

# Diverse teams are more vulnerable to adversity, finds new research

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Diverse teams are more likely to break up following a setback compared to teams consisting of people from similar backgrounds, according to new University of Minnesota research published in *Sociological Science*.

These breakups then often lead to partnerships with people with shared characteristics.

Carlson School of Management Assistant Professor Xuege (Cathy) Lu led the research to better understand why despite increased opportunities to connect with those from different backgrounds, people continue to interact with those who are similar to them. The researchers used professional men's tennis as a case study to examine the durability of diverse relationships when faced with [adversity](#) and its implications.

The researchers examined how doubles partners from the same country, compared to partners from different countries, responded to losing in the first round of Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tournaments. After analyzing nearly 10,000 doubles pairs involving 1,812 unique players from 99 countries from 2000 to 2020, the researchers found:

- Doubles partners from different countries are up to 6% more likely to break up than partners from the same country after a first-round loss.
- This effect is especially significant if the players' countries lack social trust and connections with each other.
- Players who left a two-country pair are more likely to switch to a same-country partner in the next tournament.

"The negative perception of a loss appears much greater for more diverse teams," said Lu. "Meanwhile, a same-country pair that experiences the same loss may feel fine and stick with each other. Partners with less common ground may find it more difficult to rebuild trust and move forward."

To determine social trust between the players' countries, the researchers used Facebook's Social Connected Index to measure the relative probability of Facebook friendship between users in those countries. The

researchers' analysis suggested lack of social connectivity or trust between countries had a greater impact on the [partners'](#) relationship outcome after a loss than whether they lacked a common language.

As more organizations focus efforts on increasing diversity and [networking](#), Lu says her research highlights the importance of providing additional resources to promote continued collaboration.

"After facing adversity, there appears to be this tendency to return to what's familiar," said Lu. "People have to be mindful when setbacks happen; a diverse team may be more susceptible to falling apart. Increasing mutual trust could help strengthen the resiliency of the partnership."

Shinan Wang of Northwestern University and Assistant Professor Letian Zhang of Harvard Business School are also co-authors of this research.

**More information:** Xuege (Cathy) Lu et al, Homophily, Setbacks, and the Dissolution of Heterogeneous Ties: Evidence from Professional Tennis, *Sociological Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.15195/v10.a7](https://doi.org/10.15195/v10.a7)

Provided by University of Minnesota

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