

Existence and perception of intergenerational differences in welfare state attitudes

[Draft version]

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Paper prepared for the European Population Conference 2016 (Mainz, Germany)

Topic: Ageing and Intergenerational Relations

Section 75: Economic and social consequences of population ageing

ABSTRACT

Much evidence substantiates that the German population is both ageing and decreasing: The ratio of young versus old has fallen considerably during the last decades. The consequences of population ageing are manifold. It is often speculated that this process might lead to a generational conflict. This conflict is theorized to be rooted in age-specific interests and demands, particularly with regard to preferred government action in age-sensitive welfare state policies. A common approach to analyse generational conflict consists of contrasting the attitudes of the old and the young. However, this approach takes for granted that objective differences in views are congruent with how problems are perceived subjectively by each group, which is an overly simplistic assumption. This study is the first to problematize this assumption by investigating the relation between the existence and the perception of intergenerational differences in welfare state preferences. One main finding is that differences in welfare state preferences between young and old are surprisingly small, while the subjective perception that young and old differ from each other substantially is widespread. This study broadens the prevailing view on generational conflict by offering a more nuanced understanding of generational dissimilarities in an ageing society.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic change is challenging many countries. Germany is affected by this process in particular, mainly because trends that contribute to population ageing and shrinking started earlier than in most other countries. Almost all societal areas are affected by population ageing. Current debates in Germany and elsewhere revolve around various topics such as the pension system, job market, care in old age, work-(family)life-balance, the development of the infrastructure in rural areas, the political power of the old and so forth. The challenge is to adapt the political system, social security systems, and society to these changing conditions. The needs and interests of the growing older population have to be addressed while at the same time it has to be ensured that the demands of the younger population do not fall behind. It is often hypothesised that these population developments might lead to a new age cleavage due to differing interests and priorities.

Since the 1980s the term generational conflict is used to describe one possible consequence of population ageing in Germany. It is driven by the popular assumption that young and old differ in which policy areas they demand the state to take responsibility for and the preferred level of benefits in these various policy areas. Thus, at the core of the generational conflict are age-specific differences in the preferences for welfare state policies that are age-sensitive, i.e. that mainly target either the young or the old.¹ The majority of studies that analyse generational differences by contrasting age-specific welfare state preferences conclude that there are no strong indications of a generational conflict in Germany (yet). However, this approach does not consider that the *perception* of age-specific differences might differ from actual reality. Taking into account the perception of differences might change the assessment of and the view on generational conflict. What remains unclear in studies that analyse intergenerational differences on the level of pure existence is the relation of existence and perception of these differences. To assess whether existence and perception are in accordance with each other or not offers new insights into the nature of generational conflict.

For the first time this study addresses both sides of the coin to analyse age-specific differences and to shed light on a so far widely neglected aspect in studying intergenerational differences. Thus, it contributes to a better understanding of intergenerational differences. On the basis of German survey data², welfare state attitudes (desired government responsibility and desired government

¹ Welfare state attitudes are particularly relevant because they are linked to the acceptance and persistence of a democratic regime (e.g. Almond/Verba 1963: 15-17; Easton 1965).

² The data (N=3910) was collected in a telephone survey of the German population (aged ≥ 18 yrs.) between January and September 2011, the sampling frame consisted of all households in Germany with a landline. Younger (18-35 years) and older (≥ 60 years) people were oversampled due to main research interests. We acknowledge the Volkswagen Foundation for funding this research within the project "Consequences of Demographic Change on Political Attitudes and Political Behaviour in Germany", conducted at the University of Mannheim/Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES).

benefits) towards different policies (financial security in old age, care in old age, family policy, education policy) are analysed. This study concludes that differences in welfare state preferences between young and old are surprisingly small on the level of *existence* while the *perception* that young and old do differ is widespread. Possible reasons for this mismatch are manifold and have at present not been addressed systematically in academic work. In turn, the perception of age-specific differences might have various consequences that are discussed in the outlook.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF POPULATION AGEING IN GERMANY

Germany's population has been ageing for some decades now. Since the 1970s the fertility rate hovers around 1.4 children per woman – which is clearly under the replacement level of 2.1 – while the average life expectancy has been on the rise for more than 100 years. At the same time the net migration rate is too low to halt or even reverse the initiated process. In an international comparison, ageing has already progressed considerably in Germany. In 2014, only 18 per cent of the German population were younger than 20 – a drop of 11 percentage points compared to 40 years ago. The development of the figures for the older population is completely different: In 2014 27 per cent of the German population were older than 59 years, a rise of 7 percentage points compared to 1974. Thus, today the number of seniors exceeds that of the youngsters. Population forecasts leave no doubt that the process of ageing and shrinking will continue for coming decades.³

GENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN GERMANY AND THE ROLE OF AGE

As pointed out in the introduction, population ageing may have several different consequences. Beginning in the 1980s generational conflict received public attention and has done so ever since with varying degrees of intensity. Indications for this public awareness are manifold, e.g., several books were published that caused quite a stir in public (e.g., Gronemeyer 1989, 2004; Klöckner 2003; Mohl 1993; Schirmacher 2004), various political talk shows were dedicated to this topic, in 2003 the federal chairman of the youth organisation of the Conservative party (CDU) suggested restraining implantations of artificial hip joints for very old seniors, and in 2008 the former German president Roman Herzog warned of an emerging “democracy of pensioners”. Even though clearly not everyone has noticed each publication and each statement it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the

³ For an overview of demographic change in Germany half a century back and forward see Konzelmann et al. (2014: 28-42).

German population has in one way or the other taken note of intergenerational issues and is more or less familiar with the core assumptions of an intergenerational conflict.

Briefly, the origin of the supposed intergenerational conflict in the German welfare state can be described as follows: Increasing shares of the older population lead to an increasing disadvantageous situation for younger and middle-aged population segments as they have to finance a growing number of pensioners while their own population shares drop. This development is expected to lead to rising pension contribution rates while the average pension level will decrease. As a consequence, younger population segments face a wider gap between their own contributions and payments than the old.

But not only is the pension system assumed to malfunction increasingly due to population ageing, but the social security system as a whole which is heavily based on the pay-as-you-system. In line with these concerns it is often presumed that young and old consider different policies to be relevant. More precisely, the young are supposed to favour increasing government action in policies that address their current interests, e.g., supporting families or the educational system, and in contrast ascribe somewhat lower importance to rising pension rates (although this topic clearly is not generally unimportant to them). The old, instead, are expected to demand increasing or at least stable pension payments to ensure their way of living. Since their population share is on the rise, it is often assumed that they might get into a more powerful position to have their voice heard while the interests of the young might, in the worst case, fall behind.⁴

Taken together, the notion of a generational conflict in the welfare state context is theorized to be rooted in age-specific interests and demands in an egocentric manner, particularly with regard to preferred government action in age-sensitive welfare state policies (see among others Ponza et al. 1988; Sinn/Uebelmesser 2002: 154; Blekesaune/Quadagno 2003; Wilkoszewski 2008; Goerres/Tepe 2010). Greater differences are assumed in evaluating policies focusing on the interests of the young (Bonoli/Häusermann 2009: 215). This is mainly because the likelihood of receiving various welfare state benefits changes over the life-cycle. Thus, younger people are probably in favour of expanding programs from which they can profit now or in the future. In contrast, older people are supposedly less likely to promote policies addressing the interests of the younger population from which they cannot profit directly (anymore); they are therefore expected to prefer expanding policies serving primarily their own needs.⁵

⁴ This topic is also at the core of an ongoing debate about ageing electorates and age-specific voting patterns. For more information about how demographic change affected election results (turnout and party vote) in the past and how it might affect upcoming Federal elections see Konzelmann et al. (2014).

⁵ Admittedly, this self-interest approach that corresponds to the tenets of rational utility maximization offers a somewhat one-sided view since people's preferences are most probably not predominantly driven by egoistic interests. E.g., intergenerational ties and associated feelings of solidarity have to be taken into account as well. Several studies have shown that intergenerational ties are generally evaluated positively (Blome et al. 2008: 33-35; Kohli 2009). These ties are important in several ways. Crucial for the topic at hand is that they are capable of mitigating intergenerational tensions: (almost) every

Interpreting age as expressing certain ego-centred interests (self-interest hypothesis) is only one way. Age is often regarded as a proxy for several characteristics we do not have (measurable) information about. For example, age can also be viewed as an indicator of certain values.⁶ In that case, assumptions about age-specific welfare state preferences do vary somewhat from the assumptions based on interpreting age first and foremost as reflecting interests. Most relevant for the topic at hand is that viewing age as an expression of values implies that differentiating between various policies becomes obsolete. The expectations are in that case rather straightforward (i.e. the age orientation of a policy does not matter): either the young ask more of the welfare state (because they are more accustomed to higher level of welfare state activity) or the old demand more government action (because they gained more welfare state-related experiences and have most probably seen times of excessive expansion of welfare state benefits). Taken together, it should have become clear, that age can serve as a proxy either for interest and/or for values; a combination of both factors seems most likely.⁷ Empirical analyses promise to gain hints to which motive does play a more important role.

Within the last years a number of researchers investigated (the potential for) intergenerational conflict in the German welfare state (e.g., Rinne/Wagner 1995; Falter/Gehring 1998; Kohli et al. 1999; Dallinger 2002; Ullrich 2006; Blome et al. 2008: 315-336; Goerres/Tepe 2010; Wilkoszewski 2010). As already pointed out, this is mostly done by comparing age-specific welfare state attitudes. The predominant result is that there is no strong evidence for a clash of generations (as yet), a reassuring finding, one could say. However, we claim that this conclusion is based on incomplete assumptions about the approach to the research object.

We argue that the analytical perspective of this common approach is constrained as it overlooks that the *perception* of age-specific differences might differ from actual reality. In other words, what remains an open question in current research is the relation of existence and perception of differences.

young adult has older relatives s/he cares about and hence, wants them to be taken good care of in old age. On the other hand, a large fraction of the elderly has offspring and hence an interest in expanding policies benefitting mainly the young. Some studies lend empirical support to the notion that having kids or not affect people's welfare state preferences in young policies in the sense that these policies are more relevant for (grand)parents (Ullrich 2008: 187; Wilkoszewski 2009, 2010). Thus, extending the self-interest assumption by including intergenerational bonds is theoretically and empirically logical.

⁶ The division of determinants of welfare state orientations into interest and value orientations is very common in research on welfare state attitudes (e.g., Hasenfeld/Rafferty 1989; Blekesaune/Quadagno 2003; Jæger 2006).

⁷ The notion of age reflecting interests and values that influence welfare state preferences can be seen in association with the concept of age and cohort effects (Edlund 1999: 355, more general about age and cohort effects see Glenn 1976; Hage-naars 1990: 317-210). Age effects are supposed to vary during the life-cycle since interests and demands are adapted to various stages in life such as, e.g., leaving parental home, entering the job market, starting a family, retiring, etc. Cohort effects on the other hand, are supposed to be rather stable once they are developed after the formative phase. In that perspective, individuals are seen as being influenced by the circumstances under which they were politically socialized. Both effects come into play when analysing attitudes in the course of time. Also, in the welfare state context, both individual age and cohort membership play a role: individual age is crucial when it comes to the welfare state benefits one can claim. Cohort membership is crucial with regard to the specific regulations that apply to a certain person at a certain point in time. Since these regulations are subject to change it makes a difference, e.g., whether a person was born in the 1910s or in the 1970s when it comes to the actual/expected pension level. As far as we can tell the pension level for young people of today (and soon-to-be pensioners) is going to be clearly below that of the current senior.

Considering both aspects promises deeper insights into the nature of intergenerational disagreement. It might even change our current knowledge and thus our view on generational conflict. Tackling the issue whether actual and perceived reality are in accordance with each other or not is a promising path that shall be taken here. What is more, many studies focus on examining attitudes towards only one policy area. Given the already mentioned expectation that age-specific differences might differ according to the age orientation of policies, it is obvious that attitudes towards different policies should be compared whenever possible to come up with conclusions on more solid grounds.

ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF EXISTENCE AND PERCEPTION OF DIFFERENCES

Why exactly do we think it is necessary to broaden the current view on generational dispute by investigating the relationship between actual and perceived reality? The decisive factor is, that we see a need to examine whether both dimensions of reality are in accordance with each other, mainly because: it is perfectly possible that existing differences, as identified by present analyses, are at the same time perceived by the public and vice versa (a notion which seems to be implicitly accepted by many researchers and the media). However, this congruence cannot be taken for granted, because the existence and perception of differences might also be imbalanced. More precisely, it might well be the case that differences do exist, but are for various reasons not perceived (or not perceived as conflicting) by the public. Or the other way around: Similarities in welfare state preferences do prevail, but the perception of young-old differences is nonetheless widely spread. Thus, to better understand intergenerational conflicting tendencies in context of the welfare state, it is necessary to take both perspectives into consideration; a match or mismatch between actual and perceived reality can be assessed only in this way (Fuller/Myers 1941a, 1941b; Deutsch 1976: 18f. and Groenemeyer 2012: 59 with regard to social conflicts in general and Dallinger 2002: 679 with regard to a generational conflict in particular).

Furthermore, and in line with a constructivist approach, we consider perceived reality as the driving force that matters for individual opinions and actions rather than actual reality as measured by differences on an objective level. From this follows that perception can be regarded as a necessary (but not necessarily sufficient) condition for the emergence of an intergenerational dispute. It might theoretically even be the case that perceived differences lead to a manifest conflict in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Deutsch 1976: 21f.; Schlesinger/Kronebusch 1994: 155). However, it should not be overlooked that this is not meant in a deterministic way: additional factors have to be taken into account to explain why perceived differences lead to a conflict in one case but not in the other.

The immense relevance of individual perception clearly is another justification for taking perception into consideration when talking about inter-generational issues.

Based on these explanations we argue that relating intergenerational differences on the level of their pure existence to conflicting tendencies is hasty. Given that overt possibility of a mismatch between actual and perceived reality, it is all the more astonishing that current insights are lacking. We only could find two studies that assess this relationship. In both studies indications of such a mismatch are detected in the sense that differences are perceived to be larger than they actually are (Lerner et al. 1975; Ullrich 2006).

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The focus of this paper is on analysing the relationship between the existence and the perception of intergenerational differences. To this end we first have a look at differences in welfare state attitudes by age. These attitudes are usually conceptualized as consisting of different dimensions (see, e.g., Andreß/Heien 2001: 338f.). We concentrate on the first dimension, the goals or functions of the welfare state, which is commonly further divided into extensity (extent of government responsibility for providing social security) and intensity (level of welfare state benefits, given the state is held to be responsible).⁸ To assess whether age differences vary with the focus of policies, we have a look at two policies targeting the needs of the old (financial security and care in old age), referred to in the following as “old policies”, and two policies benefitting mainly the young (family and education policy), which we call “young policies”. Next, we examine the perception of intergenerational differences. Here, we employ three items: One measures the perception of current old-young differences, the other two concern developments in the coming decades: People were asked whether they expect intergenerational conflict to arise in general as well as with respect to pensions.⁹

⁸ The second dimension contains the means to reach the goals, the third dimension is about (un)intended consequences of welfare state actions, and the fourth about the individual’s willingness to finance the welfare state via own contributions. Our data is best suited for analysing the goal dimension, which is also the one most theoretical and empirical research focuses on.

Question wording extensity: Please tell me to what extent the government should be responsible for these policy areas. Please tell me your opinion using a scale from 0 to 10, 0 meaning that the government should not be responsible at all and 10 that the government should completely be responsible. You can use the numbers in between to grade your opinion. Education/Financial security in old age/Families/Old-age care. Question wording intensity: Please tell me now whether you think that the government should spend much more money, more money, the same as now, less or much less money for these policy areas. Education/Financial security in old age/Families/ Old-age care.

⁹ Question wording current differences: In all societies there appear differences among various groups. I will name certain groups of people and then ask you to tell me whether you think the differences between these are very strong, strong, neither/nor, rather weak, or whether there are no differences at all – between young and old (battery of 7 items in total). Question wordings future conflicts: The next question is about developments in the coming decades. I will name certain situations and then ask you to tell me whether you think this situation is very/rather/maybe/rather not/not at all likely to occur – there will be a conflict between the old and the young; the young will not be willing to finance the pensions for the old any longer.

To find out more about the preferred level of welfare state activity and about differences due to age we present comparisons of means. For this purpose age is categorised in three groups: those between 18 and 35 years, people between 36 and 59 years and those 60 years or older. This categorisation is based on the concept of welfare generations (Leisering 2000), which differentiates welfare state losers from welfare state winners.¹⁰ The assignment of older (younger) citizens to the groups of welfare state winners (losers) is unambiguous. Middle-aged persons (between 36 and 59 years of age at the time of the questionnaire), however, cannot be classified precisely as winners or losers, but the majority probably belongs to the group of welfare state losers. It is assumed that they range in their attitudes between the other two age groups.

For both sets of variables, welfare state attitudes and conflict perceptions, we also run multivariate analyses to find out more about the determining factors, especially about age.¹¹ By applying these methods the effect of each of the determinants can be assessed more accurately. We first estimate standard OLS-regression models with robust standard errors. These models give information about the age effect controlled for several other possible determinants. Here, the age groups as introduced above are contrasted.¹²

For detailed findings on the age effect we additionally calculated path models and separate OLS-regression models (young vs. old). By employing path models, we take into account that age might not only have direct effects but also take indirect ways, i.e. influence welfare state orientations and conflict perceptions via other factors, which seems highly plausible. Path modelling enables us to estimate the total age effect, to decompose it into its direct and indirect components, to examine their interplay and to identify relevant mediator variables. Thus, path models give information about whether age effects as measured in standard OLS-regressions are under- or overestimated due to non-consideration of indirect effects (e.g., Bollen 1989: 50-52; King et al. 1994: 171f.). Furthermore, total age effects (defined as the sum of direct and indirect effect components) grab the influence of age more accurately than standard OLS-regressions do. Finally, separate regression models reveal whether old and young differ in their formation of attitudes/perceptions. To this end, we assess whether the differences between regression estimates of both age groups are statistically significant, which is different from ascertaining whether regression coefficients do vary from 0 within each age

Note that the items concerning the future measure conflict in the narrow sense (i.e. differences are perceived *and* rated as conflictory), while the first indicator might be regarded as a precursor (i.e. differences are perceived, but the rating is unclear). Finally note, that all items measure *perception*, not personal *involvement*. Perception can, but need not be accompanied by feelings of involvement (Delhey/Keck 2008: 344).

¹⁰ Leisering (2000) defines people born between 1925 and 1955 as winners of the welfare state development. Losers and winners in the welfare state context were first introduced by Thomson (1989) using the example of New Zealand. Note that differentiating between the terms “age group” (young and old) and “generation” (winners and losers in the context of welfare states) is essential in a time comparison. In contrast, in a cross-section analysis speaking about young and old or about losers and winners does not make a difference, because in this case each group consists of the same people.

¹¹ Lists of all indicators used in the analyses and their proposed effects are presented in Tables A-1 and A-2 in the appendix.

¹² We also checked for non-linear age effects, but found no substantial empirical evidence.

group. The latter approach is in itself interesting, but not suited for identifying age-specific determinants of welfare state orientations and conflict perceptions (Gelman/Stern 2006). The various multivariate analyses are means to differentiate age effects more nuanced than it is usually done. In the following, the results are not discussed in details, however, a brief summary as well as selected findings are presented in the appendix; detailed analyses are available upon request.

In a last step, we resume the initial question of the relation between existence and perception and provide possible reasons for the observed result. In the outlook we approach the conflict potential of the current situation and briefly provide possible scenarios of future developments in Germany.

FINDINGS

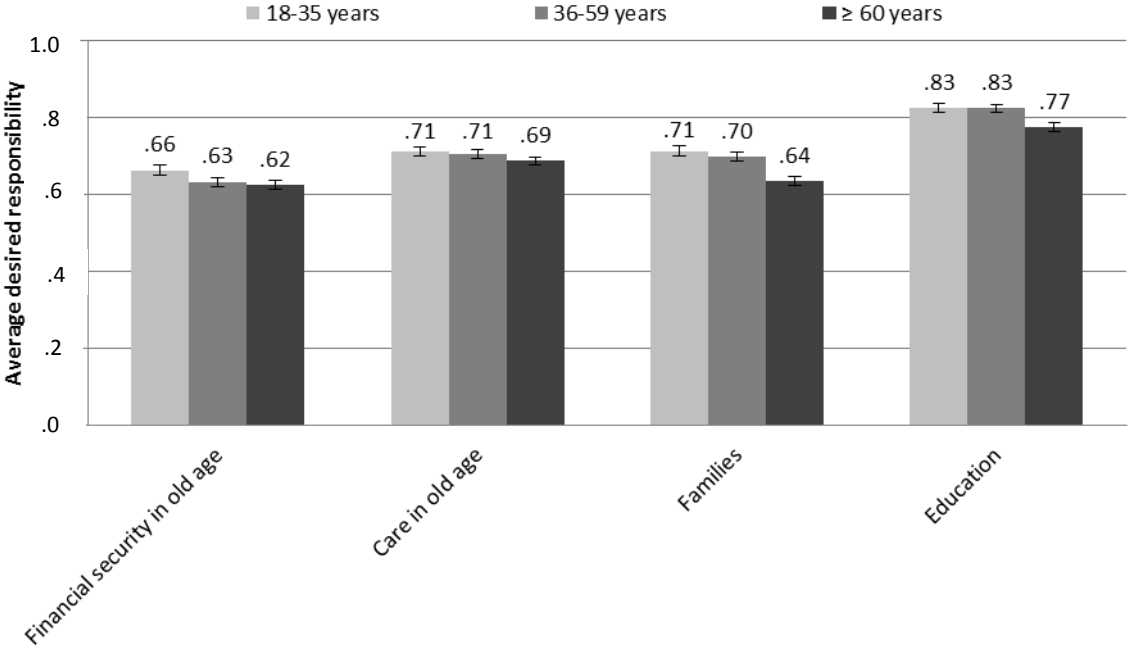
Figure 1 presents an overview of the average desired government responsibility in young and old policies by age. Overall, people expect the welfare state to take a high level of responsibility which is in line with previous findings for Germany (e.g., Roller 1992: 110-121; Ullrich 2008: 104-110; 116-120). Despite this fact, respondents do also differentiate between various fields of action, which is indicated by the non-overlapping confidence intervals. The preference order is as follows: Education ranks first, the family and the care sector are in the middle position, and comparably the lowest responsibility is demanded for securing the financial situation of the elderly. With regard to age differences we observe that the young argue for more government responsibility in all policy areas than the old; these differences are statistically significant. Middle-aged persons rank between the young and old or on the same level as either group. Interestingly, the preference order is identical for all age groups. However, although statistically significant age differences are observed, it is to say, that these are in absolute terms not tremendously large (a reason for small differences being statistically significant may be the high number of cases); the comparably largest difference (family policy) is less than one scale point.

With Figure 2 we turn to the preferred level of welfare state benefits. We arrive almost at the same conclusions as for government responsibility.¹³ Not surprisingly, many people prefer higher spending in all policy areas, whereas reductions are very unpopular (e.g., Roller 1992: 124-128; Ullrich 2008: 110-114). The preference order of the policies is the same as for government responsibility: education is seen as the policy area where most effort should be taken while financial security for the old is comparably regarded as the least important field of action. Turning to age differences, we find the responses of young and old people to differ in the same way than for government responsibility:

¹³ Even the values are almost the same (even though different scales were used). Correlation analyses clearly led evidence to the fact that both sets of indicators, that for responsibility and that for benefits, measure different aspects of welfare state attitudes (Table A-3 in the appendix; for similar findings see Roller 1998: 101; Andreß et al. 2001: 117).

younger citizens are – with the exception of care in old age where no differences are detected – more in favour of higher subsidies than older people with middle-aged people ranking in the middle. Note that these differences are in absolute terms again rather modest; the largest difference (education) is ¼ of a scale point.

Figure 1: Desired government responsibility in various policies by age



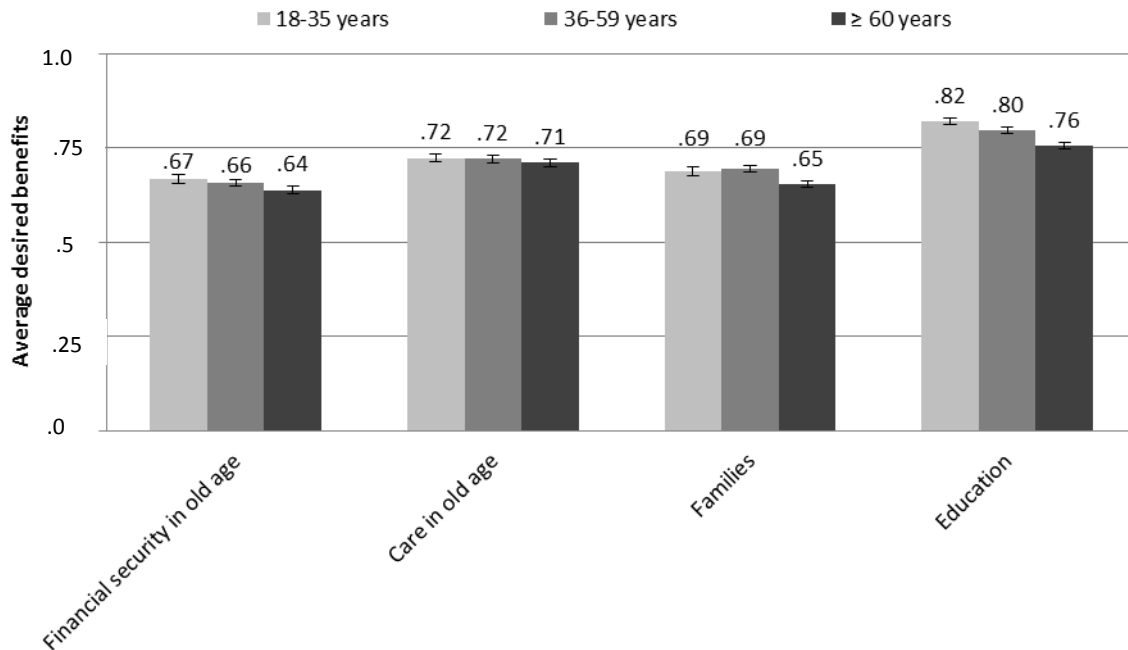
Note: Measured on an eleven-point scale from 0 (not at all responsible) to 1 (strongly responsible). Averages with 95% confidence intervals. Number of cases: 1094-1111 (18-35 yrs.), 1311-1318 (36-59 yrs.), 1411-1444 (≥ 60 yrs.). Weighted results.¹⁴

Altogether, it is to say, that, although some differences can be identified, these are not as tremendous as one might have thought in the light of public debates; similarities between the generations do prevail. Our expectation of larger age-specific differences in attitudes towards young policies is not met; the empirical evidence is rather weak which is not really surprising given that all observed age differences are rather small. There is a slight tendency for younger people to rate young policies somewhat more worthy of support than older people, however – and against our assumption – this pattern also holds true for financial security in old age. Furthermore, the education sector gets the most support from all age groups, i.e., even the old rate this policy more important than policies that rather benefit their current needs; this finding contradicts the assumption of interest-based age differences. The findings rather suggest age differences to be rooted in values: younger people demand somewhat higher government action than the old in (almost) all policy area. A possible

¹⁴ Due to different numbers of missing cases the number of cases varies in each age group. All variables were recoded to run between 0 and 1. All presented results are weighted in order to ensure representativeness.

explanation for this pattern is that younger citizens are more used to higher levels of welfare than older ones because welfare state services increased in the 20th century (Andreß et al. 2001: 41).

Figure 2: Desired government benefits in various policies by age



Note: Measured on a five-point scale from 0 (less spending) to 1 (more spending). Averages with 95% confidence intervals. Number of cases: 1068-1107 (18-35 yrs.), 1264-1292 (36-59 yrs.), 1375-1416 (≥ 60 yrs.). Weighted results.

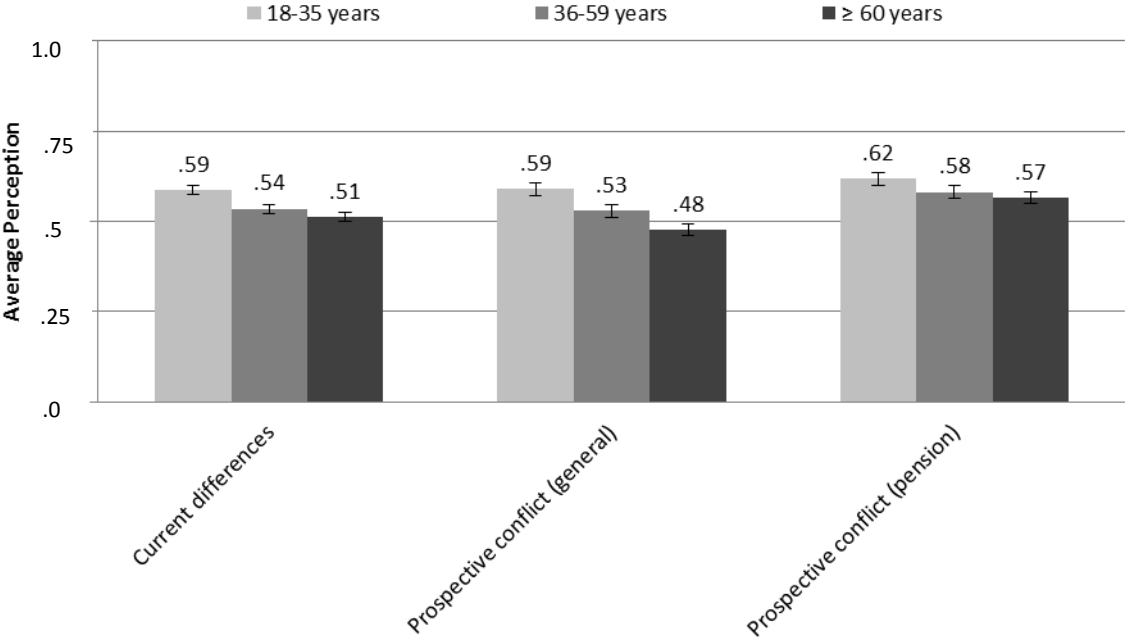
Figure 3 presents information about the perception of an intergenerational conflict today or in the future. The average perception of conflict is on a quite high level: with only one exception all means are above the mean of the scale.¹⁵ Regarding age differences, we find the young to experience a somewhat more conflict-ridden world than the old, while middle-aged person are in the middle position. What is more: the elderly differentiate somewhat more between the various scenarios than the young. The differences between the old and the young are throughout statistically significant. One possible explanation for the observed pattern is that older people are more experienced and hence more relaxed in view of potential social tensions than the young (Glatzer 1984: 220). Another reason might be that older people have a higher need for harmonious relationships and adjust their perception to this need.¹⁶ Finally, this result might be regarded as an indication of the young feeling simply more worried and more affected by future developments because it is them paying the toll,

¹⁵ However, compared with the perception of other social conflicts it is to say, that the perception of a generational conflicts is not tremendously high, but rather under-average (Figure A-1 in the appendix; for similar results for Germany see, e.g., Zagórski 2006: 7-10; Delhey/Keck 2008: 333).

¹⁶ This assumption stems from family research which shows that intergenerational relationships in families are evaluated more positive by older than by younger people (Steinbach/Kopp 2010). This finding can be transferred to intergenerational relationships on the societal level.

especially so in case of the pensions problem. But again, it should be noted that differences due to age are not tremendously large, although somewhat larger than in case of welfare state attitudes.

Figure 3: Perceived intergenerational attitudinal differences by age



Note: Measured on a five-point scale from 0 (no differences/conflict) to 1 (strong differences/conflict). Averages with 95% confidence intervals. Number of cases: 1105-1112 (18-35 yrs.), 1301-1311 (36-59 yrs.), 1428-1447 (≥ 60 yrs.). Weighted results.

BRINGING THE PIECES TOGETHER: THE RELATION OF EXISTENCE AND PERCEPTION OF DIFFERENCES

Finally, after analysing both aspects separately, we turn to the initial question by addressing the relationship between existence and perception of intergenerational differences in welfare state attitudes on a descriptive level. It should be recalled that different constellations of existence and perception are possible, which are related to certain degrees of conflict potential. It has been argued that the perception dimension is in the end more decisive for assessing the conflict potential. However, this is not to say, that attitudinal difference per se are irrelevant.

We observed younger and older citizens to differ rather slightly (if at all) in their welfare state preferences. This picture does not change much when applying different research methods (also see the summary on multivariate findings in the appendix). On the contrary, the perception that young and old do differ is markedly widespread, more than one might have assumed in light of only modest attitudinal differences. This indicates that perceptions lack an empirical basis in form of noticeable differences. We observe a mismatch of actual and perceived reality of attitudinal differences. The

situation can be best described with a term inferred from conflict theory, the “wrong conflict” (see Deutsch 1976: 21f.).¹⁷

Various reasons for such kind of a mismatch can be assumed. First and foremost, we suspect media effects to play an important role. In line with theories of media effects it can be hypothesized that the coverage as well as subliminal messages lead to people getting a somewhat imbalanced view of reality.¹⁸ In this respect, two aspects are worth mentioning: first, the growing attention for generation-related topics, especially in debates about reforming the German pension system (May 2010: 231f.). Also, the share of statements referring to *intergenerational* differences in these debates has risen while the share of arguments based on *intragenerational* differences has diminished (May 2010: 243f.). The media agenda might increasingly draw people’s attention towards intergenerational issues and thus lead to an overall growing relevance of the topic. Based on this, it can be assumed that people are getting more and more inclined to evaluate welfare-related topics against the background of intergenerational factors.

The second aspect worth mentioning is *how* generational issues are presented and discussed in the media. Biased media reporting (e.g. with regard to relevant problems, their origins and solutions) may lead to an one-sided view on intergenerational topics as well as on debates about reforming the welfare state. A study lends empirical support to the notion that the media coverage related to the pension system is very often characterised by crisis scenarios. Also claims about an emerging intergenerational conflict and about a “demographic threat” have increased (May 2010: 257f.).¹⁹ Some authors believe that demographic issues are exploited by the political elite and other actors to hide or even distract from certain issues. They believe that the discussion is simplified in an undue way and turned away from intragenerational issues such as a cleavage between the rich and poor for certain purposes. According to Klundt (2008) political debates are “biologized” by this proceeding while at the same time demographic issues are politicized (for the German case see also Schmähl 2004; Butterwegge 2005; Bosbach 2006).

¹⁷ However, due to available data it remains an open question whether respondents actually perceive *those* attitudinal differences that we examined with regard to actual reality. The reason for this is that the indicators do not fit perfectly. Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that people think of other differences than the ones that we assessed when they respond to the question whether they perceive conflicts. However, given similar results of a mismatch of both perspectives within an intergenerational context we are confident that more accurate indicators would yield a comparable finding.

¹⁸ For various media effects such as agenda-setting, priming and framing see, e.g., Brettschneider 2014: 641f.

¹⁹ For media frames in the U.S. see Holladay/Coombs 2004: 384-387.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

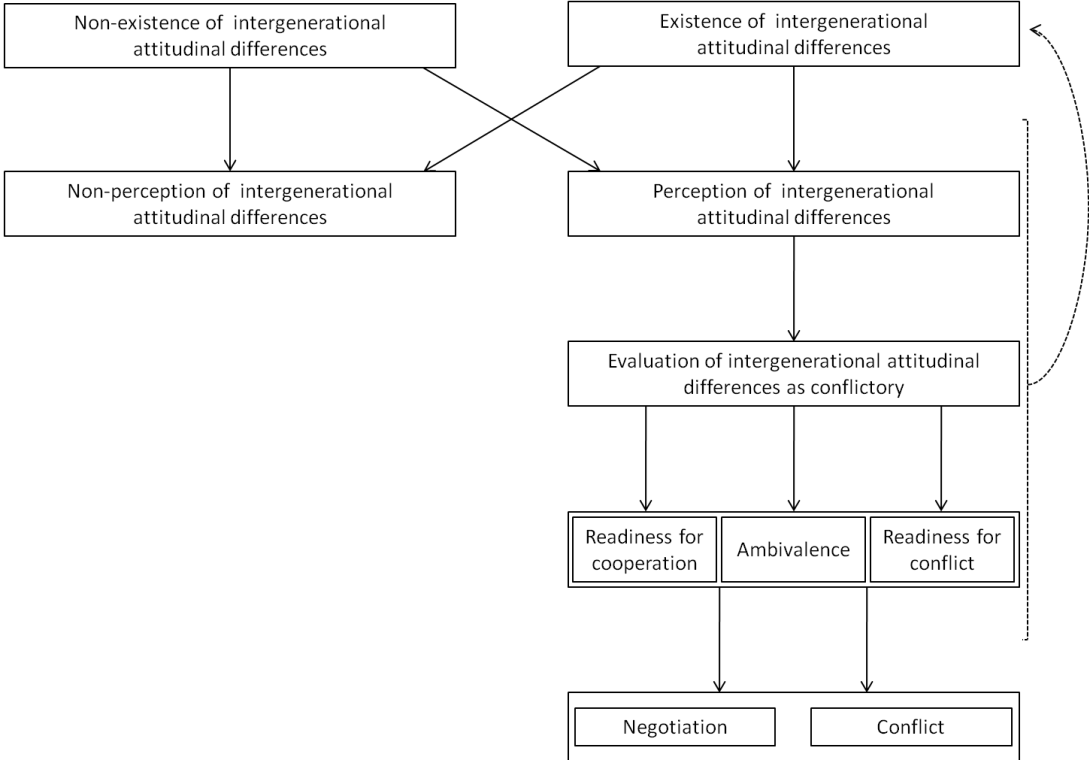
The focus of this paper was to demonstrate the necessity to pursue new paths in analysing intergenerational conflict. In so doing, this study explores new scientific territory, theoretically as well as empirically. It was argued that the current view on generational conflict is short-sighted and hinders a more comprehensive view on a complex issue. Recent studies concentrate on assessing the differences between generations in welfare state orientations on the level of pure existence without taking into account their perception. However, this approach takes for granted that objective differences in views are congruent with how situations are perceived subjectively, which is an overly simplistic assumption. Including both sides of the coin hence promises new insights. This study examined welfare state orientations in old and young policies. With few exceptions younger and older citizens resemble each other to a high degree. Using different methods of analysis, we found no clear patterns of age-specific differences indicating that welfare state orientations are mainly driven by egoistic motives. We observe younger people to generally favour a somewhat higher level of government action. Given these small differences it is all the more astonishing that the majority of people currently perceives intergenerational differences or expects them to arise in the future.

Taken together, we found a considerable mismatch between existence and perception of intergenerational differences. The widespread perception of differences has no empirical basis in the form of existing differences and can be best described as a “wrong conflict”. This result clearly merits reflection. So far, too little is known about the origins and the consequences of such a mismatch. Regarding the origins we assume that the media does play a decisive role in spreading a gloomy picture. Media reports might be the reason for why large parts of the population believe that differences do exist, even though actual facts are not dramatic. Furthermore, the identified determinants of conflict perception may serve as interesting starting points for further research on the origins of the mismatch.

Regarding the consequences of such a mismatch we are obviously restricted to more or less informed guesses. Since we regard perception of differences as more decisive than actual differences, one could argue that the potential of conflict is quite high. However, until today, despite widespread conflict perceptions we do not yet witness an open generational conflict. It is recalled that conflict perception can be regarded as a necessary condition for a high conflict potential, however, this potential does not inevitable materialize into a substantial (or even violent) conflict. The emergence of a conflict is a process that may depart from the perception of intergenerational differences and in which several factors come into play; the possible process of an emerging conflict is displayed in Figure 4. It illustrates that a conflict may arise with or without actual differences, what is more decisive is that differences are actually perceived. However, it is not sufficient just to

perceive differences; crucial is how these differences are evaluated in a next step. When differences are perceived as conflictory, different responses on the level of attitudes are imaginable, that may vary on a continuum between the extremes of readiness for cooperation and readiness for conflict. Individuals may also experience ambivalent feelings, e.g., on the one hand young people may feel that seniors have a right to claim pensions since they earned them via earlier contributions, on the other hand they may feel that they pay more than their fair share and are disadvantaged by current regulations.

Figure 4: Process of emergence of an intergenerational conflict



The last level in Figure 4 describes the level of action which again has to be viewed as a continuum between negotiation and conflict. Finally, it is to say that the whole process might remain on the level of attitudes and does not translate into visible actions (Juhász 2000: 184); an open conflict then is unlikely to happen. But if this process leads to a conflict, then at the latest attitudinal differences would be visible that did not exist at the beginning of the process in any case (this possibility is indicated by the recursive arrow in Figure 4). What should have become clear is that the consideration of additional factors is in any case necessary to better understand why perceived differences lead to a conflict in one case but not in the other.

Several reasons might hinder or slow down the emergence of a conflict, all of which broadly refer to the weak politicisation of the generation topic. To name a few: older people cannot be politically

mobilised sufficiently (Wolf/Kohli 1998: 165, more generally Olson 1968), intragenerational differences exceed intergenerational differences, making an one-sided age-related political agenda unlikely (May 2010: 275), the old cannot agree upon a common approach (Rhodebeck 1993: 344), the current situation is not yet that dramatic (Pruitt/Kim 2004: 21), intergenerational ties mitigate existing problems (Lynch 2006: 16f.). Furthermore, age may not be suitable to establish a cleavage since it is a non-stable trait – we all grow older and would like to be taken care of when we are old and frail, hence young people may be reluctant to start “age wars” (Rinne/Wagner 1995; Baltes 2004). Finally, *perceiving* a conflict is something different than feeling *involved* into one (Delhey/Keck 2008: 176).²⁰ These explanations are meant to give an idea about how an intergenerational conflict might develop and which factors could be relevant in this context; detailed analyses have to be subject of future studies.

Finally, we want to resume the aspect of a mismatch of actual and perceived reality. As we regard perception decisive for future developments one might be concerned in light of this finding. Contrary to that, it might also be reassuring that young and old do in fact not differ that much with regard to the goals of the welfare state. Of course, we should notice that age-specific differences in other dimensions of welfare state orientations are plausible and have also been reported: it was shown that the young are more worried with regard to their own old age (Bielenski et al. 1983; Dallinger 2002: 672; Ullrich 2008: 186) and that old and young differ in which reform options and operational measures in various policies they prefer (Boeri et al. 2001; Miettinen et al. 2008; Bonoli/Häusermann 2009; Wilkoszewski/Muth 2009; Fernández/Jaime-Castillo 2013), which is probably connected to associated costs. However, despite these disagreements, young and old share a view when it comes to the normative foundation of the welfare state: the government is held responsible to a similar high degree in young and old policies and benefit entitlements are not being questioned by any age group. This agreement might serve as a solid base for future efforts.²¹

Does that mean that the public is immune against public debates that every now and then even indulge in conflictory rhetoric? Given the widespread perception of conflict this should be denied. The explanations above leave no doubt that an intergenerational conflict is within the realms of possibility (bearing in mind that it takes more than detecting the existence and perception of attitudinal differences). But if there is the will to prevent such development, the findings presented here may serve as starting point. It might be soothing that the perception of conflict lacks a solid foundation. Deliberately communicating the fact that the old and young do in fact not differ that much might strengthen solidarity ties between generations, serve as “societal glue” and allow for

²⁰ This addresses the issue of salient age identities (Williams/Nussbaum 2001) and social identity theory (Tajfel/Turner 1986).

²¹ Furthermore, we should not forget that there have been more or less strong tensions between the generations frequently throughout history.

constructive debates about reforms of the welfare state. The mismatch can even be regarded as advantageous, because if differences would exist and be perceived, the situation would be much more complicated in the sense that these differences have to be dealt with. A mismatch opens up the option to dissolve the conflict potential by emphasising existing similarities. Here, another advantage of the approach becomes clear: if we would have assessed intergenerational dissimilarities by examining just one dimension, we would have drawn contrary conclusions: on the level of perception (existence) we would have considered a generational conflict rather likely (unlikely) and would have seen (no) need for action. A differentiated conclusion is only possible by bringing both dimensions together.

Altogether, this study broadens the prevailing view on intergenerational conflict by explicitly taking into account the perception aspect and thus offering a more realistic picture. As actual and perceived realities are not congruent, we conclude that it is not sufficient to analyse intergenerational differences on the level of existence. The results are meant to deepen the understanding of intergenerational dissimilarities in ageing societies by offering a more nuanced approach. Of course, to even better understand the background, the origins and the process of intergenerational conflict takes much more than the agenda of this study, which is a first step in that direction. The findings raise new questions und point to possible theoretical and empirical starting points for further research.

APPENDIX

Table A-1: Overview: indicators of determinants of welfare state attitudes and their proposed mechanisms

| | Desired government responsibility and desired government benefits | | |
|---|--|--------------|-------------------------------|
| | (1: high government responsibility/much higher benefits, 11-point/5-point scale) | | |
| | Number of categories | Old policies | Young policies |
| Age (reference category: 18-35 years) | | | |
| 36-59 years | 2 | o | o |
| ≥ 60 years (interest orientation) | 2 | o | - |
| ≥ 60 years (value orientation) | 2 | -/+ | -/+ |
| Sex | 2 | + | + |
| (1: Female) | | | |
| Kids | 2 | | + |
| (1: Yes) | | | |
| Region of Residence | 2 | + | + |
| (1: East Germany) | | | |
| Education | 3 | - | - (Families) + (Education) |
| (1: High) | | | |
| Employment Status | 2 | - | - |
| (1: Employed) | | | |
| Social Class (self-assigned) | 5 | - | - |
| (1: Upper Class) | | | |
| Own economic situation (current/prospective) | 5 | -/+ | -/+ |
| (1: Very bad) | | | |
| Fear about own old age (financially/medically) | 5 | -/+ | |
| (1: Very worried) | | | |
| General economic situation (current/prospective) | 5 | -/+ | -/+ |
| (1: Very bad) | | | |
| Dissatisfaction (per policy) | 5 | -/+ | -/+ |
| (1: Very dissatisfied) | | | |
| Political Trust | 25 | + | + |
| (1: Very high) | | | |
| Insufficient representation of the interests of the young | 5 | | + |
| (1: Not sufficiently represented) | | | |
| Insufficient representation of the interests of the old | 5 | + | |
| (1: Not sufficiently represented) | | | |
| Party identification | | | |
| (1: Identification with Party X, reference category: CDU/CSU) | | | |
| Social Democrats (SPD) | 2 | o | o |
| Liberals (FDP) | 2 | - | - |
| The Greens | 2 | + | + |
| The Left | 2 | + | + |
| No/other party | 2 | o | o |

Notes: All variables are coded from 0 to 1. o: No hypothesis formulated/no effect expected. In grey: not empirically tested. Political trust is an average index and combines the trust in the Bundestag, the politicians, the Federal Constitutional Court, and the Federal Government (each measured on a five-point scale, Cronbach's Alpha is .77). Employed: People working full-time, half-time, short-time or being on maternity/parental leave.

Table A-2: Overview: indicators of determinants of conflict perceptions and their proposed mechanisms

| | Number of categories | Perception of intergenerational attitudinal differences (1: Very strong differences today resp. conflict is very likely in the future, 5-point scale) |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Age (reference category: 18-35 years) | | |
| 36-59 years | 2 | 0 |
| ≥ 60 years | 2 | - |
| Sex | | |
| (1: Female) | 2 | + |
| Kids | | |
| (1: Yes) | 2 | - |
| Region of Residence | | |
| (1: East Germany) | 2 | 0 |
| Education | | |
| (1: High) | 3 | -/+ |
| Fear about own old age (financially) | | |
| (1: Very worried) | 5 | + |
| General economic situation (current/prospective) | | |
| (1: Very bad) | 5 | + |
| Dissatisfaction (per policy) | | |
| (1: Very dissatisfied) | 5 | + |
| Political Trust | | |
| (1: Very high) | 25 | - |
| Insufficient representation of the interests of the young | | |
| (1: Not sufficiently represented) | 5 | + |
| Insufficient representation of the interests of the old | | |
| (1: Not sufficiently represented) | 5 | + |
| The old support the young | | |
| (1: Very strong support) | 5 | - |
| The young support the old | | |
| (1: Very strong support) | 5 | - |
| Problems for the country due to by demographic change | | |
| (1: Very strong problems) | 5 | + |
| The old live at the expense of the young | | |
| (1: Strongly agree) | 5 | + |

Notes: All variables are coded from 0 to 1. 0: No hypothesis formulated/no effect expected. Political trust as in Table A-1.

Table A-3: Correlation between desired government responsibility and desired government benefits in various policies by age

| | Pearson's correlation | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 18-35 years | 36-59 years | ≥ 60 years |
| Financial security in old age | .43 ^c | .39 ^c | .32 ^c |
| Care in old age | .37 ^c | .44 ^c | .32 ^c |
| Families | .46 ^c | .45 ^c | .25 ^c |
| Education | .30 ^c | .32 ^c | .28 ^c |

Number of cases: 1065-1105 (18-35 yrs.), 1258-1289 (36-59 yrs.), 1353-1404 (≥60 yrs.). Level of significance: ^a: p≤.05, ^b: p≤.01, ^c: p≤.001. Weighted results.

Table A-4: Overview of determinants of welfare state attitudes (OLS-regressions)

| | Financial security in old age | | Care in old age | | Family | | Education | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits |
| Age | | | | | | | | |
| 36-59 years | | | | | -- | | | |
| ≥ 60 years | - | | | | --- | - | | |
| Woman | + | | + | | | | | - |
| Kids | | | | | +++ | ++ | | |
| East Germany | | | ++ | | | | + | |
| Education | --- | --- | --- | | -- | | + | + |
| Employment | | | | | | | | |
| Social class (self-assigned) | | | | | | | | + |
| Own economic situation (current) | | | | | | | | |
| Own economic situation (prospective) | | | | | | | | |
| Fear about own old age (financially/medically) | +++ | +++ | ++ | +++ | | | | |
| General economic situation (current) | ++ | | | | | | - | |
| General economic situation (prospective) | | | | | | | | |
| Dissatisfaction (per policy) | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Political trust | ++ | | | | | | | |
| Insufficient representation (old) | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | | | | |
| Insufficient representation (young) | | | | | ++ | +++ | | +++ |
| Party identification (SPD) | | | | | | | | ++ |
| Party identification (FDP) | | | | | | | | |
| Party identification (The Greens) | | | | + | + | | + | ++ |
| Party identification (The Left) | | | | | | | | +++ |
| Party identification (no/other party) | | | | | | | | + |
| Constant | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Corrected R ² | .118 | .175 | .104 | .158 | .076 | .120 | .078 | .189 |
| Number of cases | 3414 | 3362 | 3355 | 3310 | 3343 | 3314 | 3430 | 3400 |

Notes: The coding of the variables and the reference categories as in Table A-1. Regarding financial security in old age (care in old age) financial (medical) fears about own age are tested. In grey: not empirically tested. Level of significance: +/-: p≤.05, ++/--: p≤.01, +++/---: p≤.001. Weighted results.

Table A-5: Overview of determinants of conflict perceptions (OLS-regressions)

| | Current differences | Prospective conflict (general) | Prospective conflict (specific) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Age | | | |
| 36-59 years | --- | -- | |
| ≥ 60 years | -- | - | |
| Woman | ++ | | ++ |
| Kids | | | |
| East Germany | | | |
| Education | | | |
| Fear about own old age (financially) | + | | |
| General economic situation (current) | | | |
| General economic situation (prospective) | | | |
| Dissatisfaction | | | |
| ... with financial security in old age | | | |
| ... with care in old age | | | |
| ... with health policy | | | |
| ... with family policy | +++ | | |
| ... with education policy | | | |
| Political trust | -- | -- | -- |
| Insufficient representation (old) | +++ | + | |
| Insufficient representation (young) | | + | |
| The old support the young | | | |
| The young support the old | | | --- |
| Problems for the country due to by demographic change | | +++ | +++ |
| The old live at the expense of the young | | | ++ |
| Constant | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Corrected R ² | .082 | .131 | .097 |
| Number of cases | 3208 | 3133 | 3308 |

Notes: The coding of the variables and the reference categories as in Table A-2. In grey: not empirically tested. Level of significance: +/-: p≤.05, ++/--: p≤.01, +++/---: p≤.001. Weighted results.

Table A-6: Total, direct and indirect age effects on welfare state attitudes (path models)

| | Financial security in old age | | Care in old age | | Family | | Education | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits | Respon- sibility. | Bene- fits |
| Total age effect | | - | | - | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Direct age effect | | | | | --- | - | - | -- |
| Indirect age effect | | | | | + | | | - |

Notes: Level of significance: +/-: p≤.05, ++/--: p≤.01, +++/---: p≤.001. Controls as in Table A-1; age, sex, region of residence are defined as exogenous variables, the other variables are defined as mediator variables. Weighted results.

Table A-7: Total, direct and indirect age effects on the perception of intergenerational attitudinal differences (path models)

| | Current differences | Prospective conflict (general) | Prospective conflict (specific) |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Total age effect | --- | --- | --- |
| Direct age effect | --- | -- | |
| Indirect age effect | | -- | - |

Notes: Level of significance: +/-: $p \leq .05$, +/-/: $p \leq .01$, +++/---: $p \leq .001$. Controls as in Table A-2; age, sex, region of residence are defined as exogenous variables, the other variables are defined as mediator variables. Weighted results.

Table A-8: Overview of age-specific determinants of welfare state attitudes (OLS-regressions)

| Desired government responsibility | Financial security in old age | Care in old age | Families | Education |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Education | Young: $-.12^c$ Old: $-.03$ | | | |
| Dissatisfaction (per policy) | | | Young: $.19^c$ Old: $.06$ | |
| Desired government benefits | Financial security in old age | Care in old age | Families | Education |
| Own economic situation (current) | Young: $-.04$ Old: $.10^a$ | Young: $-.07^a$ Old: $.06$ | | |
| General economic situation (prospective) | | | | Young: $.06$ Old: $-.09^b$ |
| Dissatisfaction (per policy) | | | Young: $.29^c$ Old: $.17^c$ | |
| Party identification (FDP) | | | | Young: $-.06^a$ Old: $.02$ |
| Party identification (The Left) | | Young: $-.03$ Old: $.11^b$ | | |

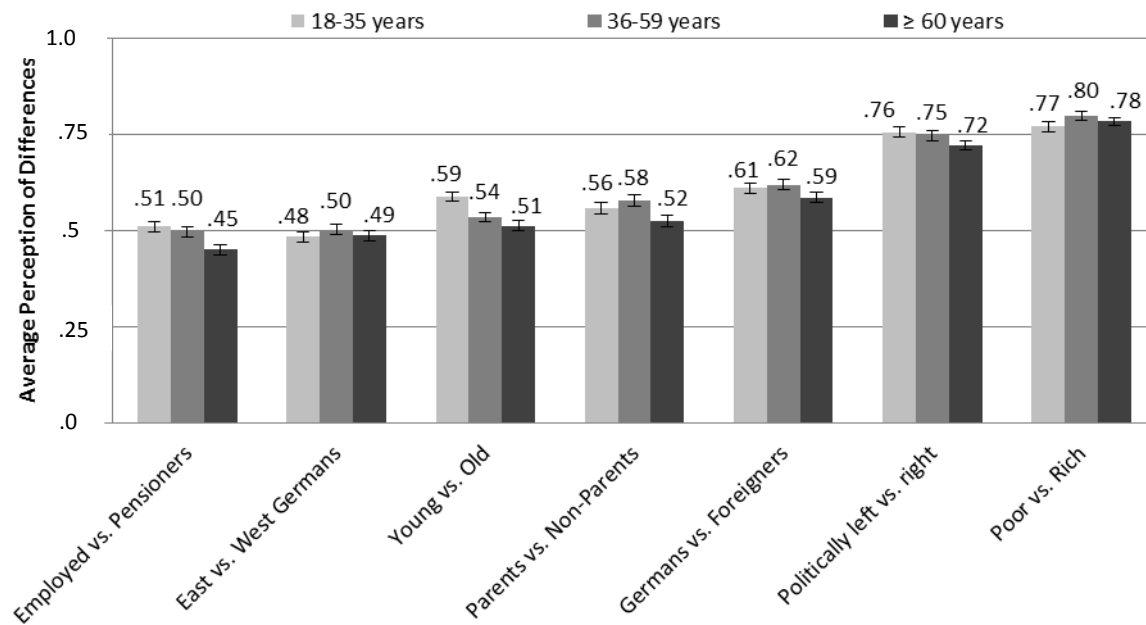
Notes: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, controls as in Table A-1. Level of significance: ^a: $p \leq .05$, ^b: $p \leq .01$, ^c: $p \leq .001$. Weighted results.

Table A-9: Overview of age-specific determinants of conflict perception (OLS-regressions)

| | Current differences | Prospective conflict (general) | Prospective conflict (specific) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Education | | Young: .08 Old: -.03 | |
| General economic situation (prospective) | | Young: .02 Old: .23 ^c | |
| Dissatisfaction (financial security in old age) | | | Young: .10 Old: -.12 ^a |
| Dissatisfaction (families) | | Young: .15 ^a Old: -.07 | |
| The young support the old | | | Young: -.02 Old: -.35 ^c |
| The old live at the expense of the young | | | Young: .09 ^a Old: -.02 |

Notes: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, controls as in Table A-2. Level of significance: ^a: p≤.05, ^b: p≤.01, ^c: p≤.001. Weighted results.

Figure A-1: Average perception of various social conflicts



Note: Measured on a five-point scale from 0 (no differences) to 1 (strong differences). Averages with 95% confidence intervals. Number of cases: 1092-1112 (18-35 yrs.), 1265-1310 (36-59 yrs.), 1358-1434 (≥ 60 yrs.). Weighted results.

Summary of multivariate findings

Since age as a determining factor is crucial for this study, we want to provide a brief summary of the main findings about the age effect derived from multivariate analyses.

The standard OLS-regressions by and large confirm the impression of rather weak age differences in welfare state orientations that was already obtained via bivariate analyses. Age has no significant effect on welfare state attitudes with the exception of preferences in the family sector, where the young demand higher government action. With regard to conflict perception, age does make a difference for perceiving current differences and expecting a general conflict in the future: the young experience more conflicts than the old (overviews of the OLS-regressions results are given in Tables A-4 to A-5 in the appendix). However, age effects as identified by these analyses tell only one part of the story.

The total age effect derived from path models additionally includes indirect effect components and is thus regarded as a more accurate reflection of reality.²² Path models reveal whether effects are under-/overestimated by the commonly used standard method. An over-/underestimation results from the interplay of direct and indirect age effects: if both have the same direction, the total age effect is larger than in the standard OLS-regression because the direct effect is intensified by an indirect effect. On the contrary: if the directions of both effects are opposite, the total age effect turns out to be smaller compared to the standard OLS-regression, i.e. the direct effect is attenuated by taking into account indirect paths. The results of the path models indicate that indirect age effects do exist, but are mostly not statistically significant with some interesting exceptions: age effects in attitudes towards young policies as identified by standard OLS-regressions are not accurately measured. A substantial opposite indirect net effect is found for preferred government responsibility in the family sector. This finding suggests that the effect of age was overestimated in the standard OLS-regressions and is in fact somewhat weaker. The result for desired benefits in the education sector is different: taking into account indirect effects demonstrates that the gap between young and old is in fact somewhat wider, the effect was underestimated in standard OLS-regressions. Thus, the total age effects reveal that age does have a certain effect on welfare state attitudes, but this effect is restricted to attitudes towards young policies. Turning to conflict perceptions, the main finding is that age effects are thoroughly underestimated in OLS-regressions, which means that old and young differ more in their perception than at first impression. The total age effects clearly show that age

²² Note, that age is operationalised here as metric variable instead of the aforementioned age groups. As a robustness check, the OLS-regressions were also calculated with age as metric variable. These sensitivity analyses reveal that the reported effects are robust. Furthermore, these analyses show that the age effects derived from OLS-regressions equal the direct age effects derived from path models.

influences conflict perceptions in all cases (for an overview of total, direct, and indirect effects see Tables A-6 and A-7 in the appendix).²³

In a final step, we had a look at age-specific determinants of welfare state attitudes and conflict perceptions. Here, some interesting results were found such as: evaluations of the family sector matter significantly more for young than old people which is probably because they are currently more affected by family policy regulations as (potential) parents. Such evaluations are a relevant factor not only for young people's welfare state preferences in that policy area but also for their perception of a general future conflict: the more dissatisfied the young are with the way family policy is currently working, the more government action they demand and the more do they expect an intergenerational conflict to arise. Another interesting finding is: the young evaluate a conflict in the pension system to be more likely when they perceive the old not to support their own age group. For the old, the result is contrary: for them it is only important if the young support their age group. So, for both age groups, support that is given by the own age group is not crucial, but only the perceived action of the other age group has the potential to lower their perception of an upcoming conflict about pensions. The reason for this might be that each age group is blaming the other age group for imbalances in the social security system. In some ways, another result contributes to this assessment: the (financial) burden of supporting the old is a relevant factor only for conflict perceptions of the young. Taken together: young people consider an intergenerational conflict about pensions in the future the more likely, the more they believe that older people are living at their expenses and are not supporting them in general at the same time. Some other differences were found, however, in an overall consideration, similarities in the formation of welfare state preferences and conflict perceptions between the age groups do prevail (for an overview of age-specific determinants see Tables A-8 and A-9 in the appendix).²⁴

Altogether is it to say, that some age effects do exist. However, whichever way you look at it, these differences are mostly rather modest; other determinants than age are obviously more important. Minor exceptions are found for attitudes towards young policies, particularly for the family sector, and for conflict perceptions, especially with regard to pensions.

²³ The question whether the age effect does rather reflect interests or values cannot be answered conclusively for several reasons. It seems highly plausible, that both interests and values come into play since monocausal explanations are not very realistic. The topic is even complicated by the possibility that the relative impact of interests and values varies with different policy areas, as well as with other situational and motivational factors.

²⁴ In an overall evaluation, the results furthermore suggest that it might be fruitful to check for conditional indirect effects (Edwards/ Lambert 2010; Preacher et al. 2007: 195f.), especially in those instances, where the effect of an identified mediator variables is at the same time moderated by age.

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