Politics over Partners:
Partisan Aversion and the Decline in Marriage

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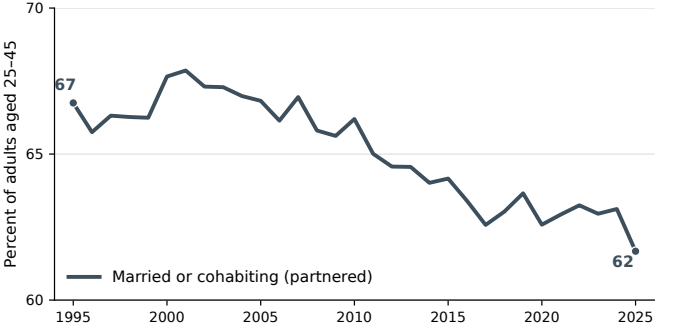
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The share married or cohabiting has fallen

Partners pool resources and share responsibilities.
(Becker, 1973; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007)

40% are single. Around half seek a relationship.
(Pew, 2020)

Changes in earnings can reduce marriage.
Declining men's earnings (Autor et al., 2019);
Rising women's earnings (Shenhav, 2021).

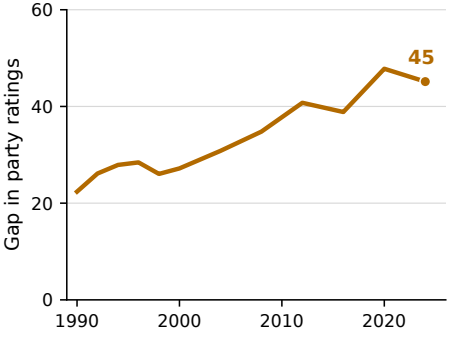


Notes. Adults aged 25–45. Cohabitation is available from 1995. **Source.** CPS March supplements via IPUMS.

But we know much less about the role of politics.

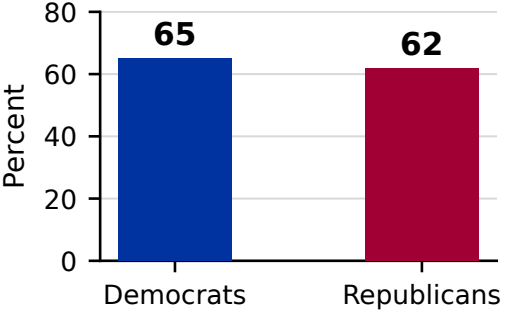
Partisan animosity and partner choice

Partisan animosity has risen



Source. ANES Time Series, ages 25–45. Own-party minus opposing-party thermometer rating; leaners included.

Reluctance to date across party lines



Source. American Perspectives Survey, December 2022, 5,055 US adults.

How much of the partnership decline is due to rising partisan aversion?

Challenge: separating partisan aversion from meeting opportunities

In observed partnership data,
partisan aversion is confounded with meeting opportunities

Few cross-party couples: why?

Strong partisan aversion? Limited meeting opportunities? Both?

Meeting opportunities shape the effect of partisan aversion

- Never meet across party lines $\longrightarrow$ no effect
- Meet often $\longrightarrow$ aversion can prevent partnerships

Observed couples

Our approach

Estimate a structural model of the marriage market

1. **Partisan aversion**
   Identify in a discrete choice experiment

2. **Meeting opportunities**
   Infer as a residual from observed partnerships, given measured preferences

Counterfactual: reduce partisan aversion, holding everything else fixed

Predict the change in partnership

Preview of the results

Experiment

Choices imply a willingness to give up about 69% of a partner's income to match on party, 10% to match on education

Model

Partisan aversion explains matching on party.
Meeting opportunities are segmented mainly by education.

Counterfactual

Lower partisan aversion to its 1990s level:

1.6 percentage points higher partnership
About 30% of the decline since 1995 (ages 25–45)

Related literature

Family economics: declining marriage, assortative mating

Stevenson and Wolfers (2007); Lundberg et al. (2016); Autor et al. (2019); Shenhav (2021); Bertrand et al. (2015, 2021); Goldin (2021); Kearney (2023); **Becker (1973)**; Mare (1991); Schwartz and Mare (2005); Fernández et al. (2005); Greenwood et al. (2014); Eika et al. (2019); Chiappori et al. (2025)

Mechanisms: preferences, meeting opportunities

Goldman, Gracie, and Porter (2026); Ciscato (2025)

This paper: partisan aversion's contribution to the partnership decline

Political economy: politics and partner choice

Alford et al. (2011); Iyengar et al. (2012, 2019); Nicholson et al. (2016); **Huber and Malhotra (2017)**; Hersh and Ghitza (2018); Iyengar et al. (2018); Easton and Holbein (2021); Hudde and Grunow (2025); Sleiman et al. (2025)

This paper: equilibrium effect of partisan aversion

Empirical matching: individual choices and equilibrium

Choo and Siow (2006); Chiappori et al. (2017); Galichon and Salanié (2022); Gualdani and Sinha (2023); Fisman et al. (2006, 2008); **Hitsch et al. (2010)**; Belot and Francesconi (2013); **Low (2024)**; **Andrew and Adams (2025)**

This paper: combine experiment with matching model; infer meeting structure

1. **Matching model**
2. Experiment
3. Estimating the model
4. Counterfactuals

Two-sided matching with transferable utility

Building on Choo and Siow (2006)

Women: type i **Men: type j**

$i, j \in \{\mathrm{D}, \mathrm{R}\} \times \{\text{college}, \text{no college}\}$

Choices

Partner with an available person

Partners generate **match surplus**: combined utility gains over remaining single.

Partners can share these gains.

Remain single

If remaining single provides higher utility.

Both people must prefer the partnership to their alternatives.

Choices as a random utility model

Each person receives a share of match surplus plus a personal taste shock.

$$\underbrace{\Phi_{ij}}_{\text{match surplus}} = \underbrace{U_{ij}}_{\text{her share}} + \underbrace{V_{ij}}_{\text{his share}}$$

Option	**Woman of type i** Utility	**Man of type j** Utility
Partnership with each other	$U_{ij} + \sigma_M \varepsilon_j$	$V_{ij} + \sigma_M \eta_i$
Remain single	$0 + \sigma_M \varepsilon_0$	$0 + \sigma_M \eta_0$

Each person's tastes over partner types: $\varepsilon_j, \eta_i \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0, 1)$.

σ_M: dispersion of personal tastes in the marriage market.

Each person chooses the option with highest utility among their available options.

Individual utility Gains and tastes Sharing and equilibrium Transfer example

Connecting match surplus to observed partnerships

Under $\varepsilon_j, \eta_i \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$: choices follow multinomial logit probabilities.

Treat observed couples and singles as an equilibrium.

$$\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{i0}} = \exp\left(\frac{U_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right) \qquad \frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{0j}} = \exp\left(\frac{V_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right)$$

μ_{ij}: number of couples μ_{i0}: number of single women μ_{0j}: number of single men

Using $U_{ij} + V_{ij} = \Phi_{ij}$, solve for match surplus:

$$\mu_{ij} = \sqrt{\mu_{i0}\mu_{0j}}\,\exp\left(\frac{\Phi_{ij}}{2\sigma_M}\right) \quad \Longrightarrow \quad \boxed{\frac{\Phi_{ij}}{\sigma_M} = 2\log\left(\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\sqrt{\mu_{i0}\mu_{0j}}}\right)}$$

Observed couples and singles reveal match surplus relative to taste dispersion.

Logit derivation Matching equation Recovering payoffs Market clearing

Meeting opportunities change what we can infer

So far, model assumes that every woman could potentially partner with every man.

What if some people never have opportunities to meet?

Few cross-party couples could reflect:

Strong partisan aversion

People pass up available cross-party partners.

Limited meeting opportunities

Cross-party partners are rarely available.

Why this matters for the partnership decline

Aversion's effect on partnerships depends on opportunities to meet across party lines.

Measure preferences to isolate the effect of partisan aversion

Write match surplus as:

$$\Phi_{ij} = \underbrace{S^p_{ij} + S^e_{ij}}_{\substack{\text{Experimentally measured} \\ \text{partner preferences}}} + \underbrace{\alpha_i + \gamma_j}_{\substack{\text{Baseline utility} \\ \text{from partnering}}}$$

1. **Measure the party and education terms in an experiment.**
   Compare partners while holding meeting opportunities fixed.

2. **Combine these preferences with observed couples and singles.**
   - Calibrate baseline utilities to shares partnered.
   - Infer meeting opportunities and taste dispersion.

3. **Reduce partisan aversion, holding everything else fixed.**
   Calculate how much partnership increases.

Surplus specification Model assumptions

1. Matching model

2. Experiment

3. Estimating the model

4. Counterfactuals

Discrete-choice experiment

Sample 511 Democrats and Republicans, ages 25–45, recruited through Prolific

50% women 52% college graduates 68% Democrats

Choices 12 choices between two potential long-term partners

Randomization Partner profiles: party, education, income, attractiveness, religious views, and family plans

Party: six positions, Strong Democrat to Strong Republican

Education: high school, some college, bachelor's, graduate degree

Incentive Personalized feedback on how their partner preferences compare to those of others

Couples and singles Sample comparison Attribute levels Feedback

An example choice task

Key instructions:

- Any **trait not listed** is the **same between the two people**, including age.
- Each profile is a gender you would consider as a long-term partner.
- Answer **as if you are single**, regardless of your current relationship status.

Source. Fielded survey instructions, reproduced verbatim.

Which person would you prefer as a long-term partner?

Person A	Person B
Education: Some College	*Education:* Graduate Degree
Political party: Weak Republican	*Political party:* Moderate Republican
Annual income: $70,000	*Annual income:* $55,000
Family plans: Unsure	*Family plans:* Unsure
Religiosity: Somewhat different views	*Religiosity:* Similar views
Physical attractiveness: Average	*Physical attractiveness:* Below Average

Full instructions Attribute levels

Choice model and estimation

In each task, respondent n chooses a profile $k \in \{A, B\}$.

$$u_{nk} = \underbrace{\log y_k - \beta_n^d d_{nk} - \beta_n^P C_{nk}^P - \beta_n^E C_{nk}^E + x'_{nk}\gamma_n}_{v_{nk}\text{: value of profile characteristics}} + \sigma\varepsilon_{nk}$$

y	Partner income	C^P	Crosses party line
d	Party-scale distance	C^E	Crosses college-degree threshold
x	Other traits, higher-earner status	σ	Dispersion of profile shocks

Under $\varepsilon_{nk} \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$: logit choice probabilities.

$$\Pr_n(A \mid \beta_n, \gamma_n) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp[-(v_{nA} - v_{nB})/\sigma]}$$

Estimate preference distributions within each type, together with σ.

Estimation details Two dispersions Coefficients

Preference coefficients for the matching model

Each type g: women or men within a party and education group.

$$u_{gk} = \log y_k - \widehat{\beta}_g^d d_{gk} - \widehat{\beta}_g^P C_{gk}^P - \widehat{\beta}_g^E C_{gk}^E + x'_{gk}\widehat{\gamma}_g + \widehat{\sigma}\varepsilon_{gk}$$

Partisan aversion $\widehat{\psi}_g$

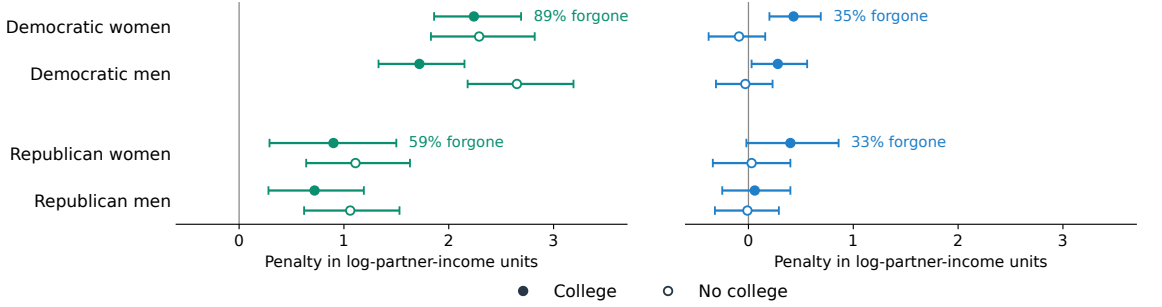
$$\widehat{\psi}_g = \widehat{\beta}_g^P + \overline{\Delta d}\,\widehat{\beta}_g^d$$

Opposing party relative to own party

Education preference $\widehat{\tau}_g$

$$\widehat{\tau}_g = \widehat{\beta}_g^E$$

Other degree status relative to own



Notes. $N = 511$. $\widehat{\beta}_g$: estimated group-average coefficients; $\overline{\Delta d}$: average added party distance. Points: posterior medians; bars: 95% posterior intervals. Labels: implied partner income forgone, $100[1 - \exp(-\text{coefficient})]\%$, for college-educated women.

Exact estimates | Raw choices | Income tradeoffs | Actual partners

1. Matching model

2. Experiment

3. Estimating the model

4. Counterfactuals

Both partners' preferences enter match surplus

Democratic college woman

Her partisan aversion: $\psi_i^f = 2.24$.

Republican college man

His partisan aversion: $\psi_j^m = 0.72$.

Across party lines: subtract both penalties.

Both have a degree: education contribution is zero.

Systematic match surplus

$$\Phi_{ij}^r = \underbrace{-2.97}_{S_{ij}^p\text{: party}} + \underbrace{0}_{S_{ij}^e\text{: education}} + \underbrace{\alpha_i^r + \gamma_j^r}_{\text{baseline utility}}$$

Baseline utility from partnering in general, fitted to shares partnered.
All values are in log-partner-income units.

Formula and restrictions Baseline example All pairings

Find the meeting opportunities that reproduce observed partnerships

Given measured preferences and population counts, fit observed couples and singles.

1. **Try meeting shares $\{p_t\}$ and taste dispersion σ_M.**

$$n_i^1 = p_i n_i, \qquad m_j^1 = p_j m_j \qquad \text{(the rest enter pool 2)}$$

2. **Predict couples and singles within each pool.**

$$\mu_{ij}^h = \sqrt{\mu_{i0}^h \mu_{0j}^h}\, \exp\left(\frac{\Phi_{ij}}{2\sigma_M}\right)$$

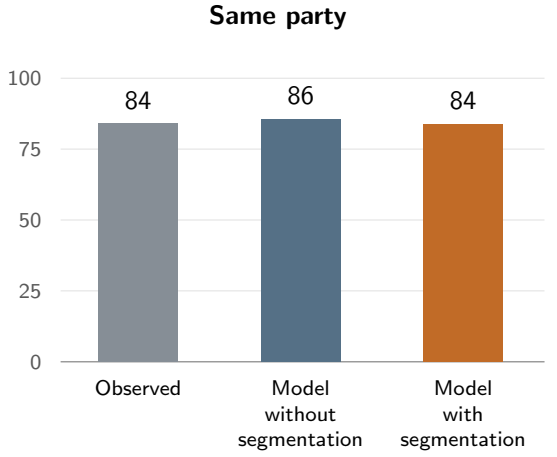
Baseline utilities complete Φ_{ij}. Adjust them until singles **added across pools** match the data for each type in each region.

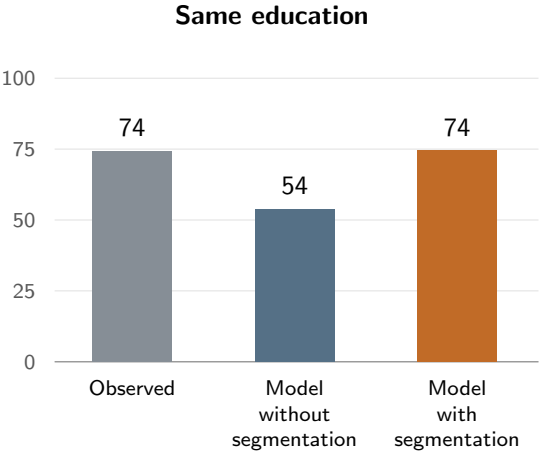
3. **Compare predicted and observed couple pairings.**
Add couples across pools. Update $\{p_t\}$ and σ_M to improve the fit.

Objective Market clearing Data Two dispersions

Measured preferences leave an education-sorting gap

Share of couples (%)





Notes. HCMST couples across four census regions. Models are estimated separately using the 511-respondent preference estimates; couple-type margins are aligned within region. With segmentation: flexible two-pool specification. Both panels use a 0–100% scale.

Identification Pool composition Shares by type Full fit Robustness

1. Matching model
2. Experiment
3. Estimating the model
4. **Counterfactuals**

Return partisan aversion to its 1990s level

Reduce every type's partisan aversion by 40%.

ANES partisan animosity was about 40% lower in the mid-1990s.

Hold the other model inputs fixed.

- Keep today's population and meeting opportunities.
- Keep education preferences and baseline partnership values.

Solve again for the partnership rate.

Why 40%? Meeting specification

Rising partisan aversion explains 30% of the decline

Returning partisan aversion to its 1990s level

1.6 pp

increase in partnership

61.0% $\longrightarrow$ 62.5%

30%

of the 1995–2025 decline

Observed decline: 5.1 pp

All adults ages 25–45.

Historical scale Dose response Composition exercises

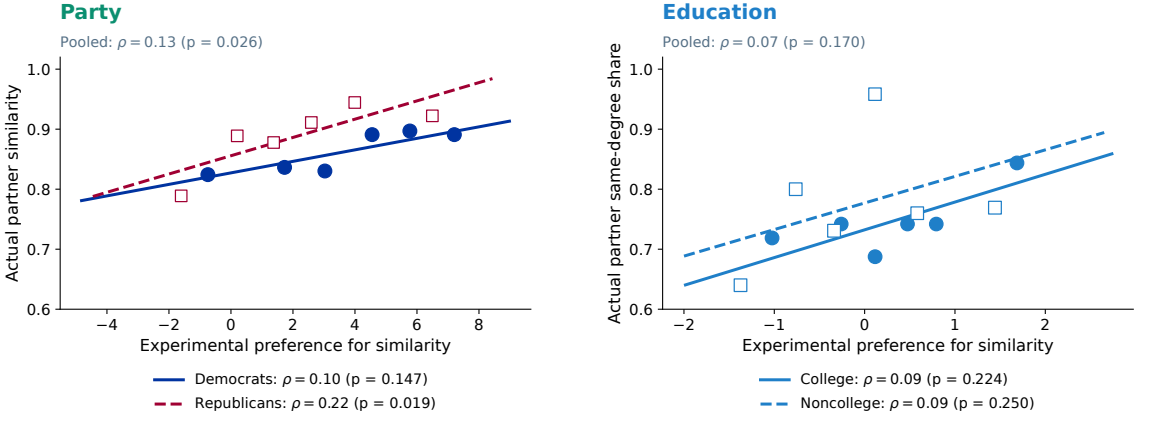
Conclusion

- **Observed strong sorting on party and education**
  Identified strong partisan aversion, weak education preferences
- **Two sources of sorting in the model**
  Party: partisan aversion Education: meeting segmentation
- **Partnership formation**
  40% lower partisan aversion: **1.6 pp more partnership**
  All adults ages 25–45; about 30% of the 1995–2025 decline explained

Held-out validation Residential evidence

Appendix

Experimental preferences and actual partners



Notes. Partnered respondents: $N = 306$ for party; $N = 340$ for education. Auxiliary individual preference scores. Dots: binned means within groups; lines: group-specific linear fits. Party proximity is one minus party distance divided by 5. Education measures matching on college-degree status. Spearman correlations use individual observations; two-sided p-values treat estimated scores as fixed.

16: Preferences

Partner choice: payoffs and assumptions

For a woman ℓ of type i and a man ℓ' of type j:

$$\mathcal{U}_{j\ell} = U_{ij} + \sigma_M \varepsilon_{j\ell}, \qquad \mathcal{V}_{i\ell'} = V_{ij} + \sigma_M \eta_{i\ell'}.$$

- Choose the highest payoff among available partner types and singlehood.
- Singlehood has systematic payoff zero and its own taste draw.
- $\varepsilon_{j\ell}, \eta_{i\ell'} \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$; σ_M sets taste dispersion.

Transfers divide systematic match surplus

$$U_{ij} + V_{ij} = \Phi_{ij}.$$

Match surplus and personal tastes

For a woman ℓ of type i and a man ℓ' of type j:

$$\underbrace{(U_{ij} + \sigma_M \varepsilon_{j\ell})}_{\text{her utility}} + \underbrace{(V_{ij} + \sigma_M \eta_{i\ell'})}_{\text{his utility}} = \Phi_{ij} + \sigma_M \varepsilon_{j\ell} + \sigma_M \eta_{i\ell'}.$$

Subtract both singlehood payoffs to get the gain from partnering:

$$\Phi_{ij} + \sigma_M(\varepsilon_{j\ell} - \varepsilon_{0\ell}) + \sigma_M(\eta_{i\ell'} - \eta_{0\ell'}).$$

The Gumbel assumption applies to each individual's taste draws

$\varepsilon_{j\ell}, \eta_{i\ell'} \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$ gives multinomial logit probabilities.
The matching equation then follows from market clearing and $U_{ij} + V_{ij} = \Phi_{ij}$.

Sharing match surplus: a transfer example

One potential couple. Singlehood gives each 0.

Gains relative to singlehood

	Woman	Man	Match surplus
Equal housework	-1	$+3$	2
He does more housework	$+1$	$+1$	2

Both now prefer partnership

The transfer changes the division; match surplus stays at 2.

Transfers divide match surplus and clear the market

A_{ij} and B_{ij} are the systematic gains before a transfer τ_{ij} to the man.

$$U_{ij} = A_{ij} - \tau_{ij}, \qquad V_{ij} = B_{ij} + \tau_{ij}.$$

The transfer cancels in their sum

$$U_{ij} + V_{ij} = A_{ij} + B_{ij} = \Phi_{ij}.$$

Let $P_i(j)$ and $Q_j(i)$ be women's and men's choice probabilities.

$$\underbrace{n_i P_i(j)}_{\text{women choosing this pairing}} = \underbrace{m_j Q_j(i)}_{\text{men choosing this pairing}} = \mu_{ij}.$$

From individual payoffs to logit choice odds

$\varepsilon_j, \eta_i \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$; σ_M sets taste dispersion. Systematic singlehood payoff is zero.

$$P_i(j) = \frac{\exp\left(\frac{U_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right)}{1 + \sum_k \exp\left(\frac{U_{ik}}{\sigma_M}\right)}, \qquad P_i(0) = \frac{1}{1 + \sum_k \exp\left(\frac{U_{ik}}{\sigma_M}\right)}.$$

The common denominator cancels in the ratio

$$\frac{P_i(j)}{P_i(0)} = \exp\left(\frac{U_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right).$$

For n_i women of type i, equilibrium counts are

$$\mu_{ij} = n_i P_i(j), \qquad \mu_{i0} = n_i P_i(0).$$

Combining both sides gives the matching equation

In the model without segmentation, μ_{ij} counts couples between types i and j; μ_{i0} and μ_{0j} count singles of those types.

Under $\varepsilon_j, \eta_i \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1)$: logit choice odds.

$$\underbrace{\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{i0}} = \exp\left(\frac{U_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right)}_{\text{women}} \qquad \underbrace{\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{0j}} = \exp\left(\frac{V_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right)}_{\text{men}}$$

Multiply these equations, using $U_{ij} + V_{ij} = \Phi_{ij}$:

$$\frac{\mu_{ij}^2}{\mu_{i0}\mu_{0j}} = \exp\left(\frac{U_{ij} + V_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right) = \exp\left(\frac{\Phi_{ij}}{\sigma_M}\right).$$

Taking the square root gives

$$\boxed{\mu_{ij} = \exp(\Phi_{ij}/(2\sigma_M))\sqrt{\mu_{i0}\mu_{0j}}}.$$

What the experiment adds to the model

Experimentally measured partner preferences restrict match surplus:

$$\Phi_{ij}^r = \underbrace{S_{ij}^p + S_{ij}^e}_{\substack{\text{Experimentally measured} \\ \text{partner preferences}}} + \underbrace{\alpha_i^r + \gamma_j^r}_{\substack{\text{Baseline utility} \\ \text{from partnering}}}$$

Each measured term adds her valuation to his.

Values are in log-partner-income units.

Observed couples and singles complete the model

- Calibrate baseline values to singlehood rates.
- Estimate meeting segmentation and taste dispersion from couple pairings, given the population.

◂ 12: Our approach

Recovering equilibrium payoffs from couples and singles

Model without segmentation; observed outcomes are treated as equilibrium.

Recover each side's payoff relative to taste dispersion

$$\frac{U_{ij}}{\sigma_M} = \log\left(\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{i0}}\right), \qquad \frac{V_{ij}}{\sigma_M} = \log\left(\frac{\mu_{ij}}{\mu_{0j}}\right).$$

Their sum recovers match surplus relative to taste dispersion:

$$\frac{\Phi_{ij}}{\sigma_M} = \frac{U_{ij} + V_{ij}}{\sigma_M} = 2\log\mu_{ij} - \log\mu_{i0} - \log\mu_{0j}.$$

Singlehood's systematic payoff is zero.

Recovering payoff levels also requires σ_M.

What respondents were asked to do

Imagine a friend briefly describes two people you could meet. They mention just a few characteristics for each. Based on this limited information, which person would you prefer as a long-term partner?

> **Key instructions:**
> - Any **trait *not* listed** is the **same between the two people**, including age.
> - Each profile is a gender you would consider as a long-term partner.
> - Answer **as if you are single**, regardless of your current relationship status.

There are no right or wrong answers. At the end you will see a **personalized chart** showing where your inferred preferences fall relative to past respondents. The chart is computed from your answers, so it will be most accurate when you give each comparison your full attention.

For each pair, choose the person you would prefer as a long-term partner.

Preference coefficients for the matching model

		Partisan aversion ψ		Education preference τ	
	Respondent	Estimate	95% interval	Estimate	95% interval
Women	D, BA	2.24	[1.86, 2.69]	0.43	[0.20, 0.69]
	D, no BA	2.29	[1.83, 2.82]	−0.09	[−0.38, 0.16]
	R, BA	0.90	[0.29, 1.50]	0.40	[−0.02, 0.86]
	R, no BA	1.11	[0.64, 1.63]	0.03	[−0.34, 0.40]
Men	D, BA	1.72	[1.33, 2.15]	0.28	[0.03, 0.56]
	D, no BA	2.65	[2.18, 3.19]	−0.03	[−0.31, 0.23]
	R, BA	0.72	[0.28, 1.19]	0.06	[−0.25, 0.40]
	R, no BA	1.06	[0.62, 1.53]	−0.01	[−0.32, 0.29]

Reference categories: own party; own college-degree status.

Notes. Log-partner-income units. Points are functions of posterior coefficient medians, as in the structural inputs; intervals are transformed posterior quantiles. $N = 511$.

Positive values are penalties. Cross-party penalties are much larger.

16: Preferences

How large are the type baselines?

The same pair, in the Northeast

Democratic college woman and Republican college man

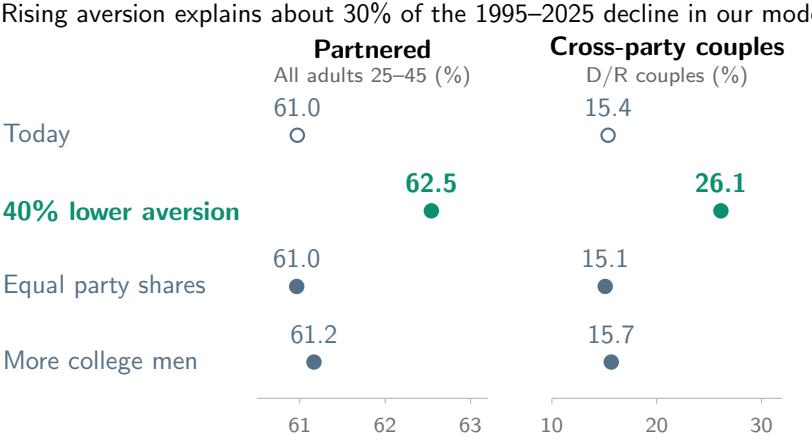
$$\Phi_{ij}^{NE} = \underbrace{-2.97}_{\text{party}} + \underbrace{0}_{\text{education}} + \underbrace{0.43}_{\alpha_i^{NE}+\gamma_j^{NE}} = -2.54$$

- These are combined values for this particular pairing and region.
- The fitted baselines reproduce observed singlehood rates.
- Personal tastes allow some of these partnerships to form despite negative systematic match surplus.

Notes. Estimates from the four-share two-pool model. Log-partner-income units; displayed values rounded to two decimals.

17: Match surplus

Supporting composition counterfactuals



Notes. Point estimates from the four-share two-pool model; other parties' baseline partnership rate held fixed. Baseline: ACS-aligned CES; marriage or cohabitation. Historical comparison assumes proportional ANES-to-aversion transfer.

◂ 21: Main result

Party distance, party line, and education coefficients

	Respondent	Distance β^d	Party line β^P	Education β^E
Women	D, BA	0.59	1.00	0.43
	D, no BA	0.70	0.81	−0.09
	R, BA	0.33	0.21	0.40
	R, no BA	0.44	0.18	0.03
Men	D, BA	0.49	0.68	0.28
	D, no BA	0.60	1.37	−0.03
	R, BA	0.17	0.35	0.06
	R, no BA	0.35	0.32	−0.01

$$\psi_g = \beta_g^P + \overline{\Delta d}\,\beta_g^d \qquad \tau_g = \beta_g^E \qquad \overline{\Delta d} = 19/9$$

Notes. Posterior coefficient medians in log-partner-income units. Positive entries are penalties in the subtracted utility terms. Party scale: six ordered categories. The 19/9 bridge is the design-average cross-party distance increase. Same saved posterior as the main coefficient table.

◂ 15: Choice model

Couples sort strongly on party and education

Partner types among D/R couples, all ages (% of all couples)

	Men			
Women	D, BA	D, no BA	R, BA	R, no BA
D, BA	11.9	5.3	3.0	1.3
D, no BA	4.5	17.9	0.6	4.1
R, BA	1.8	0.8	10.6	4.8
R, no BA	0.3	2.2	7.3	23.7

Notes. Survey-weighted shares of all couples; the entire table sums to 100 apart from rounding. Women in rows; men in columns. All respondent ages; opposite-sex married/cohabiting couples with both partners D/R, including leaners. BA = bachelor's degree or higher. Shaded cells: same party and education. **Source.** HCMST 2017, 1,633 couples; both partners' traits reported by the respondent.

86%
share same party
random pairing: 50%

75%
share same education
52%

64%
share both
26%

◂ 4: Challenge

Markets, types, and meeting pools

1. **Markets**
   Four census regions*, each with its own population

2. **Types**
   Women and men grouped by party and BA status: four types per sex

3. **Meeting pools**
   Two pools in each region; partnerships form within a pool
   Estimate each type's share p_t in pool 1

*Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.

◂ 11: Meeting opportunities

What restricts match surplus?

$$\Phi_{ij}^r = \underbrace{-(\psi_i^f + \psi_j^m)\mathbf{1}\{p_i \neq p_j\}}_{S_{ij}^p} \underbrace{-(\tau_i^f + \tau_j^m)\mathbf{1}\{e_i \neq e_j\}}_{S_{ij}^e} + \alpha_i^r + \gamma_j^r$$

- The measured penalties apply when partners cross the corresponding boundary.
- A type baseline raises match surplus equally across all pairings involving that type.
- An unrestricted interaction for each pair could absorb the sorting we use to estimate meeting opportunities.

Party penalties dominate the preference pattern

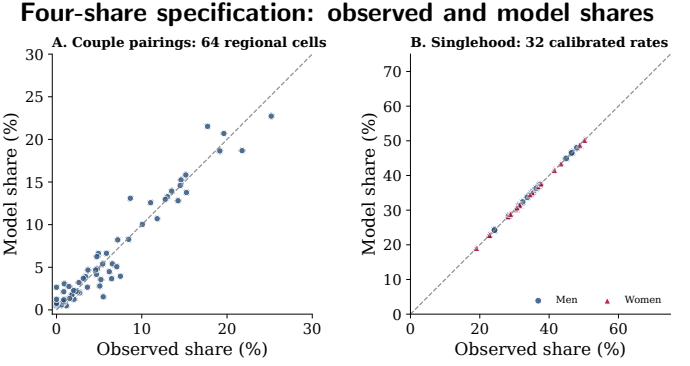
Joint preferences across partner types ($S^p_{ij} + S^e_{ij}$)

Women's types (i) \ Men's types (j)	Democrat college	Democrat no college	Republican college	Republican no college
Democrat college	0	-0.40	-2.97	-3.72
Democrat no college	-0.19	0	-2.98	-3.35
Republican college	-2.61	-3.92	0	-0.39
Republican no college	-3.14	-3.76	-0.09	0

Notes. Log-partner-income units. Same-party, same-education = 0. Sum of both sides' preferences, constructed from posterior coefficient medians ($N = 511$).

17: Match surplus

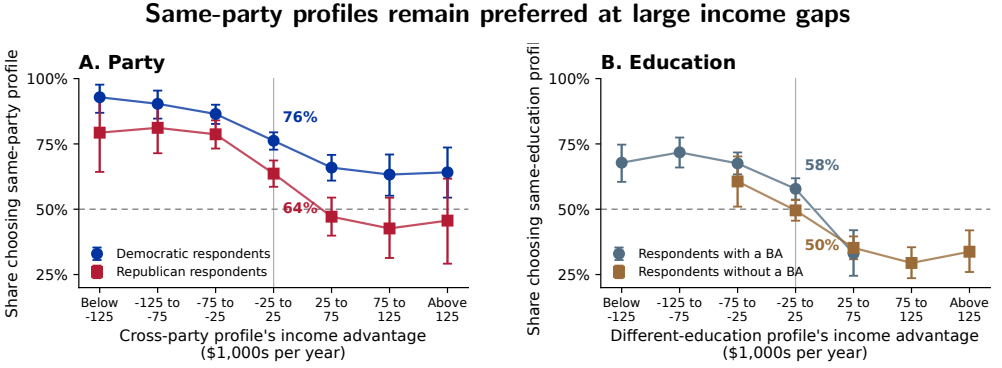
Couple pairings fit; singlehood is calibrated



Notes. Panel A: 64 HCMST region-by-type couple cells, with female- and male-type margins aligned within region. Panel B: 32 calibrated singlehood rates in the responsive population by region, sex, party, and education; CES aligned to ACS marriage and cohabitation targets. Singlehood is a calibration target; its exact fit is mechanical.

19: Model fit

Raw choices show the same party–education contrast



Notes. Markers are observed choice shares within income-gap bins. Vertical lines show 95 percent confidence intervals clustered by respondent; the dashed line marks 50 percent.

Respondents choose the same-party profile 72 percent of the time when incomes are similar and 58 percent of the time even when the cross-party profile earns over $125,000 more.

16: Preferences

Couple patterns and singlehood in the sample

	Experiment	Population data
Cross-party couples	10%	16%
Cross-education couples	23%	26%
Single	41.5–45.4%	37.4%

Notes. Couple rows: 250 experimental respondents who report marriage/cohabitation and a D/R partner with known education. HCMST: 485 married/cohabiting opposite-sex D/R couples, respondent ages 25–44, using the model's survey and partner-age eligibility weights. Experimental partner age and gender are unavailable for imposing all HCMST restrictions. Singlehood: all 511 respondents, ages 25–45; ACS-aligned CES D/R benchmark standardized to their sex-by-party-by-education shares.

Single means neither married nor cohabiting.

20 respondents report being engaged; their cohabitation is unknown.

◂ 13: Experiment design

Who answered the experiment?

Gender-balanced sample, with more Democrats than Republicans

	By gender		
Party and education	Women	Men	**Total**
Democrat, BA+	107	86	**193**
Democrat, no BA	78	77	**155**
Republican, BA+	27	44	**71**
Republican, no BA	43	49	**92**
Total	255	256	**511**

Notes. Respondent counts, ages 25–45. Recruitment targeted gender balance and national education shares using Prolific categories; no party quota. Final counts reflect sample restrictions. D/R include leaners; BA+ means a bachelor's degree or higher.

We estimate preferences for eight gender × party × education types.

◂ 13: Experiment design

Who answered the experiment?

Sample composition and the population benchmark

	Experiment	CES
Mean age	35.3	34.7
Women	49.9%	50.9%
College graduates	51.7%	42.9%
Democrats	68.1%	60.5%
Median income category	$50–75k	$50–60k

Notes. Current paper's sample comparison: 511 experimental respondents and survey-weighted CES Democrats and Republicans, ages 25–45. DCE income is personal income; CES income is household income. The reported categories therefore measure different income concepts.

◂ 13: Experiment design

Attributes and levels

Displayed partner traits and levels

Attribute	Levels	Role
Party	Strong D to Strong R (6-point)	distance and party-line penalties
Education	HS, some college, BA, graduate	BA-threshold crossing
Income	7 levels per education × gender (ACS)	numeraire
Attractiveness	below average, average, above average	displayed trait
Religious views	similar, somewhat different, very different	displayed trait
Family plans	wants, unsure, does not want	displayed trait

Notes. Party, education, religious views, and family plans enter relative to the respondent. Reported partner-gender preference selects the gender-specific income grid, and gender is not displayed.

◂ 13: Experiment design ◂ 14: Choice task

Choice model and estimation

Respondent n compares profiles A and B; the task index is suppressed.

$$u_{nk} = v_{nk} + \sigma\varepsilon_{nk}, \qquad \varepsilon_{nk} \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0,1),$$

$$v_{nk} = \log y_k - \beta_n^d d_{nk} - \beta_n^P C_{nk}^P - \beta_n^E C_{nk}^E + x_{nk}'\gamma_n.$$

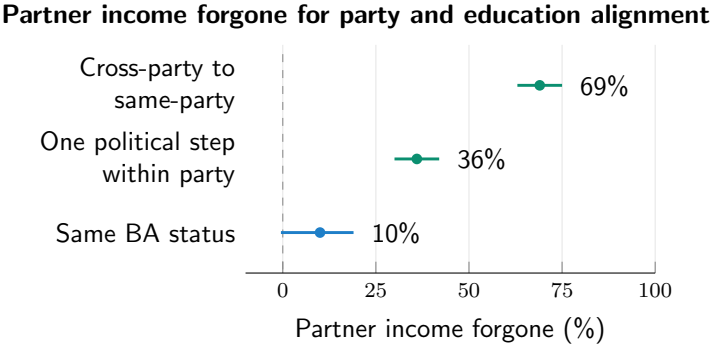
y: partner income; d: partisan distance; C^P: cross-party; C^E: cross-BA threshold.
x: attractiveness, religious views, family plans, and higher-earner status.

$$\Pr_n(A \mid \beta_n, \gamma_n) = \left[1 + \exp\left(-\frac{v_{nA} - v_{nB}}{\sigma}\right)\right]^{-1}.$$

- **Mixed logit.** Each person has one taste vector across 12 tasks; tastes vary across people.
- **Hierarchical pooling.** Party and education taste means vary across eight respondent types.
- **Estimation.** Bayesian NUTS jointly estimates taste distributions and choice-error dispersion σ.

15: Choice model

Partner income forgone



Notes. Log-income-model-implied tradeoffs at eight type means, with 95% credible intervals. For party, convert each of 27 partisan-position comparisons to an income share before averaging comparisons and types equally. Other traits and higher-earner status held fixed. Large tradeoffs can extend beyond the displayed income range.

Partner income forgone: 69% for party alignment, 10% for education

16: Preferences

Assumptions behind the matching model

1. **Transferable utility.** Partners divide match surplus through transfers; only total match surplus determines who matches whom.
2. **Additive match surplus.** $\Phi^r_{ij} = S^p_{ij} + S^e_{ij} + \alpha^r_i + \gamma^r_j$. Baselines vary by type and region. No additional unrestricted component for each type pairing.
3. **Experimentally measured partner preferences.** S^p_{ij} is party value; S^e_{ij} is education value. Each adds her valuation to his, directly in log-partner-income units.
4. **Individual tastes.** Residual tastes are independent Gumbel draws with common dispersion σ_M. They attach to partner types, singlehood, and outside partnership; there is no person-pair-specific taste term.
5. **Meeting pools.** Conditional on type, pool assignment is independent of individual taste draws. Type-specific shares are common across sexes and regions; counterfactuals hold them fixed. Match surplus for a pairing is the same in both pools.
6. **National parameters.** Preferences, σ_M, and pool shares are common across regions; each region has its own population and type baselines.
7. **Aversion counterfactual.** Hold nonparty preferences, baselines, taste distributions, σ_M, population, meetings, and outside payoffs fixed. Outside-partnership numbers respond; same-sex outcomes stay fixed.

◂ 12: Our approach

What is observed and what is estimated

Object	Source	Role
Partner preferences	Choice experiment	Fix party and education preferences across 16 possible matches
Party-by-sex-by-education counts	CES	Fix who is available in each region
Couple-type association	HCMST couples	Jointly estimate σ_M and meeting segmentation from 64 regional cells
Singlehood and outside matches	CES, aligned to ACS	Calibrate type baselines and outside-match payoffs

Notes. CES: Cooperative Election Study, 2017–2024. ACS: American Community Survey, 2017–2021, marriage and cohabitation targets. HCMST: How Couples Meet and Stay Together, 2017. The matching model fits couples across four census regions.

North Carolina voter-file couples are held out of estimation.

◂ 18: Estimation

Objective and estimation steps

Observed couple counts C^r; model counts $\widetilde{C}^r$, with type totals aligned to HCMST.

$$(\widehat{\sigma}_M, \{\widehat{p}_t\}) = \arg \min_{\sigma_M, \{p_t\}} \sum_r D\Big(C^r, \widetilde{C}^r(\sigma_M, \{p_t\})\Big)$$

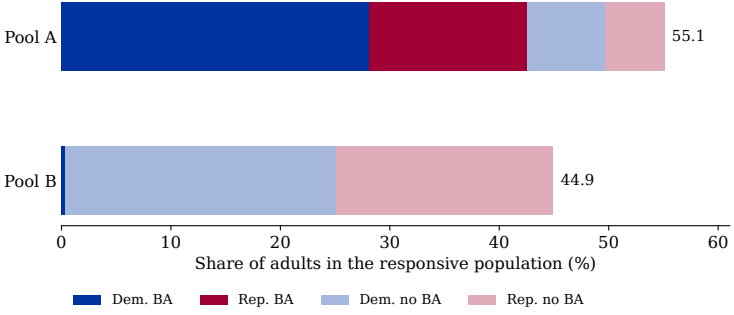
$$D(C, \widetilde{C}) = 2 \sum_{ij} \left[C_{ij} \log \frac{C_{ij}}{\widetilde{C}_{ij}} - C_{ij} + \widetilde{C}_{ij} \right]$$

For each candidate $(\sigma_M, \{p_t\})$:

1. Split each regional population across meeting pools.
2. Calibrate outside payoffs; adjust type baselines and solve matching repeatedly until singlehood matches.
3. Add the final predicted couples across pools in each region.
4. Align type totals to HCMST; evaluate deviance over 64 cells.

18: Estimation

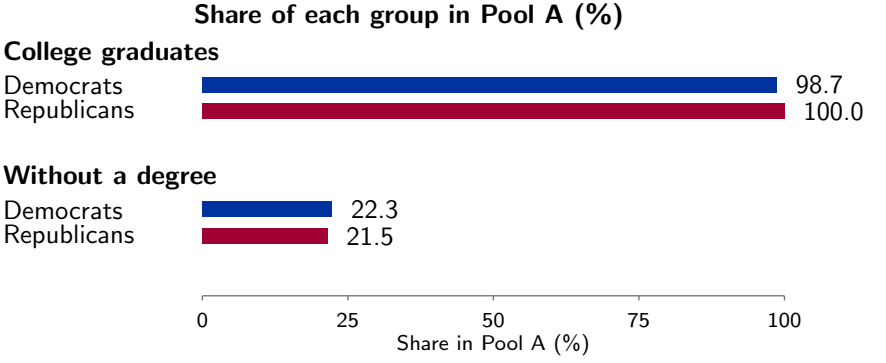
Composition of the estimated meeting pools



Notes. Flexible two-pool specification on the married-or-cohabiting population. Adults per 100 in the responsive population, summed across regions. Pool assignment shares common across women and men.

19: Model fit

Meeting-pool shares by party and education



Notes. Flexible two-pool estimate. The share in Pool A is estimated separately for each party-by-education group.

Counterfactuals hold these four shares fixed. Meeting opportunities are segmented mainly by education.

Within education groups, Democrats and Republicans enter Pool A at nearly the same rates.

◂ 19: Model fit ◂ 20: Counterfactual

How the estimates change with the model structure

Meeting pools and the gain from 40% lower aversion

Specification	Deviance	σ_M	Gain (pp)
Education-based two pools	41.06	0.93	1.53
Four-share two pools	40.27	0.93	1.57
Flexible three pools	36.58	1.19	1.17
Flexible four pools	32.58	$\to \infty$	0.00

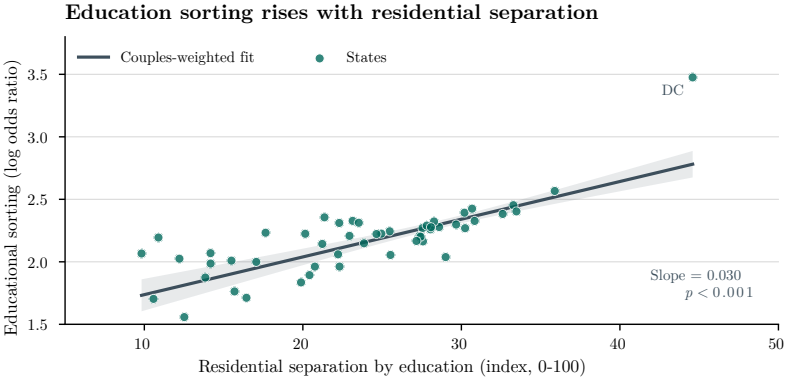
Notes. Gains in partnership among all adults ages 25–45. Attained feasible fits; no global-optimum claim. Four-pool taste dispersion approaches its boundary. Relative to the four-share two-pool model, AIC rises by 4.31 with three pools and 8.32 with four.

Region-specific taste dispersion

Partnership gain: 1.52 pp, compared with 1.57 pp in the main specification.

◂ 19: Model fit

Residential segregation and educational sorting

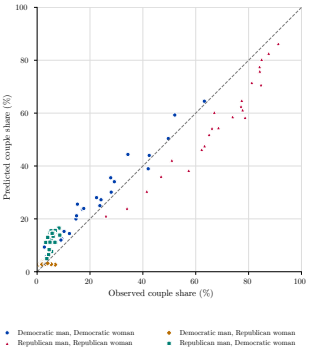


Source. 2017–2021 ACS, IPUMS USA. Adults ages 25–45; 50 states and DC. Segregation across PUMAs within states; educational sorting measured by log odds ratios. Residential patterns are observed after partnerships form.

Stronger residential segregation accompanies stronger educational sorting.

◂ 22: Conclusion

Party sorting in North Carolina: a held-out check



Source. November 2025 NC voter file; 88,656 address-linked opposite-sex pairs, both actively registered D/R and aged 25–45. National preferences and meeting parameters with local population inputs. Observed pairings and their party totals are held out.

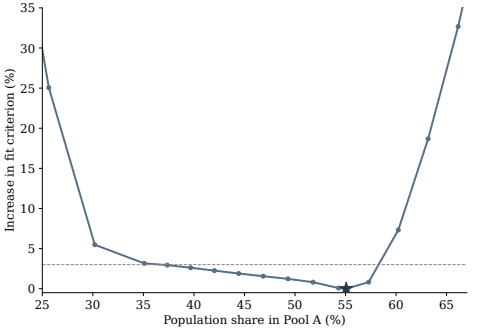
Same-party couples: observed 91.4%; model 82.0%.

The model understates same-party sorting in 23 of 24 commuting zones.

◂ 22: Conclusion

Meeting shares are less precisely determined

Fit across alternative meeting-pool sizes



Notes. Saved profile of the four-share model; fit criterion relative to its minimum. Other parameters adjust along the profile. The dashed line marks a 3% increase in the criterion. This is a sensitivity profile, not a confidence interval.

Several pool allocations fit closely.

Pool A contains 42–57% of the population along the nearby profile.

Partnership gains remain 1.52–1.58 pp across these fits.

$\widehat{\sigma}_M = 0.93$
95% bootstrap interval: $[0.74, 1.13]$.

Equilibrium accounting

$$\mu_{i0}^{rh} + \mu_{io}^{rh} + \sum_j \mu_{ij}^{rh} = n_i^{rh},$$

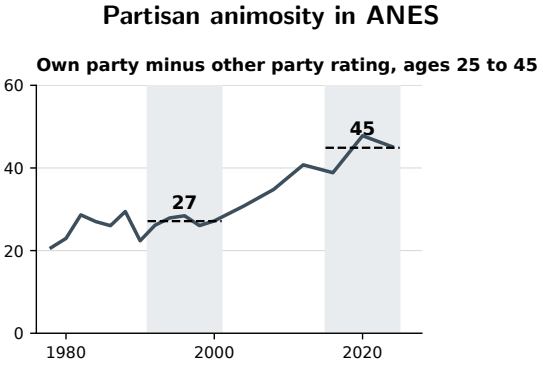
$$\mu_{0j}^{rh} + \mu_{oj}^{rh} + \sum_i \mu_{ij}^{rh} = m_j^{rh},$$

$$\frac{\mu_{io}^{rh}}{\mu_{i0}^{rh}} = \exp(\zeta_{fi}^r), \qquad \frac{\mu_{oj}^{rh}}{\mu_{0j}^{rh}} = \exp(\zeta_{mj}^r).$$

- Everyone is counted once as single, with a D/R partner, or with an outside partner.
- Fixed outside payoffs imply type-specific outside-match-to-single odds that remain constant across counterfactual equilibria.

◂ 10: Equilibrium ◂ 18: Estimation

Why reduce partisan aversion by 40%?



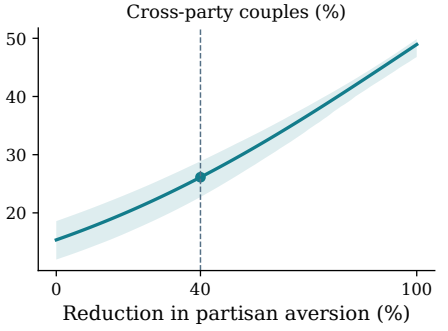
Notes. In-party minus out-party feeling thermometer, D/R adults ages 25–45 including leaners. Historical gap about 40% below the current gap. Apply a 40% reduction to every type's estimated cross-party penalty; current population composition and meeting fixed.

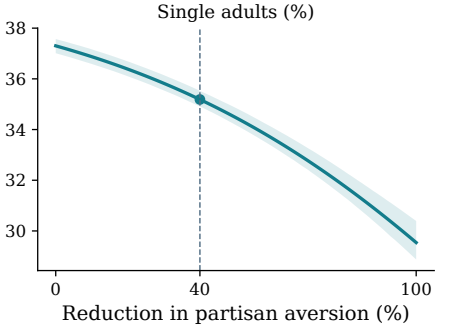
Pooled affective gap: 27.1 in 1992–2000; 44.9 in 2016–2024

Assumption: proportional transfer to partner-specific partisan aversion

◂ 20: Counterfactual

Effects of reducing partisan aversion





Notes. Four-share two-pool specification; composition and meeting fixed. Shading: 95% intervals from 1,000 paired bootstrap draws. Dashed line: the main 40% reduction. Singlehood among D/R adults; cross-party share among D/R couples.

Complete aversion removal: 7.8 pp less singlehood among Democrats and Republicans

◂ 21: Main result

Partnership definition and historical scale

Partnership: marriage or cohabitation

- CES population, 2017–2024; union rates aligned to ACS, 2017–2021
- Model baseline: **61.0% of all adults partnered**
- Within D/R adults: **37.3% single**

40% lower partisan aversion

$$\underbrace{2.12 \text{ pp}}_{\text{D/R adults}} \times \underbrace{74.15\%}_{\text{share of all adults}} = \underbrace{1.57 \text{ pp}}_{\text{all adults}}$$

CPS partnership: 66.75% (1995) $\rightarrow$ 61.67% (2025)

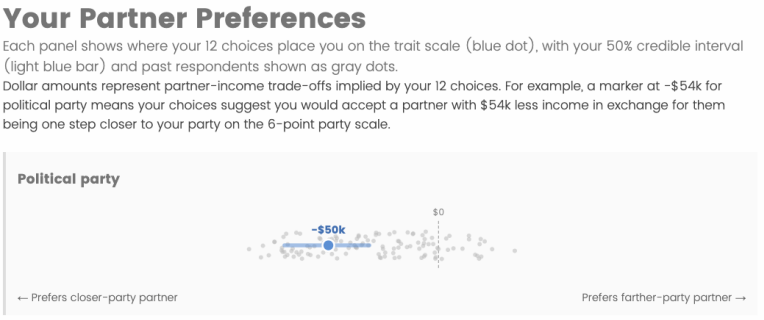
Rising aversion accounts for **30.9%** of this decline in the model

Notes. Ages 25–45 throughout. Outcomes for other parties held fixed. Historical comparison conditional on proportional transfer from ANES animosity to partner aversion and fixed meeting. CPS counts married or householder-linked cohabiting adults. Model and CPS baselines use separate surveys and periods.

◂ 21: Main result

Personalized feedback after the choice tasks

Respondents saw their own estimate alongside earlier respondents' estimates



Notes. Example from the fielded survey, cropped to the party panel. The blue marker and line show one respondent's estimate and uncertainty interval; gray dots show earlier respondents. The dollar value is personal feedback, not a paper estimate. Respondents also received panels for education, attractiveness, religious views, and family plans.

◂ 13: Experiment design

Experimental and market taste dispersion

An equivalent normalization: fix experimental error dispersion at one.

$$\widetilde{u}_{nk} = b_y \log y_k - b_n^P C_{nk}^P + \cdots + \varepsilon_{nk}, \qquad \varepsilon_{nk} \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \text{Gumbel}(0, 1).$$

Divide utility by $b_y > 0$ to express values in log-partner-income units:

$$\beta_n^P = \frac{b_n^P}{b_y}, \qquad \sigma = \frac{1}{b_y}, \qquad u_{nk} = \log y_k - \beta_n^P C_{nk}^P + \cdots + \sigma\varepsilon_{nk}.$$

- **Experiment:** $\sigma = 0.71$; 95% posterior interval $[0.62, 0.83]$.
- **Marriage market:** estimate its own taste dispersion σ_M; current estimate 0.93.

Equal dispersion would impose $\sigma_M = \sigma$. In experimental shock units, market taste dispersion is σ_M/σ.

◂ 15: Choice model ◂ 18: Estimation