

How politics drive our personal relationships – and even where we live

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Naomi Cahn is the Justice Anthony M. Kennedy Distinguished Professor of Law and director of UVA's Family Law Center. Credit: University of Virginia

The 2020 presidential election again laid bare the divisions that separate people in the United States. While President-elect Joe Biden won 306

electoral votes to President Donald Trump's 232, and more than 80 million popular votes, nearly 74 million Americans voted for Trump.

Since the Nov. 3 election, the University of Virginia's nonpartisan Institute of Democracy has offered many expert opinions and analysis on its Election 2020 and Its Aftermath page, drawing from diverse experts from across Grounds.

One of those analyses comes from Naomi Cahn, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy Distinguished Professor of Law and the Nancy L. Buc '69 Research Professor in Democracy and Equity.

Cahn, the co-author of the book "Red Families v. Blue Families," joined the faculty of UVA's School of Law this fall and directs its Family Law Center. She wrote a piece for the Institute of Democracy about what the election can tell us about our personal lives.

UVA Today reached out to Cahn to learn more about how politics influences people's dating and marital patterns as well as where they chose to live.

Q. How do politics—and party affiliation—influence people's dating behaviors?

A. OKCupid, a dating website, recently reported that more than three-quarters of people said their romantic partner's political leanings are "very important." In reporting its findings, OKCupid said "I voted" has become the new "I love you." In fact, according to OKCupid, users of the site can now get a "Voter 2020 profile badge so registered voters can find the love they deserve."

OKCupid also found a gender gap larger than revealed in the 2020 exit

polls: namely, 73% of women reported they leaned Democratic, compared to 57% of men. By contrast, the preliminary election [exit polls](#) found a 56%-48% split. The dating app Bumble found politics ranked ninth out of 50 factors women considered when considering whom to date.

Q. Do political leanings and their influence on personal relationships influence one gender more than another, and how does that play out with people who identify as non-binary or are members of the LGBTQ community?

A. I have not yet seen data related to people who identify as non-binary. However, a study by the Public Religion Research Institute reported in 2019 that "Republicans (70%) are substantially more likely than independents (39%) or Democrats (33%) to say they would be unhappy if their child married someone who is transgender."

And according to the New York Times exit poll, 64% of those who identify as "gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender" voted for Biden, while 27% voted for Trump. Fifty-one percent of those who don't so identify voted for Biden, while 48% voted for Trump. That is, 21% more of those who do not identify [as LGBTQ] voted for Trump, while 13% less voted for Biden.

Q. What are you observing in terms of political influence when dating moves to marriage?

A. When dating relationships turn to marriage, people are more likely to choose partners who share the same political leanings. A recent study by the Institute for Family Studies found 79% of marriages are between people who identify with the same party. Only 4% are between

Democrats and Republicans, and the remaining 17% are between independents and those who identify with one of the two major parties.

Q. How have these tendencies changed over the last decade or so?

A. Think about the question of how you'd feel if your child married someone of the opposite political party. In the same study I referenced above by the Public Religion Research Institute, more Democrats—45% – would be displeased, compared to 35% of Republicans. In a sign of just how politically polarized we have become, in 1960, only 4% of Republicans or Democrats would have been unhappy with a mixed marriage with the other political party. The number of these "inter-political marriages" appears to be decreasing.

Q. Why do you think politics plays such a large role in people's personal relationships, and is that a good or a bad thing?

A. Republicans and Democrats increasingly think poorly of one another, so that will inevitably affect how people relate to one another in an intimate relationship. And the party labels seem to indicate something about how we think about a range of issues, like mask wearing, abortion, gun control, climate change, or even views about the president.

One way that couples can cope with their political differences is by not talking about politics at all; while that may allow them to cope with one another, it does remove a level of connection in a relationship. Candid discussion between people of different political parties can help not just in understanding, but also, perhaps, in moving toward common ground.

Q. Can you talk about how politics affects people's residential patterns and historically, when that influence began?

A. Since 1976, when only 26% of voters lived in a place where one party won by an overwhelming majority in a [presidential election](#), that number has steadily increased. While Biden won urban areas with 60% of voters, Trump won rural areas, with 57%.

Politics may affect not only where people move, but also their political preferences once they get there. People are much less likely to interact with others from another political party at local civic gatherings than at work. They increasingly live where people vote in the same way.

More information: [millercenter.org/election-2020 ...
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Provided by University of Virginia

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