

# Sleeping with the enemy

Partisan sorting in online dating

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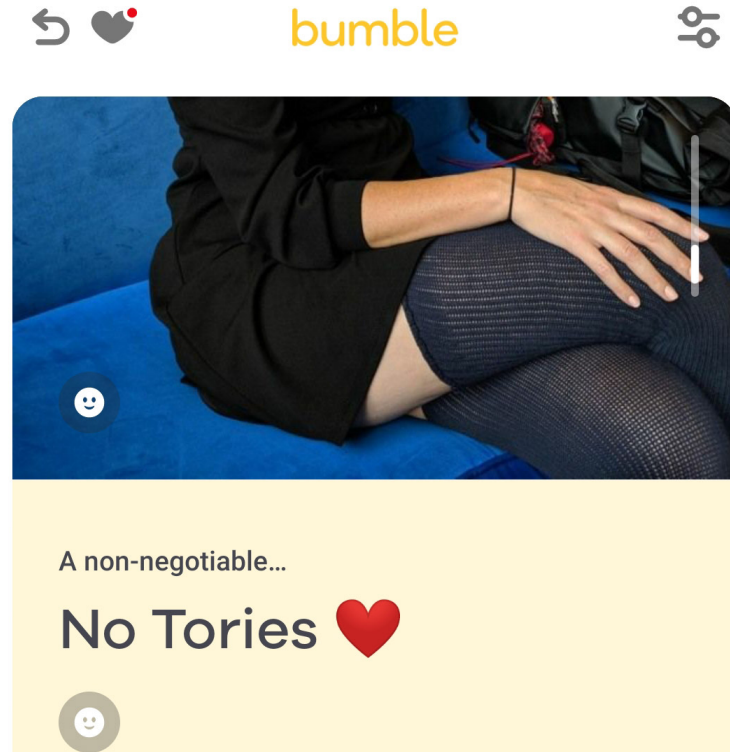
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# Motivation



## 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.

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

# Attributes levels

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

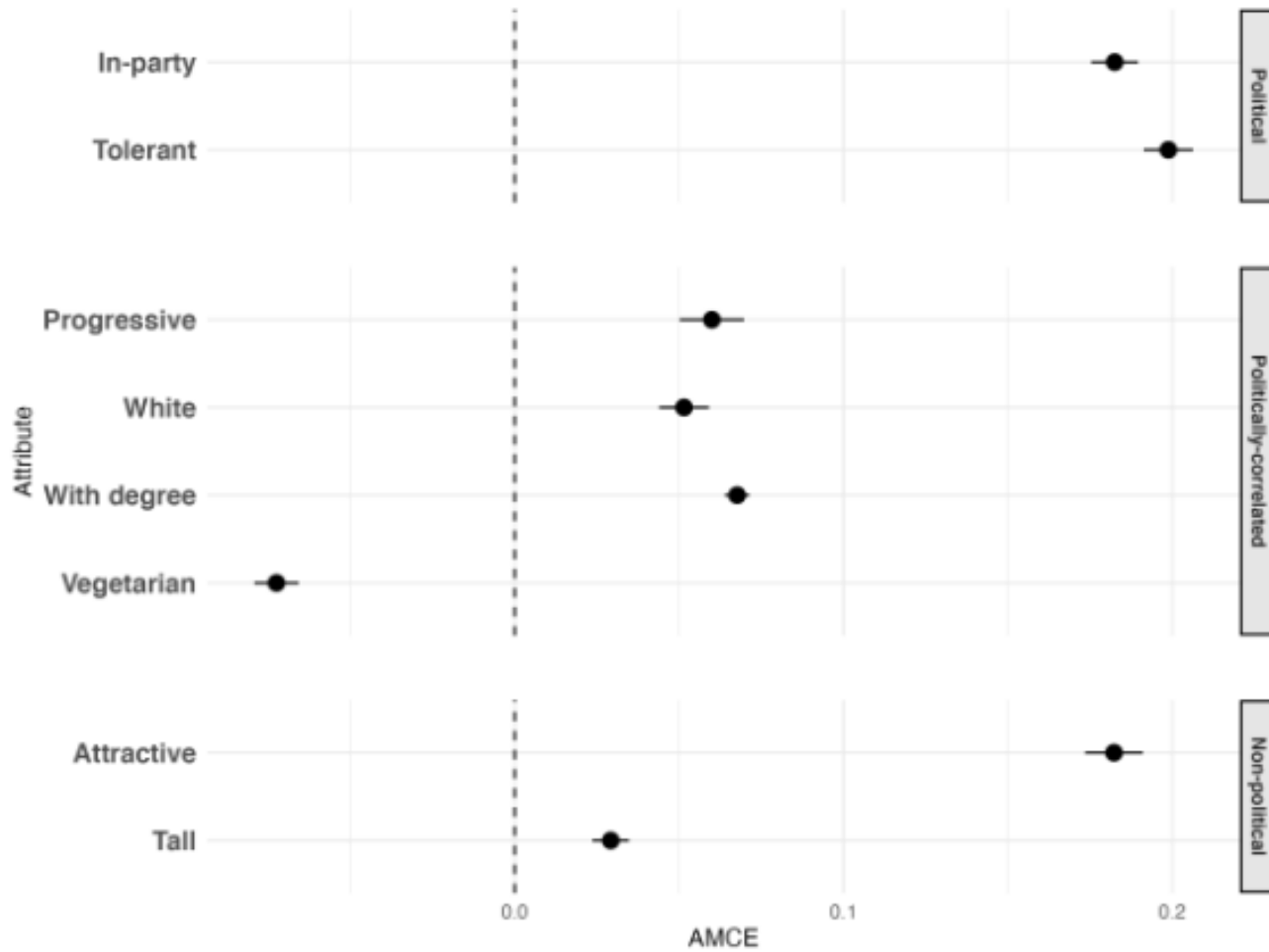
# Associated survey

- 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

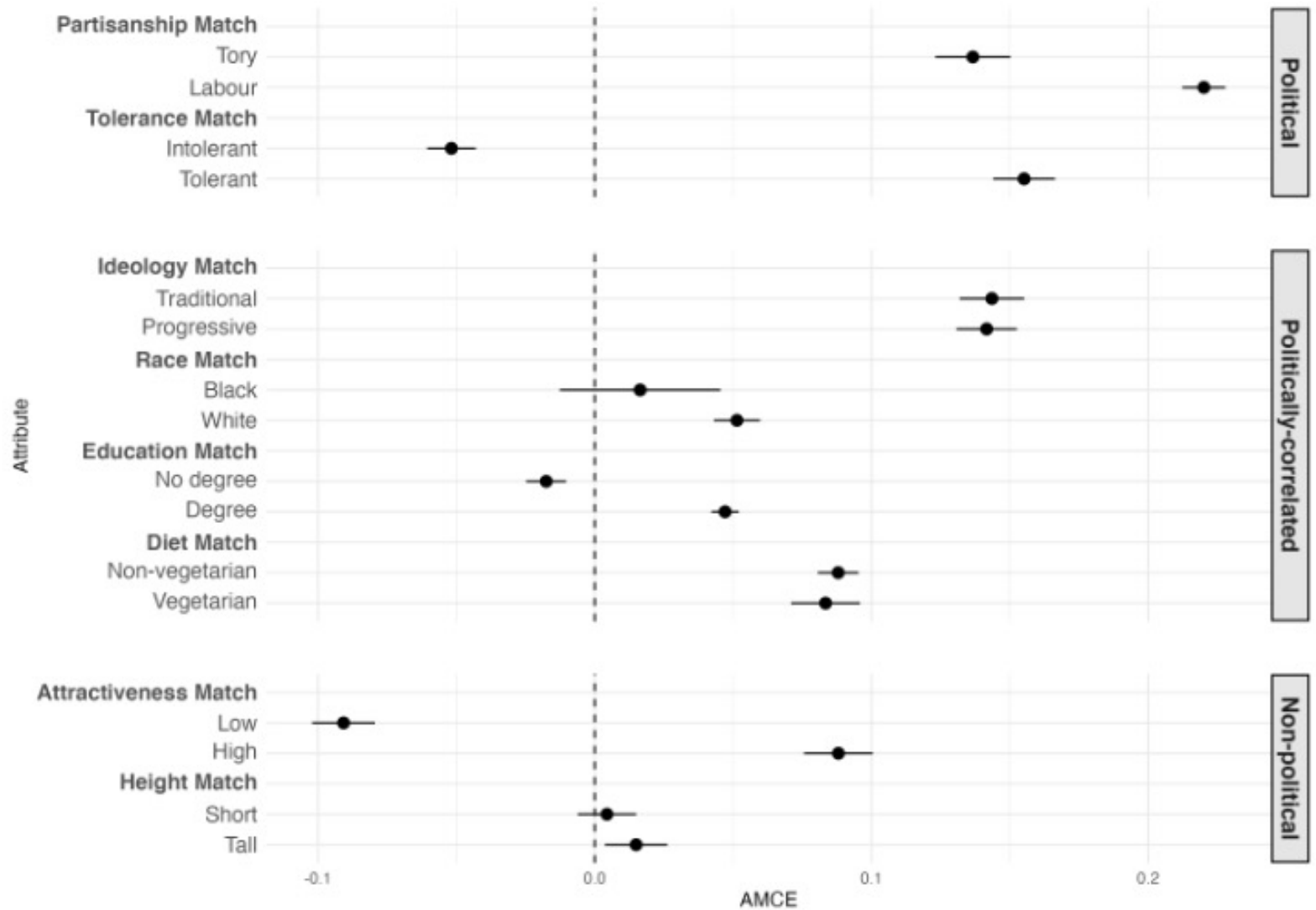


# Results

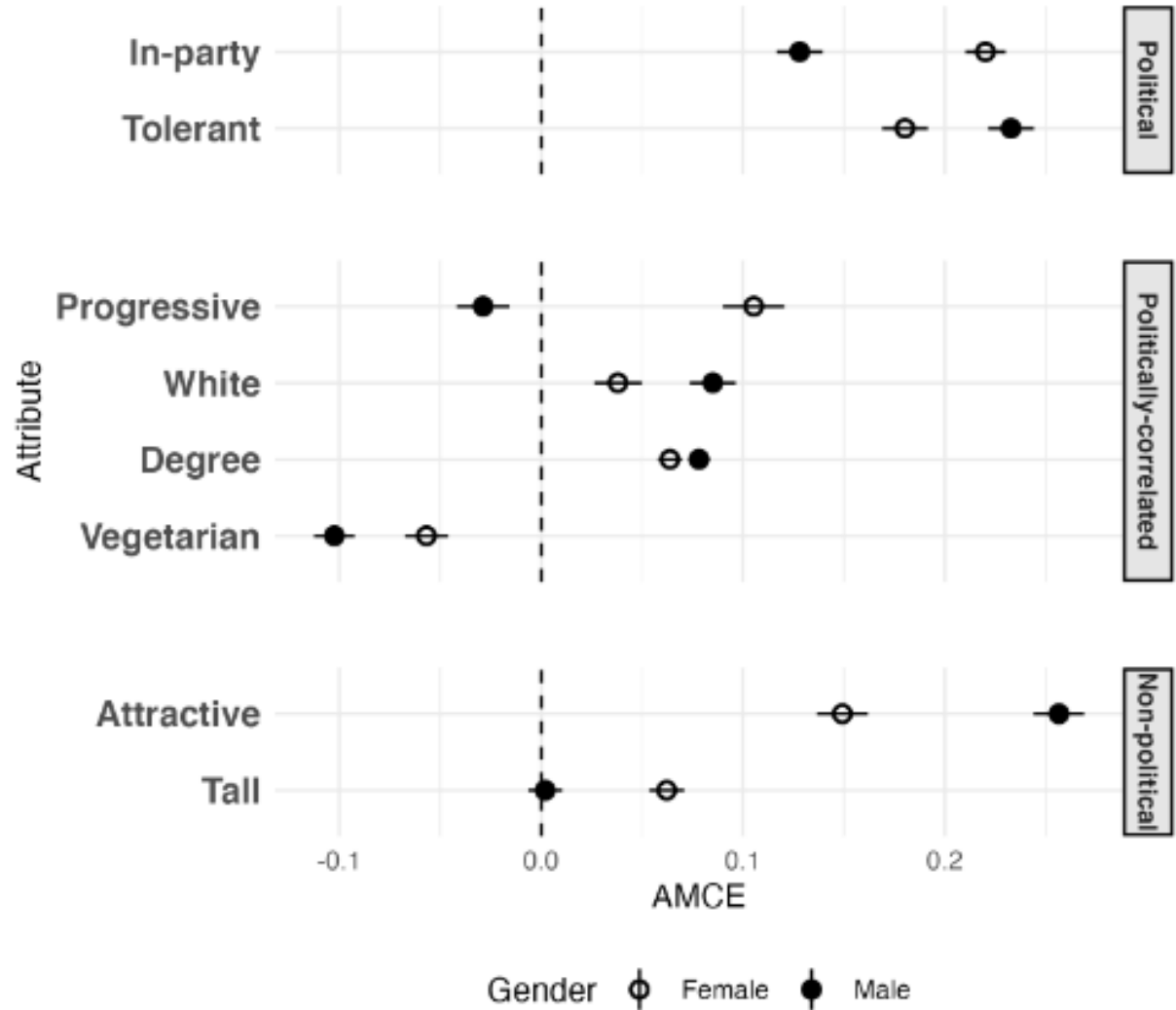
- Not attractiveness
- Not partisanship
- But tolerance
  
- Respondents prefer:
  - Progressive
  - Non vegetarian/vegan
  - Tall
  - White



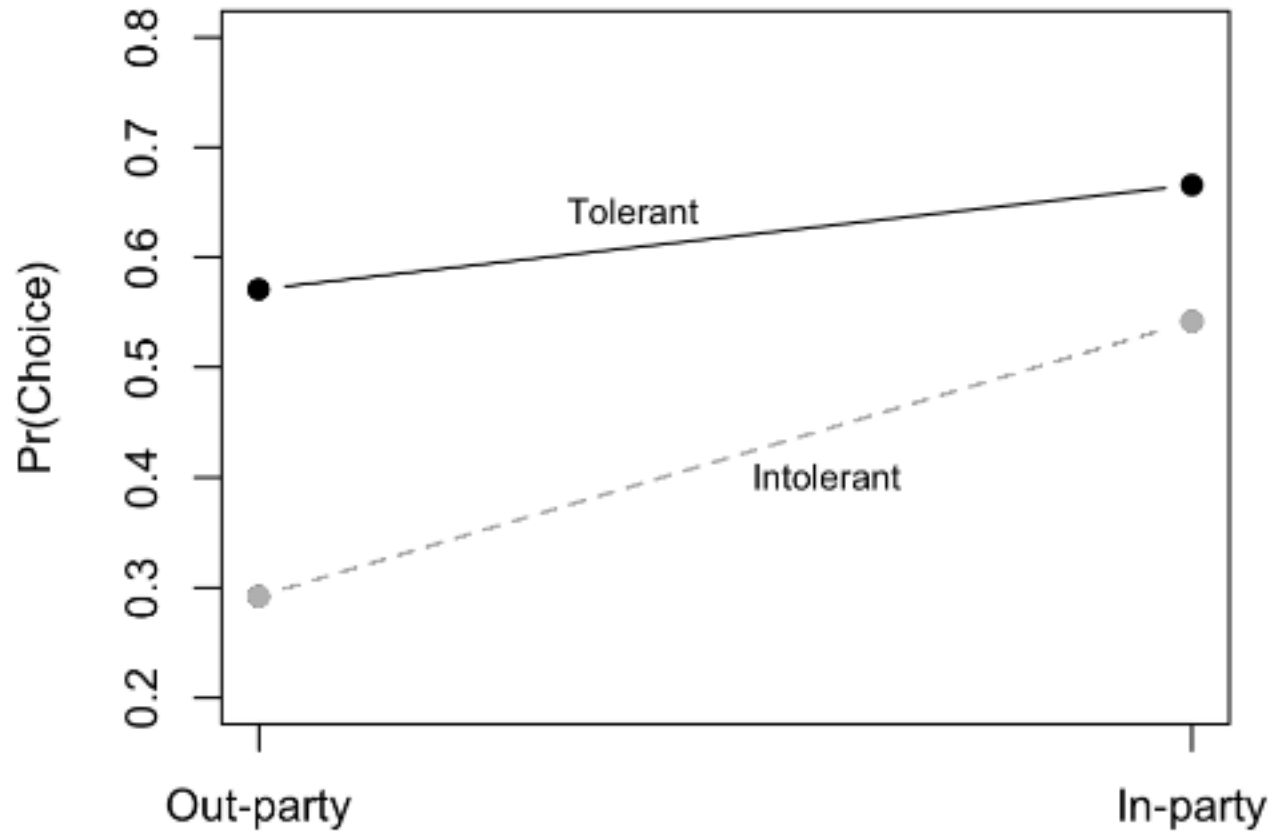
# Matching results



# Gender differences

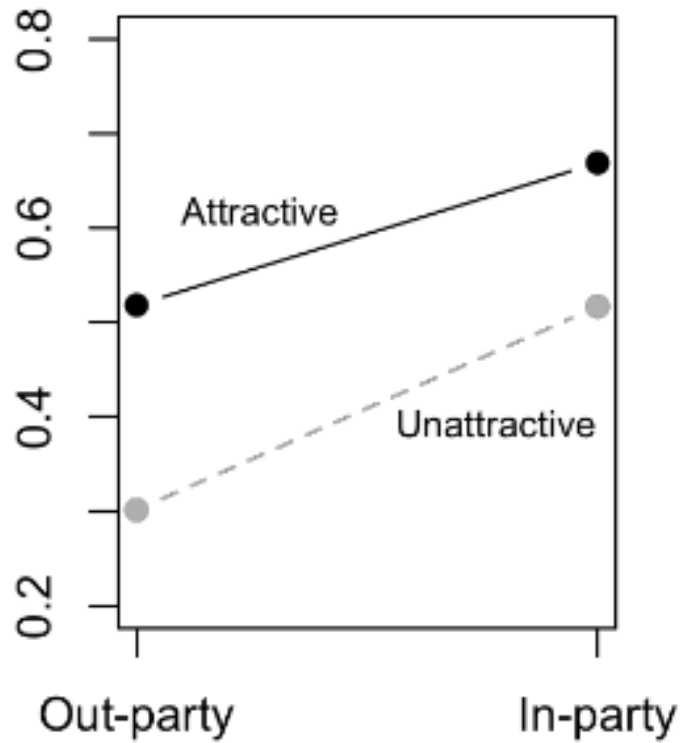


# Tolerance as a mediator

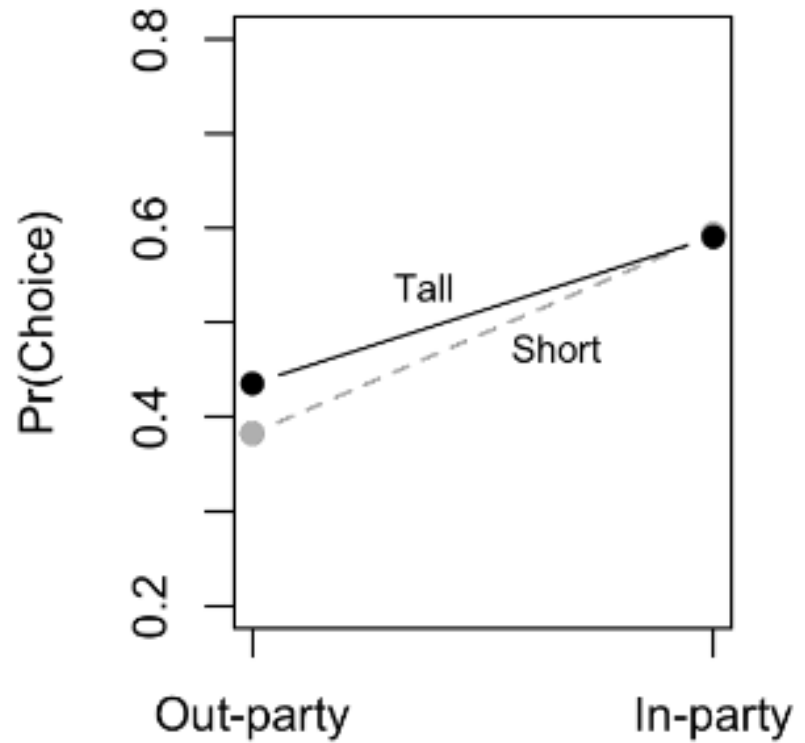


# What about attractiveness?

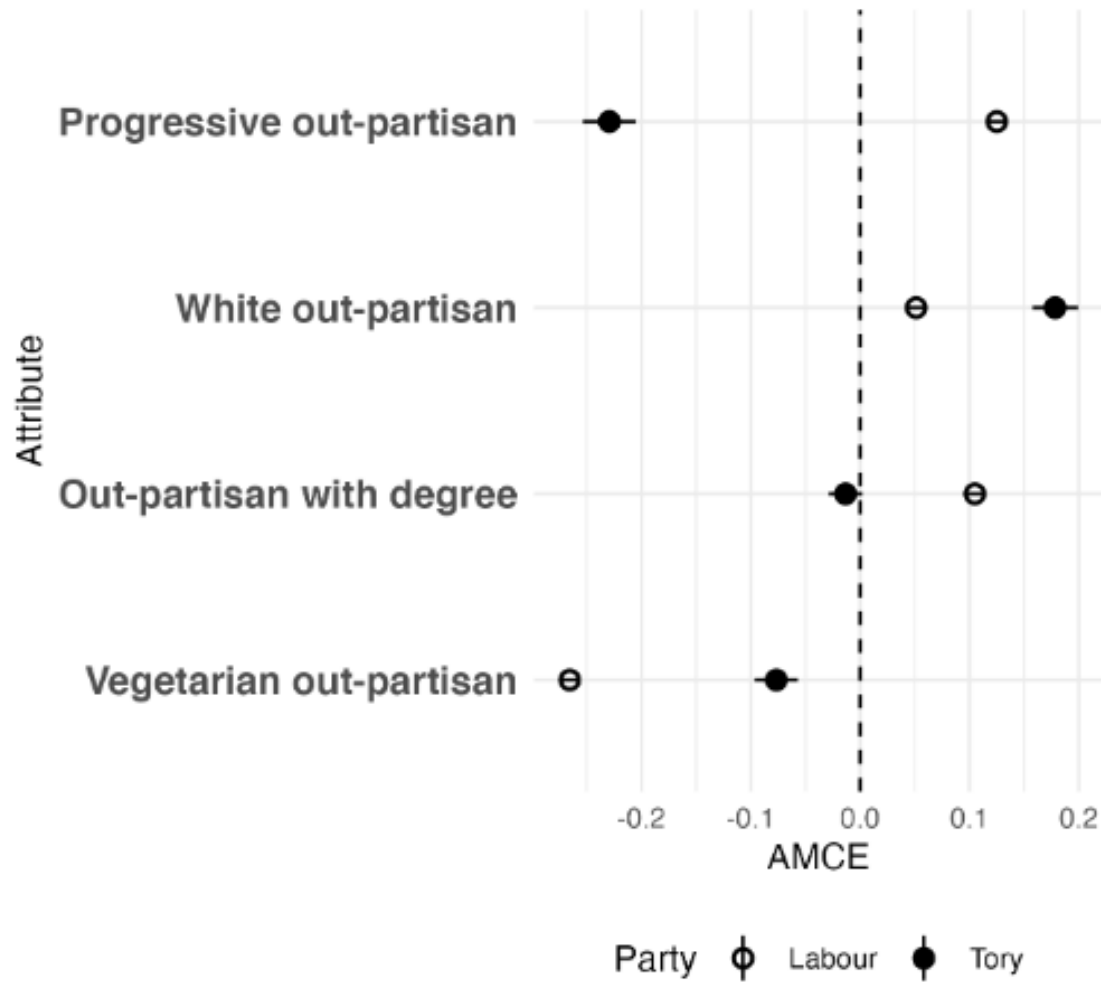
## Beauty



## 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)