cohen 2010; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Jennings and Niemi 1974; Sears and Brown 2023; Sidanius et al. 2008). The influential Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study (Jennings et al. 2005), for example, first surveyed its respondents at the end of high

*We thank Curtis Bram, Anna Hiltner, Martín Opertti, Craig Rawlings, and Jessi Streib for our joint work in collecting these data, and the participants of 2024–2025 Bass Connections Seminar at Duke University, *Young Voices: Growing Up in America*, for their indispensable role in our data collection efforts. This study received support from the Institute for Humane Studies under grants IHS019321 and IHS018259. It was also supported by the Social Science Research Institute, the Bass Connections Program, and the Kenan Institute for Ethics, all at Duke University.

†Department of Sociology, Duke University. Correspondence: turgut.keskinturk@duke.edu.
‡Department of Political Science, Duke University. Correspondence: christopher.johnston@duke.edu.
§Department of Sociology, Duke University. Correspondence: stephen.vaisey@duke.edu.

school, and the 1980-1981 Wisconsin panel study of families (Sears, Dennis, and Chaffee 2015; see also Sears and Valentino 1997) is composed primarily of respondents in their teenage years.

This represents a significant gap. The years of middle to late childhood—roughly, ages 8 to 12—represent a critical period of psychological and social development (DelGiudice 2017). During these years, children show an increased focus on interpersonal comparison and differentiation in self-representations (Harter 2015). This is reflected, for example, in the development and maturation of personal values (Knafo-Noam, Daniel, and Benish-Weisman 2024). Indeed, by the time children enter high school, a substantial amount of attitude formation has already taken place (Hess and Torney 2006).

Further, the research that does exist on politics in childhood—while valuable—is limited in scope. Early empirical work focused primarily on children's ideas about citizenship and American democracy, political authority, and conceptions and evaluations of prominent offices (e.g., the President), figures (e.g., John F. Kennedy), and the two major parties (Greenstein 1967; Hess and Torney 2006). In contrast, these studies give little attention to children's opinions on *issues*. For example, Hess and Torney (2006) only ask their young respondents *whether* they have taken sides on particular political issues, but do not ask for the opinions themselves. Greenstein (1967:67) simply assumes that children are "not sufficiently well informed to understand the sorts of statements which make up liberalism-conservatism scales," and, therefore, "specific issue questions were not asked."

Recent research shares the same substantive focus on figures and partisanship rather than issues. Oxley et al. (2020) consider children's images of the President in the more polarized contemporary context. While children still hold the President in high regard in the abstract, they are more likely to express negativity toward the sitting President than in the past. In a similar vein, Lay et al. (2023) study the emergence of party identification during childhood and its relationship to evaluations of prominent political figures; Hatemi and Ojeda (2021) focus on the transmission of partisanship from parent to child and the moderators of this process; and Tyler and Iyengar (2023) find that 11- and 12-year-olds have levels of partisanship and affective polarization similar to that of adults.

In sum, there are reasons to think that young people form meaningful opinions about politics prior to their teenage years, but there is much less research on political development during childhood compared to adolescence and young adulthood. Moreover, while political issues and ideology are central to the study of adult political behavior, there is essentially no research on the extent and structure of children's issue opinions and their relationship to other variables.

In this article, we present the results of a new survey of 10- to 12-year-olds, which was conducted

during 2024-25. We measure children's opinions on a wide range of political topics. These include not only standard outcomes, like partisanship and evaluations of the President, but also a variety of salient issues, including (among others) immigration, abortion, redistribution, and health care. We benchmark children's responses with two other data sources. The first is a survey given to one parent from each household in our survey, which was conducted concurrently with the children's survey, and which includes an identical set of questions. The second is the 2024 American National Elections Study's face-to-face sample, which was conducted close in time to our surveys, and which includes several identical questions, and a number of roughly comparable questions. This allows us to benchmark children against a representative sample of American adults.

We use these data to answer the following important questions:

1. To what extent do children in the contemporary U.S. have issue opinions? What issues are they most likely to have opinions about?
2. How does issue opinionation compare to candidate evaluations and the extent of partisan and ideological identification?
3. Which of children's opinions are most similar to their parents? Where is the reproduction of parental politics most and least likely?
4. To what extent are children's issue opinions structured in ways similar to the broader public? Is there emerging ideological structure in children's belief systems?

Our findings suggest misplaced skepticism about issue opinion holding among children. On each individual issue question, a majority of our youth sample expresses an opinion—despite having an explicit "don't know" response option available—and most issues show very high levels of opinionation. Indeed, the proportion of children willing to state an opinion on an issue often exceeds the proportion willing to identify with a political party. Moreover, we show that these issue opinions display emerging left-right ideological structure and correlations with other important variables, such as evaluations of Presidential candidates and the two major political parties.

We find particularly high levels of opinionation with respect to evaluating Presidential candidates, and these evaluations are often very strong. We also find that evaluations of candidates are highly correlated with the surveyed parent's evaluations. Child-parent correlations are much lower, on average, for issue opinions, but there is substantial variation across issues. These findings suggest that attitudes toward prominent political figures—Presidential candidates in particular—may be especially important in seeding the development of children's political belief systems.

These findings come with the caveat that our household sample is more educated than the typical

household both in the targeted population and in the United States more generally. This likely biases our results in the direction of finding more opinionation and structure. Our data nonetheless provide a unique window into the opinions of children during a key period of social and psychological development. They suggest that a substantial portion of U.S. children in this age range have meaningful attitudes about the key issues, people, and parties that shape contemporary U.S. politics, and meaningful levels of ideological structure. In the conclusion, we consider in greater detail the broader implications of these findings, and possible avenues for future research.

Data and Measurement

We use three data sources for our analyses. The first two are original surveys of children aged 10 to 12 and one of their parents, collected in the Research Triangle region of North Carolina between October 2024 and August 2025. We surveyed 228 children and 173 parents (with 23 parents having two children participating in the study). The third is the fresh face-to-face (FTF) probability sample ($N = 1,042$) of the 2024 American National Election Study (ANES). We use ANES because it was fielded around the same time as our own surveys and it serves as a national benchmark.

We recruited the majority of children (74%, $N = 168$) via probability-based mailers sent to 12,500 unique addresses sampled from a Wake County voter file, obtained from the commercial company L2. We supplemented this sample using non-probability methods, with advertisements in parent Facebook groups and outreach through Parent-Teacher Associations across the Research Triangle. As part of this process, parents first completed a brief intake survey and scheduled a session for their child. Each child survey was self-administered in Qualtrics during a synchronous Zoom session with a member of our research team, who provided survey instructions, monitored attention, and ensured independent responding. We invited parents to an online and self-administered survey after their child's session. Among invited parents, 86% completed their questionnaire (77% of whom were women).[1] Online Appendix A provides more details on these data sources.

We measure political preferences using thirteen items, which feature nine policy issues and four evaluations. The issues involve a range of cultural and economic questions, including the legality of abortion, immigration, gun regulations, the role of government in healthcare, jobs, and reducing inequality, and the trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth. In addition

[1]Our parent sample is higher income, more educated, and disproportionately white relative to Wake County and the U.S. more generally (see Tables A2 and A3 in Online Appendix A). That being said, the sample features substantial partisan variation, with 34% of parents identifying as Republicans and 59% as Democrats, when leaners are included. Considering the difficulties of reaching this age group, we believe that our study fills a substantial gap.

to these issues, we asked for evaluations of Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, and the Republican and Democratic parties. Online Appendix B provides the question wordings and response options for each item. All items are coded such that higher values represent conservative positions, or *warmer* attitudes toward Trump/Republicans and *colder* attitudes toward Harris/Democrats.[2]

A central component of our measurement strategy is that we did not simplify the items for children. Instead, we used question wordings and response options from standard adult survey items, such as those in the ANES, and instructed children that "Don't Know" is a perfectly appropriate answer if they have not thought about the issue, or if they have trouble understanding it. This has two consequences for our investigation: (1) we achieve interpretable comparisons across groups, and (2) when children select "Don't Know" or skip a question, we infer that children have not formed or articulated their own preferences on that issue. Existing research on the political opinions of pre-adults has either avoided issue items entirely or simplified them beyond comparability with adult surveys. In contrast, our design lets us directly compare children's issue opinions to those of adults.

Results

We present our findings in three sections. First, we examine children's political identities and their opinion behaviors. We then turn to the household level, asking how closely children's preferences reflect those of their parents. In the final section, we examine the *structure* of children's preferences, the degree to which they are systematized, as well as how such patterns compare to adults.

Political Identity and Opinion Behavior

We begin by examining the distributions of partisan and ideological identification across the three samples, as shown in Figure 1. We find that a substantial share of children identifies with a party, with about 50% noting that they are either a Democrat or a Republican, a figure comparable to recent teen surveys when we exclude Independent leaners (Tyler and Iyengar 2023).[3] Yet, 36% of children selected "Don't Know" (DK) as their response or skipped the question altogether, compared to 1.2% among parents and 1.6% among the ANES respondents. Ideological identification shows an even sharper pattern, with roughly 70% of children reporting a DK response, compared

[2]Figure C1 in the Online Appendix C provides item-level response distributions among children and parents.
[3]Figure C2 in Online Appendix C shows the correspondence between parental partisan identity and the child's partisan identity. Among parents with a partisan identity, 53% of children report the same partisan identity as their parent.

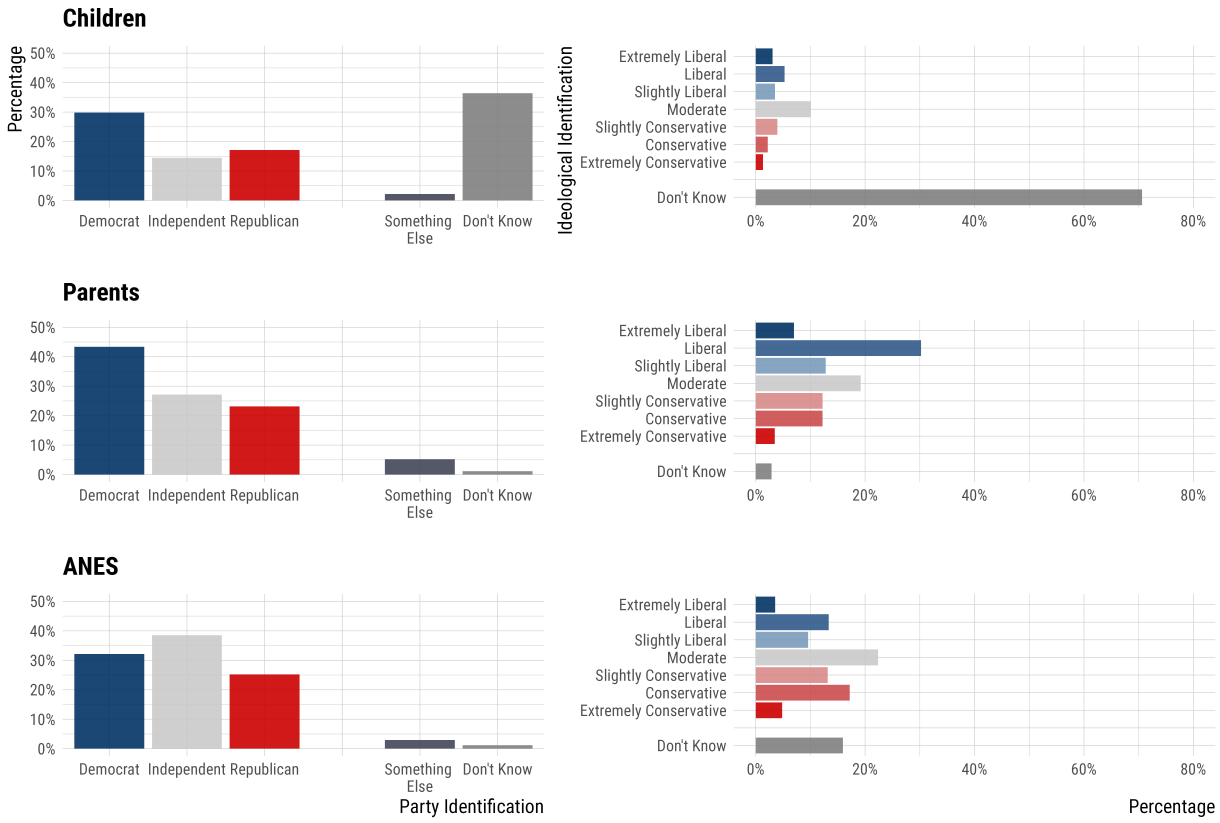

Figure 1: Partisan and Ideological Identification Across Groups

Notes: The figure presents the distributions of partisan identification (left column) and ideological identification (right column) for children (N = 228), parents (N = 173), and the ANES sample (N = 1,042). Bars represent the proportion of respondents in each category within each sample. ANES estimates are weighted with FTF sampling weights.

to 3% among parents and 15% of ANES respondents. Children are thus considerably more likely to identify with a political party than with an ideological category.

Figure 2 demonstrates how reporting DK responses extends to issues. The share of DK responses ranges from 8% on the evaluation of Trump to 48% on the government's role in reducing inequality. The figure shows that there is in fact systematic variation in such missingness: the evaluations of well-known political figures (Trump and Harris) elicit fewer DKs, while items involving more abstract economic and policy trade-offs lead to substantially more missing responses.[4] Strikingly, however, children are generally more likely to report an opinion on issues than to identify with a party: only the issues of inequality and immigration show a higher don't know rate than partisanship.

[4]The high opinionation rate for candidates is consistent with Sears and Valentino (1997), who find substantial increases in candidate evaluation among young people over the course of a campaign.

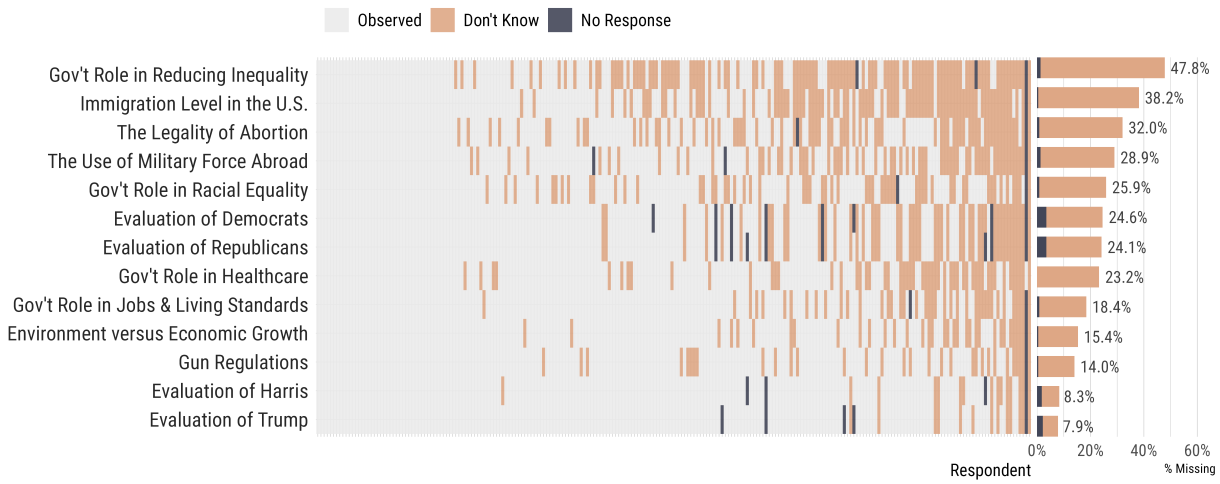

Figure 2: Response Missingness Among Children

Notes: The figure presents the response missingness among children. The left panel shows the missingness pattern for each of the 13 political items across all 228 children, with each column representing one respondent. Items are sorted vertically by total missingness rate (highest at top) and respondents are sorted horizontally by total missingness across items (highest at right). The right panel shows the share of "Don't Know" and non-response for each item.

We explore response patterns among children by examining item missingness and extremity, which we define as the absolute distance from the midpoint in each question. Table C1 shows that political *interest* (the standardized average of self-reported interest in politics and the frequency of following the news) predicts substantially more opinionation, with the number of DK responses decreasing by almost 50% when moving from the least interested child to the most interested child. We do not observe differences in response patterns by parental positions or extremity (Table C2), though we show that self-identified Democratic children are the most opinionated, followed by Independents, Republicans, and children with no partisan identification (Figure C4). In conclusion, opinionation levels are associated strongly with the child's partisan affiliation and interest in politics.[5]

Response patterns on opinion extremity, however, show that the extremity among parents (Table C4), rather than individual differences among children (Table C3), is the most consequential predictor. In Figure C3, we present these extremity scores across issues and evaluations, separately for each group. Children's extremity levels across issues closely follow those of parents, with evaluations of Trump and Harris, as well as the positions on gun regulations and government's role in racial equality having the highest extremity scores. There is, once again, partisan differentiation in these results (Figure C4), with children identifying as Democrats and Republicans having higher

[5]Interestingly, we find that it is political *interest*, rather than *knowledge*, that predicts opinion reporting (Table C1). The primary importance of interest is consistent with prior empirical research on adults (see Prior 2019).

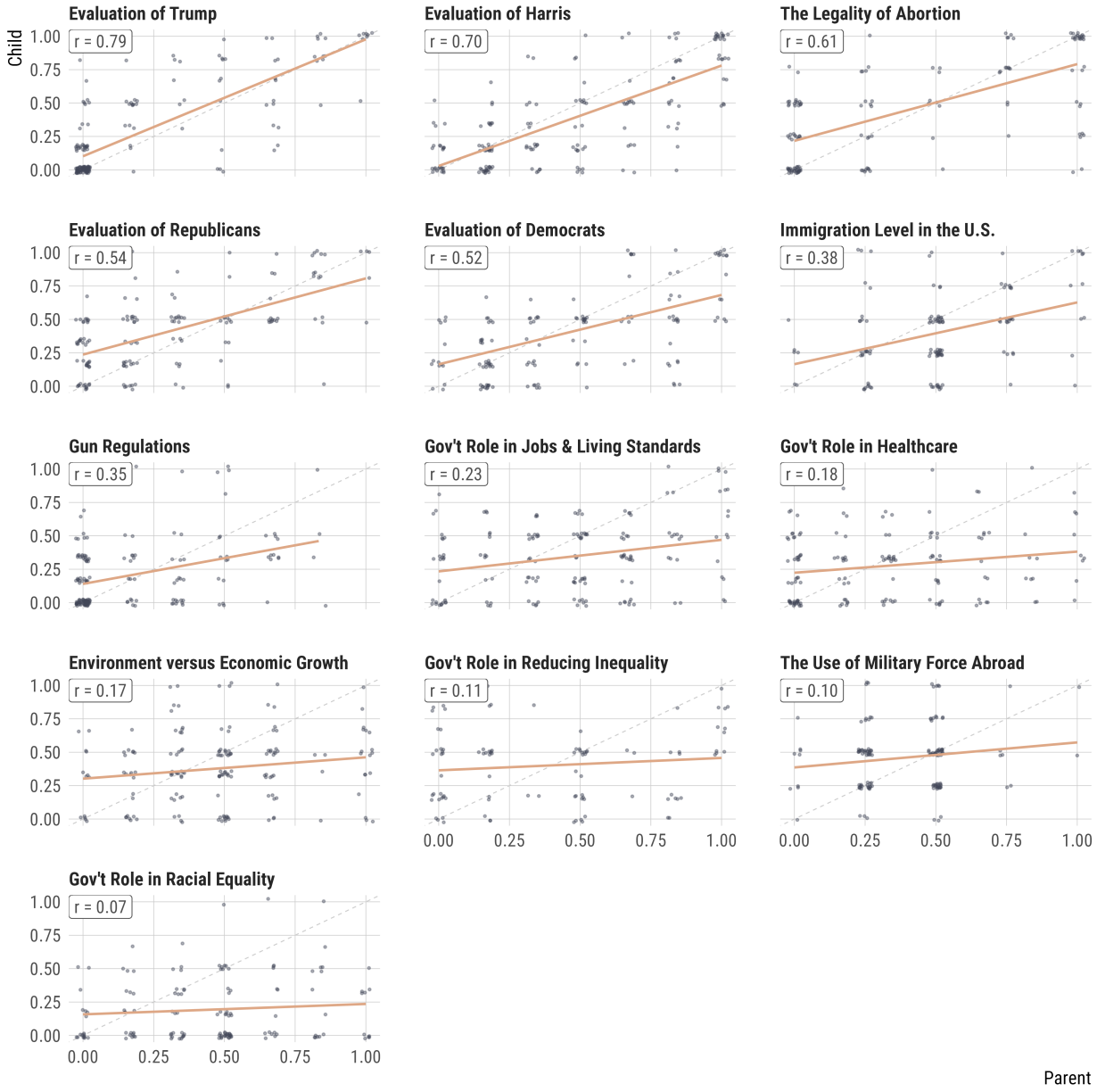

Figure 3: Parent-Child Correspondence on Political Issues and Evaluations

Notes: The figure presents parent-child correspondence for each of the 13 political items, restricted to paired households in which both parent and child provided a substantive response. Each point represents a parent-child dyad, with parent responses on the horizontal axis and child responses on the vertical axis. The dashed line indicates perfect correspondence, and the solid line is the linear best fit. Spearman correlations are shown in the top left corner of each panel.

extremity levels than children identifying as Independent or children with no identities.

Correspondence Between Parents and Children

How closely do children's preferences correspond to those of their parents? Figure 3 presents parent and child responses on each of the thirteen items, with Spearman correlations in each panel. We see that correspondence is strongest for evaluations of political figures and parties and considerably weaker for policy issues, except for the legality of abortion, immigration, and gun regulations. For most remaining issues, correlation coefficients fall below $\rho \approx 0.25$. These patterns suggest that parent-child alignment is concentrated on partisan figures, parties, and a small set of high-profile cultural issues, and they are considerably weaker across the broader policy landscape.[6]

We examine whether parent-child congruence is higher among parents with high political interest in Figure C6 (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). We find that parental interest in politics is not associated with stronger parent-child congruence. While we do observe a correlation with parent political knowledge, this association is relatively modest. We explore the question of whether issues with high missingness are associated with weaker parent-child correlations in Figure C7, which demonstrates that there is a relationship, though it is not the case that the strongest parent-child correlations are *always* also the least missing among children. In other words, most children report opinions on issues for which their expected correspondence with the parents is weak. These findings suggest that while there are significant family correlations, children regularly express issue positions different from their parents.

The Structure of Political Preferences

We now turn to the structure of children's preferences. We examine this question first through pairwise correlations among items, with Figure 4 presenting this correlation structure separately for children, parents, and the ANES sample. Looking at the average absolute correlation across all item pairs, which we estimated using a Full Information Maximum Likelihood protocol, we see similarity between parents ($|r| = 0.47$) and the ANES sample ($|r| = 0.40$), with lower inter-item correlations among children ($|r| = 0.24$). Once again, items related to candidate and party evaluations are more organized compared to issue positions. Importantly, however, this structure is directionally similar to adults': children's opinion correlations share the same sign, with conservative positions cohering together as they do for adults, only more loosely.

To understand how this structure is organized around an underlying *latent ideology*, operationalized as a left–right factor, Figure 5 presents factor loadings from one-factor confirmatory factor analyses

[6]Of course, these correlations are conditional on children having a response on a given issue.

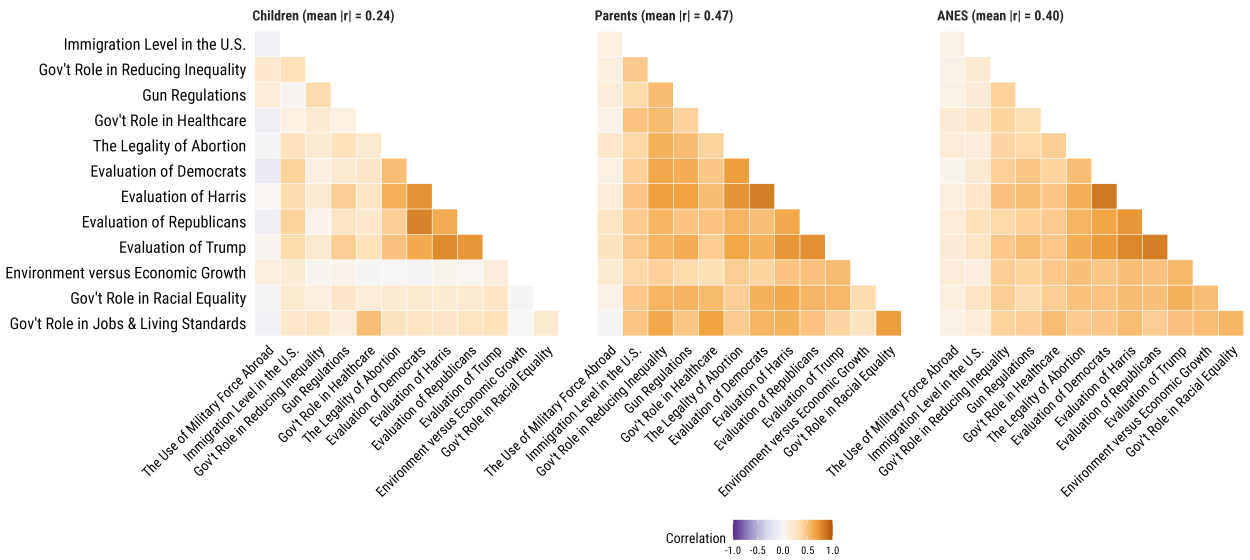

Figure 4: Correlation Structure of Political Preferences Across Groups

Notes: The figure presents pairwise Pearson correlations among 13 political items, separately for children, parents, and the ANES sample. We performed hierarchical clustering on the ANES correlation matrix to decide on the item ordering, which is held constant across groups to allow comparison. The mean absolute correlation across all item pairs is reported in each panel header. We use full information maximum likelihood when estimating correlation coefficients; estimates for ANES additionally incorporate sampling weights.

(CFA) estimated separately for each group.[7] Among parents and the ANES sample, the left-right dimension is defined most strongly by candidate and party evaluations, but issue opinions are also strongly related to this dimension, with standardized loadings exceeding 0.50 for almost all issues. Among children, the opinion structure is also strongly defined by evaluations of candidates and parties (with loadings ranging from 0.83 to 0.86), while issues have substantially lower loadings compared to adults.[8]

Nonetheless, there are substantively meaningful relationships between this left-right dimension and children's opinions on many issues. Each factor loading represents the expected standard deviation change in the respective issue opinion for a one standard deviation change in the latent left-right dimension. Thus, with the exception of military force and the environment versus eco-

[7]Table D1 in the Online Appendix D presents CFA fit statistics for the one-factor model, as well as a two-factor model CFA (where we define *economic* attitudes via the set of *Government Role in Racial Equality*, *Environment versus Economic Growth*, *Government Role in Jobs and Living Standards*, *Government Role in Reducing Inequality*, and *Government Role in Healthcare*, and the *cultural* attitudes as the rest) and a three-factor model CFA where we split *evaluations* from cultural attitudes. We find that a two-factor solution among parents and a three-factor solution among ANES outperform a one-factor solution, though this is not the case among children. This is in itself a suggestive finding: issue structure among children is not strong enough to warrant a multidimensional evaluation of preferences. This is why we use the one-factor solution among children (as well as adults) as our evaluative criteria for *how much structure there is*.

[8]Table D2 in Online Appendix D quantifies the similarity of correlation structures and factor loadings across pairs of samples, showing that children's preference structure is substantially less similar to either of the adult samples.

nomic growth, all issues move meaningfully as a function of left-right orientation, and opinions on abortion, gun regulations, and immigration have a substantial relationship. On immigration, for example, a one standard deviation increase in latent right-wing orientation is associated with a 0.46 standard deviation *decrease* in support for immigration. These findings suggest that ideological structure begins to emerge prior to adolescence.

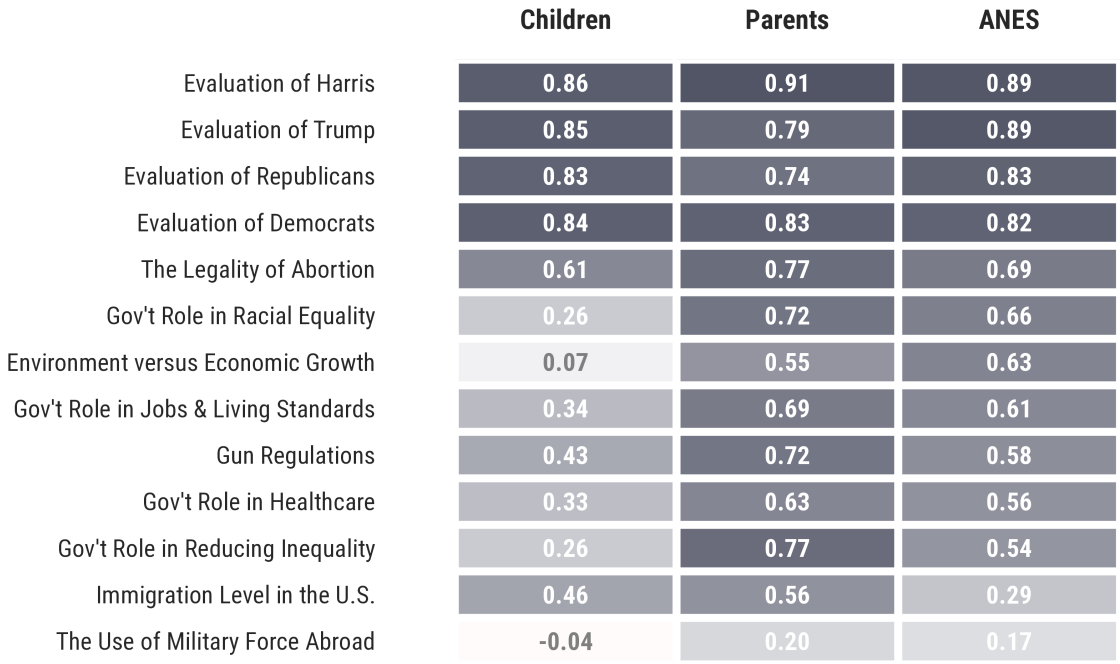

Figure 5: Factor Loadings from One-Factor Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Notes: The figure presents factor loadings from one-factor confirmatory factor analyses estimated separately for children, parents, and the ANES sample. Each cell reports the standardized loading of the item on the latent factor. Models are estimated by FIML for missing data. Estimates for ANES additionally incorporate FTF sampling weights.

Given their importance, it is useful to quantify how much variance in candidate and party evaluations is issue-laden versus independent of issues. Figure 6 presents R^2 values from structural equation models that regress each of the four evaluations on nine issue positions, separately for each group, alongside an alternative model predicting a single latent evaluation (see Tables D3 and D4 for fit statistics and the full set of coefficients, respectively). R^2 values show that shared variance between issues and evaluations is substantially lower among children (56%) compared to parents (89%) and ANES respondents (67%). That said, children's issue positions are associated with a very sizable share of variance in evaluations. Even at this young age, children show a meaningful link between evaluations of prominent figures and parties and their positions on salient issues.

In summary, our analyses present important descriptive findings. Children enter adolescence with

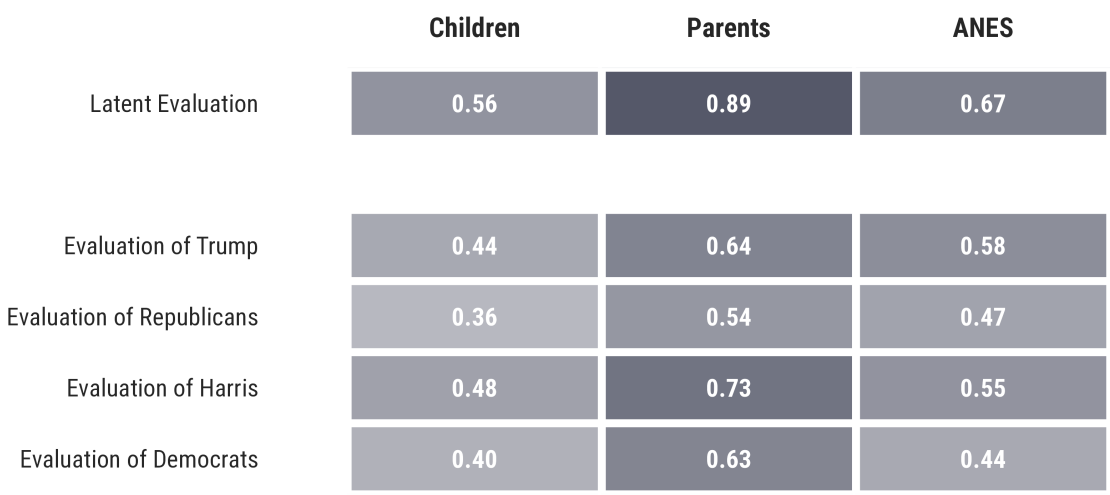

Figure 6: Variance in Evaluations Predicted by Issue Positions

Notes: The figure presents R-squared values from structural equation models predicting political evaluations from the nine issue positions, separately for children, parents, and the ANES sample. The bottom four rows report R-squared values for each evaluation modeled separately; the top row reports R-squared value for a latent evaluation factor measured by all four evaluation items. Models are estimated by FIML; ANES additionally incorporates FTF sampling weights.

meaningful political orientations (Hess and Torney 2006): a substantial share already identifies with a party, reports preferences across a variety of issues, and their evaluations of parties and candidates are already connected to their issue positions. Yet, their political preferences remain relatively less structured than those of adults, and parent-child correspondence seems to be concentrated on candidate and party evaluations, and a rather narrow set of high-salience, cultural issues. Taken together, these findings suggest a picture of an emerging political orientation, but one that has not yet fully crystallized into a coherent ideological worldview.

Discussion

In this article, we present a systematic look at the political opinions children form before adolescence. We show that skepticism about whether children this young hold genuine issue opinions is largely misplaced. Indeed, children express policy opinions more often than they identify with a party; these opinions organize along the same left-right axis as adults, if less tightly; and evaluations of candidates and parties anchor this emerging structure.

Our findings have several implications for the study of political development. Classic political socialization research treats early political development mainly as *parental transmission of partisanship*:

children inherit a political identity, above all a partisan identity, from their parents, before they are able to appreciate debates over issues and ideology (Greenstein 1967; Hess and Torney 2006; Hyman 1959). Our results suggest this is only one part of the story. Consistent with this research, we show that attitudes toward Presidential candidates and parties form a strong affective core to children's emerging political outlook, and these attitudes correspond closely to those of their parents. However, we also find that children hold opinions on a wide range of *issues*, and the rate of issue opinionation is (in most cases) higher than the rate of partisan *identification*. Moreover, children's issue opinions diverge from those of their parents across a sizable portion of the policy landscape, and whether a child holds an opinion on an issue tracks the child's own political interest more so than any feature of the parent. We believe that these findings speak to an emerging literature in which children's own sense of self is an important factor that shapes the development and organization of political opinions across the life-course. Consistent with recent research on political socialization in the United States (e.g., Carlos 2026; Dinas 2014; Gash and Tichenor 2022; Ojeda and Hatemi 2015), we argue that studies of political development need greater attention to the agency of the individual child.

We also examined the structure of children's preferences, and these findings have two implications. On the one hand, issue constraint among children is weaker than for adults. On the other hand, constraint is not absent: the same left–right dimension that organizes adult opinion is already detectable, in a more rudimentary form, among 10-to-12-year-olds. This finding speaks to a long-running debate about the nature of "mass belief systems" (Converse 1964): the fact that a recognizable version of adult structure appears this early suggests that the basic structure of opinions may be in place before the cognitive sophistication, engagement, and exposure to elite cues usually thought to produce it.

Of course, our study has important limitations. First, our surveys are cross-sectional, so we cannot speak to the dynamics of opinion formation. We believe that future research that tracks children into adolescence and young adulthood is of paramount importance to understand how opinions cohere across the life-course. Second, the households we reached are more educated, higher-income, and more heavily white than the broader population, and part of the sample was recruited through non-probability channels. This almost certainly inflates the levels of opinionation and structure we report, and future work with national samples would be valuable. Finally, we fielded our surveys in the period surrounding the 2024 presidential election: a salient, national, and affectively charged window (Sears and Valentino 1997). The high levels of opinionation we document, and the prominence of candidate and party evaluations in organizing preferences, may partly reflect

the idiosyncracies of the Presidential election context and the intensity of this particular cycle. But, as Sears and Valentino (1997) argue, elections can also be understood as catalysts for the development of attitudes toward salient features of the campaign; attitudes which then persist into later years and shape subsequent engagement with the political system.

These limitations notwithstanding, our study offers a rare window into an understudied period of political development. The children we surveyed hold opinions on the issues of the day and they are drawn to the figures and parties that dominate national politics. Childhood is not too *early* or too *undeveloped* a period for the study of issues and ideology. We believe that understanding how the political opinions of a ten-year-old eventually cohere into the belief system of an adult remains one of the most important questions for the study of political behavior.

References

Beck, Paul Allen, and M. Kent Jennings. 1991. "Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations." *The Journal of Politics* 53(3):742–63.

Carlos, Roberto F. 2021. "The Politics of the Mundane." *American Political Science Review* 115(3):775–89.

Carlos, Roberto F. 2026. *Information Brokers: Political Socialization in Latino Immigrant Families*. University of Chicago Press.

Cohen, Cathy J. 2010. *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." Pp. 206–61 in *Ideology and Discontent*, edited by D. Apter. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

DelGiudice, Marco. 2017. "Middle Childhood: An Evolutionary-Developmental Synthesis." *Handbook of Life Course Health Development* 95–107.

Dinas, Elias. 2014. "Why Does the Apple Fall Far from the Tree? How Early Political Socialization Prompts Parent-Child Dissimilarity." *British Journal of Political Science* 44(4):827–52.

Gash, Alison L., and Daniel J. Tichenor. 2022. *Democracy's Child: Young People and the Politics of Control, Leverage, and Agency*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Greenstein, Fred I. 1967. *Children and Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Harter, Susan. 2015. *The Construction of the Self: Developmental and Sociocultural Foundations*. Guilford Publications.

Hatemi, Peter K., and Christopher Ojeda. 2021. "The Role of Child Perception and Motivation in Political Socialization." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(3):1097–1118.

Hess, Robert D., and Judith V. Torney. 2006. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*. Transaction Publishers.

Hyman, Herbert H. 1959. *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior*. Free Press.

Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. 2005. "Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965–1997: Four Waves Combined." Inter-university Consortium for Political; Social Research. doi:10.3886/ICPSR04037.v1.

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1968. "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child." *American Political Science Review* 62(1):169–84.

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1974. *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools*. Princeton University Press.

Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *The Journal of Politics* 71(3):782–99.

Knafo-Noam, Ariel, Ella Daniel, and Maya Benish-Weisman. 2024. "The Development of Values in Middle Childhood: Five Maturation Criteria." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 33(1):18–26.

Lay, J. Celeste, Mirya R. Holman, Jill S. Greenlee, Zoe M. Oxley, and Angela L. Bos. 2023. "Partisanship on the Playground: Expressive Party Politics Among Children." *Political Research Quarterly* 76(3):1249–64.

Ojeda, Christopher, and Peter K. Hatemi. 2015. "Accounting for the Child in the Transmission of Party Identification." *American Sociological Review* 80(6):1150–74.

Oxley, Zoe M., Mirya R. Holman, Jill S. Greenlee, Angela L. Bos, and J. Celeste Lay. 2020. "Children's Views of the American Presidency." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84(1):141–57.

Prior, Markus. 2019. *Hooked: How Politics Captures People's Interest*. Cambridge University Press.

Sears, David O., and Christia Brown. 2023. "Childhood and Adult Political Development." Pp. 65–108 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, edited by L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, J. S. Levy, and J. Jerit. Oxford University Press.

Sears, David O., Jack Dennis, and Stephen Chaffee. 2015. "Wisconsin Political Socialization Study, 1980 (M129)": Version V1. Harvard Dataverse. doi:10.7910/DVN/T2VX6K.

Sears, David O., and Nicholas A. Valentino. 1997. "Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization." *American Political Science Review* 91(1):45–65.

Sidanius, James, Shana Levin, Colette Van Laar, and David O. Sears. 2008. *The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Tyler, Matthew, and Shanto Iyengar. 2023. "Learning to Dislike Your Opponents: Political Socialization in the Era of Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 117(1):347–54.

Online Appendix for

The Emerging Structure of Political Preferences in Childhood

Turgut Keskintürk* Christopher D. Johnston† Stephen Vaisey‡

Table of Contents

*Department of Sociology, Duke University. Correspondence: turgut.keskinturk@duke.edu.
†Department of Political Science, Duke University. Correspondence: christopher.johnston@duke.edu.
‡Department of Sociology, Duke University. Correspondence: stephen.vaisey@duke.edu.

Online Appendix A: Data Sources

A.1. Overview

We draw on three data sources. The first two, a sample of children aged 10 to 12 and one of their parents, were collected by the authors and colleagues in the *Research Triangle* region of North Carolina between October 3, 2024 and August 5, 2025, as part of a collaborative project on political development. To provide a national adult benchmark to this project, we use the fresh face-to-face probability sample featured in the *American National Election Study*'s (ANES) 2024 Time Series Study. All survey instruments and data collection procedures for the children's and parents' surveys received approval from Duke University's Institutional Review Board (protocol number: #2024-0534).

We surveyed 228 children and 173 parents, with 23 parents having two children participating in the study. Our recruitment process combined probability and non-probability methods. The majority of the child sample (74%) was recruited through mailers sent to addresses sampled from a Wake County voter file, which we obtained from the commercial company L2. The rest was recruited via advertisements in parent Facebook groups, emails to local community groups, and Parent-Teacher Associations across the broader Research Triangle area (representing 26% of the final data).[1]

We use the ANES 2024 fresh face-to-face sample as our national benchmark, which is a nationally representative probability sample of U.S. citizens age 18 or older, recruited through address-based sampling. We restrict our analyses to this component ($N = 1,042$) rather than the combined ANES sample because it provides a probability-based adult comparison group. All ANES analyses use the face-to-face (FTF) sample weights to produce population-representative estimates. One value of using ANES is that the survey was fielded around the 2024 election, like our own surveys.

A.2. Sampling and Recruitment for the Child and Parent Surveys

The recruitment procedure began with a mailed letter or online advertisement (depending on the method used) inviting adults with children aged 10–12 to participate. Parents completed an intake survey in which they confirmed their child's age, indicated willingness to participate, entered the names of the participating parent and child, and provided informed consent. We then redirected the parents to a virtual calendar to schedule a survey session for their child. Households with more

[1] Before recruiting our participants, we conducted cognitive interviews with 20 children to ensure that children could understand the questions and survey structure, as well as maintaining the necessary attention throughout the 30–45 minute questionnaire. These interviews suggested that our survey instrument did not have any major shortcomings.

than one eligible child were allowed to participate with all children in the target age range.

To construct our sampling frame, we filtered the Wake County voter file for households with children estimated to be between 6 and 14 years old, and adults inferred to be between 25 and 50 years old.[2] We conducted three mailing waves, each using a separate list of addresses randomly sampled from our sampling frame. In Wave 1, we sent 5,000 mailers, which yielded 52 participants.[3] Since this initial sample skewed Democratic, we sent 2,500 mailers in Wave 2 targeting registered Republicans and 5,000 mailers in Wave 3, oversampling Republicans (50%) while including Democrats and households without party information. Waves 2 and 3 combined yielded 116 participants. To supplement the probability-based sample, we recruited 60 additional children through advertisements in parent Facebook groups (92%) as well as PTA emails or community groups (8%).

Each household received a letter inviting participation with the message *be a voice for the community*, along with a $1 bill parents were free to keep. Children and parents each received a $10 Amazon Gift Card upon completion in Wave 1 and the Facebook recruitments; with IRB approval, this was raised to $20 for Waves 2 and 3 to improve response rates. The letter we used is as follows:

> *Dear Wake County household,*
>
> *Be A Voice for Your Community!*
>
> *Do you have a child who is 10 to 12 years old? If so, we invite you and your child to participate in a research study about what it's like to grow up in America. Your household is among a select few chosen to represent the opinions and experiences of people in your area. If you have more than one child in this age range, we invite them to participate too.*
>
> ***What is the research for?*** *We want to understand both your and your child's opinions about American society today. The research is being conducted by Duke University.*
>
> ***Why participate?*** *Your insights are important. We want to make sure all perspectives are represented in our survey. Participating is easy and takes about* ***45 minutes****. Participating will make the study more accurate, so we all know more about the views of your community. You and your child will* ***each*** *receive a* ***$10 Amazon gift card*** *for completing the survey. When the study is complete, we can share the results with you.*

[2] L2's age estimates for children in the household were not granular enough to identify our 10–12 target range directly.
[3] While the naive response rate was about 1%, note that our effective response rate must be slightly higher, since our mailers reached households with children aged 6-14, many of whom were ineligible for the 10-12 study.

> ***How to participate? Your child's survey will be conducted using Zoom, a video conferencing service. As the parent, you don't need a Zoom appointment. You may fill out your survey on your own, at your convenience. To schedule your child's survey appointment and access the link to your survey, please visit the website or scan the QR code printed below, and then enter your personal access code.***
>
> ***Who can I contact with questions?*** *If you have difficulty scheduling the appointment or have other questions, please email us at youngvoices@duke.edu. We are happy to help.*
>
> ***Thank you for considering being part of this research study. In appreciation of your time, we included $1 with this invitation. This dollar is yours to keep. You and your child will each be emailed $10 Amazon gift cards after you complete the survey. You can schedule the survey now —claim your spot today!***

We posted advertisements in parent Facebook groups for the non-probability recruitment:

> *Young Voices: Growing Up in America project at Duke University is looking for participants!*
>
> *If you are interested in joining in our study and be a voice for your community, claim your spot and visit* [*LINK*]. *If you have difficulty scheduling the appointment or have other questions, please email us at youngvoices@duke.edu. We are happy to help.*

And we attached the e-flyer with more details, presented in Figure A1 below.

A.3. Survey Administration

All child surveys were self-administered while the child was in a live Zoom session with a member of the research team. We recruited undergraduate students through Duke's Bass Connections program (with the research project called *Young Voices: How Kids Develop Political Identities*) to onboard and monitor children during their sessions.

When a child entered the session, a team member welcomed them and provided a short tutorial on how to complete the survey in Qualtrics. Children were reminded to attend carefully to response options, were reassured that "don't know" was a legitimate answer, and were instructed not to ask for help from anyone else. After receiving instructions, children provided verbal assent. The team member then turned off audio and video while remaining available for any issues. In the surveys, we programmed the questions such that children had the option to read each question themselves or to play a pre-recorded audio version via a button on each page. Surveys typically lasted 30 to

Figure A1: E-Flyer Used for Recruitment in Facebook Groups

45 minutes, and most Zoom sessions (75%) involved a single child over the entire meeting.[4]

After the child completed the survey, the parent was sent a link to their own questionnaire, which was self-administered online. We achieved an 86% response rate among the invited parents.

[4]In sessions with multiple children, team members gave general instructions to the group, after which final instructions, verbal assent, and surveys took place in breakout rooms to prevent children from interacting with one another.

A.4. Descriptive Statistics

Table A1 provides the descriptive statistics for children in our sample.

There are several children aged 9 or 13. We allowed these children to participate as their birthdays were close to our official birthday cut-offs.

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics for Children

Characteristic	**N = 228**
Age	
9	2.2%
10	37.3%
11	29.4%
12	29.8%
13	1.3%
Gender	
Boy	55.7%
Girl	39.9%
Something Else	4.4%
Race	
White	68.9%
Black	7.5%
Hispanic	7.9%
Asian	7.9%
Other	3.5%
Don't Know	4.4%
Political Identity	
Democrat	29.8%
Independent	14.5%
Republican	17.1%
Something Else	2.2%
Don't Know	36.4%

Table A2 provides the descriptive statistics for our parent sample as well as the ANES benchmark.

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics for Parents and ANES Benchmark

	Parents	**ANES**
Characteristic	**N = 173**	**N = 1,042**
Age	44.4 (4.5)	48.7 (18.1)
Gender		
Man	21.4%	48.3%
Woman	77.5%	50.0%

(*continued*)

Characteristic	Parents N = 173	ANES N = 1,042
Something Else	1.2%	1.7%
Race		
White	82.7%	64.7%
Black	7.5%	12.0%
Hispanic	2.9%	13.7%
Asian	6.9%	3.6%
Other	0.0%	5.9%
Education		
No College	5.2%	66.3%
Bachelor's	50.9%	20.4%
Post-Grad	43.9%	13.3%
Marital	89.0%	51.4%
Income		
Less than $10,000	0.0%	7.3%
$10,000 to $24,999	1.2%	5.3%
$25,000 to $49,999	2.9%	13.4%
$50,000 to $74,999	5.2%	13.8%
$75,000 to $99,999	11.0%	13.5%
$100,000 to $149,999	26.0%	19.7%
$150,000 or more	53.8%	27.0%
Political Identity		
Democrat	43.4%	32.1%
Independent	27.2%	38.5%
Republican	23.1%	25.2%
Something Else	5.2%	3.0%
No Response	1.2%	1.2%

Our parental sample is skewed toward higher-income, highly educated, female, and white respondents. That being said, we compared our parent sample to estimates we obtained from the *American Community Survey*'s (ACS) 2023 data. We filtered for households in Wake County (with PUMA codes 01203, 01204, 01205, 01206, 01207, and 01208) with kids aged 10 to 12. We then constructed some basic weighted estimates for comparison, which we present in Table A3.

Table A3: Comparisons of Parent Sample with American Community Survey

Characteristic	Parent Sample	ACS Estimates for 2023
Median HH Income	175,000	144,857
Percent with College Degree	95	64
Mean Age	44	44
Percent White	83	55

Online Appendix B: Measurement of Political Preferences

B.1. Question Wording for Preference Items

The exact question wordings of outcome variables in child and parent surveys are as follows.

- **Introduction:** Great! For the next set of questions, we will ask you about your opinions on different issues using a 7-point scale. Some people feel strongly about one side of the issue, and place themselves at point 1. Others feel strongly about the other side of the issue, and place themselves at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. For example, some people think that children should go to school all year round, others think that children should get the entire summer off from school, and others fall somewhere in between, as in the scale below. Each of the following questions will be like this. If you haven't thought much about one of the issues, it is fine! Please tell us by clicking the choice *Haven't thought much about this.

  [*1 = children should go to school all year round, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = children should get the entire summer off from school, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **Government Role in Healthcare:** People at point 1 think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to help people in paying for doctors and hospital bills. People at point 7 think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves. And others fall somewhere in-between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

  [*1 = Government should help people in paying for doctors and hospital bills, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = People should take care of these things themselves, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **The Legality of Abortion:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? A pregnant woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion if she wants it, for any reason.

  [*1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree*]

- **Immigration Level in the U.S.:** Should the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live be:

  [*1 = Increased a lot, 2 = Increased a little, 3 = Left the same as it is now, 4 = Decreased a little, 5 = Decreased a lot*]

- **Government Role in Jobs & Living Standards:** People at point 1 feel the government in Washington should do everything possible that every person has a job and a good standard of living. People at point 7 think that this is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of themselves. And others fall somewhere in-between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

  [*1 = Government should see to jobs and standard of living, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = Each person should take care of themselves, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **Gun Regulations:** People at point 1 think the federal government should make it much more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now. People at point 7 think the federal government should make it much easier for people to buy a gun than it is now. And others fall somewhere in-between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

  [*1 = Make it much more difficult to buy guns, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = Make it much easier to buy guns, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **Government Role in Reducing Inequality:** Now let's turn to some other kinds of questions. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?

  [*Favor, Oppose, Neither favor nor oppose*]

  Do you [Favor/Oppose] that a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little?

  [*A great deal, A moderate amount, A little*]

- **Government Role in Racial Equality:** People at point 1 feel that the government in Washington should not make any special effort to help black people because they should help themselves. People at point 7 feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of black people. And others fall somewhere in-between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

  [*1 = Black people should help themselves, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = Government should help black people, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **Environment versus Economic Growth:** People at point 1 think that economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent. People at point 7 think that protecting the environment should be the top priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs. And others fall somewhere in-between.

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

[*1 = Economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = Environment should be the top priority, Haven't thought much about this*]

- **The Use of Military Force Abroad:** How willing should the United States be to use military force to solve international problems?

  [*1 = Extremely willing, Very willing, Moderately willing, A little willing, Not at all willing*]

- **Trump/Harris Evaluations:** Now let's turn to a different topic. How much do you dislike or like each of these people?

  [*Donald Trump/Kamala Harris*]

  [*1 = Strongly dislike, 2 = Dislike, 3 = Slightly dislike, 4 = Neither dislike nor like, 5 = Slightly like, 6 = like, 7 = Strongly like, Don't know*]

- **Republicans/Democrats Evaluations:** And how much do you dislike or like each of these groups?

  [*The Democratic Party/The Republican Party*]

  [*1 = Strongly dislike, 2 = Dislike, 3 = Slightly dislike, 4 = Neither dislike nor like, 5 = Slightly like, 6 = like, 7 = Strongly like, Don't know*]

B.2. Correspondence of Preference Items to ANES Questions

These items are matched to the ANES codebook (2025) using the mapping in Table B1.

In our reproduction repository, we share a correspondence sheet that provides the complete question wordings and response options for our survey questions and their ANES counterparts.

Table B1: Correspondence to the ANES Survey

Item	ANES Variable
Gov't Role in Healthcare	V241245
Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	V241252
Gov't Role in Racial Equality	V241255
Environment versus Economic Growth	V241258
Gun Regulations	V242325
Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	V242253x
The Legality of Abortion	V241248
Immigration Level in the U.S.	V242227
The Use of Military Force Abroad	V241313
Evaluation of Trump	V241157
Evaluation of Harris	V241156
Evaluation of Democrats	V241166
Evaluation of Republicans	V241167

Online Appendix C: Results from Supplemental Analyses

Table C1: Predicting the Number of Don't Know Responses Among Children

	Baseline	Adjusted
Intercept	1.01	0.97
	(0.06)	(0.76)
Political Interest	-0.30	-0.19
	(0.06)	(0.05)
Political Knowledge	0.02	0.07
	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age		-0.05
		(0.07)
Gender: Girl		0.21
		(0.12)
Gender: Something Else		0.10
		(0.20)
Race: Black		0.24
		(0.20)
Race: Hispanic		-0.17
		(0.19)
Race: Asian		-0.12
		(0.17)
Race: Other		-1.14
		(0.37)
Race: Don't Know		0.44
		(0.21)
Party ID: Independent		0.50
		(0.21)
Party ID: Republican		0.55
		(0.19)
Party ID: Something Else		0.93
		(0.32)
Party ID: Don't Know		0.74
		(0.17)
N	225	225
Pseudo R2	0.047	0.097

Notes: The table reports Poisson regression coefficients (with robust standard errors in parentheses) from models predicting the number of "don't know" responses among children. Interest in politics is measured as the average of self-reported interest in politics and news following, while political knowledge is measured as the sum of correct responses to 5 knowledge questions. Both variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a SD of 1.

Table C2: Predicting Item-Level Don't Know Responses Among Children

	Directional	Extremity
Parental Position	-0.11	
	(0.31)	
Parental Extremity		-0.04
		(0.18)
N	2064	2064
Pseudo R2	0.130	0.130
Household FEs	X	X
Item FEs	X	X

Notes: The table reports logistic regression coefficients (with household-clustered standard errors in parentheses) from models predicting whether a child reports a "don't know" response on a given question. The "Directional" model uses the parent's position on that issue, with higher values indicating conservative responses. The "Extremity" model uses the parent's absolute distance from the midpoint, with larger values indicating more extreme positions.

Table C3: Predicting Extremity Among Children

	Baseline	Adjusted
Political Interest	0.03	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Political Knowledge	0.02	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age		-0.02
		(0.01)
Gender: Girl		-0.02
		(0.02)
Gender: Something Else		0.15
		(0.05)
Race: Black		0.04
		(0.04)
Race: Hispanic		0.01
		(0.04)
Race: Asian		-0.08
		(0.04)
Race: Other		0.08
		(0.04)
Race: Don't Know		-0.00
		(0.04)
Party ID: Independent		-0.13
		(0.03)
Party ID: Republican		-0.07
		(0.03)
Party ID: Something Else		-0.01
		(0.07)
Party ID: Don't Know		-0.14
		(0.03)
N	2242	2242
Adjusted R2	0.088	0.123
Item FEs	X	X

Notes: The table reports regression coefficients (with household cluster standard errors in parentheses) from models predicting the extremity of responses among children, defined as the absolute distance from the midpoint. Interest in politics is measured as the average of self-reported interest in politics and news following, while political knowledge is measured as the sum of correct responses to 5 knowledge questions. Both variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a SD of 1.

Table C4: Predicting Item-Level Extremity Among Children

	Directional	Extremity
Parental Position	-0.05	
	(0.04)	
Parental Extremity		0.12
		(0.03)
N	1926	1926
Adjusted R2	0.208	0.217
Household FEs	X	X
Item FEs	X	X

Notes: The table reports regression coefficients (with household-clustered standard errors in parentheses) from models predicting the extremity of child responses, defined as the absolute distance from the midpoint. The "Directional" model uses the parent's position on that issue, with higher values indicating conservative responses. The "Extremity" model uses the parent's absolute distance from the midpoint, with larger values indicating more extreme positions.

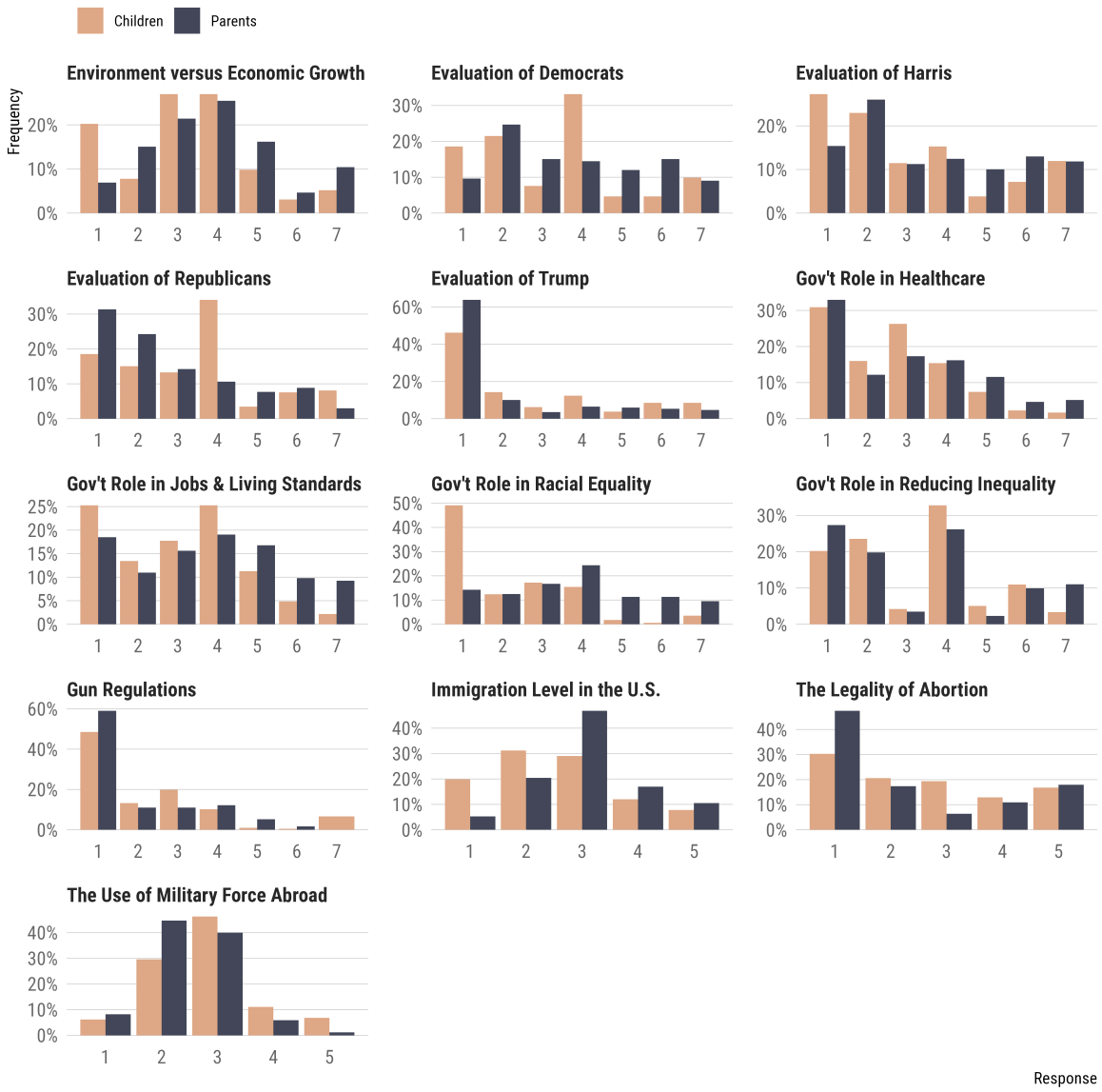

Figure C1: Item-Level Response Distributions Among Children and Parents

Notes: The figure presents the distribution of responses for each of the 13 issues, separately for children (N = 228) and parents (N = 173). Bars represent the proportion of respondents selecting each response option, computed within each sample (excluding DK responses). Items are coded such that higher responses represent conservative positions.

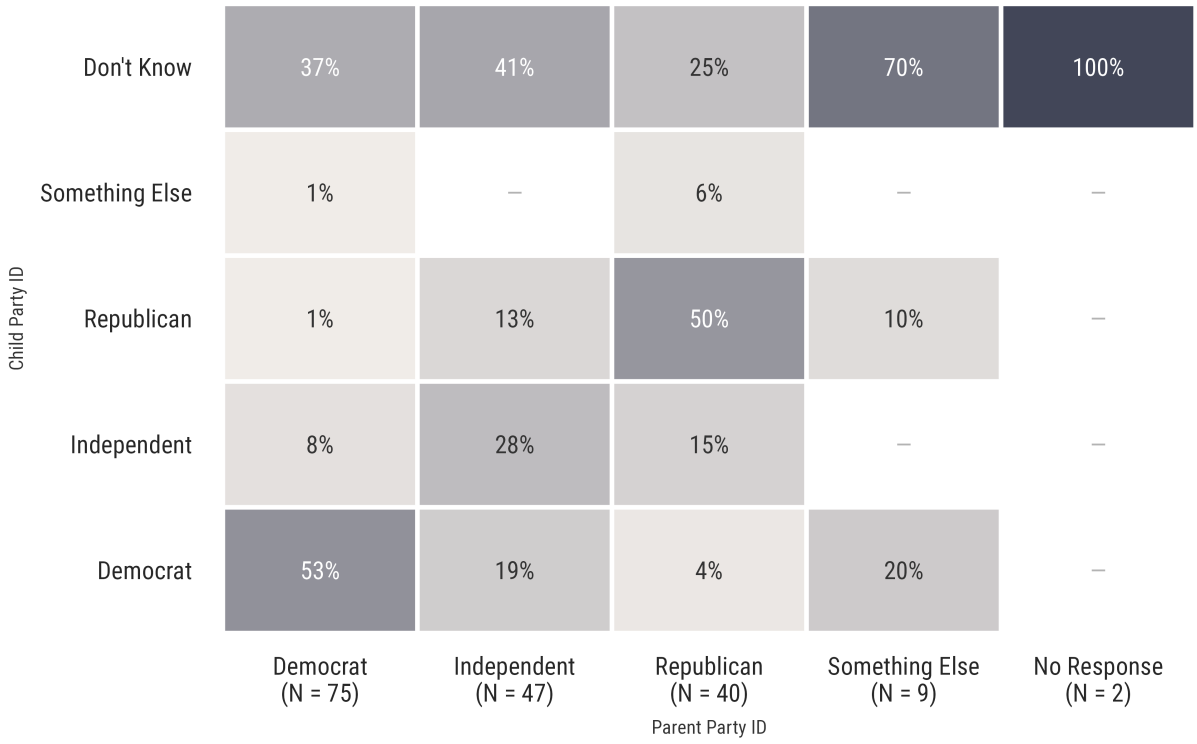

Figure C2: Partisan Identity Among Parents and Children

Notes: The figure presents the distribution of partisan identification across parents and children (N = 196), with parent identification on the horizontal axis and child identification on the vertical axis. Cell values report the share of children in each party category, conditional on the parent's party identification (that is, column percentages sum to 100%).

	Children	Parents	ANES
Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	0.50	0.60	0.66
Gun Regulations	0.71	0.73	0.61
Environment versus Economic Growth	0.45	0.43	0.55
Gov't Role in Healthcare	0.56	0.59	0.55
Gov't Role in Racial Equality	0.68	0.49	0.50
Evaluation of Democrats	0.50	0.54	0.50
Evaluation of Harris	0.64	0.60	0.49
Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	0.49	0.52	0.49
The Legality of Abortion	0.64	0.79	0.44
Evaluation of Republicans	0.47	0.64	0.43
Evaluation of Trump	0.73	0.82	0.40
Immigration Level in the U.S.	0.49	0.35	0.40
The Use of Military Force Abroad	0.33	0.35	0.32

Figure C3: Levels of Extremity Across Issues and Groups

Notes: The figure presents the average levels of "extremity" in each issue across groups, defined as the absolute distance from the midpoint. The extremity score for each item is 0–1 normalized.

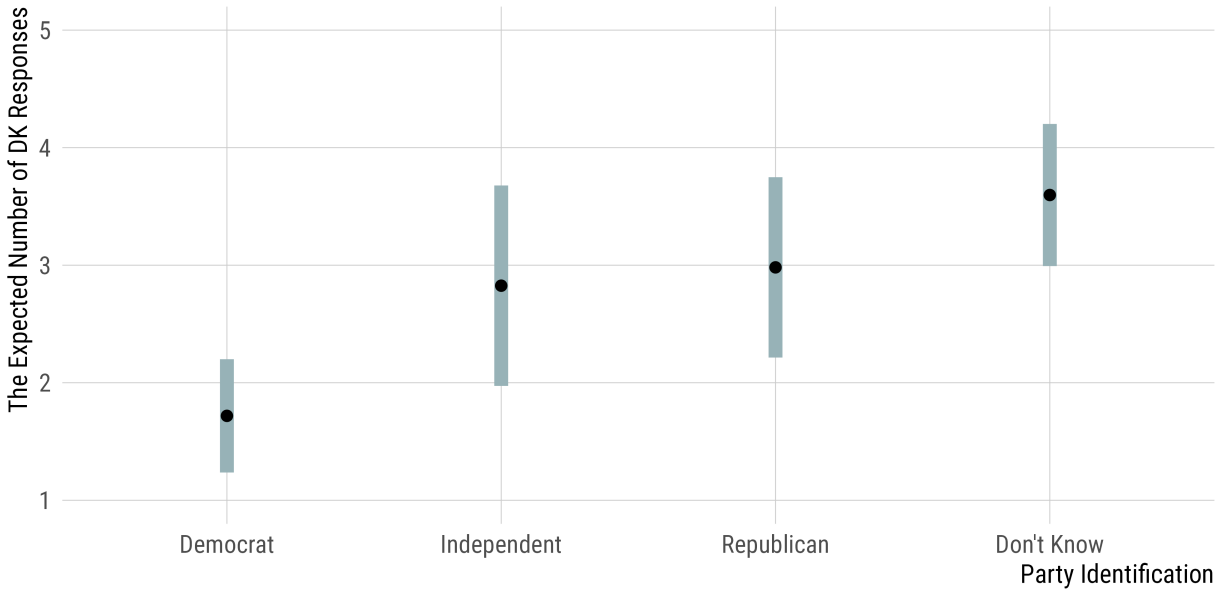

Figure C4: Predicted Number of Don't Know Responses Among Children by Party

Notes: The figure presents the predicted number of Don't Know responses by party identification, excluding "Something Else," using the adjusted model presented in Table C1. 95% confidence intervals with robust standard errors.

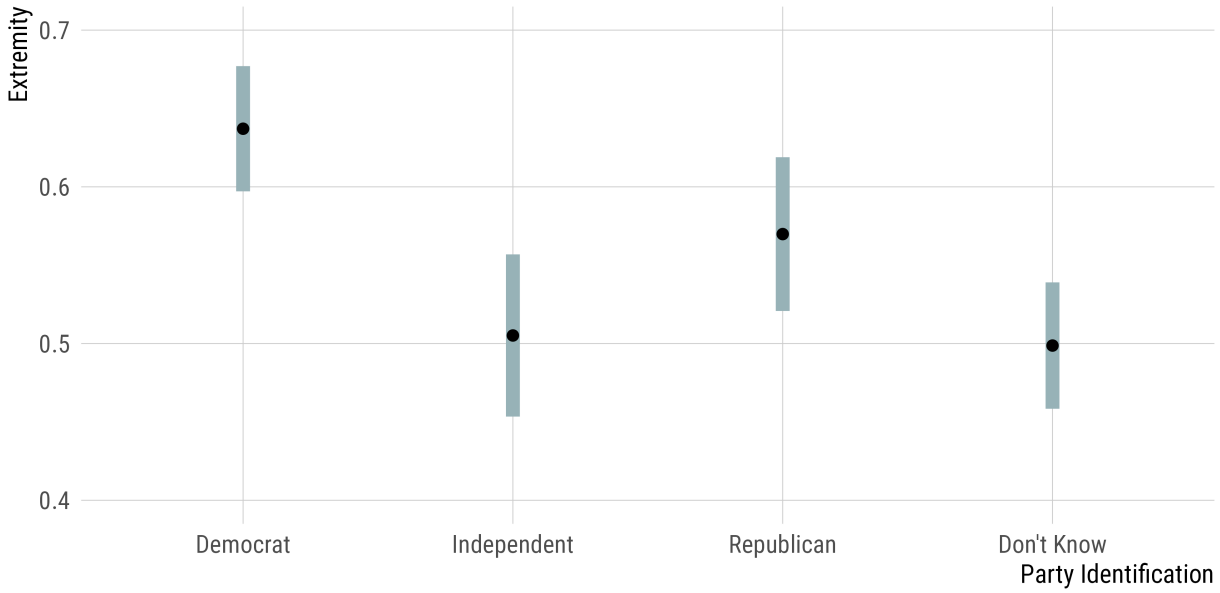

Figure C5: Predicted Levels of Extremity Among Children by Party

Notes: The figure presents the predicted levels of "extremity" by party identification, excluding "Something Else," using the adjusted model presented in Table C3. 95% confidence intervals with cluster-robust standard errors.

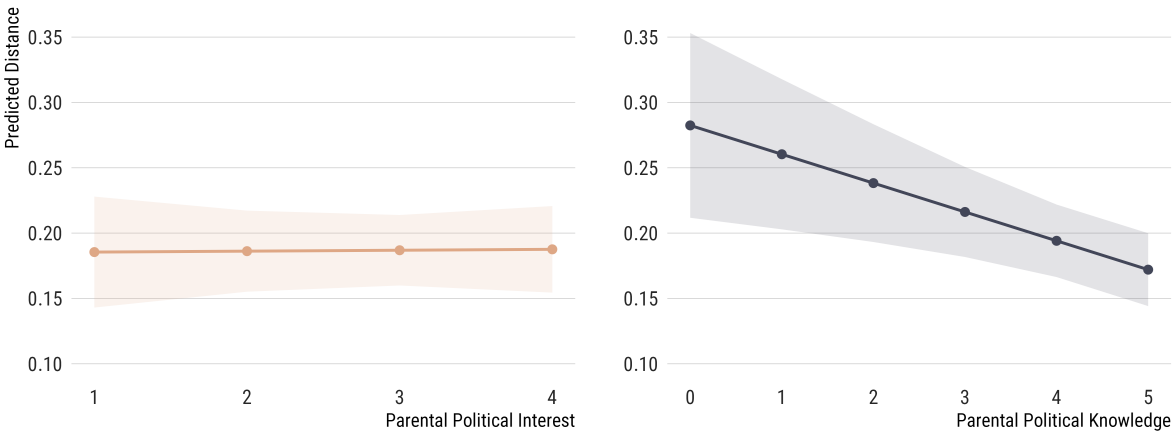

Figure C6: Parent-Child Correspondence by Parental Political Engagement

Notes: The figure presents the predicted levels of parent-child correspondence on issues, measured as the absolute difference between parent response and child response, as a function of parental political interest (measured as self-reported interest) and parental political knowledge (measured as the sum of correct responses to 5 knowledge questions). OLS estimates with item fixed effects, 95% confidence intervals, and cluster-robust standard errors.

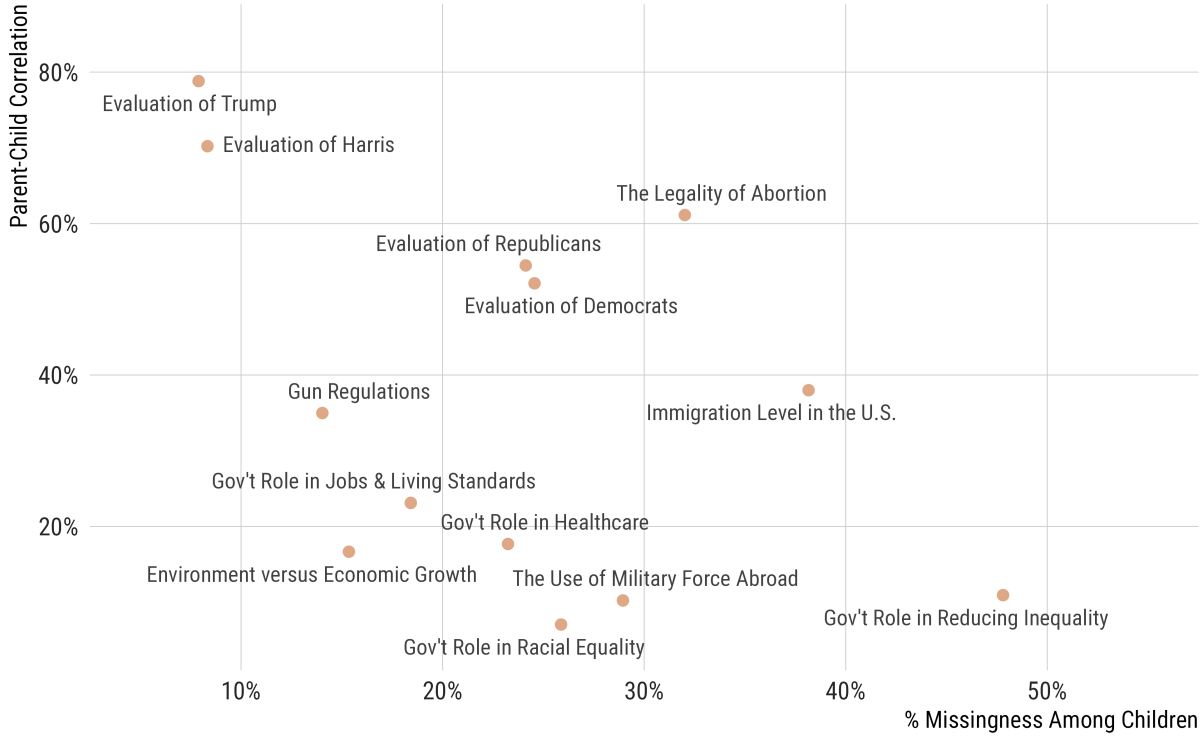

Figure C7: Missingness Among Children and Parent-Child Correlations

Notes: The figure presents the percent missingness among children and Spearman correlations between child responses and parent responses across issue positions and evaluations.

Online Appendix D: Supplemental Tables from Analyses of Preference Structure

D.1. Confirmatory Factor Analyses

This section presents fit statistics and similarity measures for the analyses of preference. Table D1 presents CFA fit statistics across factor solutions, separately for each sample. Table D2 quantifies the similarity of correlation structures and factor loadings across pairs of samples.

Table D1: CFA Fit Statistics by Sample and Number of Factors

Model	Group	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	BIC
1-Factor	ANES	0.878	0.854	0.113	0.051	-185.6
2-Factor	ANES	0.921	0.903	0.092	0.041	-423.7
3-Factor	ANES	0.931	0.914	0.087	0.033	-480.2
1-Factor	Children	0.767	0.720	0.130	0.084	374.8
2-Factor	Children	0.822	0.783	0.114	0.077	336.7
3-Factor	Children	0.825	0.779	0.115	0.074	345.6
1-Factor	Parents	0.875	0.850	0.123	0.063	-82.6
2-Factor	Parents	0.904	0.883	0.109	0.065	-116.9
3-Factor	Parents	0.904	0.880	0.110	0.064	-109.9

Notes: The table reports fit statistics for the sample confirmatory factor analyses. Models are estimated by maximum likelihood with robust standard errors, and use full-information maximum likelihood for missing data. ANES estimates additionally incorporate FTF sampling weights.

Table D2: Similarity of Correlation Structure and Factor Loadings Across Samples

Question	Comparison	r	Distance
Correlation Structure	Children - Parents	0.63	0.29
Correlation Structure	Children - ANES	0.48	0.25
Correlation Structure	Parents - ANES	0.71	0.13
Factor Loadings	Children - Parents	0.77	0.29
Factor Loadings	Children - ANES	0.77	0.25
Factor Loadings	Parents - ANES	0.85	0.12

Notes: The table reports measures of similarity between pairs of samples. The column *r* reports the Pearson correlations across samples. Distance reports the root mean squared difference.

D.2. Structural Equation Models for Candidate and Party Evaluations

Below, we also report fit statistics and coefficients for the structural equation models used to predict political evaluations from issue positions. Table D3 presents fit statistics, while Table D4 reports the standardized coefficient estimates from the separate-equation specification.

Table D3: SEM Fit Statistics

Sample	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Children	0.845	0.776	0.141	0.040
Parents	0.904	0.861	0.115	0.035
ANES	0.905	0.862	0.120	0.024

Notes: The table reports fit statistics for the latent-evaluation SEM, where a single latent evaluation factor measured by the four evaluation items is regressed on the nine issue positions. Models are estimated by full-information maximum likelihood for missing data. ANES estimates incorporate FTF sampling weights.

Table D4: Standardized Coefficients from SEMs

Evaluation	Item	Children	Parents	ANES
Democrats	The Legality of Abortion	0.38	0.40	0.23
Democrats	Gov't Role in Racial Equality	0.03	0.15	0.15
Democrats	Environment versus Economic Growth	-0.11	0.02	0.10
Democrats	Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	0.02	0.10	0.08
Democrats	Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	-0.11	0.15	0.09
Democrats	Gun Regulations	0.12	0.18	0.22
Democrats	Immigration Level in the U.S.	0.31	0.02	0.02
Democrats	Gov't Role in Healthcare	0.12	0.00	0.04
Democrats	The Use of Military Force Abroad	-0.10	-0.05	-0.06
Harris	The Legality of Abortion	0.43	0.38	0.29
Harris	Gov't Role in Racial Equality	-0.02	0.16	0.12
Harris	Environment versus Economic Growth	-0.02	0.08	0.07
Harris	Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	-0.02	0.03	0.10
Harris	Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	-0.11	0.14	0.13
Harris	Gun Regulations	0.31	0.22	0.23
Harris	Immigration Level in the U.S.	0.24	0.04	0.04
Harris	Gov't Role in Healthcare	0.15	0.07	0.07
Harris	The Use of Military Force Abroad	0.04	0.00	-0.01
Republicans	The Legality of Abortion	0.25	0.21	0.30
Republicans	Gov't Role in Racial Equality	0.00	0.22	0.15
Republicans	Environment versus Economic Growth	-0.04	0.17	0.14
Republicans	Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	0.09	-0.01	-0.00

(*continued*)

Evaluation	Item	Children	Parents	ANES
Republicans	Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	-0.23	0.14	0.01
Republicans	Gun Regulations	0.24	0.02	0.13
Republicans	Immigration Level in the U.S.	0.36	0.08	0.14
Republicans	Gov't Role in Healthcare	0.12	0.10	0.10
Republicans	The Use of Military Force Abroad	-0.04	0.13	0.04
Trump	The Legality of Abortion	0.29	0.30	0.28
Trump	Gov't Role in Racial Equality	0.04	0.23	0.22
Trump	Environment versus Economic Growth	0.08	0.19	0.13
Trump	Gov't Role in Jobs & Living Standards	0.04	-0.23	0.00
Trump	Gov't Role in Reducing Inequality	-0.12	0.12	0.07
Trump	Gun Regulations	0.33	0.22	0.23
Trump	Immigration Level in the U.S.	0.25	0.09	0.08
Trump	Gov't Role in Healthcare	0.18	0.09	0.05
Trump	The Use of Military Force Abroad	0.05	0.10	0.05

Notes: The table reports standardized coefficients from the structural equation models, where each of the four evaluation items is regressed on the nine issue positions. ANES estimates incorporate FTF sampling weights.

References

American National Election Studies. 2025. "ANES 2024 Time Series Study, Full Release." August 8, 2025 Version.