

Sleeping with the enemy

Partisan sorting in online dating

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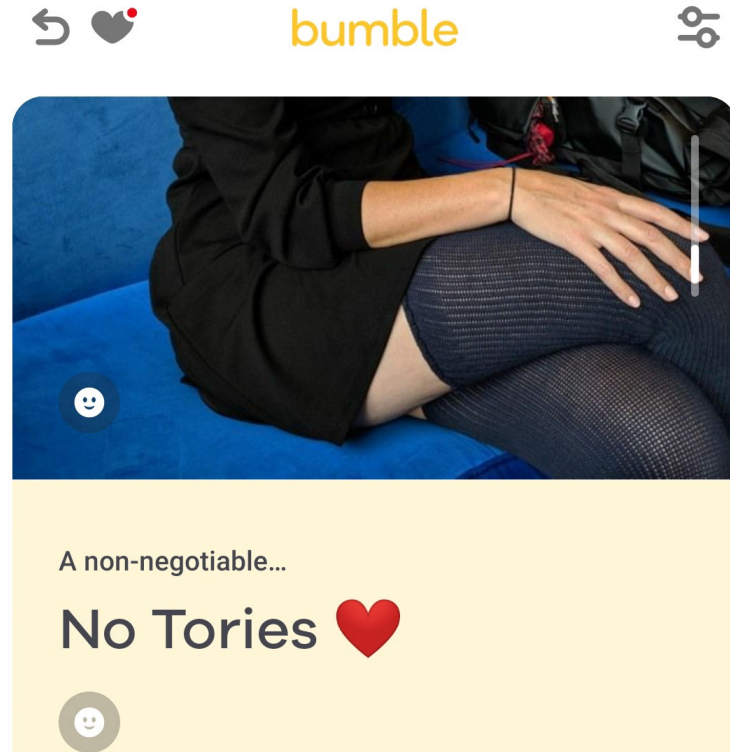
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Motivation



The Problem with Right Wing Men On Dating Apps

There's been plenty of debate recently about left-wingers automatically rejecting right-wing men because of their politics. What hasn't really been mentioned is how unpleasant those men can be.



Broader literature motivation

- Partisanship affects a range of political:

- And non political behaviors:

Broader literature motivation

- Partisanship affects a range of political:
 - **Trust** in government (i.e. Morisi et al 2019, Klein Teeselink and Melios, 2023)
 - **Information processing** (i.e. Hetherington, 1998, Pennycook et al, 2020, Melios et al, 2022)
 - **Affective Polarisation** (i.e. Iyengar, 2019)
- And non-political behaviors:
 - **Charitable Donations** (i.e. Klein Teeselink and Melios, 2022)
 - **Investment Choices** (i.e. Bankert, 2021)
 - **Abortion decisions** (i.e. Melios, Walsh and Dolan, 2022)
 - **Roommate choices** (i.e. Shafranek, 2021)
 - Even **SWB** (i.e. Di Tella and MacCulloch, 2005)

Broader literature motivation

- Why care about online dating?
 - Long-term dating
 - Marriage
 - Who our friends are?
- More consequential decisions than dating
- But, dating allows us to:
 - Get a glimpse on how dynamics of partisan social sorting works
 - Study trade-offs
 - Decompose the relative relevance of traits:
 - Political
 - Politically correlated
 - Personal
 - Connects to the broader literature on:
 - Cross cutting identities
 - Polarisation
 - Partisan biases

What do we know about dating out-partisans?

- Not the first ones that study partisanship/dating:
 - Huber & Malhotra (2017) – we prefer co-partisans:
 - Similar sorting to education and race
 - Nicholson et al (2016) - partisanship affects attractiveness ratings
 - Easton & Holbein (2021) – show:
 - Less pretty
 - Less dateable
 - Not worth the matchmaking time/effort
- But, fail to account for:
 - Interactions of political and non-political traits
 - Interactions of political and politically correlated traits

Experiments that just manipulate party affiliation might miss other influential attributes that affect choices through assumed/inferred characteristics

What we propose

- Inferred characteristics can muddle the primary causal effect we are interested in
- Does aversion towards out-partisans stem from just politics or other associated traits?
- We develop a new experiment based on three categories of traits:
 - Political traits
 - Politically correlated traits
 - Non-political traits
- This allows us *to discern the extent to which partisanship is used as a social heuristic in online dating.*
- *Taste based (homophily) or statistical discrimination in online dating?*

The experiment

- We started by approaching a worldwide dating platform (anonymous)
 - Attempted running a real in-platform experiment
 - It was borderline unethical
 - But we got anonymized demographic data of users across the world, inc:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Preferences
- Based on these demographics and literature we define:
 - **8 traits** (political, non-political and politically correlated)
 - **17 preregistered hypotheses**
- We examine the main effects for:
 - 8 main attributes (traits)
 - Interaction of these attributes with partisanship
 - Gender differences on height and educational preferences

The experiment

- Attributes
 - **Non Political**
 - Physical Attractiveness
 - Height
 - **Political**
 - Partisanship
 - **Politically correlated**
 - Education
 - Race
 - Diet
 - Ideology
 - Tolerance

The experiment

- We use these attributes to develop a “visual conjoint” experiment
 - Some traits are available as text
 - Some as part of a picture
- Pictures required specific attention to:
 - Size & Quality
 - Realism
 - Background
 - Expressions
 - Clothing
- Developed an equal amount of pictures for gender, race and physical attractiveness (8 pretty- 8 unattractive)
 - 500 individuals rated the pictures for levels of attractiveness before the study
 - Based on this we standardized the “level of attractiveness” of each photo based on what the 80% of respondents agreed on
 - Consulted with the dating companies on how realistic the profiles look

Profiles

The image displays two profile cards, A and B, set against a yellow background. Each card features a circular label at the top (A and B), a height icon and '5'8"', a graduation cap icon and 'Degree', a leaf icon and dietary preference, a person icon and political affiliation, and a 'Values' section. Card A is associated with a photo of a Black man, while Card B is associated with a photo of a white man.

Attribute	Profile A	Profile B
Height	5'8"	5'8"
Education	Degree	Degree
Dietary	No dietary limitations	Vegetarian, trying to turn vegan
Politics	Labour, but open to match with anyone	Labour, no Tories!
Values	I would describe myself as progressive	I would describe myself as traditional

Attributes levels

Attribute	Levels
Political	
Party	Labour Tory
Political Tolerance	Open to match with anyone No Tories/Lefties!
Politically-correlated	
Ideology	Traditional Progressive
Race	White Black
Education	Degree No degree
Diet	Vegetarian, trying to be vegan No dietary limitations
Non-political	
Physical attractiveness	High Low
Height	Tall Short

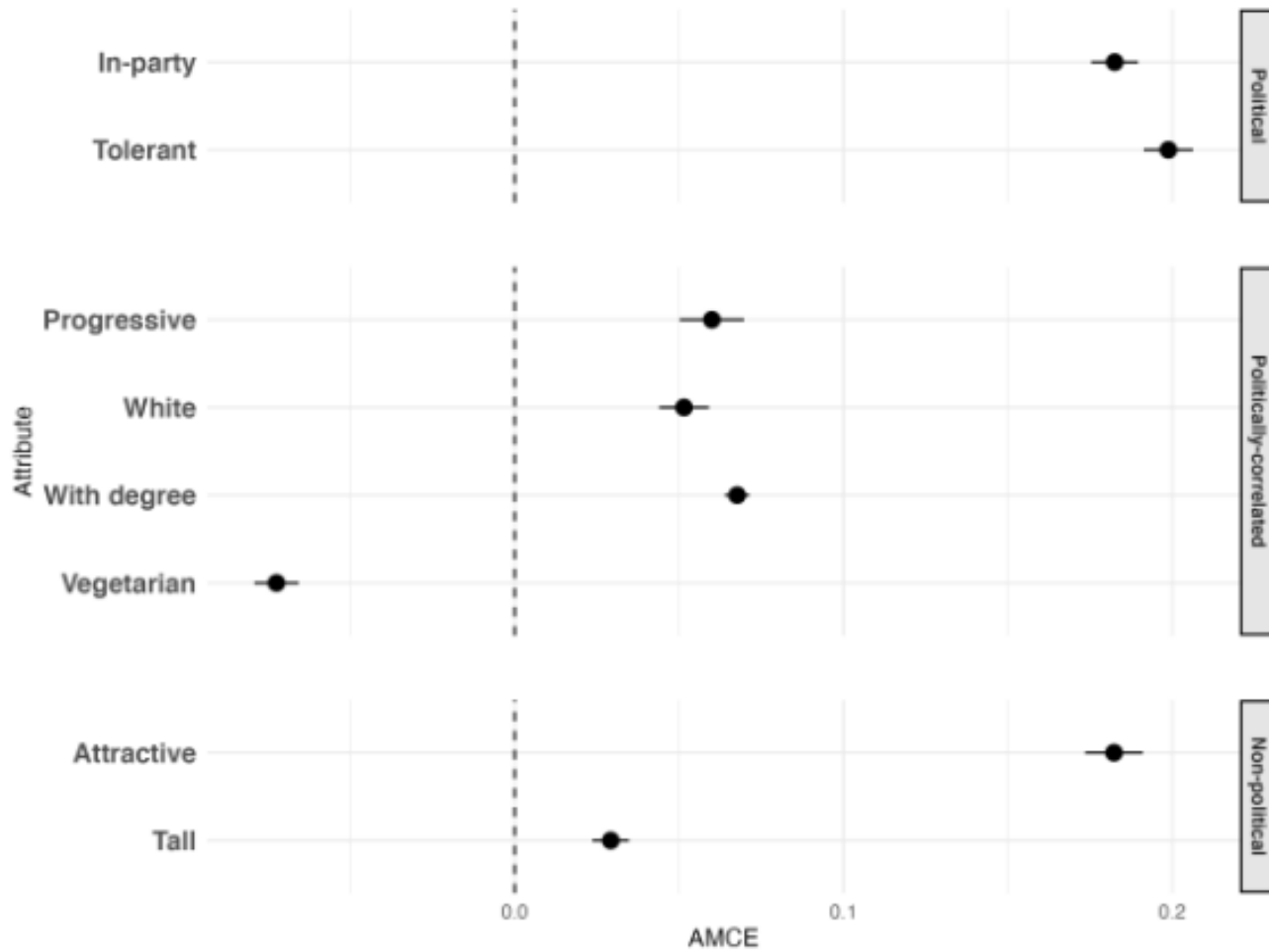
Associated survey

- First, they answer:
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Relationship status
 - Preference on dating (men, women, no preference)
- Then 16 choices between pairs
- Then:
 - Height
 - Ethnicity
 - Diet
 - Partisanship
 - Previous vote in the 2019 election
 - Like other party supporters
 - Questions on politically-correlated traits by party
 - Attention checks and feedback
- We run a fractional factorial design with 3.000 individuals in the UK, that were unmarried and matched the representative sample of demographics from the platform

Results

- What matters most?

Results

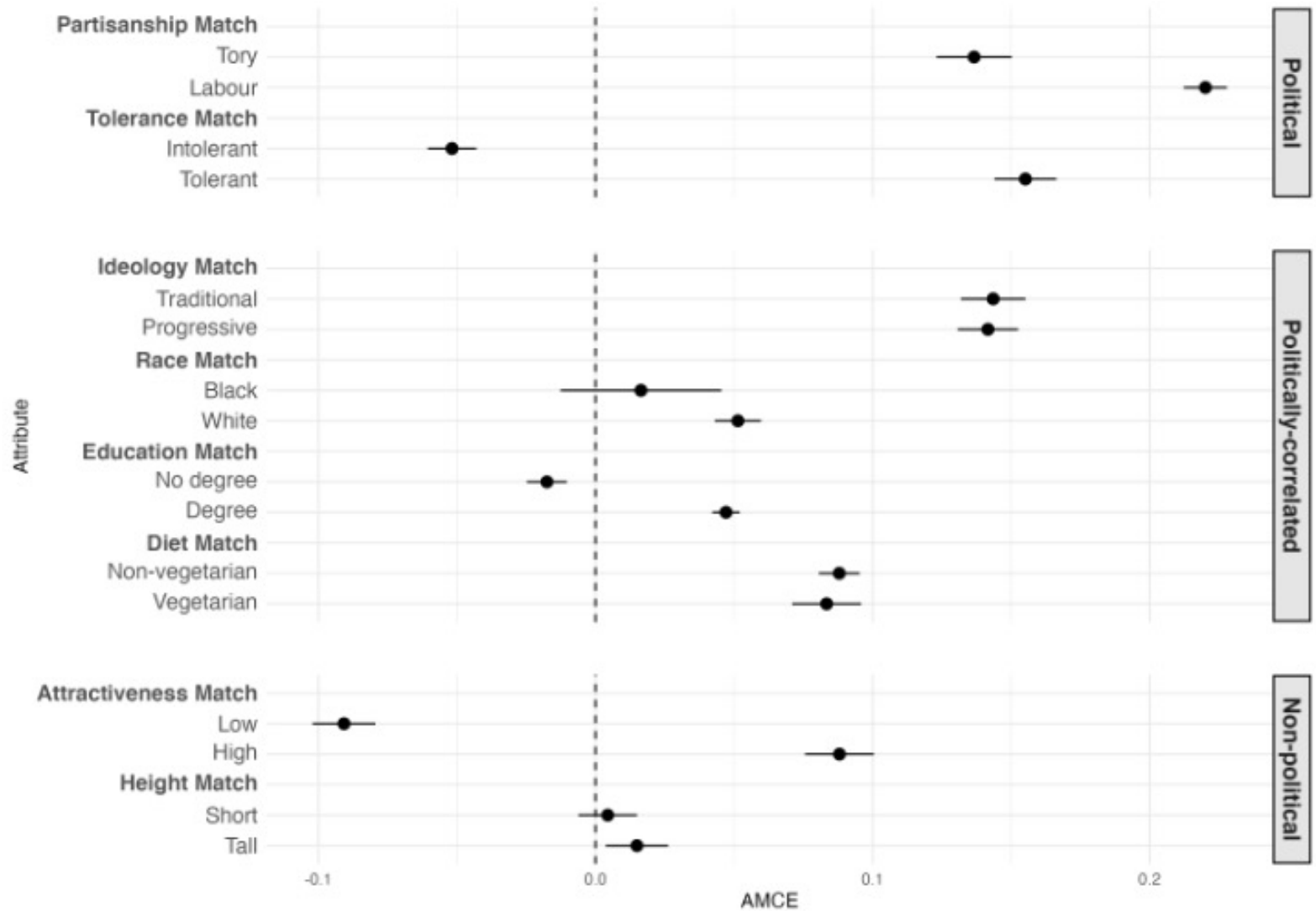


Results

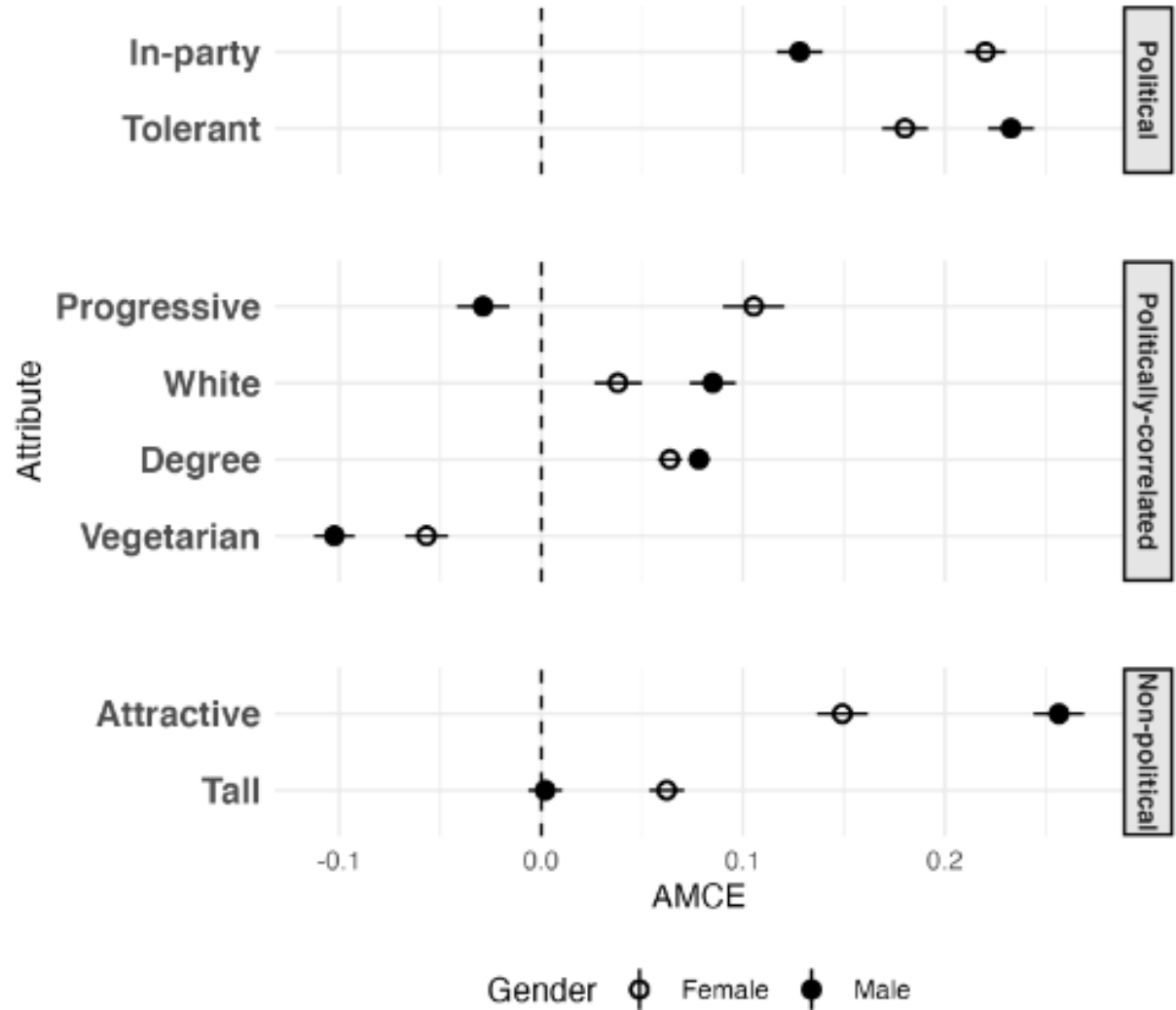
- Not attractiveness
- Not partisanship
- But tolerance

- Respondents prefer:
 - Progressive
 - Non vegetarian/vegan
 - Tall
 - White

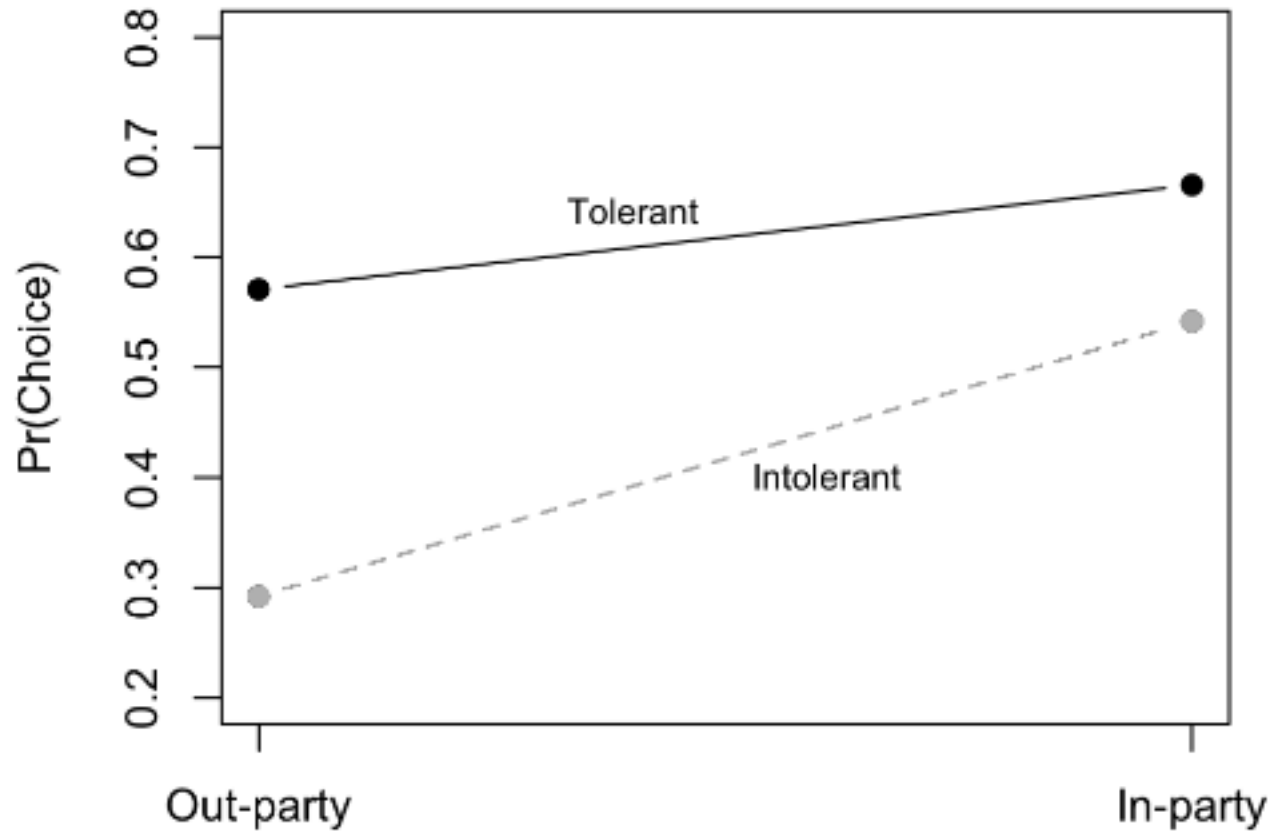
Matching results



Gender differences

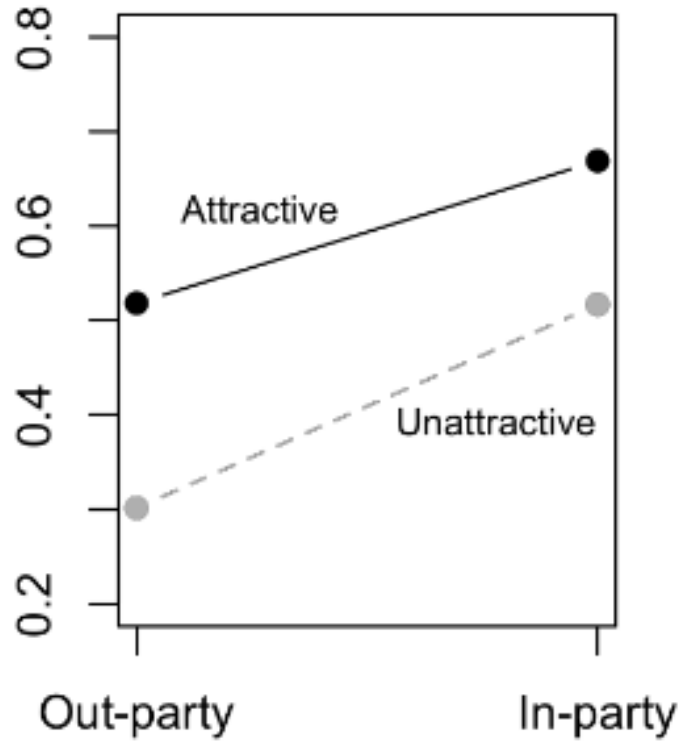


Tolerance as a mediator

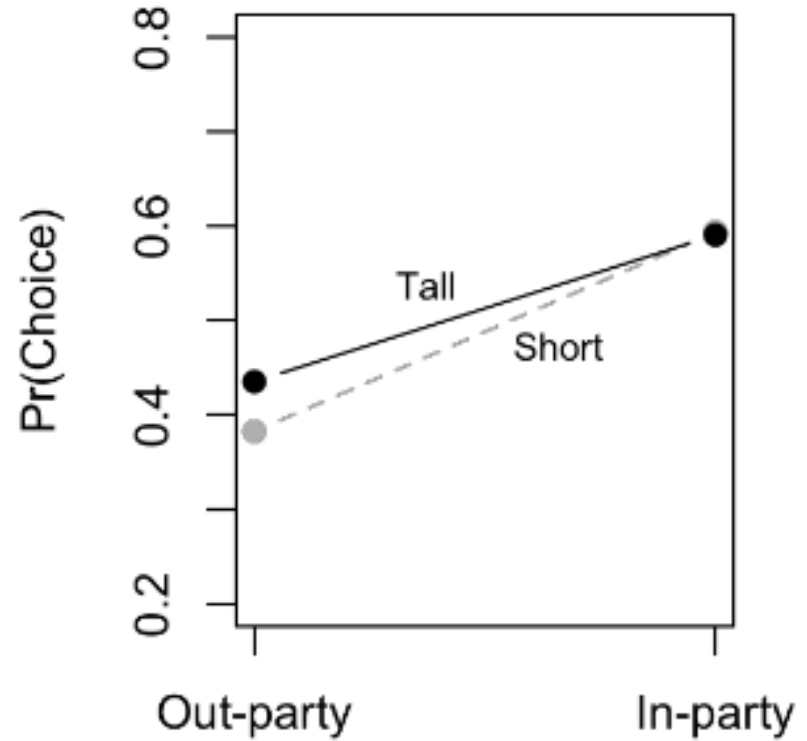


What about attractiveness?

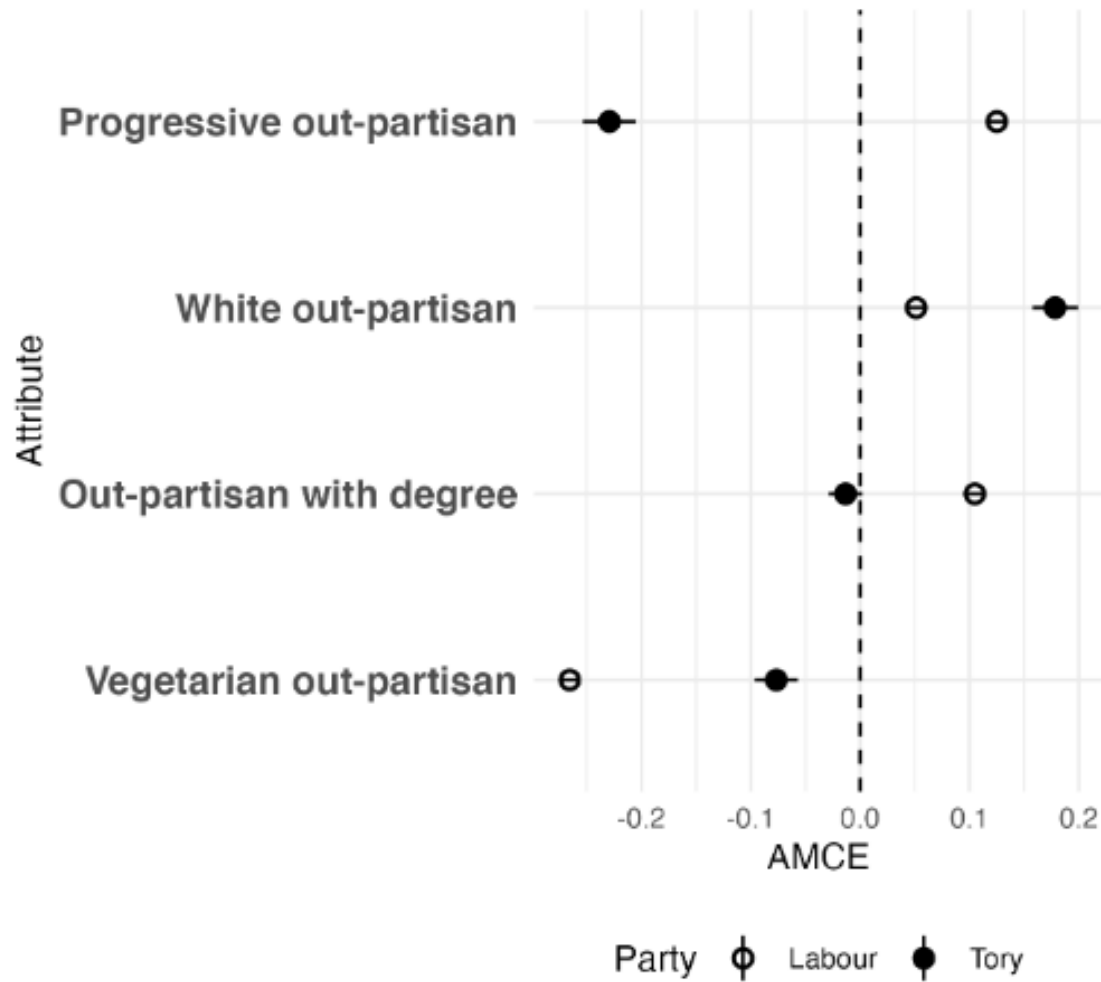
Beauty



Height



Counter stereotypical matches



Conclusions

- We developed a forced-choice conjoint experiment
- 3000 individuals choose between 16 pairs of dating profiles
- We show that partisanship has an effect similar to traditional dating criteria (attractiveness)
- Value partisanship twice as much as they value education
- Besides being pretty, being tolerant/open to other parties can work as a mediator
- Open questions about other types of identities (Brexit for example)