

Far Right Normalization & Centrifugal Affect. Evidence from the Dating Market*

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Abstract

Are radical right supporters penalized by a social norm against the radical right on the dating market? This paper investigates this question by leveraging diverse empirical sources, including a unique and behavioral *visual* conjoint experiment conducted in Britain and Spain. Theoretically, we argue that the radical right is accommodated within the dating market as a result of the affective spillovers among those on the center-right who view dating those from the opposing ideological bloc as more socially costly than dating their own in-bloc partners. Empirically, we test this by examining the behavior of center-right partisans and assessing whether they follow a polity-based norm which places a premium on ostracizing stigmatized parties, or a bloc-logic norm which incentivizes the rejection of out-bloc partisans. The results demonstrate that center-right partisans accommodate the radical right and are actively *expected* to do so by fellow in-group partisans. Any dating market penalty for radical right partisans is based on the composition of those on the dating market rather than any polity-level norm enforcement. An accommodating bloc-logic in dating preferences among the mainstream right has large normative implications as it suggests that affective polarization and out-bloc rejection between overarching political camps contributes to facilitating the social normalization of radical right supporters who often hold preferences incompatible with liberal democracy.

Short title: Far Right Normalization & Centrifugal Affect

Keywords: affective polarization; conjoint experiment; dating; far right; partisan identities; radical right; visual conjoint

Replication files are available in the JOP Data Archive on Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jop>). The empirical analysis has been successfully replicated by the JOP replication analyst.

*Ethical approval for the original data collection and experiment was provided by the Faculty of Social Science Ethical Review Board at the University of Southampton with approval number #ERGO91536.

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Introduction

A long-standing social norm in liberal democracies has ensured the marginalization of far right parties and those that support them (Art, 2011; Bolin, Dahlberg, and Blombäck, 2023; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2019; Harteveld, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg, and Kokkonen, 2015). In recent years, however, the institutional marginalization of those radical right actors that were once stigmatized is dissipating and is now increasingly normalized (Mudde, 2019; Valentim, 2024; Arzheimer, 2019). Radical right political parties enjoy widespread electoral success across much of Western Europe and their political positions are increasingly accommodated (Lange, 2012; Van Spanje, 2010) particularly by parties on the mainstream right (Bale, 2023; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2018; Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016), despite evidence of the negative electoral consequences of doing so (Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi, 2023). Given this widespread electoral success and institutionalization, does the social rejection against those who sympathize against the radical right still exist?

We examine the prevalence of social penalties against supporters of the radical right (Harteveld, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg, and Kokkonen, 2015; Harteveld, Dahlberg, Kokkonen, and Van Der Brug, 2019; Ammassari, 2023; Art, 2011; Bolin, Dahlberg, and Blombäck, 2023; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2019; Lindskog, Dahlberg, Öhrvall, and Oscarsson, 2024), or indeed normalization (Valentim, 2024; Arzheimer, 2019), by focusing on the dating market and asking: do radical right supporters face a norm-based social penalty on the dating market? Should a social penalty for the radical right exist, partner selection is a social arena where this is very likely to be observed. Dating preferences remain one of the remaining social arenas where active and explicit peer-to-peer assessment is socially encouraged, where individuals engage in performative self-promotion and social bench-marking (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely, 2010), and where discriminatory biases are socially rationalized as issues of "personal taste" or "individual preference" (Bedi, 2015). The dating market is also one of many non-electoral arenas where political congruence and assimilation matter.

A rich body of empirical literature demonstrates that politics and the group-based conflicts that emerge from holding salient political identities, can result in affective spillovers in the social world (Berntzen, Kelsall, and Harteveld, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025). We know, for example, that knowledge about a target's political partisanship significantly influences decision-making (Mason, 2018) and can lead to explicit discrimination (Gift and Gift, 2015; Engelhardt and Utych, 2020). The same is true of the dating market. Experimental and

observational studies demonstrate that there is a clear partisan in-group bias that results in political homophily with potential partners and that this homophily emerges *during* the selection process as opposed to emerging from the relationship itself. In short: partisans systematically prefer dating fellow in-group partisans (Huber and Malhotra, 2016; Sleiman, Melios, and Dolan, 2023; Easton and Holbein, 2021; Alford, Hatemi, Hibbing, Martin, and Eaves, 2011).

We contribute to this literature and assess, by diverse empirical means including a pre-registered *visual* conjoint experiment (López Ortega and Radojevic, 2025), how individuals on the dating market respond to the presence of radical right supporting citizens. Understanding the presence of radical right accommodation in non-electoral social scenarios is important as it serves as an instrumental approach of auditing the normalization of illiberal actors and the erosion of social norms that provide a firewall against illiberal turns (Álvarez-Benjumea and Valentim, 2024). Liberal democratic societies are resilient when members of the polity share a common social understanding that certain illiberal and intolerant actors are “beyond the pale” so when tolerance of illiberal intolerance becomes normalized, it signals a debilitation in the resilience of liberal democracy.

Empirically, we leverage cross-national evidence from from Spain and Britain, two cases which vary, among other characteristics, on their historical legacies in the stigmatization of the radical right as well as the electoral success of radical right parties. Our contribution is twofold. First, we provide robust experimental evidence that the radical right penalty on the dating market is marginal. Where it is observed, we demonstrate that it is largely a function of the (left-leaning) ideological composition of the young(er) population active on the dating market as opposed to a function of any polity-level social norm enforcement against the radical right. Given the novel behavioral set-up of our *visual* conjoint experiment that replicates the interface of real world online dating apps, our empirical contribution wields significant causal purchase that builds on existing experimental designs on the political dynamics of dating behavior (Sleiman, Melios, and Dolan, 2023; Easton and Holbein, 2021).

Second, we build on emerging literature on affective polarization in multi-party systems in Europe (Wagner, 2021; Harteveld, 2021b; Harteveld, 2021a; Gidron, Adams, and Horne, 2020) that highlights the bloc-based nature of affect-based sorting (Bantel, 2023; Hagevi, 2015; Simón, 2020; Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021). Theoretically, we argue that that these bloc-based “camps” result in bloc-orientated affective spillovers and empirically support this expectation with evidence from the dating market. These affective spillovers, driven by support-

ers of mainstream right-wing parties, result in the social accommodation of the radical right. Whereas prevalent tests of radical right normalization look at polity-level norms, we focus on normalization as a function of bloc-based affective sorting. Where we provide theoretical novelty is in arguing (and evincing) that affective polarization and the establishment of party camps in multiparty systems (Bantel, 2023) can drive the social normalization of traditionally stigmatized actors. This is because of two opposing norms: i) polity-based norm (reject those stigmatized by system) and, ii) group-based norm (reject those from opposing bloc). Put another way, in those contexts where inter-bloc polarization is high, accepting someone socially unacceptable among the wider population is better than accepting someone socially unacceptable among one's own partisan in-group. The implications of our theoretical proposition – and the empirical evidence that supports it – suggests that the social normalization of the radical right should be included in the pool of work that highlights the democratically undesirable consequences of affective polarization (Berntzen, Kelsall, and Hartevel, 2024; Iyengar, Lelkes, Malhotra, and Westwood, 2019; Areal, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025).

Stigma, social norms & the radical right

An established body of work theorizes and empirically demonstrates that expressing non-normative political preferences – such as open expressions of support for radical right-wing parties – is socially costly (Ammassari, 2023; Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten, 2013; Hartevel, Mendoz, and Rooduijn, 2022; Art, 2011; Hartevel, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg, and Kokkonen, 2015; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2019). As a result of these social costs people often opt to mask their true preferences (Kuran, 1997) or engage in distinctive voting practices in order to protect against the social penalties exercised by their peers in response to holding stigmatized preferences (Lindskog, Dahlberg, Öhrvall, and Oscarsson, 2024; Valentim, 2024). Stigma, such that it exists, is (re)-enforced by third-party sanctioning (Bicchieri, 2017) whereby individuals, like dating app users evaluating profiles, sanction those expressing stigmatized views, like support for illiberal political parties.

Should associations with radical right parties be norm-defiant, we would expect such associations to translate into negative penalties in the dating market. The dating market, much like recruitment processes in the labour market, is a situation where individuals are explicitly assessed against a selector's own criteria, where individuals self-promote, selectors discriminate (Bedi, 2015; Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely, 2010), and where undesirable characters (such

as holding an unacceptable political view) will carry with it a negative penalty in this explicit evaluation process. Should open expressions of radical right support be stigmatized, we would anticipate norm-enforcement (Bicchieri, 2017) in the form of social sanctions against these profiles.

H1 (*stigmatization* thesis): Dating profiles which indicate support for the radical-right will be significantly less likely to be evaluated positively relative to profiles that express support for any other party.

There are, however, numerous arguments to expect there to be little social penalty for radical right supporters. As evidenced by their increasing electoral success (Mudde, 2019), driven in part by mainstream parties legitimizing the issue positions of radical right parties (Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi, 2023) and platforming in the mainstream media (Jonge, 2019), citizens are likely to update their prior beliefs about the socially acceptable nature of supporting these parties or the positions they espouse (Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin, 2020; Bjånesøy, Ivarsflaten, and Berntzen, 2023). Indeed, a rich empirical literature has demonstrated that radical right electoral success, including gaining institutional access to the legislature, forming coalitions, or even externally supporting minority executives all contribute towards normalizing the radical right, legitimizing their place within the party system, and destigmatizing preferences and behaviors associated with radical right actors (Bjånesøy, Ivarsflaten, and Berntzen, 2023; Gul, 2023; Valentim, 2024). This is true even of states with a stronger pedigree and international reputation of social liberalism like Sweden (Ekholm, Bäck, and Renström, 2022), a country (traditionally) known for being resilient to the radical right (Rydgren and Van der Meiden, 2019) where the radical right Sweden Democrats now boast a central position within the country via its collaboration with the right-led national government (Aylott and Bolin, 2023).

Consider also Spain, a country often praised for its democratic transition to democracy and (now former) exceptional status as a country free from the radical right (Rama, Zanotti, Turnbull-Dugarte, and Santana, 2021; Mendes and Dennison, 2021). The social stigma associated with the radical right there has dissipated (Mendes and Dennison, 2021) allowing VOX, Spain's radical right party, to become the third largest party in the country as well as an essential, and often relied upon (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2024), legislative partner for the mainstream right. Indeed, recent observational data from Spain demonstrates that citizens, regardless of whether they belong to the left or the right, do not support the systematic exclusion of the rad-

ical right which they believe should be treated “just like any other” political party (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2024).

Should expressions of radical right support carry no social stigma because of their normalization, we would expect to see little norm enforcement and social punishment for self-identified radical right supporters on the dating market. We interpret the rejection of **H1** as evidence in support of an alternative *normalization* thesis.¹

Of course the potential rejection of the radical right may emerge because of spatial distinctiveness – lack of homophily (Huber and Malhotra, 2016; Sleiman, Melios, and Dolan, 2023) – rather than norm-enforcing sanctions associated with it, particularly in the case of those on the dating market with a younger median age and who, on average, tend to be more liberal. Should normalization of the radical right support in the dating market exist in the form a widespread absence of social sanctions, we anticipate that center-right voters will be positively predisposed to dating profiles that express support for the radical right. Radical right parties are a frequent parliamentary ally for the mainstream right (Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016; Lange, 2012) and – at least in the case of Spain – center-right and radical right parties co-organize and co-participate in political activities as a right-wing ‘bloc’ (Simón, 2020) against the political left. The presence of a ‘bloc logic’ in affective dynamics is supported by empirical assessments of affective polarization in multiparty systems (Bantel, 2023; Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021; Hagevi, 2015). Relying on data from twenty-three democracies, Bantel (2023) provides strong cross-national evidence that affective polarization is underlined by a “demarcation between multi-party political *camps*” and that voters are attached to political blocs which form the foundation for a social group-based identification (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) that is causally prior and overlays partisanship (Bantel, 2023).

Our theoretical proposition on the bloc-based centrifugal forces – underpinned by the notion that *negative* identities and affect drive affective polarization more than positive identities and affect (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes, 2012; Iyengar, Lelkes, Malhotra, and Westwood, 2019; Lawall, Turnbull-Dugarte, Foos, and Townsley, 2025; Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega, 2024; Areal, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025) – is illustrated in Figure 1. In a

¹Our pre-analysis plan formalized this hypothesis explicitly as H2. *Normalization* thesis: dating profiles which indicate support for the radical-right will be no less likely to be evaluated positively than profiles that express support for any other party. Given these hypotheses (both pre-registered) are essentially alternative expectations – support for the normalization thesis indicates a rejection of the stigmatization thesis – we have streamlined this in the write-up of the results. The empirical models and interpretation of the results in relation to these alternative hypotheses do not deviate in any way from those stipulated in the pre-analysis plan.

polity where support for the radical right (R2) is norm-defiant, then a center-right partisan (R1) – presented with potential partners that are equally desirable on other observable characteristics and incentivized to enforce social norms (Álvarez-Benjumea and Valentim, 2024) – should prefer center-left partisans (L1) over those of the radical right. In short, center-right voters should reject those that express support for the radical right despite belonging to the same ideological bloc because association with potential partners that support parties considered “beyond the pale” (Van Spanje, 2010) is socially undesirable and costly.

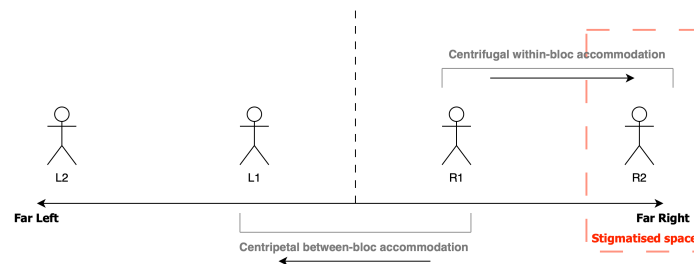


Figure 1: Understanding within-bloc logic

Should, however, a within-bloc logic socially sort individuals into polarized and antagonistic *blocs* beyond solely singular partisan identities (Simón, 2020; Bantel, 2023; Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021), R1 is incentivized to accommodate those on the radical right. This accommodating bias is based on a trade-off between two opposing norm violation costs: the polity-level social norm against associating with a politically stigmatized group, and the group-based social norm (and cognitive dissonance) against associating with those from the political bloc-based out-group. The presence of the former norm, as detailed above, is well established (Gul, 2023; Ammassari, 2023; Blinder, Ford, and Iversflaten, 2013; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2019; Harteveld, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg, and Kokkonen, 2015; Art, 2011) if, however, evidence signals it is in decline (Valentim, 2024; Mendes and Dennison, 2021; Aylott and Bolin, 2023; Arzheimer, 2019). The presence of the latter norm assumes that center-right partisans hold an empirical expectation (second order preference) regarding what individuals *should* do when faced with such a trade-off (Bicchieri, 2017). We demonstrate below that this is indeed the case. Out-group intolerance among the politically polarized is a powerful political force (Berntzen, Kelsall, and Harteveld, 2024) and, in line with the expectations of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), in-group members tend to place a premium on complying with fellow in-group members’ expectations (Mason, 2018) and, perhaps

more significantly, are systematically more predisposed to signal their rejection and dissimilarity from the out-group (Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025; Lawall, Turnbull-Dugarte, Foos, and Townsley, 2025). In a polarized context where group-based identities exercise increased influence, center-right partisans are increasingly inclined to view the radical right parties as the enemy of their (shared) enemy and, as a result, their friend. Affective polarization can, therefore, incentivize in-bloc accommodation of the radical right not because of positive affect towards the radical right, but because of the strong negative affect towards political opponents on the center-left. In the absence of both radical right stigmatization and between-bloc polarization, the dating preferences of those among the center-right (R1) should, assuming equality in the desirability of other traits, should be as-good-as-random for L1 and R2. Similar, as-good-as-random, outcomes should be observed for L1 and L2 in the presence of *equal* levels of stigmatization and between-bloc polarization. When stigmatization is absent or in decline but between-bloc polarization is high, then R2 should benefit from an accommodating advantage. Finally, when stigmatization remains intact but between-bloc polarization is absent or in decline, then L1 should be the recipient of the advantage because of social penalties against R2. Our pre-registered hypothesis is that radical right tolerance among the center-right has been normalized as a function of between-bloc polarization and, as a result, a within-bloc logic will prevail over potential norm-enforcing social sanctions against the radical right in the dating market.

H2 (*bloc-logic* thesis): Among supporters of the mainstream right, dating profiles which indicate support for the radical-right will be more likely to be evaluated positively relative to profiles that report support for the center-left.

Empirical strategies

Our primary test of these hypotheses is based on original data from two countries – Britain and Spain – which vary in their extent of the radical right institutionalization. The radical right parties we consider are VOX (Rama, Zanotti, Turnbull-Dugarte, and Santana, 2021; Mendes and Dennison, 2021) and Reform UK.² Whereas the radical right in Spain has been institutionalized within the political system (Field and Alonso, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2024) via its widespread national-level success, parliamentary representation, and coalition-worthy status

²Both parties have been categorized as radical right-wing parties according to data from both the PopuList (V3.0) project (Rooduijn, Pirro, Halikiopoulou, Froio, Van Kessel, De Lange, Mudde, and Taggart, 2024) and within the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Hooghe, Marks, Bakker, Jolly, Polk, Rovny, Steenbergen, and Vachudova, 2024).

the same is not true of Britain at the time of fielding the experimental data collection (February 2024).³

Empirically, we rely on a three-pronged approach to test our hypotheses and the underlying mechanisms behind the observed relationships. We provide details on the first two here, and return to the third in later section. The first two approaches combine observational and experimental evidence sourced from our original survey. Online survey respondents (N=2000) were gathered by Dynata for both Britain and Spain. Dynata provided a (quota-based) representative sample of those individuals from each country aged 18-40 (descriptive statistics in Online Appendix). Age restrictions were placed on the sampling in order for it to reflect the demographic makeup of those most active of the dating market and using online dating apps. Data from Tinder, for example, identifies 85% of active users to be within this age bracket.

For our initial observational analysis, we presented respondents with a slate of characteristics and asked them to identify if they viewed these characteristics as a “red flag” when considering a potential partner. Our core dependent variable in this instance is self-reported identification of support for the radical right as an undesirable trait in a potential partner. Should expressions of support for the radical right be socially unacceptable, we would expect individuals to report this to be a red flag (even if they do not actually believe so). In order to benchmark the presence of a social stigma, we include two potential traits in a partner that we anticipate will be largely considered undesirable in a potential dating match: i) support for Russian president Vladimir Putin, or ii) having an OnlyFans⁴ profile.

For our experimental study we designed and pre-registered⁵ a *visual* conjoint survey experiment (López Ortega and Radojevic, 2025)⁶ that randomly exposes respondents to visually manipulated fictional dating profiles. Respondents were presented with a single profile and asked to behave in way that they normally would on a dating application. There is no forced

³We consciously refer to ‘institutionalization’ rather than normalization here. Indeed, the ideas and values of the radical right in Britain have, in many ways, been normalized via their adoption and application from the mainstream right Conservative party. Not only did the Conservatives, under the leadership of Boris Johnson, absorb much of the latent support of the radical right’s electorate (Evans, Geus, and Green, 2023), its political offering has been described as that of an “ersatz version” of a radical right-wing party (Bale, 2023). In July 2024, Reform UK won national-level parliamentary representation for the first time after the snap election held on July 4th. Note that the predecessors of Reform UK – first UKIP and subsequently the Brexit Party – failed to achieve representation in the UK House of Commons via the ballot box.

⁴OnlyFans is an online platform for content creators that produce and share sexual content to online subscribers.

⁵The pre-analysis plan is available for consultation on the Open Science Framework (OSF) via: https://osf.io/y5kh7/?view_only=bba3af1bd28c419c9face0856cd8ebdd

⁶As demonstrated by López Ortega and Radojevic (2025), visual conjoint manipulations provide significant improvements in terms of external validity. Not only do they approximate more natural interactions, but they are significantly better at reducing social expectation bias.

comparison between opposing profiles; ten individual profiles were presented to respondents successively (N=20,106). Our outcome measure is behavioural. Rather than coercing a preference or asking respondents to self-report the likeability and/or desirability of a profile, we asked them to swipe on one of three emoticons presented below each profile, as previously customary on the dating app Tinder, in order to behaviourally evaluate the presented dating profile. The emoticons included a red cross (indicating reject), a blue star (indicating “superlike”), and a green heart (indicating like).⁷ Given the experimental online interface in which we observe respondent behavior does not lead to real-world dating – respondents in our sample will never meet the fictitious profiles they are presented with – our experimental design replicates the common initial stages of the contemporary online dating rituals (evaluating unknown individuals) *only*, rather than actual dating per se (Ranzini, Rosenbaum, and Tybur, 2022).

The profiles present manipulated faces originally sourced from the Chicago Face Database (Ma, Correll, and Wittenbrink, 2015), which were selected on their comparable and high scores on attractiveness. Using a sample of ten base faces that varied on gender and ethnicity, we then leveraged an AI-based facial editing algorithm to create eight variations of a single face. These iterations resulted in a total population of eighty faces that varied the profile’s gender, ethnicity, age, emotion (smiling or neutral expression) as well as their gender congruence.⁸ The eight variations of a single face reproduced in Figure 2 represent an illustrative example. All of the facial manipulations for each of the ten base faces are available for consultation in the supplementary material.

To ensure real-world external validity, respondents are never exposed to a variation of a single face (or the randomly assigned accompanying name) more than once. Respondents were exposed to a total of ten profiles. In real terms, this means that respondents with single-sex preferences were exposed to a single variation (of the eight) variations from each of the initial population of ten base faces. Individuals who expressed being attracted to both men and women, were exposed to random subsample of five men and five women. Relying on experimental manipulations of a smaller pool of base faces and including fixed-effects for these

⁷Tinder’s “superlike” function claims to increase matching success by 300%. See: <https://tinder.com/en-GB/feature/stand-out>.

⁸We manipulated facial expressions given this can moderate perceptions of individuals (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008) and is even found to influence political decisions (Homan and Schumacher, 2023; Horiuchi, Komatsu, and Nakaya, 2012). Gender congruence was operationalised for men as having facial hair (compared to clean shaven) and for women by having long (as opposed to short) hair.

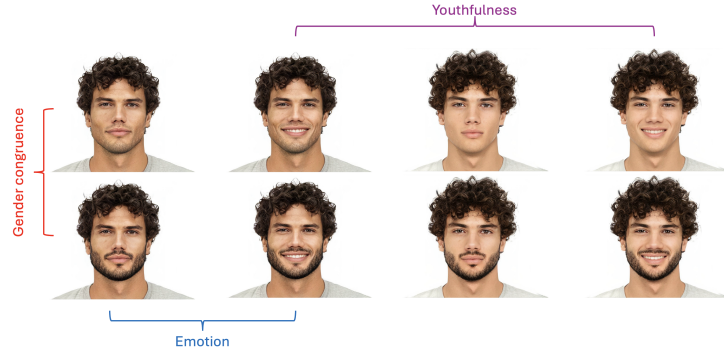


Figure 2: Example eight variations in base face

allows us to control for those features in faces that we cannot easily observe (e.g. mandibular symmetry or biocular width) but which are demonstrated to influence a profile’s probability of success during initial evaluations on the dating market (Valentine, Li, Penke, and Perrett, 2014).

In addition to our core explanatory attribute of interest (support for the radical right) and the facially-manipulated characteristics detailed above, the visually-presented dating profiles also manipulated the individual’s: occupation, education, distance from respondent, dating preferences (e.g. hookup, or serious partner), the presence of nationalist symbols, the presence of information on pronouns (Britain) or diverse (vegan) diet (Spain), as well as three hobby tags. Simultaneous randomization, a core feature of the value-added form conjoint designs, facilitates the identification of the average effect of a concrete attribute value (e.g. support for the radical right) independently of all other attribute values included in the manipulation. Multiple randomization reduces the potential for stereotyping – statistical discrimination (Phelps, 1972) – and adjacent inferences (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey, 2018). In Appendix C we summarize the full list of attributes and their potential values. Typical examples of a visually manipulated profile are reproduced Figure 3 which reproduces a typical profile presented to a respondent attracted to men (a) or women (b).

Observational evidence

In Figure 4 we report the proportion of respondents (individuals of dating age) in both Britain and Spain that identify each of the named traits as being something they would consider negative in a potential partner. In both cases individuals self-report, on average, that they would negatively evaluate a potential partner based on an individual’s support for the radical right. This self-reported rejection is larger in Spain (64%) than in Britain (57%) and, in both countries,

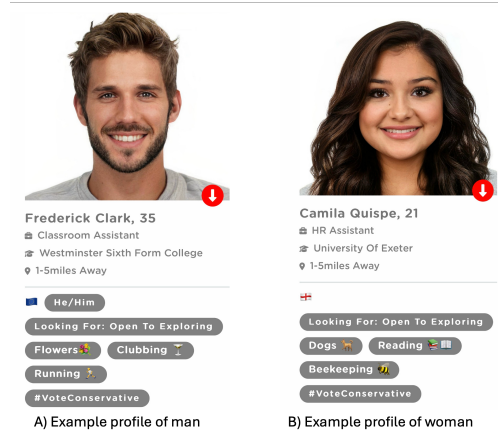


Figure 3: Examples of visually manipulated dating profiles

it is larger than the penalty applied to any other political party supporter, and yet smaller than that reported in the case of expressed support for Putin or of having an OnlyFans profile.

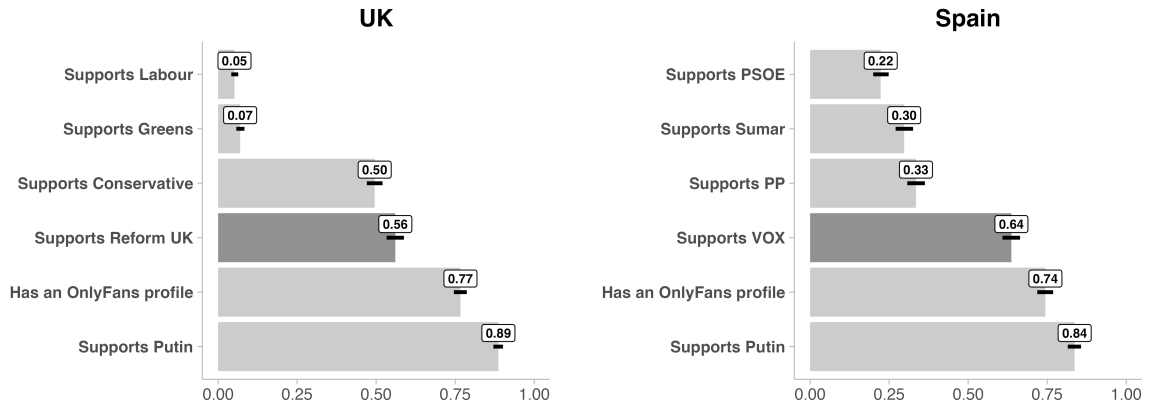


Figure 4: Rejection (self-reported) of the radical right in dating market

Descriptively, this observational evidence points towards the social rejection of the radical right. There are, however, three important features that explain the *overall* penalty observed in respondents' self-reported preferences.

First, self-reported claims to reject dates that express radical right sympathies are likely to be inflated *if* a social norm exists around the radical right. In other words, and as a result of preference falsification (Kuran, 1997), the distribution of individuals who claim to reject radical right partners may be biased upwards compared to the real underlying distribution of individuals who would apply this social sanction in practice. Second, self-reported rejection of the radical right may be a product of *statistical discrimination* (stereotyping) as opposed to a concrete stigmatized biases based uniquely on expressions of radical right support. Statisti-

cal discrimination or inferential profiling can occur when individuals, devoid of informational equivalence, make inferences based on correlated outcomes (Phelps, 1972). In other words, individuals may self-report rejecting a potential sexual partner that votes for the radical right not because of their electoral or political preferences but because they assume that a radical right supporter is likely to have other characteristics that they consider undesirable.⁹ Experimentally manipulating radical right support can reduce sensitivity bias and approximate genuine preferences whereas doing so independently of adjacent characteristics – like what can be done in a conjoint setting – gets around the potential problem of informational equivalence (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey, 2018).

Third and finally, those individuals active in the dating market are a subgroup of the wider population that are, by their very composition, likely to be negatively predisposed to the radical right. Those on the dating market are much younger and younger individuals are, on average, more socially liberal than comparable individuals who are older. As a result, it's not clear if the *on average* penalty is simply a function of political homophily within a more left-leaning population resulting in a penalty for those that are more ideologically dissimilar. If a social norm-enforcing penalty is applied by citizens in general, it should be also be present among those who identify with the center-right. As hypothesized (H2), however, we anticipate that the incentives for those on the center-right is to accommodate their political in-bloc members. To test if the overall rejection of the radical right is indeed the result of the left-leaning baseline among the dating population, we report the conditional probability of self-reported rejection based on party identification in Figure 5.

The left-panel reports the results of this conditional test for Britain; the right-panel reports the results for Spain. In the British case, we report the probabilities based on identification with the Conservatives (center-right), Greens (left), Labour (center-left), and the Liberal Democrats (center-left). For Spain, we consider voters attached to the far-left Together We Can party [*Unidas Podemos*](UP), the center-right People's Party [*Partido Popular*](PP), the center-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party [*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*] (PSOE), and the far-left Unite (*Sumar*). A symmetrical pattern is observed regardless of the country considered. Whereas a sizable majority of respondents that identify with parties on the left self-report that

⁹Consider this illustrative example. Say in a given country it is well known that radical right supporters are statistically more likely to have left school at aged 16, have an unskilled and low-paid job, live in rural towns, are more likely to believe the Earth is flat, and believe that the Covid-19 vaccine was made of microchips. Knowing they vote for the radical right (which one may not care about), one can make strong inference that they have a low-paying job (which one may indeed care about).

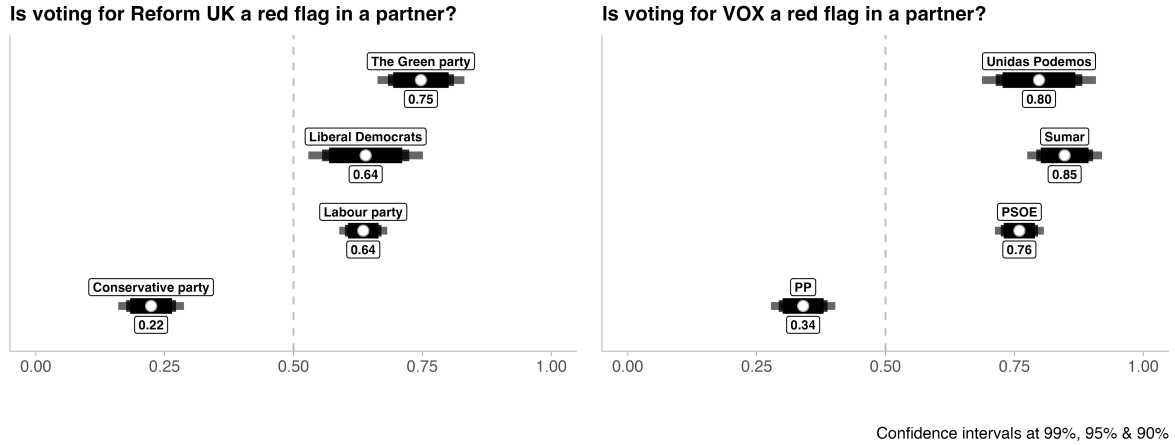


Figure 5: Conditional probability of (self-reported) radical right rejection

they would consider voting for the radical right in their respective country to be a red flag, the same is not true of those who identify with the mainstream center-right parties. For these voters, and according to this self-reported measure which is likely to over-estimate penalties, associations with the radical right are normalized. Only one in five Conservative voters on the British dating market would consider voting for Reform UK to be unacceptable whereas one in three PP voters in the Spanish market express the same view.

The presence of this within-bloc *tolerance* of the radical right among center-right voters suggests that there is little unique social penalty against the radical right. Indeed, when we compare the proportion of individuals who believe voting for the center-right is *also* a red flag, Green and Labour voters are equally likely to say so, and in Spain the same is true of respondents who identify with UP or Sumar, but not the PSOE (see Figure A1 and Figure A2). These results suggest that rather than an anti- radical right norm, rejection of the radical right in general is observed because of political homophily being prioritized by the more left-leaning population on the dating market. The self-reported normalization of the radical right among the center-right provides indicate support for [H2](#).

Experimental evidence

We now turn to test our hypotheses experimentally via our novel *visual* conjoint design. As detailed above, the value added of the experimental approach is that it allows us to rule out an explanation for radical right rejection that is based on statistical discrimination (Phelps, 1972; Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey, 2018) and also allows us to observe behavior with a lower risk of sensitivity bias, even vis-à-vis a regular conjoint experiment (López Ortega and Radojevic, 2025).

We begin our presentation of the experimental results by considering the evidence from Britain. Figure 6 reports two estimands: the marginal mean (MM) and the average marginal component effect (AMCE). The MM indicates the favourability toward dating profiles that express support for one of the political parties considered, marginalizing across all other attributes and their corresponding values.¹⁰ Note that the reference line for the plot reporting the MM is 0.46 which indicates the mean level of positive selection. Recall that, given our conjoint task is behavioral (swiping) and not a product of forced choice, the median selection does not need to sum to 0.5. In real terms, the mean selection probability of 0.46 indicates that, on average, respondents were more likely to opt to reject the dating profile than select it.¹¹ The AMCE indicates the change in the probability that a profile is evaluated positively based on a change from the baseline category where the profile expresses support for the center-right.

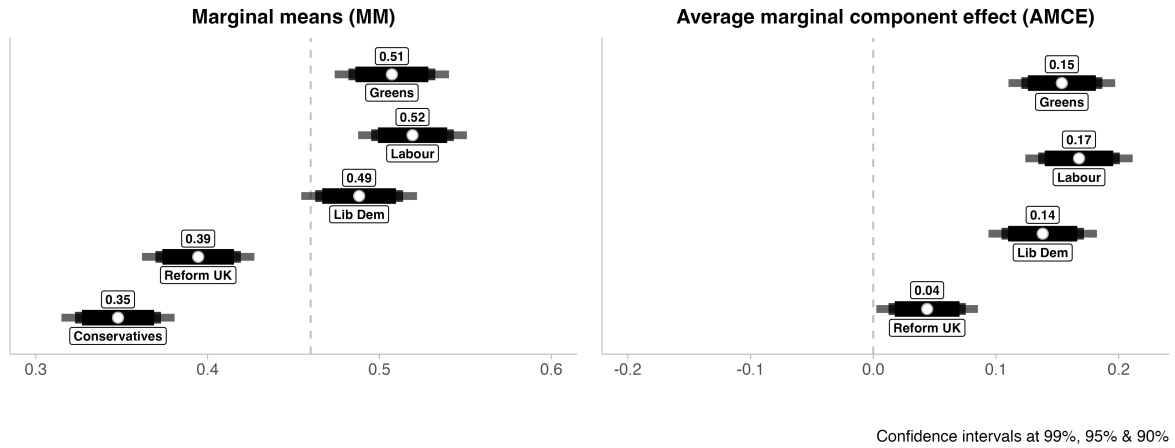


Figure 6: Modeling radical right penalty on the dating market (UK)

Overall, the results from our experimental test in Britain do *not* provide clear evidence that supporters of the radical right are subjected to any norm-enforcing penalization in the dating market (H1). While the MM for profiles that express support for Reform UK are below the median at 0.39, citizens on the dating market in Britain are actually more inclined to penalize voters of the mainstream right who are positively evaluated only 35% of the time. The AMCE for support for Reform UK is positive and significant indicating that, marginalizing across all other attributes features, Reform UK voters are four percentage-points more likely than

¹⁰We limit our reporting to our core attribute of interest but the effect of all simultaneously randomized attributes are reported in Appendix (see Figures A3 & A4). The results reported in Figure 6 and Figure 7 are estimates that include radical right identifying respondents. Alternative models that exclude these voters are reported in Appendix D1.

¹¹There is sizable gender gap in the baseline level of acceptance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, and as evidenced by data from Tinder, men are more likely to swipe right (i.e. select) than women, who are more likely to swipe left (i.e. reject) profiles on the dating application.

comparable Conservative voters to enjoy success on the dating market. These results indicate that – at least in the case of Britain – expressions of support for the radical right have become more normalized: in a social environment where individuals are engaged in an explicit and active form of socially evaluating others, supporting the radical right does not carry with it any unique penalty.

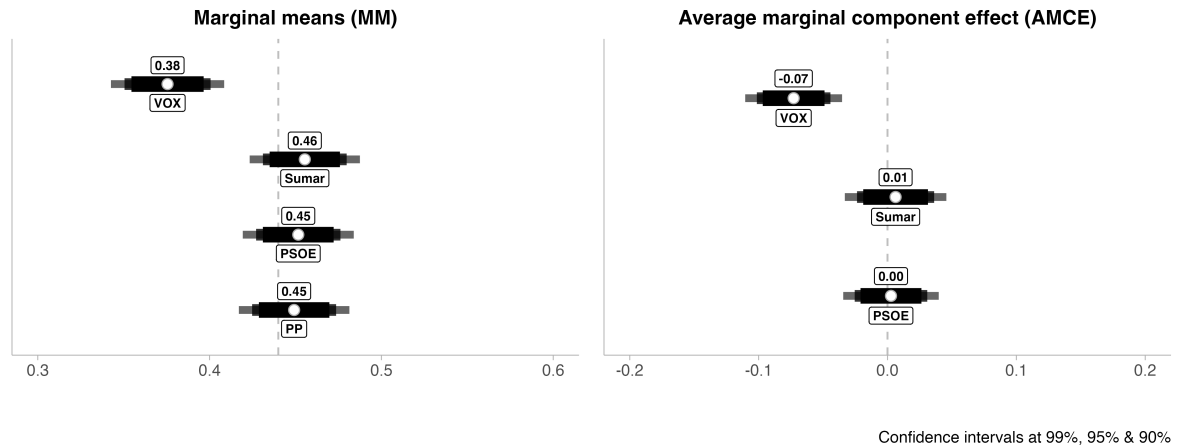


Figure 7: Modeling radical right penalty on the dating market (Spain)

Figure 7 reports the overall results from Spain. The reference category for the AMCE is expressed support for the mainstream center-right party, the PP. Despite Spain's radical right party enjoying a far more institutionalized position in the country and enjoying more widespread electoral support, the results indicate that expressing support for the radical right vis-à-vis expressing support for the center-right causes a significant and sizable reduction on one's romantic prospects. Overall, the MM for each of the other parties being considered – regardless of whether they are on the right (PP) or on the left (Sumar or PSOE) – illustrates that the probability of being positively evaluated on the dating market is as-good-as random. The same is not true of those who express support for VOX: while the average probability of being romantically or sexually successful for supporters of all other parties is indistinguishable from the overall probability of 0.44, the chances for a VOX-supporter are significantly lower at .38.

These results from Britain and Spain provide mixed evidence. In Britain potential dates who express support for the radical right enjoy a probability of success on the dating market that is below average, it is *not*, however, lower than that experienced by individuals who express support for the mainstream right either. By contrast, in Spain expressions of radical right support do indeed result in a specific penalty congruent with the expectations of the stigmatization thesis (H1). VOX-supporting individuals on the dating market are uniquely penalized com-

pared to supports of all other parties. Should a social norm against the radical right exist, we would expect this to also be exercised by individuals on the political right who, foregoing any bloc-based congruence, opt to reject individuals with norm-defiant political preferences.

In-bloc accommodation

In Figure 8 we report the results of subgroup comparison that stratifies respondents based on their expressed affinities with parties on either side of the left-right divide. The left-hand panel reports the conditional AMCE and the central panel reports the conditional MM where observations are colored for respondents who identify with the political left (grey) or the political right (black). The right-hand panel reports the pairwise difference in the conditional MM. Radical right supporters are excluded from the sample.

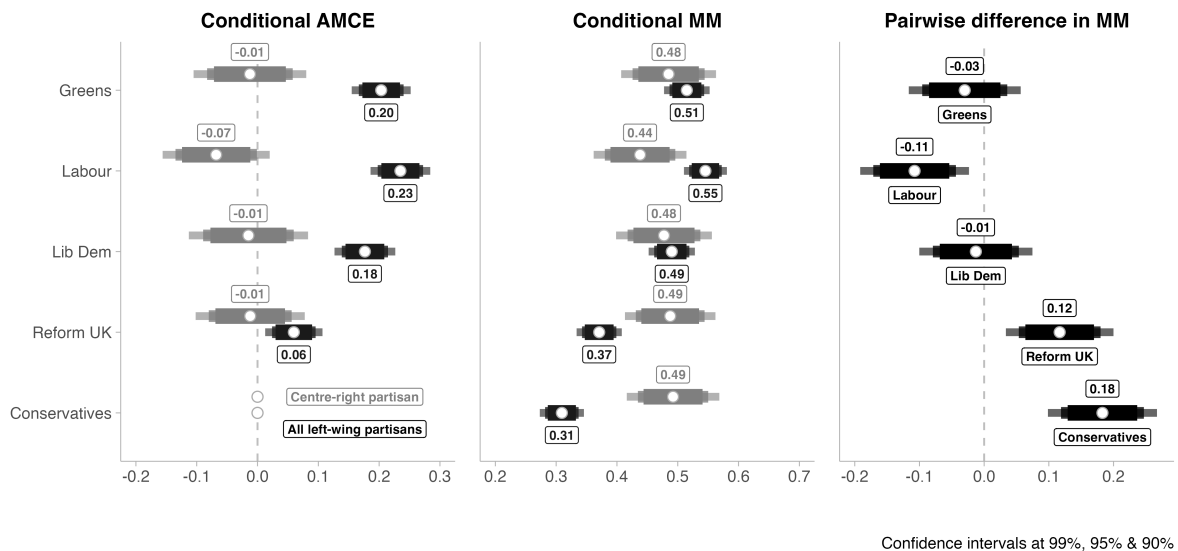


Figure 8: In-group asymmetries (UK)

Across all estimands, the results from Figure 8 demonstrate clearly that any asymmetry in radical right penalty on the dating market is driven by voters on the left. Whereas respondents who identify with the center-right show a small tendency to engage in group-based bias in their dating preferences, those on the left are significantly more inclined to do so. Center-right respondents are equally likely to positively evaluate a Conservative-voting (.48) or Reform UK-voting partner (.48). Left-wing respondents, however, are significantly *less* likely to apply a penalty to the latter over the former. In other words, even though a dating penalty against the radical right is driven entirely by left-voting respondents rejecting potential dates who express support for Reform UK, even among this subgroup, there is less of a penalty than that observed for the Conservatives. For those on the right, there is clear evidence of a within-bloc

logic that prioritizes radical right normalization: for the mainstream right, dating someone from radical right is equal to dating someone from their own party.

In Britain, the results demonstrate that the social penalty exhibited by those on the left towards those on the right is larger than the reverse penalty exhibited by those on the right towards those on the left. This dissimilarity in within-bloc homophily is congruent with evidence of asymmetric levels of negative affect between the left and the right in Britain (Hobolt, Lawall, and Tilley, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025). Indeed, assessing levels of relative in- and out-group affect in Britain using the identity measures designed by Huddy, Bankert, and Davies (2018), our data shows equal levels of in-group affect among the left and right but a greater (and statistically significant) level of out-group affect among the left towards the right than the reverse.

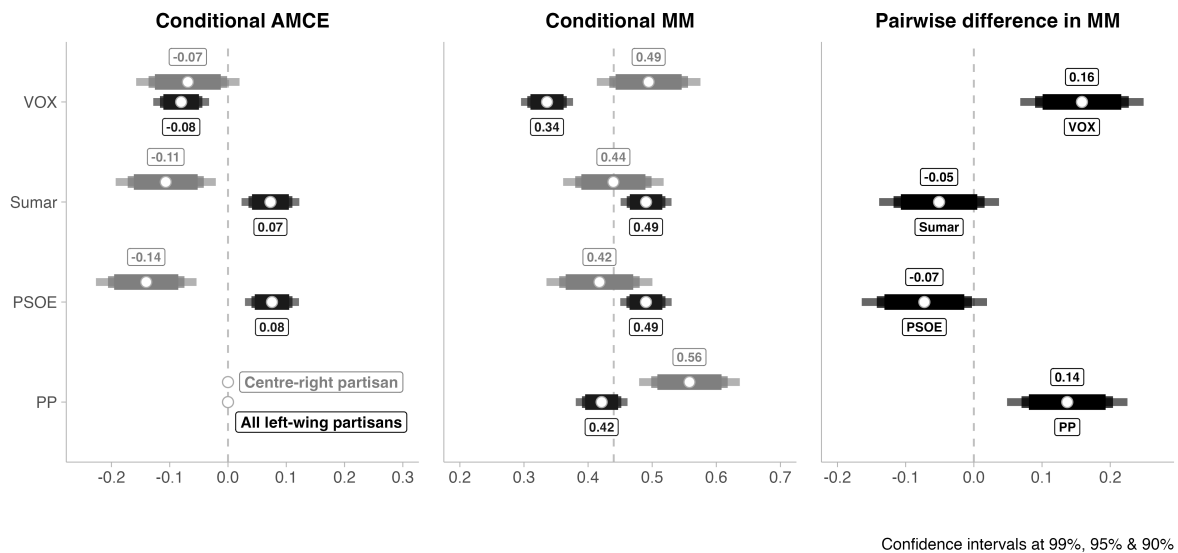


Figure 9: In-group asymmetries (Spain)

We turn to consider the results from Spain in Figure 9. Vis-à-vis individuals on the political left evaluating a potential date, those on the political right are far more likely to positively evaluate profiles expressing support for the radical right. Indeed the difference in the MM (.16) between right- (.49) and left-wing respondents (.34) is not only statistically significant but also large and equates to a 47% increase. Comparing the difference in the MM for profiles expressing support the mainstream right (PP) among respondents from the the same political strata (.14) as a benchmark, the in-group premium for the radical right is numerically larger than (if statistically symmetrical to) that of the mainstream right. In real terms, while right-wing individuals in Spain display a significant negative disposition towards those who express

support for the center-left (PSOE) or the far-left (Sumar), there is no penalty for radical right supporters who are, on average, treated just like in-group partisan supporters. This centrifugal biases provides strong causal purchase for the bloc-based model of affective polarization in multi-party settings (Bantel, 2023; Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021; Simón, 2020) which, as demonstrated here, contributes to the social normalization and accommodation of radical right supporters. Unlike the British case, the effects of within-bloc homophily in Spain are of a similar magnitude among those on either side of the ideological partition.

The subgroup variation in the experimental evidence from both Britain and Spain provides strong support for H2. In both countries, manipulating expressions of party supports shows that the overall penalty on the dating market against supporters of the radical right is a function of the left-leaning median position of individuals on the market themselves. There is no difference in the probability of experiencing success on the dating market for radical right supporters among those who identify with the mainstream right. Indeed, congruent with H2, a center-right voter is more inclined to reject a sexual partner on the center-left than they are to do the same to someone from the radical right.

In addition to the core analyses reported above, we also hypothesized variation in the level of social sanctions against radical right supporters based on gender and LGBTQ status. Theoretically, we anticipated that the radical right voting penalty among women and LGBTQ individuals would be greater than it is for men and cisgender heterosexuals. We report the findings of these subgroup asymmetry tests in Appendix E. The results, which challenge our pre-registered expectations, demonstrate that women are, on average, *not* significantly more likely (or indeed less) likely to penalize radical right supporters on the dating market vis-à-vis men. A similar lack of subgroup heterogeneity is observed in the case of LGBTQ identifying individuals.

Testing the mechanisms

So far our empirical results have provided evidence in support of one of our hypotheses. Both our original observational and novel visual conjoint experiment have evinced that there is no polity-level penalty against radical right supports on the dating market (H1 rejected); and that center-right supporters are more inclined to accommodate potential partners who vote for the radical right by providing them with a dating market premium (H2). The net negative penalty against VOX in Spain, can be explained by ideological distinctiveness and the strong levels of rejection from those on the left alone. Our theoretical explanation for these results is based on

the relative importance of *negative* affect towards supporters of political out-group members and the subsequent construction of multiparty group-based blocs. In short: positive affective spillovers that lead to radical right accommodation among the center-right emerge not because of in-bloc positive affect for the radical right, but because of higher levels of out-bloc negative affect among center-right partisans towards those on the left. Social accommodation of the radical right among those on the center-right is then not because of who radical right supporters are, but rather who they are *not* (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega, 2024; Lawall, Turnbull-Dugarte, Foos, and Townsley, 2025). Affective spillovers, like those observed in our experimental manipulation, emerge as a result of this bloc-based affective polarization and a within-bloc norm that places a premium on the rejection of out-group (read out-bloc) members and the accommodation of in-group (read in-bloc) members.

For this expectation to be empirically supported, we would expect to observe two patterns. First, we would expect the level of *negative* affect towards out-bloc partisans to be greater than the level of *positive* affect towards in-bloc partisans. Returning to Figure 1, we should expect to see R1's negative affect (hate) for L1 to be greater than their positive affect (love) for R2. Second, should a social norm exist whereby center-right partisans are incentivised to reject potential partners from the opposing bloc over those of their in-bloc, we would expect center-right individuals to express higher levels of intolerance of a deviation from this norm (Bicchieri, 2017). Both of these assumptions are supported by the data.

Out-bloc rejection over in-bloc affection

First, as evinced in Figure 10, we show that the negative affect towards out-bloc members (center-left partisans) is greater relative to positive affect towards in-bloc (radical right partisans) among those who identify with the center-right. For Britain, we use data from Wave 25 (May 2023) of the British Election Study (BES).¹² For Spain, we use data from a second original survey (June 2024).¹³

Can the positive affective spillover on the dating market towards Reform UK and VOX among Conservative and PP partisans be explained by higher levels of positive affect towards the corresponding radical right party in each country? The descriptive data from BES and the

¹²The BES data provides data on respondents' self-reported affect towards different political parties and the E-DEM data provides data on respondents' self-reported affect towards the supporters of political parties. The latter is preferable when assessing affective spillovers, but the former serves as a useful, if however, imperfect proxy. In both instances the variables are rescaled 0-1.

¹³We fielded an original survey among a representative (quota-based) sample of 4,661 respondents in Spain that reflects the gender, age, educational and geographic distribution of the Spanish population. Descriptive summary statistics for this original data reported in the Appendix G

Centre-right voters' in-bloc & out-bloc affect

Absolute (upper panel) and relative (lower panel) affect towards in-bloc & out-bloc partians

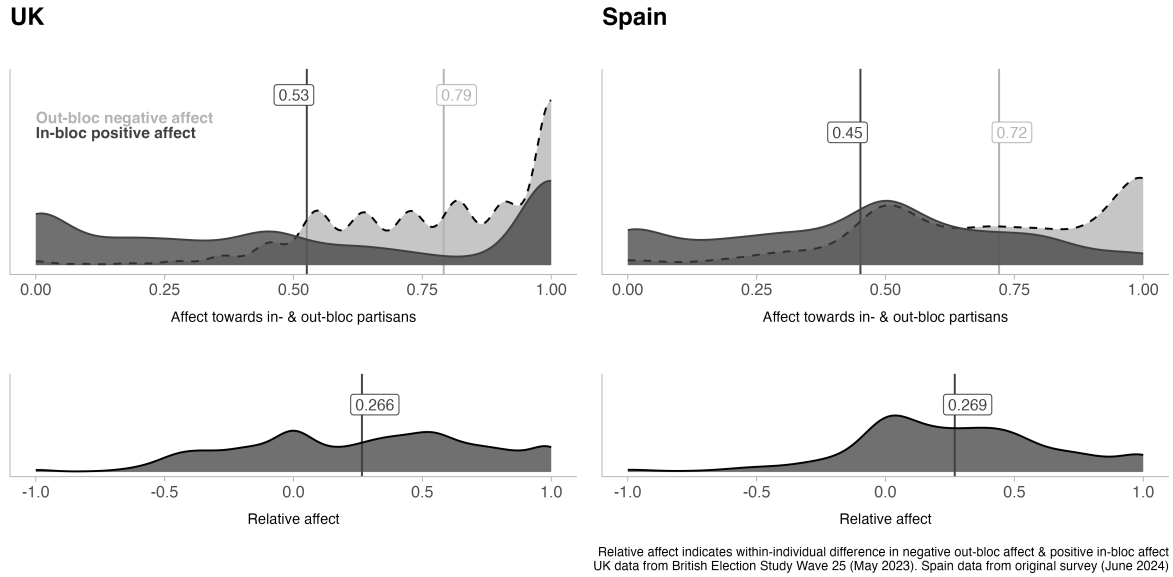


Figure 10: Self-reported bloc-based affect among center-right partisans

original second survey in Spain does not support that explanation. While center-right affect towards the radical right is, on average, positive it does not signal a roaring endorsement towards in-bloc partians. Instead, and congruent with our theorised expectations, the rejection of the out-bloc center-left party is significantly and substantively higher than the level of positive in-bloc affect for the radical right. Comparing the result from Spain using panel data with longitudinal variation in the center-right's accommodation of VOX shows this asymmetry is not a function of elite-level mainstreaming by the center-right PP.¹⁴

Bloc-based norm & the expectations of other

We now turn to consider if citizens, including, in particular, those who identify with the center-right *expect* their peers to penalize or reward out- and in-bloc members on the dating market. Should individuals' behavior be influenced by a social norm, we should observe clear preferences on what is (and is not) acceptable for individuals to do among *others* (Bicchieri, 2017). To answer this question, we rely on Wave 19 of the BES for data on Britain and data from our second original survey for Spain.

¹⁴In Appendix F, we use panel data from the E-DEM project to explore the same relationship. The panel nature of the E-DEM dataset allows us to test how the normalization of the radical right has evolved over time. E-DEM included measures of affect towards supporters of parties, including VOX, over three waves from February 2019 until May 2019. In the first wave, VOX had enjoyed its first regional parliamentary success but had not yet been fully embraced by the center-right nor had the party enjoyed the national-level success it would do by the time of the final wave at the time of the country's congressional elections (Field and Alonso, 2024; Rama, Zanotti, Turnbull-Dugarte, and Santana, 2021). The panel nature of the dataset allows us, therefore, to assess i) citizen-level accommodation (or stigma) both *before* and after elite-led mainstreaming, as well as ii) *within-individual* change in the relative affect towards the center-left and radical right among center-right partisans *over time*. The former is an important assessment of the potential scope conditions of our theory.

To assess the prevalence of a social norm against out-bloc members of the radical right, we rely on the following instrument from the BES – “How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for [PARTY]?” – which recorded responses on 5-point (Very unhappy - Very happy) scale. We replicate the same wording in our second original survey in Spain and, like the BES, ask this question to all respondents and for a diverse list of parties. This is distinct from other surveys, e.g. the CONAP dataset (Berntzen, Kelsall, and Harteveld, 2024), which only asks this question of respondents’ least liked party as opposed to all parties. With data on several parties, we can measure tolerance between distinct party dyads (Gidron, Adams, and Horne, 2023).

Relying on responses to this question, we identify if respondents are on average happy to accept that their child would marry someone from a diverse catalogue of parties, including those of the radical right. We categorise a party as unacceptable when a respondent reports being unhappy or very unhappy about their child marrying a supporter of that party. This allows us to assess if there indeed exists a normative view among others that would lead to individuals’ being socially incentivised to reject the radical right on the dating market. We can also, importantly for our theoretical claim, test if respondents of the center-right are more, equally, or less happy to accept that their child would marry someone from the radical right (in-bloc) vis-à-vis someone from the center-left (out-bloc). Doing so can demonstrate if there is a group-based expectation (second order preference) that socially accommodating the center-left is *more* socially costly for center-right group members than accommodating the radical right.

Table 1: Expectations of society (all respondents)

Value	Britain (N=32,177)			Spain (N=4661)			
	Reform	Conservative	Labour	VOX	SALF	PP	PSOE
Acceptable	0.65	0.75	0.81	0.56	0.62	0.72	0.78
Unacceptable	0.35	0.25	0.19	0.44	0.38	0.28	0.22

Data: Britain (British Election Study) and Spain (original data)

Outcome: Tolerance towards partisanship of child’s partner

Table 1 reports the tolerance for a child’s romantic partner among all respondents based on their hypothetical partner belonging to the radical right, center-right, or center-left. In the case of Spain, the data collection took place in the weeks after the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2024 during which a new radical right party emerged and was electorally successful: *Se Acabó La Fiesta* [The Party Is Over] (SALF) won three seats in the European legislature and

4.5% of the of national vote share. We included SALF in the consideration set for respondents. The value-added of including SALF as a party with, at least at the time of fielding, no institutional collaboration with the center-right, allows us to assess if there is any social (in)tolerance or accommodation among respondents in the absence of any party-elite level normalization. Similar to the panel nature of the E-DEM data (Appendix F), the arrival of SALF facilitates a test of the scope conditions as we can observe if the absence of stigma is conditioned by elite-level cooperation.

In both Britain and Spain, the social expectations of citizens are clear. The majority of respondents report that it is socially *acceptable* for their child to marry a radical right supporter. The polity-level acceptance of the radical right is slightly greater in Britain at 65% than it is in the case of Spain. 56% of Spanish respondents reported that they would accept their child marrying a VOX supporter and slightly more (62%) said the same for those that support SALF. While the self-reported acceptance for children marrying the radical right is notably lower than all other parties reported, it is important to signal that the absolute level of acceptance is comfortably the majority view among respondents.

Table 2: Relative expectations of in-group partisans (center-right partisans)

Value	Britain (N=11,153)	Spain (N=1265)	
	Reform	VOX	SALF
Center-left more acceptable	0.08	0.17	0.17
Equally acceptable	0.53	0.54	0.58
Radical right more acceptable	0.39	0.29	0.25

Data: Britain (British Election Study) and Spain (original data)

Outcome: Relative tolerance towards in- & out-bloc partisanship of child's partner

In Table 2 we report levels of relative acceptance of the radical right vis-à-vis the center-left among center-right respondents. In other words, what is the relative level of acceptance towards Reform UK (VOX or SALF) supporters compared to Labour (PSOE) supporters among Conservative (PP) partisans. There is no systematic rejection of the radical right among the center-right: on average, center-right voters are most likely to view their child marrying a radical right voter as equally acceptable as a center-left voter. Beyond those who view these as equally acceptable (the modal position), center-right respondents are significantly more inclined to accept their child marrying a radical right supporter than a center-left supporter. The difference in Britain is sizeable. Less than one in ten Conservative voters view their child marrying a Labour partisan as more acceptable than their child marrying a Reform UK partisan.

Whereas the acceptability of their child marrying a Reform UK partisan over a Labour partisan is close to five times (488%) greater, with two in five respondents expressing this relative level of social acceptance.

A similar pattern is observed in Spain if, however, the magnitude of the out-bloc rejection is lower than that observed in Britain. In the case of VOX-supporting individuals, 30% of PP voters find their child marrying someone who votes for the radical right to be more acceptable than someone who votes for the center-left, which is close to twice (170%) as large as the proportion who view the reverse to be more acceptable. In the case of SALE, an equal proportion (.17) report that they consider the center-left to be less acceptable than the radical right with one in four reporting that voting for the radical right is more acceptable.

These descriptive findings serve as an important explanation in support for our theorized mechanisms. First, they demonstrate that - on average - there is no polity-level social rejection of the radical right in either Britain or Spain. In other words, citizens are more tolerant than intolerant of others forming a social relationship with radical right supporters. The empirical focus here on the hypothetical relationship of a respondent's child is important given that the we can assume respondents care more about the potential social dynamics of their children than other, less approximate individuals in their social networks like friends or neighbors. In other words, focusing on one's children is a tough test: if we observe no systematic rejection here – demonstrating the absence of social norm-enforcement – we are even less likely to observe it elsewhere.

Second, these descriptive findings help explain the experimentally identified accommodation of the radical right on the dating market by those on the center-right. Our theorized explanation for this accommodation, in addition to stronger levels of negative affect towards the left, is that there exists a social norm among center-right group members that views social relationships with the center-left as being more socially unacceptable than those with the radical right. While center-right partisans' modal view is that dating individuals from either party is equally acceptable, there is a significantly stronger social expectation among group members that forming a romantic partner with the radical right is *more* acceptable than doing so with the center-left.

Discussion

Using both observational data and experimental manipulations, we identified no norm-based social sanctions against supporters of the radical right on the dating market in Britain and

Spain. While radical right supporting individuals may enjoy lower success on the dating market compared to supporters of other parties, this reduced success can be explained by a lack of political homophily or spatial distinctiveness from those who make up the dating market population as opposed to being the result of an enforced social norm against these supporters.

To explain the lack of a penalty in the dating market against the radical right causally identified in both our observational and experimental set up, we demonstrated first that there is no polity-level expectation that dating the radical right is unacceptable. In both countries we consider – which vary in their institutionalization of the radical right – we show that only a minority of individuals view their child dating a member of the radical right to be unacceptable. Second, and in order to explain the high level of in-bloc accommodation of the radical right among center-right voters, we demonstrate that center-right partisans are inclined to view dating the radical right as *more* acceptable than dating someone from the center-left. This peer expectation signals a clear pro-normalization process among center-right partisans that places a premium on centrifugal social sorting.

Our findings clearly indicate that radical right supporters are not subject to a systematic social sanction, but are accommodated within the online dating market. The absence of this sanction points towards the absence of a social norm against the radical right. Should radical right parties remain stigmatized, we should observe third-party sanctioning (Bicchieri, 2017) in the form of a significant penalty applied against those online dating profiles who express support for these parties. We do not. When observing individuals' *private* evaluations of distinct dating profiles, those assumed to be "beyond the pale" (Van Spanje, 2010) are not subjected to any systematic norm enforcement mechanisms.

Importantly, the lack of a radical right penalty we observe is in an online setting where individuals' preferences are private rather than in public dating environments. Dating profile evaluations form the basis of most contemporary dating rituals (Ranzini, Rosenbaum, and Tybur, 2022), but this private activity can only remain private for a certain period of time.¹⁵ Our empirical design can only identify the prevalence or absence of norm-enforcing behavior in this private context and, theoretically, one might expect in a context where peers are aware of respondents' evaluations of others. That said, the strong and significant expectation – sec-

¹⁵Who one swipes right or left on in online dating applications is not observed by peers, but who one chooses to go on an in-person date with in the real world is potentially observed by others. Whether matching online leads to romantic relationships (which can often be observed by others) rather than purely sexual encounters (which are not) is an empirical question with varied evidence (Grøntvedt, Bendixen, Botnen, and Kennair, 2020).

ond order preference (Bicchieri, 2017) – among center-right identifying individuals that dating someone from the radical right is *more* socially desirable than dating someone from the center-left suggests that significant variation is unlikely to be observed. This is particularly true given, as shown by Valentim (2024), self-reported survey responses tend to under-report sympathies with the radical right. Should such under-reporting be present, the true in-bloc preference for the radical right among center-right partisans in Britain and Spain may be even greater than that which we report in Table 2.

The implications of our findings are threefold. First, our results speak to the consequences of heightened levels of polarization by demonstrating that high levels of affective polarization contributes to radical right normalization via negative affective spillovers between mainstream party identifiers. When center-right individuals are affectively polarized against the mainstream left, they are more inclined to accommodate the radical right and their peers hold an empirical expectation that they do so signalling the presence of a group-based social norm.

Second, the social accommodation of the radical right among center-right parties has implications for the electoral strategies of center-right party strategies. Some center-right parties have moved to accommodate the radical right, despite evidence demonstrating that doing so is electorally ineffective (Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi, 2023). One of the electoral incentives that has restricted this accommodation is the assumption among parties that their electorate still view the radical right as stigmatized and, as a result, center-right parties refrain from engaging with the radical right in order to avoid the potential electoral costs that emerge from forgoing a political fire wall or *cordon sanitaire* (Downs, 2012; Van Spanje, 2010). If, however, center-right partisans' tolerance for the radical right is high, as we demonstrate both experimentally and with observational data here and even in the case of an exceptionally new radical right party like *Se Acabó La Fiesta* (SALF), then the anticipated electoral consequences for radical right accommodation by party elites is also diminished and institutional accommodation may become more likely (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2024; Bolin, Dahlberg, and Blombäck, 2023).

Third, the social sorting on the dating market based on bloc-based political camps beyond partisanship – such as those theorised and identified by Bantel (2023), Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila (2021), Hagevi (2015), and Simón (2020) – is likely to spell further bad news for levels of affective polarization. When social sorting is both cause and consequence of affective polarization, then politically motivated assessments on the dating market are likely to

further exacerbate the problem by contributing to this self-reinforcing cycle (Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner, 2025). When romantic units are formed on the basis of ideological compatibility, they are less likely to be exposed to opposing political preferences and form socially structured echo chambers (Mason, 2018; Harteveld, 2021b) and successive exposure to reinforcing political identities and preferences is empirically demonstrated to further increase animosity and intolerance towards political out-group members (Hobolt, Lawall, and Tilley, 2024; Klar, 2014).

While we did not theorise systematic differences between the two countries, our case selection assumed, as detailed both above and in our pre-analysis plan, variation in levels of institutional normalization of the radical right. VOX is the third largest party in the Spanish legislature and the center-right has engaged in formal coalitions with VOX, whereas Reform UK had yet to experience any parliamentary representation in Britain at the time of fielding our original *visual* conjoint experiment.¹⁶ Institutionalization of the radical right via either parliamentary representation or elite-level accommodation by the mainstream right does not appear to condition our results. Theoretically, the patterns of radical right social accommodation may well vary across countries where a social norm against the radical right remains more entrenched. As discussed above, however, even in country's like Sweden where the rejection of the radical right has tended to boast a stronger pedigree, there is clear evidence of normalization (Rydgren and Van der Meiden, 2019; Aylott and Bolin, 2023; Lindskog, Dahlberg, Öhrvall, and Oscarsson, 2024): the sitting national government in Sweden is supported by the radical right Sweden Democrats. Similar trajectories are observed in Germany where the radical right has become increasingly normalized (Valentim, 2024; Arzheimer, 2019) and where the radical right *Alternative für Deutschland* has succeeded in being able to boast several successive electoral victories at both the regional and European level (Arzheimer, 2019).

Given our theoretical claim is that the social accommodation of the radical right in the dating market is driven by high levels of out-bloc negative affect, we anticipate that our findings should replicate in those multiparty country contexts where affective polarization between partisan identifiers is high. Importantly, the levels of affective polarization in Britain and Spain are, according to Reiljan (2020) and Wagner (2021), neither substantively or significantly distinct from those of their European peers. Ultimately, whether the patterns observed in the

¹⁶During the 2024 UK General Election, Reform UK won 14.3% of the popular vote and won parliamentary representation in five constituencies in the UK.

countries considered here replicate elsewhere remains an empirical question but we theorize that a bloc-logic can explain social normalization of the radical right in those contexts where there is a strong centrifugal antagonism between those on the center-left and center-right, although other contextual factors may also play a role and replication is encouraged across different settings and systems. Finally, our focus in this paper has been on the radical right given the historical and long-standing stigma against these parties in Western democracies. Scholars of post-communist regimes may well anticipate different patterns in those states where the dominant political stigma has been centered around the rejection of communism and parties on the far-left.

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