Partisanship and Partner Preference:

The Question of Ethnicity

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**ABSTRACT**

Does partisanship affect how Whites and Hispanics are attracted to each other? This study uses two data sets to compare rates of coupling between Whites and Hispanics to determine if there is a correlation between Republican identification and interethnic attraction. Previous research, social justification theory, and social dominance theory are referenced to develop two hypotheses: (1) compared to Democrats, Republicans will be less attracted to Hispanics, and (2) compared to Hispanic Democrats, Hispanic Republicans will be more attracted to Whites. The study finds evidence supporting both hypotheses, showing that compared to Democrats, Republican identity is correlated to decreased preference for Hispanic partners. After an analysis of results, the study offers a discussion of their implications, such as the integration of Hispanics and Hispanic culture into mainstream American culture, and the possible alienation of Hispanics from the Republican party.

***Keywords****: partner preference; coupling; interracial attraction; interethnic attraction; intermarriage; Hispanic integration*

**INTRODUCTION**

Research has shown that both White and Black Republicans demonstrate increased preference for White compared to White and Black Democrats. There have been fewer studies, however, that investigate the influence of partisanship on interethnic attraction. This paper will analyze the correlation between partisanship and attraction to Hispanic partners for White non-Hispanics, White Hispanics, non-White Hispanics, and non-White non-Hispanics. Such insight will provide useful new insight into the relationship between White and Hispanics, as well as the relationship between Hispanics and the Republican party.

The change in the ethnic composition of the United States not only poses a unique question for social scientists, but for citizens adjusting to unfamiliar culture, and policy makers, educators, and political leaders who must design legislation and lead institutions in a way that spreads the most well being possible for an increasingly diverse population with an increasingly varied set of wants and needs. The Hispanic population continues to grow, their material culture continues to be adopted into American fashion, food, and lifestyle trends, and they are continuously forming friendships and families with with other non-Hispanic citizens. The mass integration of Hispanics persons into the U.S. has also brought significant change to marketing and commercialism. Many services offer Spanish translators, an increasing number of employers now require employees to speak Spanish, and in areas with large Hispanic populations, such as Los Angeles and San Antonio, some neighborhood supermarkets and stores offer their products and services exclusively in Spanish, and are also frequently accessed by non-Hispanics and non-Spanish speakers. Hispanic culture is gradually being becoming commonplace in the lives of American consumers. As cultures collide, we must make an effort understand how Hispanics are integrating and what actors facilitate or impede integration, so that we do not become a fragmented nation. It is especially crucial that we understand how the increasing salience of Hispanic integration relates to increasing salience of political polarization in a racially charged era of the “Latino Vote,” “*X* Lives Matter,” and the popularity of Donald Trump’s proposed Mexican border wall.

Hispanics have become the largest minority in the U.S. The 2014 Census National Population Projections predict that the Hispanic population in the U.S. will be roughly 120 million by the year 2050. The non-White Hispanic population is predicted to be nearly 30% of the total population by 2050, while the White non-Hispanic population will drop below 50% for the first time in American history.

Intermarriage refers to the marriage between two people of different racial, religious, or ethnic background. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010 a reported 15.1% of all new marriages and 8.4% of all marriages in total comprised of spouses from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Of all new marriages, 43.3% were White and Hispanic combination; 36.2% of all new marriages of Native-born Hispanics were between two people of different races or ethnicities. With the increasing Hispanic population, it is likely that the rates of intermarriage will continue to grow.

The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into a topic left mostly untouched by previous studies on the relationship between partisanship and race relations: the integration of Hispanics through study of partisanship’s effect on interethnic attraction. Most research on the subject in the past has observed the relationship between White and Blacks. Using data from two previous studies, this study will compare respondents stated political affiliation with their stated partners’ race to determine if there is a correlation between increasing conservatism and preference for White partners.

**INTERRACIAL ATTRACTION AND PARTISANSHIP**

A handful of prior studies have been conducted on the effect of political affiliation on interracial attraction, especially between Whites and Blacks. For example, a study by Eastwick Et al. (2009) studied the results of two series of dating experiments to determine how White male participants’ attraction to White and Black female participants compared based on a scale of political conservatism. They found that conservative participants’ preference for White partners over Black partners was statistically significant, as well as the increased preference of more liberal participants to be attracted to Black partners over White partners. Further, the attraction to White partners increased dramatically for participants who more strongly identified as conservative. The study noted that the out-group bias demonstrated by liberal participants might be attributed to the age of the study group: White undergraduates, who might be affected by “a unique element of liberalism within a college population” that is more resistant to the status quo, and therefore who might actually prefer dating someone outside their race.

In another related study, Anderson Et al. (2014) collected data from an online dating site to compare stated and unstated racial dating preference among conservatives and liberals. The dating website allowed users to state explicitly if they felt a same-race partner was a “must-have,” “at least nice-to-have,” or that they had no preference. In addition, because people are often not inclined to admit or are aware that they have racial preferences, Anderson Et al. collected data that noted how frequently users visited other users’ profiles. If a user frequented the profiles of users of one particular race over another, it was assumed they had a preference for romantic partners of that race—this was referred to as users’ revealed dating preference. Different from the Eastwick Et al. study, Anderson Et al. compared preferences for conservative and liberal White men and women, and Black men and women. What the study revealed was that conservative users were more likely than liberal users to state both must-have and at least nice-to-have in terms of same-race partners. Conservative White women showed the highest likelihood to state must-have and nice-to-have, followed by Black women, then White men, then Black men. Interestingly, Black men demonstrated the least difference between the amount of users stating must-have versus nice-to-have, and almost indistinguishable variation across the political spectrum. However, analysis of users’ revealed dating preference showed that among users who stated must-have, nice-to-have, or no preference, there was no variation between any degree of conservatism or liberalism. For example, an extremely conservative user who stated nice-to-have was no more likely to show interest in same-race profiles than extremely liberal users; this pattern held true on each level of preference. Therefore, while conservatives were more likely to explicitly state same-race preference, conservatives and liberals both demonstrated comparable interest in same-race users.

***The Difference Between Race and Ethnicity***

Both the Eastwick Et al. and Anderson Et al. studies concluded that for White men, increasing conservatism is correlated to preference for White partners. The studies differed in that Eastwick Et al. determined extreme conservatism for Black men showed slight preference for White women, while Anderson Et al. determined that conservative Black men actually show slight preference for Black partners. However, both still only compare data between Whites and Black. One might assume the same would be true concerning ethnicity, but ethnicity is not classified the same way as race. Race generally refers to sets of physical characteristics shared between and used to categorize groups of people. Ethnicity refers to cultural traits that characterize regional groups of people, such as national origin, language, and religion. Generally, race is a much more noticeable feature than ethnicity. Race is more or less assigned, while people can choose to have ethnic association. This distinction between race and ethnicity is important, because the former almost always elicits some level of division between people from different categorizations, while the former might not be so intuitively divisive.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AND ETHNIC DIVISION**

System justification theory and social dominance theory are two perspectives that provide insight into the relationship between racial and ethnic division, and political polarity. System justification theory refers to the disposition to “defend, bolster, and justify prevailing social, economic, and political arrangements” (Jost and van der Toorn, 2011). Social dominance theory asserts a “tendency for humans to form and maintain group-based hierarchy,” (Sidanius Et al., 2004). According to a survey on racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. by party ID from Gallup in 2014, 89% of the Republican party is non-Hispanic White. Whites are also widely considered the dominant social group. Income and educational attainment statistics collected by the Census in 2014 show that whites are currently the highest earning, and most educated racial group. Most elected officials and heads of corporations are also white, disproportionate to the racial demographics of the country. If social dominance theory and social justification theory are true, then we can assume most Republicans, as they are disproportionately White, are more likely to seek White romantic partners who affirm positive beliefs about their race and social capital.

Conservatives also tend to support minimal social change, and assert individual responsibility in regards to social opportunity and success (Carney Et al., 2008). Sidanius Et al. also note that contemporary conservatives tend to defend their ideology as stemming from fundamental values of individual freedom, and dedication to “maintaining established values and institutions.” As the growth of interracial and interethnic relationships are a relatively recent trend (anti-miscegenation laws being deemed unconstitutional a mere 49 years prior), one could assume Republicans might be less likely to embrace the novelty of such a relationship. Further, White Republicans might be less inclined to engage in an interracial relationship, as it might erode traditional social barriers and notions of status.

Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to see social inequality as a structural problem, as opposed to one of individual capability (Hunt, 2007). This difference in philosophies would likely cause some degree of uncomfortable tension in interracial/ethnic relationships. Social justification theory asserts that we are drawn to people who affirm our beliefs about how society operates; if most Republicans are White, then most Republics are likely to seek romantic partners who affirm positive beliefs about Whites’ social standing. Thus, as Whites and Hispanics generally have opposing views on social inequality that make the other appear either guilty or blameworthy for their social and economic standing, and as Whites disproportionately comprise the Republican party, Republicans overall will have a lower preference for Hispanic partners, than White partners.

Referencing social justification theory, social dominance theory, and the social conservatism embraced most Republicans, the first hypothesis is that Republicans overall will demonstrate less preference for Hispanic partners compared to Democrats.

The second hypothesis is based part on the phenomenon of the “whitening” of Hispanics as well as components of system justification and social dominance theory. In 2014, Pew compared ethnic identity data between the 2000 and 2010 Census. They observed that 2.5 million people changed their identification as Hispanic or some other race to White between the two censuses. Among other groups who changed their ethnic identity from one classification to another, this was the largest. Hispanics are also speaking Spanish at home exclusively with less frequency. According to the 2010-2020 Language Projections by the Census, 74% of Hispanic families currently speak Spanish at home, while 25% speak English only. It is estimated that by 2020, 66% of Hispanic families will speak Spanish at home, while an increased 34% will speak English only. Many scholars question if these is a sign that Hispanics are assimilating into “whiteness” as the German and Irish have. Assimilation is also further justified by the increasing percentage of Hispanic-White marriages. The small percentage of Hispanics who identify as Republican likely feel a stronger desire to assimilate into the dominant group than Democrat Hispanics, because as previously explained, Republicans are more likely to uphold the status quo.

Therefore, Republican Hispanics are more likely to prefer White partners compared to Democrat Hispanics, because of a desire to assimilate into the status quo and gain association with the dominant social group.

1. Compared to Democrats, Republicans on average will demonstrate less preference for Hispanic partners.
2. Comparted to Hispanic Democrats, Hispanic Republicans will demonstrate more preference for White partners than Hispanic Democrats.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This paper uses data collected by the first wave of the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS, 2006), which surveyed 2,610 respondents 18 and older on religious issues, with a focus on the impact of race and ethnicity in their lives. The questions pulled from the study asked respondents what race they were, and what race their spouse was. Of all respondents 520 were Hispanic, 1293 were White, and 190 were Asian, 528 were African American, and 109 were “other.” This paper also uses survey data from Stanford’s “How Couples Meet and Stay Together” (HCMST, 2009) from a group of 4,002 people by asking them how they met their partners. The questions pulled from HCMST also asked what race they were, and what race their partner or spouse was. Both studies also asked respondents to identify to what they degree they felt conservative or liberal.

This study controlled for age, sex, and education. The data are also weighted according to sex, age, and educational attainment of the respondents. Logistic regression was used to analyze the effect of partisanship, sex, and education. Linear regression was used for age and strength of respondents’ association with conservatism or liberalism.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows data pulled from the PALS study indicating prevalence of Republican respondents stating their partners were White, compared to Democrat respondents. M1 through M6 show that Republican respondents were more likely to state their partners were White than Democrat respondents, which supports the first hypothesis. While the data for M2 were not significant, it is still leans in the direction of preference for White partners. M3 indicates significant preference by Hispanic Republicans compared to Democrats for White partners, which supports the second hypothesis. Education had a significant impact overall, notably for Blacks and Hispanics for White partners, as well as a Hispanics for Hispanic partners. Much of the data do not provide strong enough evidence to claim an absolute correlation between Republican identification and preference for White partners and lower preference for Hispanic partners, however, it leans in the direction of both hypotheses.

**Table 1: PALS Total Preference for White Partners**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | M1  ALl | M2  white | M3  nonwhite | M4  black | M5  hispanic | M6  asian | M7  hispanic for Hispanic |
| REP/DEM | 1.87\*\*\*  (.301) | .214  (.469) | 1.85\*\*\*  (.647) | 0  --- | 2.12\*\*\*  (1.07) | 8.15\*\*\*  (1.84) | -.986  (.866) |
| MALE | -.232  (.284) | -.602  (.500) | -.344  (.593) | 1.13  (1.12) | -.570  (.874) | 6.38\*\*\*  (2.34) | .183  (.697) |
| EDUCATION | .357 \*\*\*  (.120) | -.012  (.218) | .363\*\*  (.193) | -3.01  (3.38) | .762\*\*\*  (.337) | ---  --- | -.522\*\*  (.268) |

Age omitted from data set

Education attainment data omitted for Asian due to lack of respondents

Standard deviation omitted for Black respondents’’ preference for White partner because there were no relevant cases

Figures with with three asterisks denote a statistically significant p-value (<.05), while figures with two asterisks denotes a p-value < .10, and one asterisk denotes a p-value < .25.

Standard error is noted in parentheses.

**Figure 1: Graph of 95% confidence intervals for probability of selecting a White partner**

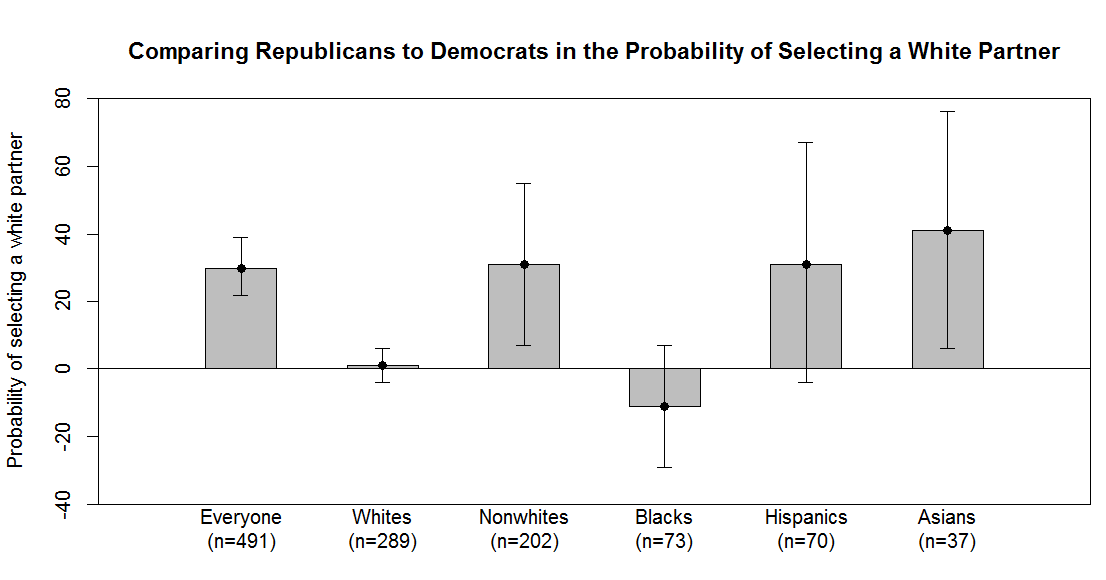


Table 2 shows data from the HCMST study, which indicate prevalence of Republican respondents stating their partners were White, compared to Democrat respondents. M8 includes all Republican respondents’ preference for White partners, M9 includes White only respondents’ preference, M10 includes non-Whites for Whites, M11 includes Blacks for Whites, and M12 includes Hispanics for Whites. Similar to data drawn from the PALS study, Republicans were more likely to have White partners than Democrats across all races and ethnicities. The data were not statistically significant for Whites only and Hispanics, still, it leans in the direction of White preference as indicated in M9 and M12. In M10, non-White Republican men overall were less likely to have White partners than non-White Republican women with some significance. Increasing education had the largest impact on Hispanics for White partners. The data in Table 2 also support the hypothesis that Republicans are less likely than Democrats to prefer White partners.

**Table 2: HCMST Total Preference for White Partners**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | M8  all | M9  white | M10  nonwhite | M11  black | M12  hispanic |
| REP/DEM | 1.17\*\*\*  (.154) | .231  (.270) | .983\*\*\*  (.233) | 1.68\*\*\*  (.832) | .320  (.345) |
| MALE | -.033  (135) | .256  (.257) | -.325\*  (.209) | -.902\*  (.646) | -.414\*  (.335) |
| EDUCATION | .086\*  (073) | -.024  (.151) | .124  (.104) | -.341\*  (.258) | .488\*\*\*  (.195) |

Figures with with three asterisks denote a statistically significant p-value (<.05), while figures with two asterisks denotes a p-value < .10, and one asterisk denotes a p-value < .25.

Standard error is noted in parentheses.

Table 3 also shows data from the HCMST study, however, indicating Hispanic Republicans’ partner preference compared to Hispanics Democrats. M13 includes preference for White non-Hispanic partners, M14 includes preference for White Hispanics, M15 includes preference for non-White Hispanics, M16 includes preference for all Hispanics, and M17 includes preference for non-White non-Hispanic partners. Indicated by M13, Republican Hispanics were more likely to have White partners than Democrats. M14, M16, and M17 show that Hispanic Republicans are less likely to have Hispanic and non-White non-Hispanic partners. The one exception to the lower likelihood of having a Hispanic partner is shown by M15, which shows that Hispanic Republics are actually more likely than Hispanic Democrats to have a non-White Hispanic partner. The data for this model was inconsistent, however, not statistically significant.

Aside from M15, these data were significant and supported the second hypothesis that compared to Hispanic Democrats, Hispanic Republicans will demonstrate more preference for White partners.

Table 3: HCMST Hispanics’ Partner Preference

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | M13  white nonhispanic | M14  white hispanics | M15  nonwhite hispanics | M16  all hispanics | M17  nonwhite nonhispanics |
| REP/DEM | .944\*\*\*  (.315) | -.878\*\*\*  (.357) | .072  (.429) | -.476\*  (.307) | -.996\*\*\*  (.489) |
| MALE | -.449\*  (.310) | .125  (.348) | .414  (.430) | .401\*  (.303) | .140  (.451) |
| EDUCATION | .291\*\*  (.167) | .176  (.175) | -.588\*\*\*  (.300) | -.210  (.169) | -.160  (.234) |

Figures with with three asterisks denote a statistically significant p-value (<.05), while figures with two asterisks denotes a p-value < .10, and one asterisk denotes a p-value < .25.

Standard error is noted in parentheses.

**CONCLUSION**

The data pulled from both studies indicates that compared to Democrats, Republicans overall demonstrate lower preference for Hispanic partners. Additionally, data from both studies indicates that compared to Hispanic Democrats, Hispanic Republicans demonstrated more preference for White partners. These observations support both the first and second hypotheses respectively, illustrating that partisanship has some correlation to interethnic attraction for Whites and Hispanics. Whether this correlation can be attributed conflicting conservative and liberal social justifications, Whites’ and minorities’ philosophical dissonance on inequity, Hispanics being integrating into mainstream American culture, or some combination of the three is still left uncertain. However, the confirmation of the hypotheses impels the urgency to discover the dividing link between Republicans and Democrats, and Whites and Hispanics.

In an era of extreme polarization and social unrest, the relationship between the growing Hispanic, and White population will be crucial to understanding the future of the political climate. Between now and December 2015 Gallup surveyed what Americans believed were the most important problems facing this country; each month the second highest non-economic concern was “Immigration/Illegal Aliens” only below dissatisfaction with the government. More Hispanic citizens in the country also means more potential voters in the country. The expanding Hispanic voter population, commonly referred to as the “Latino vote,” is a central focus, especially now, for representatives, who understand that winning elections will largely depend on who can pander best to the Hispanic community. With the rate that the Hispanic population is growing, a candidate who could arouse the Latino vote would gain a significant constituency. As of now, 56% of Hispanics identify as Democrat, and 26% as Republican, though that difference has been shrinking since 2013 (Pew Party Identification Trends, 1992-2014). Considering the anti-immigration rhetoric the Republican platform has adopted, and general Democrat lean of Hispanics, one can assume they may vote for Democrat representatives with increasing frequency. Should the Republican party further alienate Hispanics, we might see the party loose power as the that population continues to grow and integrate.

The “whitening” of Hispanics will have implications for future generation of Hispanic Americans as well. If Hispanics are assimilating in a way that adopts “whiteness” and abandons some cultural practices such as language, authentic Hispanic culture might become lost in translation—especially if the trend of increasing marriages between Whites and Hispanics, and the decline of Spanish speaking homes continues.

This study was able to find evidence that compared to Democrats, Republican identity is correlated with decreased preference for Hispanic partners, and increased preference for White partners by Hispanics. While the explanation for the phenomenon remains unclear, it is certain that understanding and building the relationship between Whites and Hispanics, and Republicans and Hispanics will be vital to the population’s solidarity.

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