



## Original Article

# Do bedroom eyes wear political glasses? The role of politics in human mate attraction

Casey A. Klofstad<sup>a,\*</sup>, Rose McDermott<sup>b</sup>, Peter K. Hatemi<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup>*Department of Political Science, University of Miami*<sup>b</sup>*Department of Political Science, Brown University*<sup>c</sup>*Genetic Epidemiology, Queensland Institute of Medical Research*

Initial receipt 18 October 2010; final revision received 2 June 2011

**Abstract**

Most social science research portrays attitudes and behaviors as a product of one's environment or social upbringing. Recently, however, scholars have begun to expand upon this paradigm by showing that biological factors such as genes, which are passed from parents to offspring, can also help explain differences in political attitudes and behaviors. As a result, illuminating how spouses select one another is the first step toward understanding both the genetic and social transmission of political preferences from parents to offspring. Yet the question of whether individuals actively seek out mates who are more politically similar is unknown. To address this lacuna, data were gathered from Internet dating profiles. These data show that most individuals are reluctant to advertise politics when attempting to attract a mate. However, the correlates of political attitudes and behavior, such as education and civic engagement, do predict whether a person uses politics as a way to attract a mate. Thus, although spouses share such predilections more than almost any other trait, individuals do not appear to initially select potential dates along political lines.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Politics; Mate choice; Mate attraction; Sexual selection; Internet dating**1. Introduction**

It is traditionally thought that political preferences and behaviors are a product of one's environment (e.g., parental socialization, exposure to political discussion in social networks and the like) and one's social background and standing (e.g., education, political engagement and the like) (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Klofstad, 2011; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zaller, 1992). The most notable work within this paradigm, *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), used survey data collected in the United States to interpret the high correlation of partisan preferences between parents and offspring as the result of parental socialization. Thus, it has long been believed that political orientations were "learned" at the knees of our parents.

More recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to draw upon evolutionary, neurobiological and psychological paradigms to explain political preferences and behavior (e.g., Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008). More specifically, the finding that individual differences in political attitudes and behaviors are due as much, or in some cases more, to genetic heritability as they are to the social environment or processes of socialization (Eaves, Eysenck & Martin, 1989; Martin et al., 1986; for a review, see Hatemi, Dawes, Frost-Keller, Settle, & Verhulst, 2011) has inspired a revision of theory and models regarding the import of political socialization on offspring political preferences (Hatemi et al., 2010). If political orientations are genetically influenced (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005) and this influence passes from parents to children, then knowing how parents select each other as mates is the first step in the political socialization process (Eaves & Hatemi, 2008).

Political preferences are especially important in this regard, as spouses appear to be more similar in their political preferences than almost any other trait, with religious affiliation being the exception (Alford et al., 2011; Eaves

---

\* Corresponding author. Department of Political Science, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL 33146.

E-mail address: klofstad@gmail.com (C.A. Klofstad).

et al., 1999; Stoker & Jennings 1989, 2006; Zuckerman, Fitzgerald, & Dasovic, 2005). Furthermore, this similarity exists prior to marriage (Feng & Baker, 1994; Watson et al., 2004), and length of marriage apparently has little effect on spousal similarity (i.e., similarity is not a product of spouses socializing each other over time) (Caspi & Herbener 1993; Mascie-Taylor 1989).<sup>1</sup> Because cohabitating long-term romantic partners (e.g., parents and spouses) have a high degree of concordance on political orientations, it has been assumed that they simply select each other on these traits. However, this assumption has yet to be fully explored. In this paper, we examine whether political preferences play a conscious role in a dater's attempt to attract a mate. Thus far, the literature has focused on the last step of the mating process — long-term mating outcomes. Here we concentrate on the first step — the act of mate selection.

To address this lacuna, data were collected from a nationally representative sample of dating profiles posted on a popular Internet dating Web site. We use an Internet sample not only because this represents an increasingly prevalent way for people to meet, but also because it enhances the ability of individuals to choose dates strategically by culling through extensive online databases, especially at the outset of the dating process when online date seekers are less constrained by reality or social norms because they are not initially meeting potential partners face to face.

## 2. The role of politics in human mating preferences

### 2.1. Date selection should be apolitical for most

We anticipate that most individuals will choose not to advertise politics as part of their “plumage” when initially attempting to attract a mate for two reasons. One is because politics is a very low-salience topic, at least among the American public (e.g., Zaller 1992). For example, results from the 2008 American National Elections Studies (ANES) Time Series Study pre-election questionnaire show that 55% of the American public reported being only “somewhat” or “not much” interested in the historic 2008 campaign.

Second, politics is a potentially controversial topic to discuss with a potential mate. Indeed, political disagreement is infrequent in social networks of relatives and friends (Mutz 2002a, 2002b, 2006). Individuals seeking in-group members may use politics as a coalitional badge to the extent that such an affiliation remains salient to them (Kurzman, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2001). However, such displays of shared affiliation emerge later in relationships, when the in-group's norms are established (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Applying this logic to the dating market, people have an incentive to misrepresent or hide their political preferences at the outset of the dating process [i.e., a “withholding effect”;

for other examples, see Pawlowski and Dunbar (1999) on how older women have an incentive to not list their age in dating profiles to appear younger, and Hall, Park, Song and Cody (2010) on how males are more likely to misrepresent personal assets, while females are more likely to misrepresent weight]. The costs of displaying political affiliation are potentially high at this point because when people do not share the same political attitudes, strangers view them in a less positive way, have less warm feelings toward them and base future views of them through this less positive lens (Byrne, 1961; Curry and Kenny 1974; Cavior, Miller, & Cohen, 1975). Thus, signaling or soliciting a specific political affiliation may not prove adaptive when the goal is to maximize potential dating options. Moreover, Kofoed (2008) shows that while many subjects would consider having sex with someone from another political party, a significantly larger number refused to even attempt dating across party lines. Simply put, signaling one's political affiliation may remove half of the dating pool. This may be especially problematic if the dater's goal is short-term sexual interaction and not longer-term mating, which is not uncommon, particularly in younger adults.

These findings, however, appear at odds with studies on mate assortment. That is, political affiliations do appear important for long-term mating (Alford et al., 2011) and thus may emerge more significant in the negotiation from short-term to longer-term partnership or when seeking a long-term mate. For these reasons, we anticipate that most individuals will choose not to advertise politics when attempting to attract a mate initially for fear of potentially alienating otherwise attractive, especially shorter-term, partners, but may use politics as a sifting mechanism when choosing a long-term partner from the pool of potential mates.

### 2.2. Who does consider politics during mate selection?

While we expect that most individuals will not use politics to attract a mate, there are mitigating factors that drive and condition mating choices. Positive assortative mating is a behavioral pattern that is common across a variety of taxa, including humans (Mare 1991; Vandenberg 1972), whereby individuals seek mates who align with them on the attributes that matter most to them (Buston & Emlen, 2003; Hill & Reeve, 2003). Moreover, since the mating market is highly conditional, we expect that individuals with different resource incentives will rely on different strategies (Buss & Barnes, 1986). For example, Pawlowski and Dunbar (1999) find that men prefer women of high reproductive value (i.e., young), while women prefer men who possess more resources. So, while the list of resources that daters seek may include money, physical attraction or status, for some, it might also include shared political values (i.e., loyalty to the in-group).

Applying this logic to the dating market, some individuals may choose to use politics as a way to signal in-group membership when offering themselves to a potential mate,

<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to note that married couples are more similar in their political views than unmarried couples (Botwin et al. 1997).

especially those for whom politics is particularly important or sexually charged.

Consequently, we expect that individuals who are predisposed to be engaged in politics will advertise politics as a way to attract a mate with similar interests. A number of demographic factors predispose individuals for political engagement. Given that historically women were less active in politics and that politics is stereotypically seen as an interest more common to men (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Lopez and Taylor 2009), we expect that women will be less likely than men to invoke politics when attempting to attract a mate. Since racial and ethnic minorities have been historically less active in politics (Verba et al., 1995), we expect that members of these groups will be less likely to use politics when attempting to attract a mate. Provided that the ability and wherewithal to become engaged in politics increase as one ages, becomes better educated and earns more income, we also anticipate that instances of politicized dating will increase alongside these factors. Also, since individuals are more likely to be politically active if they are civically engaged (e.g., Verba et al., 1995), we expect that individuals who have such engagement will be more likely to invoke politics when trying to attract a mate.

Finally, both evolutionary (Bereczkei, Voros, Gal, & Bernath, 1997; Geary, Vigil, & Byrd-Craven, 2004) and socialization (Townsend and Levy 1990) perspectives find that physical attractiveness is important to women and men to varying degrees and for different reasons. Thus, we also need to consider the role that physical characteristics play in the decision to include or omit politics from one's "sales pitch." As discussed above, politics is likely to be seen by most as a topic better left untouched when attempting to attract a mate initially. Consequently, an individual who chooses to use politics to attract a mate must be willing and able to afford the "costs" associated with engaging in a potentially risky behavior that might unnecessarily exclude possible prospects. Given that sexually attractive individuals are seen as more desirable (Townsend & Levy 1990), we expect that people who are physically appealing to the opposite sex will be more likely to make mention of politics, if it is important to them, when attempting to attract a mate.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Data collection

In the fall of 2009 data were collected from profiles posted on a popular Internet dating Web site. The exact source of these data is confidential to preserve the privacy of the users of this service. We can reveal, however, that the individuals we studied selected their own dates (i.e., the online service did not match couples together). While dating profiles are not a perfect representation of human mate choice, this research design is frequently used to study such behavior (e.g., Bereczkei et al., 1997; Greenlees & McGrew

1994; McGraw 2002; Waynforth & Dunbar 1995; Wiederman 1993). Moreover, online dating allows potential partners to distill characteristics of most interest to them more efficiently, allowing those most invested in certain traits to both advertise and respond differentially to those who signal similar concerns. Also, online dating is becoming an increasingly prevalent behavior. Studies commissioned by two popular online dating sites, Match.com and eHarmony (Harris Interactive 2009), claimed that 17% of US couples married in the last 3 years met through an online dating Web site (Chadwick Martin Bailey, 2010) and that 18.52% of new marriages between 2008 and 2009 were of couples who met on the Internet (Harris Interactive 2009). Certainly, both Web sites and the agencies that represent them have an interest in promoting the use of the Internet to find mates, and their findings were not subject to peer review. However, their claims are consistent with Madden and Lenhart's (2006) Pew Online Dating report, which found that 15% of American adults say they know someone who had married or been in a long-term relationship with someone they met online.

To develop a nationally representative sample of dater profiles, we randomly selected 313 US zip codes and extracted information from the first five profiles of men seeking women and the first five profiles of women seeking men listed within a 10-mile radius of each zip code. Because we are generally concerned with mate selection as a mechanism by which the transmission of political orientations occurs from biological parents to offspring, data were not gathered from individuals seeking a same-sex partner. The information gathered from the profiles is based on responses to a "close-ended" survey completed by the dater (i.e., our data do not include content coding of "open-ended" text). Data were collected from a total of 2944 profiles because some zip codes contained fewer than five male and/or female profiles.

#### 3.2. Political content in dating profiles

In the dating profile section on "interests," daters were allowed to select "political interests." In the "politics" section of the profile, daters were allowed to identify themselves as either "very liberal," "liberal," "middle of the road," "conservative," "ultra conservative," "nonconformist," "some other viewpoint," or "no answer."

#### 3.3. Covariates of politicized mate selection

Our analysis accounts for biological sex, age, race, education and income. We also examine whether one lists "volunteering" or "religion/spiritual" as interests, as indicators of civic engagement (e.g., Putnam, 2001; Verba et al., 1995). Whether the daters chose to post their picture in their profile is used as a proxy for physical attractiveness, under the assumption that attractive individuals will be more willing to post their picture. This assumption seems reasonable given that visual displays correlate with objective

measures of physical attractiveness in a variety of taxa, including certain primates. For example, Soltis et al. (1999) found that female Japanese macaques proved more receptive to mating with males who displayed most frequently, particularly when they were most fertile. Similar display patterns have been found in humans (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). In our examination of whether politics was listed as an interest, we include reported political preferences as independent variables in the analysis. Conversely, in the analysis of whether political preferences were reported, we add whether one listed politics as an interest as an additional measure of civic engagement.

3.4. Method of analysis

In the next section, we first examine how frequently political content is advertised in dating profiles. We then present a multivariate analysis to examine the covariates of advertising political content. Since all of our dependent variables are bivariate, these analyses were conducted using logistic regression in the Zelig package of the R statistical computing program; Zelig is an open source program frequently used by political scientists (Imai, King, & Lau, 2008, 2007a, b). As logistic regression coefficients are not readily interpretable, substantive interpretations of statistically significant coefficients were derived using the “setx” and “sim” procedures in Zelig, the details of which are explained in Imai et al. (2008, 2007a).

4. Results

4.1. Frequency of political content in dating profiles

Fig. 1 shows the frequency of the different interests that daters could mention in their profile. Those most frequently selected were ones that a person would use to signal that they are a fun and outgoing companion, such as going to movies and dining out. In contrast, political interests ranked near the bottom of the list, with only 14% of daters including this category in their profile. To put this figure into perspective, when asked to describe their body type, a higher proportion of daters (17%) voluntarily described themselves as either “heavy set,” having “a few extra pounds” or “stocky.”

Fig. 2 shows that relatively few individuals were willing to express a definitive political preference (i.e., either liberal or conservative) in their profile, as the majority of daters report that their politics are “middle of the road” (57%). Relative to nationally representative data from the ANES, our daters overreported moderate viewpoints and underreported definitive viewpoints. However, in comparison to the ANES sample, daters were more likely to offer a response to the politics question rather than just say “no answer”; rather than dodging the issue by not offering a response, it appears daters chose to report that they have moderate political preferences.

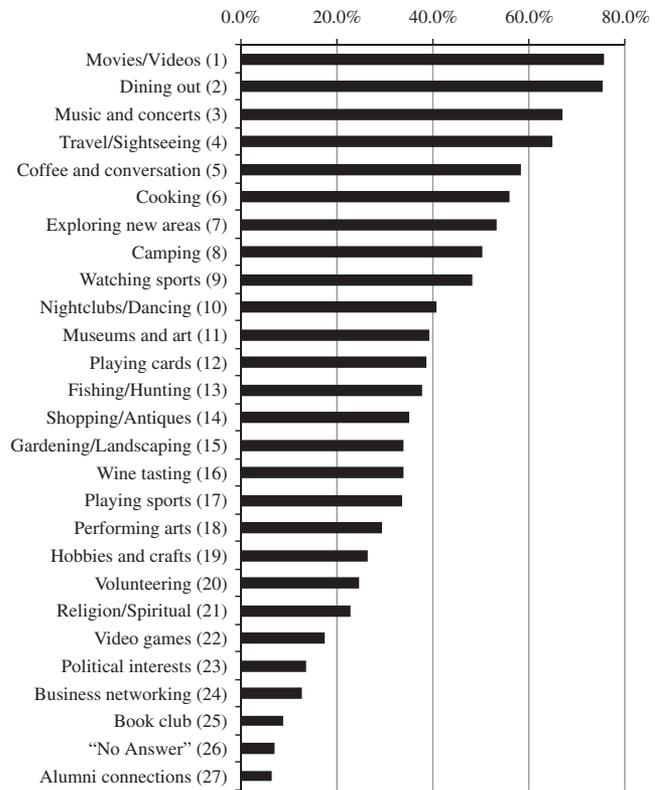


Fig. 1. Percent of subjects who checked a given interest in the dating profile. Overall rank among all other interests is listed in parentheses.

4.2. Who lists politics as an interest?

Starting at the top of the first column of Table 1, the results indicate that women are eight percentage points less likely to report being interested in politics. Age correlates

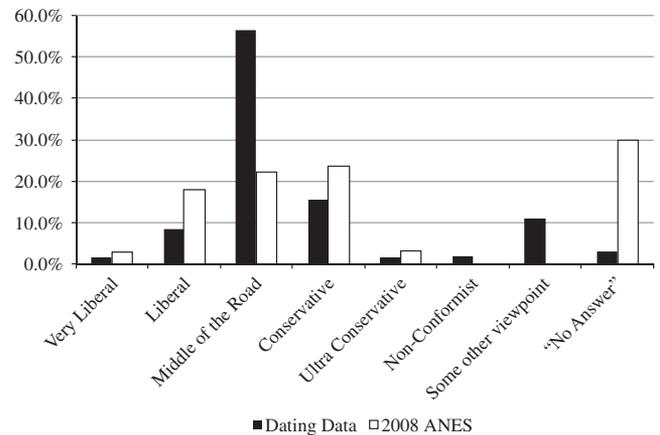


Fig. 2. Self-reported political preferences. The ANES data come from the 2008 pre-election time series questionnaire (variable V083069). The ANES respondents were coded “very liberal” if they responded “extremely liberal,” “liberal” if they responded “liberal” or “slightly liberal,” “middle of the road” if they responded “moderate; middle of the road,” “conservative” if they responded “slightly conservative” or “conservative,” “very conservative” if they responded “extremely conservative” and “no answer” if they refused to respond or responded “don’t now” or “I haven’t thought much about it.”

Table 1  
Covariates of reporting being interested in politics

Demographics	All daters	Women	Men
Gender (female)	-.63*** (.18)	—	—
Age	.02*** (.01)	.02** (.01)	.02** (.01)
Race (White)	.16 (.32)	.91 (.64)	-.09 (.39)
Race (Black)	.31 (.42)	1.07 (.76)	.01 (.55)
Race (Latino)	-.18 (.45)	.18 (.93)	-.35 (.52)
Education	.20** (.06)	.08 (.11)	.27*** (.08)
Income	.13** (.06)	.26** (.11)	.06 (.07)
<b>Physical attractiveness</b>			
Posted picture in profile	.07 (.18)	-.06 (.29)	.17 (.23)
<b>Civic engagement</b>			
Interested in volunteering	1.04*** (.17)	.99*** (.28)	1.03*** (.22)
Interested in religion/spirituality	.57** (.18)	.32 (.30)	.72** (.23)
<b>Political preferences</b>			
Liberal	1.97* (1.04)	16.46 (2656.03)	1.73 (1.08)
Conservative	1.55 (1.04)	16.10 (2656.03)	1.35 (1.06)
Middle of the road	.77 (1.04)	15.20 (2656.03)	.60 (1.05)
Nonconformist	.82 (1.18)	16.12 (2656.03)	.01 (1.33)
Some other viewpoint	-.04 (1.11)	-.56 (2767.03)	.22 (1.13)
Intercept	-5.20*** (1.10)	-20.94 (2656.03)	-4.79*** (1.13)
AIC	1076	407	683
N	1467	634	847

Note: Cell entries are coefficients from a logistic regression analysis (Imai et al., 2008, 2007a,b). Standard errors are listed in parentheses. Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) is twice the number of parameters in the model minus twice the value of the model's log-likelihood. Sample sizes vary due to omission of cases with missing data.

\* $P \leq .10$ ; \*\* $P \leq .05$ ; \*\*\* $P \leq .01$ .

positively with listing politics. For example, an 18-year-old is four percentage points less likely to report being interested in politics than a 40-year-old. Educational attainment increases the likelihood of listing politics. For example, a dater who graduated from college is four percentage points more likely to report being interested in politics than a dater who completed high school. Income correlates with listing politics. For example, a dater earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 per year is four percentage points more likely to report being interested in politics than a dater who earns between \$25,000 and \$35,000. Daters interested in volunteering are 13 percentage points more likely to report being interested in politics. Likewise, those interested in religion/spirituality are seven percentage points more likely to list politics.

The final two columns of Table 1 indicate some differences in the mating strategies of women and men. Women with higher incomes are more likely to list politics as an interest in their dating profiles, but no such relationship is detected among men. Education correlates with listing politics as an interest among men, but not among women. The data also show that while interest in religion/spirituality correlates with listing politics as an interest among men, such a relationship is not detected among women.

#### 4.3. Who is willing to express a political preference?

Table 2 examines the antecedents of an individual's willingness to express a political preference in his or her dating profile. Individuals who identified as "very liberal," "liberal," "conservative" or "ultra conservative" are treated as having expressed a definitive preference, while all others are coded as having not expressed a definitive preference. Individuals who identified as "very liberal" or "liberal" are treated as liberals, while all others are coded as not reporting being liberal; individuals who identified as "ultra conservative" or "conservative" are treated as conservatives, while all others are coded as not reporting conservative views. Finally, individuals who identified as "middle of the road" are treated as middle of the road, while all others are coded as not reporting moderate views.

The first column of Table 2 indicates that older daters were more willing to express a definitive political preference. For example, a 40-year-old is predicted to be four percentage points more likely to have reported a definitive preference than an 18-year-old. Education is positively correlated with reporting a definitive preference. For example, college graduates are 15 percentage points more likely to list a definitive preference than high school graduates. Individuals interested in religion and spirituality are 13 percentage points more likely to list a definitive preference, and individuals who listed politics as an interest are 19 percentage points more likely to have listed a definitive preference.

The second and third columns of Table 2 indicate that these results hold for women and men alike (with the exception of the positive relationship between age and expressing a definitive preference among men only). More specifically, in step with the literature on political engagement (e.g., Burns et al., 2001; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997), women are less likely to report that they are interested in politics than men (Table 1). On the other hand, the insignificant *Gender* coefficient in the first column of Table 2 indicates that both sexes are equally likely to express a definitive political preference. Moreover, interest in politics is also correlated with reporting a definite political preference among both men and women. Given the small minority of daters who expressed such a preference (27%), this suggests that both men and women must be sufficiently civically engaged so that the potential costs associated with explicitly identifying with an ideological camp are perceived to be small or irrelevant.

The middle portion of Table 2 examines the antecedents of identifying as either a liberal or a conservative. Consistent with the gender "partisan gap" (e.g., Burden 2008), women are nearly twice as likely to report being a liberal. Education is positively correlated with reporting liberal preferences. For example, college graduates are 11 percentage points more likely to report being liberal than high school graduates. Likewise, individuals interested in politics are 11 percentage points more likely to report being liberal. These findings hold for men and women alike.

Table 2  
Covariates of reporting political preferences

Demographics	Liberal or conservative			Liberal			Conservative			Middle of the road		
	All daters	Women	Men	All daters	Women	Men	All daters	Women	Men	All daters	Women	Men
Gender (female)	.04 (.13)	—	—	.72*** (.19)	—	—	-.41*** (.15)	—	—	.08 (.11)	—	—
Age	.01** (.005)	.003 (.007)	.02*** (.01)	-.01* (.007)	-.02* (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.03*** (.01)	.02** (.01)	.03*** (.01)	-.002 (.004)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Race (White)	-.03 (.24)	-.48 (.33)	.45 (.34)	-.54* (.30)	-.66* (.40)	-.32 (.46)	.52 (.32)	-.03 (.46)	.95** (.46)	.17 (.21)	.43 (.31)	-.08 (.29)
Race (Black)	-.47 (.34)	-.50 (.47)	-.57 (.52)	-.19 (.43)	.01 (.54)	-.55 (.74)	-.43 (.46)	-.71 (.66)	-.33 (.66)	.07 (.29)	.01 (.43)	.13 (.39)
Race (Latino)	-.64* (.36)	-.44 (.55)	-.69 (.49)	.02 (.42)	-.05 (.62)	.09 (.60)	-1.40** (.63)	-1.19 (1.08)	-1.37* (.78)	.55* (.30)	.87* (.52)	.32 (.37)
Education	.26*** (.05)	.29*** (.08)	.25*** (.06)	.48*** (.07)	.42*** (.10)	.55*** (.10)	.06 (.05)	.07 (.10)	.06 (.07)	-.10** (.04)	-.09 (.07)	-.11** (.06)
Income	-.04 (.04)	-.05 (.08)	-.05 (.06)	-.07 (.07)	-.04 (.10)	-.11 (.09)	-.01 (.05)	-.02 (.10)	-.02 (.06)	.09** (.04)	.14** (.07)	.08 (.05)
<b>Physical attractiveness</b>												
Posted picture in profile	.17 (.13)	.07 (.20)	.23 (.18)	.31 (.20)	.11 (.26)	.55* (.32)	.05 (.15)	-.004 (.24)	.06 (.20)	-.04 (.12)	.13 (.18)	-.14 (.16)
<b>Civic engagement</b>												
Interested in volunteering	-.26* (.15)	-.30 (.22)	-.23 (.20)	-.07 (.21)	-.07 (.28)	-.10 (.32)	-.29* (.17)	-.40 (.27)	-.21 (.22)	.16 (.13)	.15 (.20)	.18 (.19)
Interested in religion/spirituality	.58*** (.14)	.67*** (.21)	.56*** (.20)	-.39* (.23)	-.44 (.30)	-.26 (.35)	.97*** (.16)	1.24*** (.24)	.79*** (.21)	-.49*** (.13)	-.53*** (.20)	-.48*** (.19)
Interested in politics	.99*** (.16)	1.18*** (.27)	.91*** (.20)	1.03*** (.22)	1.06*** (.32)	.97*** (.30)	.61*** (.18)	.64** (.32)	.62*** (.22)	-.65*** (.16)	-.79*** (.27)	-.57*** (.20)
Intercept	-2.24*** (.34)	-1.48*** (.48)	-2.97*** (.47)	-2.97*** (.47)	-1.82 (.60)	-3.54*** (.71)	-3.19*** (.43)	-2.83*** (.64)	-3.76*** (.58)	.33 (.29)	-.38 (.44)	.91** (.39)
AIC	1712	754	963	930	500	446	1364	546	831	2005	864	1153
N	1482	634	847	1482	634	847	1482	634	847	1482	634	847

Note: Cell entries are coefficients from a logistic regression analysis (Imai et al., 2008, 2007a, b). Standard errors are listed in parentheses. Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) is twice the number of parameters in the model minus twice the value of the model's log-likelihood. Sample sizes vary due to omission of cases with missing data.

\* $P \leq .10$ ; \*\* $P \leq .05$ ; \*\*\* $P \leq .01$ .

Also consistent with the gender partisan gap, Table 2 shows that women are six percentage points less likely to identify as conservative. Age is positively correlated with expressing conservative political views. For example, a 40-year-old is six percentage points more likely to identify as a conservative than an 18-year-old. Latinos are 12 percentage points less likely to identify as conservatives. Daters interested in religion/spirituality are 19 percentage points more likely to report conservative preferences. Individuals interested in politics are 10 percentage points more likely to report being conservative. These findings hold for men and women alike, with the exception of the positive relationship between being white and identifying as conservative among only men.

The final three columns of Table 2 examine the antecedents of reporting “middle of the road” preferences. Given that the vast majority of the sample did so (57%), it is not surprising that this risk-adverse strategy was adopted by both men and women alike, as indicated by the insignificant *Gender* coefficient. Education is negatively correlated with reporting moderate preferences. For example, college graduates are seven percentage points less likely to report being “middle of the road” than high school graduates. Income correlates with listing “middle of the road.” For example, a dater earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 per year is seven percentage points more likely to report being “middle of the road” than a dater who earns between \$25,000 and \$35,000. Daters interested in religion/spirituality are 12 percentage points less likely to report moderate preferences. Individuals interested in politics are 15 percentage points less likely to report “middle of the road” preferences. These findings hold for men and women alike, with the exceptions of the negative relationship between education and identifying as “middle of the road” among only men, and the positive relationship between income and reporting “middle of the road” among only women.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *The difference between assortative dating and assortative mating*

The role of politics in human mate assortment has been studied in the past (e.g., Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999), and it has been found that most mate pairs are highly correlated on political preferences, more so than on almost any other trait. However, little attention has been focused on the role of politics in human dating selection preferences. Here, we find that most people do not choose to advertise political interests or definitive political preferences (i.e., liberal or conservative) when attempting to find a mate. Instead, people tend to advertise indicators of sociability and compatibility, such as enjoying dining out and being “middle of the road” when it comes to political preferences. We also find that one’s willingness to advertise politics to a potential date is highly correlated with demographic and attitudinal

characteristics that have been linked to political activism and engagement, such as education, religiosity and age.

### 5.2. *Similarities and variations in dating strategies between males and females*

With regard to expressing an interest in politics and identifying as “middle of the road,” income matters for women but not for men, consistent with the theories that women tend to be more concerned about resources when selecting a mate than are men (Geary et al., 2004). More specifically, the more financially secure a woman is, the more likely she is to post political content in her dating profile. One potential reason this might be the case is because women who are more financially successful have less need for resources from potential mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Moore et al., 2006).

The data also show that as education increases, men are more likely to include political interests and “middle of the road” preferences as part of their dating profile. Likewise, being older increases the likelihood of expressing a definitive preference among men, but not women. These results may be a product of differences in lifestyle; as education increases and as one ages, politics may become more salient. It is easy to imagine, for example, that change in national economic policies would matter more to a 50-year-old well-educated stockbroker than a 22-year-old professional athlete (i.e., two men of roughly equal means, but in different stages of the life course). Future study is needed to clarify whether this correlation between education, age and politics in men reflects a casual path or is simply a matter of disposition (e.g., personality, cognition, shared genetic influences, etc.).

Similarly, the analysis of expressing an interest in politics shows that religiosity matters for men but not for women. This could be due to the possibility that women who list religion as an interest belong to more pious denominations that adhere to more traditional gender roles, where politics is seen as in the domain of men. The women in our sample who listed religion/spirituality as an interest most commonly listed “Christian/other” as their domination. Likewise, the women in our sample who listed religion as an interest were overwhelmingly “conservative” or “ultra conservative.” Given that many mainstream Christian faiths were offered as options in the profile, this could indicate that these women belong to Evangelical Christian churches that adhere to more traditional gender roles and where women have fewer opportunities to participate in roles of leadership [see Verba et al. (1995) for an explanation of how such experiences account for the correlation between religiosity and political engagement].

### 5.3. *Other variations in dating strategies*

While income correlates with reporting interest in politics, it is not related to one’s willingness to express a definitive political preference. This suggests that personal resources are related to having a basic interest in politics, but

that other factors, such as education and civic engagement, matter more when it comes to expressing definitive preferences. In line with research that shows that individuals who are engaged in their community tend to be civically engaged in general, but disengaged with the ideological side of politics (e.g., Klofstad 2011), we also find that voluntarism is positively related to political interest, but negatively related (albeit marginally) to reporting a definitive political preference.

#### 5.4. Conclusions

Numerous studies in the extant literature find that individuals in long-term relationships tend to share political preferences. Yet, politics does not appear to play a conscious role in a dater's initial attempt to attract a mate. So, we are left with a conundrum. If we are not selecting on politics for dating, but end up politically similar in long-term mating, and this similarity is not conformity, then the questions becomes, what steps in between mate selection and actual mating occur that drive politically similar people to long-term partnership? What mechanism filters potential apstates from the pool as individuals move from short-term dating to long-term mating?

Removing active selection on politics during the early stage of mate attraction, as our data suggest, leaves open two alternative potential explanations. First, humans desire compatibility in their long-term relationships (Vandenberg 1972); from an evolutionary perspective, compatibility should increase the likelihood of a mate pair being able to successfully raise offspring (Geary et al., 2004). Accordingly, while we might not be choosy on politics at the outset of a relationship, individuals are likely to make a long-term association with a partner who shares critical values, such as their political attitudes. Thus, it is only the majority of those who share political views who remain in long-term relationships. Second, people could be making long-term mate choices on the basis of nonpolitical characteristics that correlate with political predilections, such as religiosity (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997), physiology (Amodio, Jost, Master, & Yee, 2007) or intelligence (Kanazawa 2010; Mare 1991; Rushton & Nicholson 1988). Consequently, when one assort on any of these nonpolitical characteristics, one is also likely to assort on politics, even if such a pairing is unintended.

In conclusion, we note that as research continues on the genetic antecedents of political preferences and behavior, so should research on the role of politics in human mating preferences. Critically, we find that the politics of dating and mating appear to be dissimilar. That is, our study shows that the traits individuals advertise when soliciting a date do not match the traits reported in the extant literature regarding the factors upon which long-term mates most likely assort. This divergence raises the question of whether political attitudes are a cohesive element in relationships, and what we witness as assortative mating on politics reflects one of the

characteristics that promote long-term partnership and procreation. Future research should further investigate the psychological architecture individuals inhabit as they select long-term mates from the pool of potential dates.

#### Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the members of the Nowicki Lab at Duke University for support and feedback. The University of Miami provided resources for data collection.

#### References

- Amodio, D. M., Jost, J. T., Master, S. L., & Yee, C. M. (2007). Neurocognitive correlates of liberalism and conservatism. *Nature Neuroscience*, *10*, 1246–1247.
- Alford, J. R., Funk, C. L., & Hibbing, J. R. (2005). Are political orientations genetically transmitted? *American Political Science Review*, *99*, 153–167.
- Alford, J. R., Hatemi, P. K., Hibbing, J. R., Martin, N. G., & Eaves, L. J. (2011). The politics of mate choice. *The Journal of Politics*, *73*, 1–19.
- Bereczkei, T., Voros, S., Gal, A., & Bernath, L. (1997). Resources, attractiveness, family commitment; Reproductive decisions in human mate choice. *Ethology*, *103*, 681–699.
- Botwin, M. D., Buss, D. M., & Shackelford, T. K. (1997). Personality and mate preferences: five factors in mate selection and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality*, *65*, 107–136.
- Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (2001). The private roots of public action: gender, equality, and political participation. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buss, D. M., & Barnes, M. (1986). Preferences in human mate selection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *50*, 559–570.
- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: an evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, *100*, 204–232.
- Burden, B. C. (2008). The social roots of the partisan gender gap. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *72*, 55–75.
- Buston, P., & Emlen, S. (2003). Cognitive processes underlying human mate choice: the relationship between self-perception and mate preference in western society. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *100*, 8805–8810.
- Byrne, D. (1961). Interpersonal attraction and attitude similarity. *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, *62*, 713–715.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). The American Voter. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Caspi, A., & Herbener, E. S. (1993). Marital assortment and phenotypic convergence: longitudinal evidence. *Social Biology*, *40*, 48–60.
- Cavior, N., Miller, K., & Cohen, S. H. (1975). Physical attractiveness, attitude similarity, and length of acquaintance as contributors to interpersonal attraction among adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality*, *3*, 133–142.
- Chadwick Martin Bailey. (2010). Recent trends: online dating. Available at: [http://cp.match.com/cppp/media/CMB\\_Study.pdf](http://cp.match.com/cppp/media/CMB_Study.pdf).
- Curry, T. J., & Kenny, D. A. (1974). The effects of perceived and actual similarity in values and personality in the process of interpersonal attraction. *Quality and Quantity*, *8*, 27–44.
- Doosje, B., Rojahn, K., & Fischer, A. (1999). Partner preferences as a function of gender, age, political orientation and level of education. *Sex Roles*, *40*, 45–60.
- Eaves, L. J., & Hatemi, P. K. (2008). Transmission of attitudes toward abortion and gay rights: parental socialization or parental mate selection? *Behavior Genetics*, *38*, 247–256.
- Eaves, L. J., Heath, A. C., Martin, N. G., Maes, H. H., Neale, M. C., & Kendler, K. S., et al. (1999). Comparing the biological and cultural

- inheritance of personality and social attitudes in the Virginia 30 000 study of twins and their relatives. *Twin Research*, 2, 62–80.
- Eaves, L. J., Eysenck, H. J., & Martin, N. G. (1989). Genes, culture and personality: an empirical approach. London, UK: Academic Press.
- Feng, D., & Baker, L. (1994). Spouse similarity in attitudes, personality, and psychological well-being. *Behavior Genetics*, 24, 357–364.
- Fowler, J. H., Baker, L. A., & Dawes, C. T. (2008). Genetic variation in political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 102, 233–248.
- Gangestad, S., & Simpson, J. (2000). The evolution of human mating: trade-offs and strategic pluralism. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 23, 573–644.
- Geary, D. C., Vigil, J., & Byrd-Craven, J. (2004). Evolution of human mate choice. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 27–42.
- Greenlees, I. A., & McGrew, W. C. (1994). Sex and age differences in preferences and tactics of mate attraction: analysis of published advertisements. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 15, 59–72.
- Hall, J. A., Park, N., Song, H., & Cody, M. J. (2010). Strategic misrepresentation in online dating: the effects of gender, self-monitoring, and personality traits. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 117–135.
- Hatemi, P. K., Hibbing, J. R., Medland, S. E., Keller, M. C., Alford, J. R., & Smith, K. B., et al. (2010). Not by twins alone: using the extended family design to investigate genetic influence on political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, 54, 798–814.
- Hatemi, P. K., Dawes, C. T., Frost-Keller, A., Settle, J. E., & Verhulst, B. (2011). Integrating social science and genetics: news from the political front. *Biodemography and Social Biology*, 59, 1–21.
- Hill, S., & Reeve, K. (2003). Mating games. *Behavioral Ecology*, 15, 748–756.
- Imai, K., King, G., & Lau, O. (2008). Toward a common framework for statistical analysis and development. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, 17, 1–22.
- Imai, K., King, G., & Lau, O. (2007a). Zelig: everyone's statistical software. Available at: <http://GKing.harvard.edu/zelig>.
- Imai, K., King, G., & Lau, O. (2007b). logit: logistic regression for dichotomous dependent variables. In K. Imai, & G. King, & O. Lau (Eds.), Zelig: everyone's statistical software. Available online at <http://gking.harvard.edu/zelig>.
- Kanazawa, S. (2010). Why liberals and atheists are more intelligent. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, doi:10.1177/0190272510361602.
- Klofstad, C. A. (2011). Civic talk: peers, politics, and the future of democracy. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kofoed, E. (2008). The role of political affiliations and attraction in romantic relationships: why can't we all just get along? *Advances in Communication Theory & Research* 2. Available at: <http://www.k-state.edu/actr/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/4kofoed-politics-and-attraction.pdf>.
- Kurzban, R., Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (2001). Can race be erased? Coalitional computation and social categorization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 98, 15387–15392.
- Lopez, M. H., & Taylor, P. (2009). Dissecting the 2008 electorate: most diverse in U.S. history. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Madden, M., & Lenhart, A. (2006). On line dating. Pew Internet: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2006/Online-Dating/01-Summary-of-Findings.aspx>.
- Mare, R. D. (1991). Five decades of educational assortative mating. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 15–32.
- Martin, N. G., Eaves, L. J., Heath, A. C., Jardine, R., Feingold, L. M., & Eysenck, H. J. (1986). Transmission of social attitudes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 83, 4364–4368.
- Mascie-Taylor, C. G. N. (1989). Spouse similarity for IQ and personality and convergence. *Behavior Genetics*, 19, 223–227.
- McGraw, K. J. (2002). Environmental predictors of geographic variation in human mating practices. *Ethology*, 108, 303–317.
- Moore, F. R., Cassidy, C., Smith, M. J. L., & Perrett, D. I. (2006). The effects of female control of resources on sex-differentiated mate preferences. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 27, 193–205.
- Mutz, D. C. (2002a). Cross-cutting social networks: testing democratic theory in practice. *American Political Science Review*, 96, 111–126.
- Mutz, D. C. (2002b). The consequences of cross-cutting networks for political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46, 838–855.
- Mutz, D. C. (2006). Hearing the other side: deliberative versus participatory democracy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pawlowski, B., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (1999). Withholding age as putative deception in mate search tactics. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 20, 53–69.
- Putnam, R. D. (2001). Bowling alone. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Rushton, J. P., & Nicholson, I. R. (1988). Genetic similarity theory, intelligence, and human mate choice. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 9, 45–58.
- Soltis, J., Mitsunaga, F., Shimizu, K., Yanagihara, Y., & Nozaki, M. (1999). Female mating strategy in an enclosed group of Japanese macaques. *American Journal of Primatology*, 47, 263–278.
- Stoker, L., & Jennings, K. (2006). Political similarity and influence between husbands and wives. *The social logic of politics*, Alan Zuckerman (pp. 421–423). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Stoker, L., & Jennings, M. K. (1989). Life-cycle transitions and political participation: the case of marriage. *American Political Science Review*, 89, 421–433.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In H. Tajfel, Ed. *Differentiation between social groups: studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 149–164). London, England and New York, NY: European Association of Experimental Social Psychology.
- Townsend, J. M., & Levy, G. D. (1990). Effects of potential partners' physical attractiveness and socioeconomic status on sexuality and partner selection. *Journal Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 19, 149–164.
- Vandenberg, S. G. (1972). Assortative mating, or who marries whom? *Behavior Genetics*, 2, 127–157.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. (1995). Voice and equality: civic voluntarism in American politics. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Verba S., Burns N., & Schlozman K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: gender and political engagement. *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 1051–1072.
- Watson, D., Klohnen, E. C., Casillas, A., Simms, E. N., Haig, J., & Berry, D. S. (2004). Match makers and deal breakers: analyses of assortative mating in newlywed couples. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 1029–1068.
- Waynforth, D., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (1995). Conditional mate choice strategies in humans: evidence from "lonely hearts" advertisements. *Behaviour*, 132, 755–779.
- Wiederman, M. W. (1993). Evolved gender differences in mate preferences: evidence from personal advertisements. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 14, 331–352.
- Zaller, J. (1992). The nature and origins of mass opinion. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Zuckerman A. S., Fitzgerald J., & Dasovic J. (2005). Do couples support the same political parties? In A. S. Zuckerman, Ed. *The social logic of politics* (pp. 75–94). Philadelphia, PA: Temple.