

MORE THAN POLITICS: HOW IDEOLOGY SHAPES WHO AMERICANS TRUST, DATE, AND AVOID

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between May 21 and June 3, 2025, Florida State University's [Institute for Governance and Civics](#) conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,004 U.S. adults to examine Americans' willingness to engage with those of opposing political views and other groups. The survey measured tolerance across seven everyday scenarios. The goal: to understand how political, demographic, and ideological factors shape tolerance. The results paint a troubling picture: political identity now shapes not only Americans' civic behavior, but also their closest personal relationships—from friendships to family ties and romantic preferences.

- **Tolerance declines as relational intimacy increases**

While 73% of respondents would join a recreational activity with someone who holds opposing political views, just 52% would be comfortable with that person marrying into their family—and only 41% would date the person.

- **Women show greater intolerance in the context of intimate relationships**

Women are more likely than men to say they would not date someone with different political views (35% of women vs. 25% of men). Among single adults ages 18 to 29, the gap is even wider: 42% of women say they wouldn't date across political lines, compared to just 16% of men. For those 30 and older, the difference is smaller (32% vs. 26%) but still exists.

- **Intolerance is most pronounced among those at the ideological extremes**

Only 26% of people who are very liberal and 36% of those who are very conservative said they would be okay with someone from the other side marrying into their family. But more moderate respondents were more open: 39% of somewhat liberal and 64% of somewhat conservative people said they would be comfortable with it.

INTRODUCTION

Political polarization in America has grown stronger over recent years. Political identity increasingly shapes who Americans trust, date, and engage with in daily life.

Understanding how citizens navigate these political divisions is essential to assessing

the health of our republic. One variable we believe is critical to track over time is political tolerance—not just in principle, but in the everyday choices people make about those with whom they interact.

We define political tolerance as the willingness to interact with or accept those with differing political orientations in varied relational and social contexts—ranging from everyday interactions to close personal ties and positions of trust.

Our survey asked people whether they would engage with others who have different political views in areas like dating, marriage, business, school, or recreational activities. We found that political intolerance affects personal relationships—especially for younger people. The clearest pattern shows up in dating. Young, unmarried women—especially those who are ideologically liberal—are the most likely to avoid dating someone across political lines. This imbalance may quietly widen social divides, reduce dating options, and fuel feelings of isolation in an already challenging social world.

TOLERANCE DECLINES AS RELATIONAL INTIMACY INCREASES

People in our survey were given three response options: unwilling to interact, willing but prefer not to interact, and willing to interact with people with opposing political views across seven scenarios. Table 1 presents the results. For comparison, we also include responses to the same items for two non-political groups—ex-felons and flat-earthers—who serve as useful reference points.

Overall, 73% of respondents said they would be willing (10% unwilling) to buy something from someone with opposing political views. In comparison, 60% were

willing to buy from ex-felons (18% unwilling) and 61% willing (21% unwilling) from flat-earthers. Fewer respondents—though still a majority—reported being willing (52%) to have a person with opposing political views marry into their family; this figure drops to 26% for ex-felons and 24% for flat-earthers.

These results suggest that people are more tolerant of those with different political views than other groups with social stigma. But that tolerance depends on the situation. For example, buying something from someone who holds opposing political views is not the same as letting them teach your child—or marrying into your family. These situations are different due to how much risk or trust is involved.

People are more tolerant of those with different political views than other groups with social stigma. But that tolerance depends on the situation.

To understand tolerance across different situations, we took a closer statistical look at our survey's seven questions about tolerance. Three main dimensions emerge—Everyday Interactions, Shared Institutions, and Close Relationships.

As shown in Table 2, each dimension reflects a different level of social closeness and personal exposure. *Everyday Interactions* involve brief, low-stakes exchanges where people remain at arms length from each other.

Table 1: Tolerance Across Target Groups

When it comes to __, would you be willing to...			
Date them...?	% No	% Prefer not to	% Yes
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	30	29	41
Ex-felons	49	29	22
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	60	21	19
Have them marry a member of your family...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	14	33	52
Ex-felons	36	39	26
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	44	33	24
Sell them something...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	9	11	80
Ex-felons	15	15	70
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	17	13	70
Buy something from them...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	10	17	73
Ex-felons	18	22	60
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	21	18	61
Send members of your family to school with them...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	9	19	72
Ex-felons	30	32	38
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	30	30	40
Have them teach members of your family at school...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	16	32	52
Ex-felons	36	33	31
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	62	21	17
Engage in a social or recreational activity with them...?			
People of the opposite political party or political disposition	7	20	73
Ex-felons	18	29	54
Someone who believes the Earth is flat	23	28	49

Table 2. Distinguishing Types of Tolerance

Tolerance Dimension	Items	Common Thread
Everyday Interactions	• Buy something from them • Sell them something • Engage in a social or recreational activity with them	Brief, low-stakes contact where both sides remain independent.
Shared Institutions	• Send members of your family to school with them • Have them teach members of your family at school	Sustained contact mediated by schools, workplaces, or other public bodies—indirect influence over loved ones.
Close Relationships	• Have them marry a member of your family • Date them	Deep, personal ties that shape personal and family life

Shared Institutions introduce more frequent forms of contact like in schools, workplaces, or other public systems. These are contexts where people who hold opposing political views may affect your family or community. *Close Relationships* demand the highest levels of trust and intimacy. These are contexts where the boundary often blurs between tolerance and value alignment.

Even when people generally tolerate those with opposing political views, they become less tolerant when a relationship demands deeper trust

Figure 1 shows the average tolerance score for each of the three dimensions across the three target groups. We coded each item on a 0–1 scale. We then averaged the scores within each dimension and rescaled them from 0 to 100 to give us a

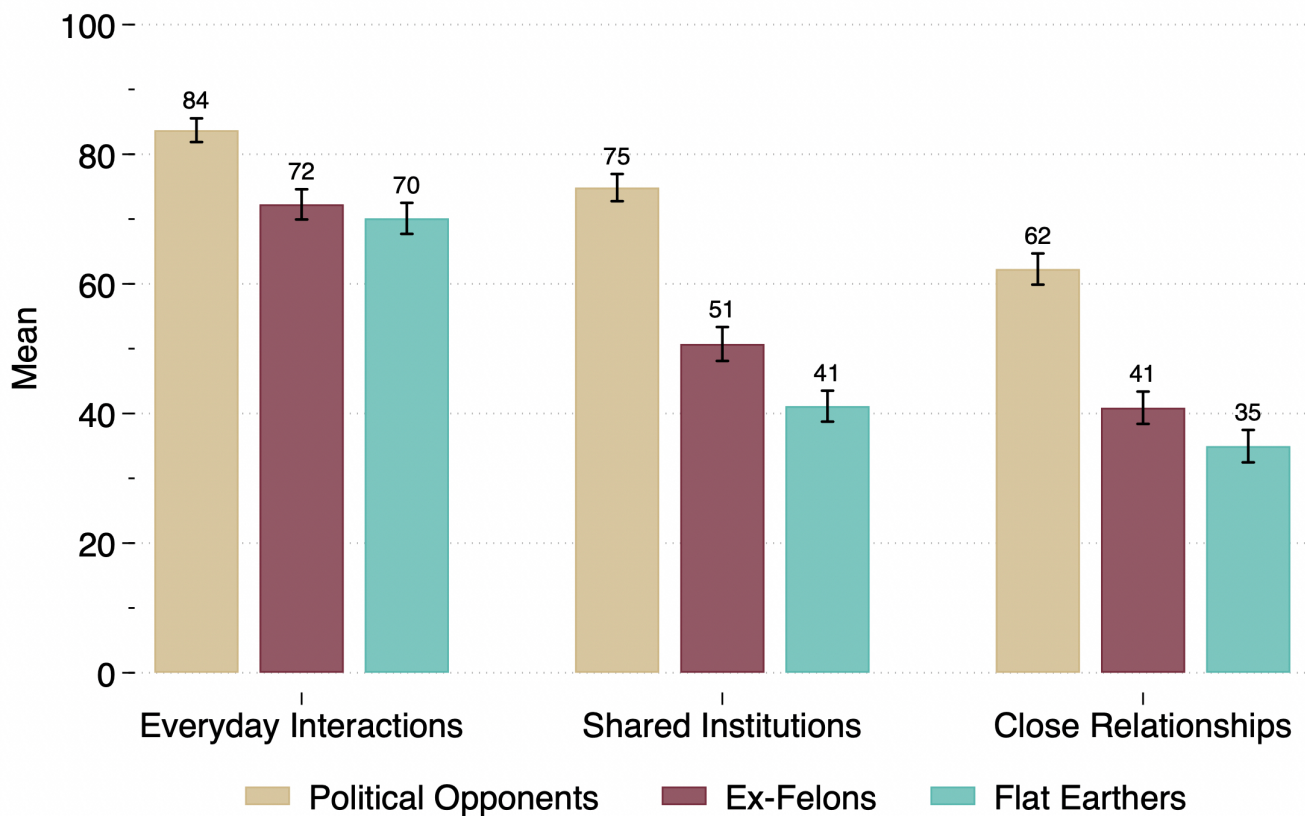
tolerance index for each group.

The results reveal that tolerance declines as the level of personal closeness increases. The average respondent scores 84 on *Everyday Interactions* with those of opposing political views. But that number drops to 75 for *Shared Institutions* and to 62 for *Close Relationships*. Even when people generally tolerate those with opposing political views, they become less tolerant when a relationship demands deeper trust, emotional closeness, or exposure to influence.

POLITICAL TOLERANCE IS LARGELY STABLE ACROSS GENERATIONS

Differences in tolerance across basic demographic groups—such as age and sex—tend to be modest, inconsistent, or contingent on the specific target group and domain of social engagement.

Figure 1: Average respondent tolerance by dimension and target group



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Tolerance indexes are scaled from 0 to 100, where a score of 0 corresponds to a “No” (i.e., not willing) response, 50 to a “Yes, but prefer not to,” and 100 to a definitive “Yes” (i.e., fully willing).

As Figure 2 below shows, levels of political tolerance are high across all age cohorts and all three tolerance dimensions.

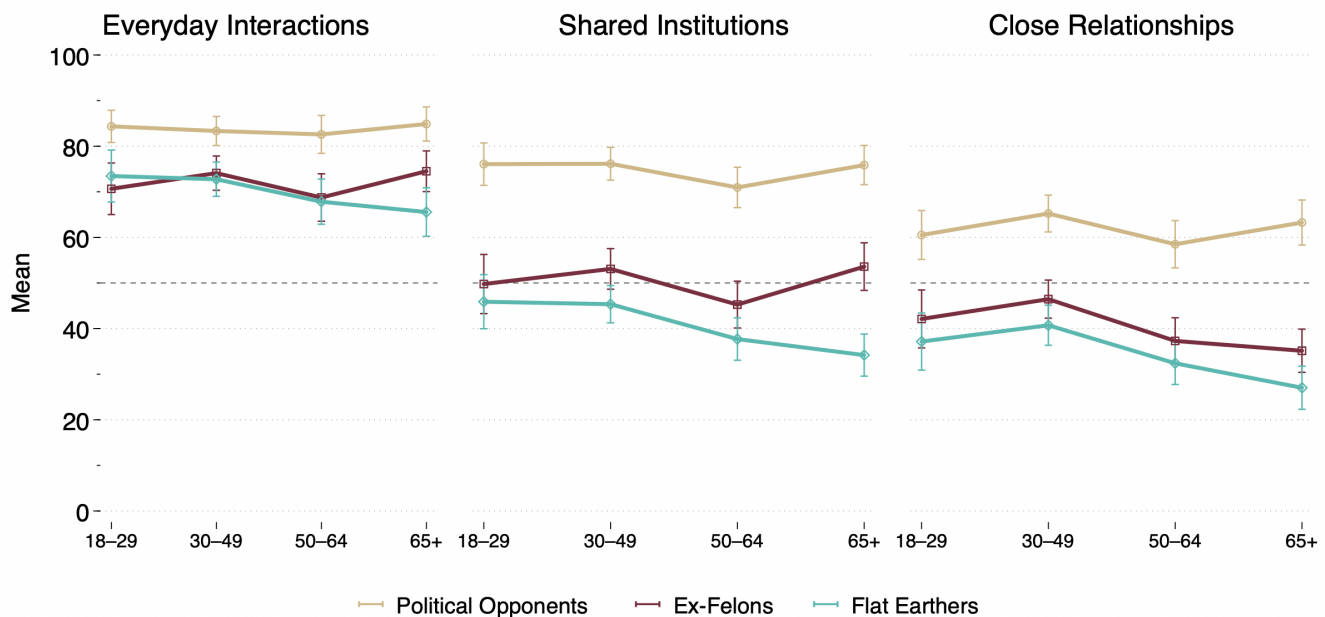
This finding is somewhat surprising considering the IGC’s February 2025 voter survey, which found younger voters—particularly Gen Z—to be less politically tolerant than their older counterparts.

Still, some generational differences exist. Young adults (18–29) are the least likely to say that they are willing to buy something from someone with opposing political views (67%, compared to 73–77% for older cohorts). Interestingly, 82% say they would be willing to *sell* something to those with

those with opposing political views—suggesting they are more comfortable making money *from* political opponents than giving money to them.

When it comes to close relationships, a similar but more muted pattern appears. Young adults (18–29) are more open than those aged 50–64 to having a family member marry across political lines (50% vs. 46%), but less open than adults aged 30–49 (58%) and those 65 and older (52%). They are also the least willing to date across political lines: just 36% say they would do so, compared to 39–45% of older

Figure 2. Average Tolerance Index Scores by Age Group



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Tolerance indexes are scaled from 0 to 100, where a score of 0 corresponds to a “No” (i.e., not willing) response, 50 to a “Yes, but prefer not to,” and 100 to a definitive “Yes” (i.e., fully willing).

adults.

As the next section shows, this modest generational divergence masks a larger divide that emerges when age groups are disaggregated by sex.

YOUNG WOMEN ARE THE MOST POLITICALLY SELECTIVE DATERS

Young women are much more intolerant than men and older women when it comes to romantic relationships. Across most social domains, men and women report similar levels of willingness to date, transact with, or engage in shared spaces with people who hold opposing political views. Sex-based differences in political tolerance are generally modest and inconsistent—except when it comes to romantic relationships.

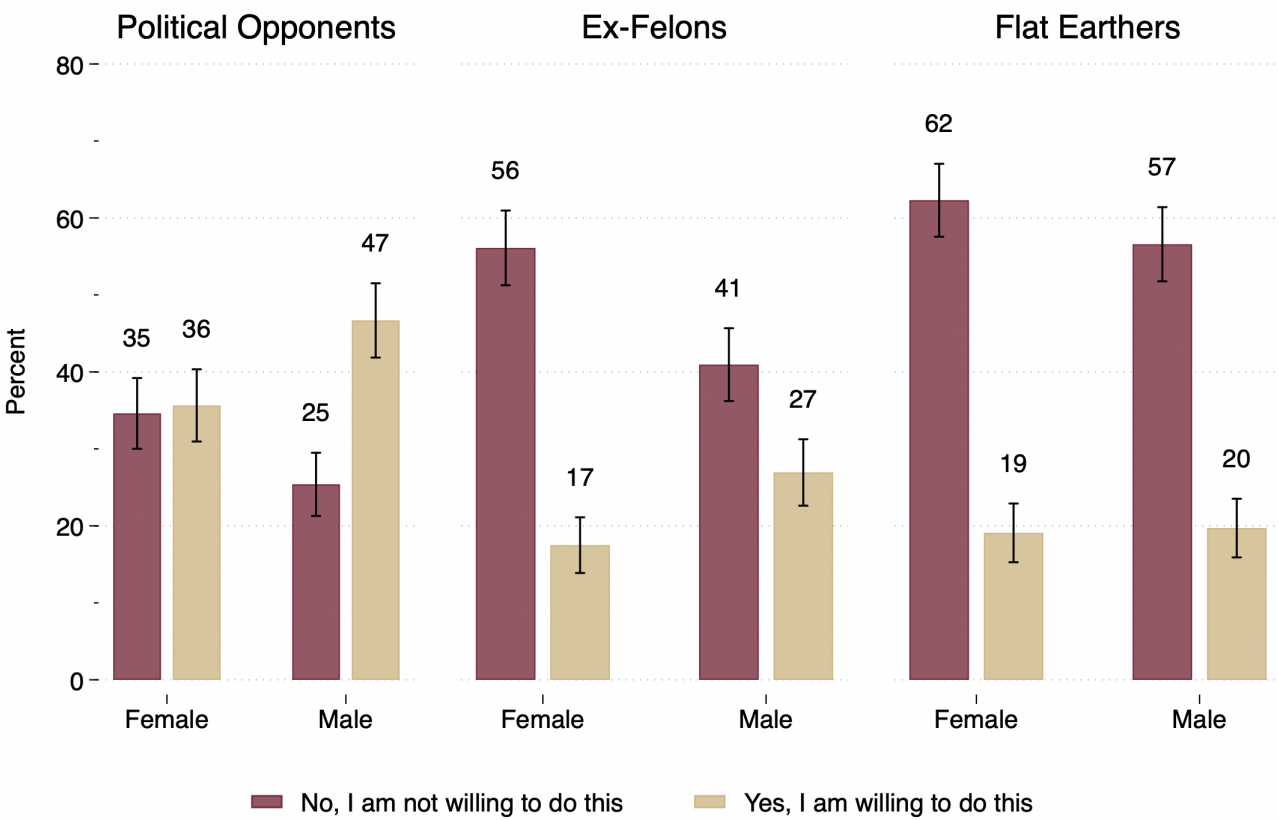
As shown in Figure 3, women (35%) are significantly more likely than men (25%) to

say they are unwilling to date someone with opposing political views. Similarly, men (47%) are more likely than women (36%) to say they would date someone with opposing political views. Women’s refusal to date across political lines is one of the largest observed across any of the survey’s tolerance indicators.

Only 25% of young women are open to dating across political lines, as compared to 49% of young men.

While respondents of both sexes express even greater reluctance to date exfelons or flat-earthers, they are only a small fraction of the dating pool—unlike those with differing political views, who are both numerous and inescapable in everyday life. As a result, women’s political selectivity likely has broader implications

Figure 3: Willingness to Date People With Opposing Political Views, Ex-Felons, and Flat-Earthers by Sex



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Responses of “Yes, but prefer not to” are included in the data but are not displayed.

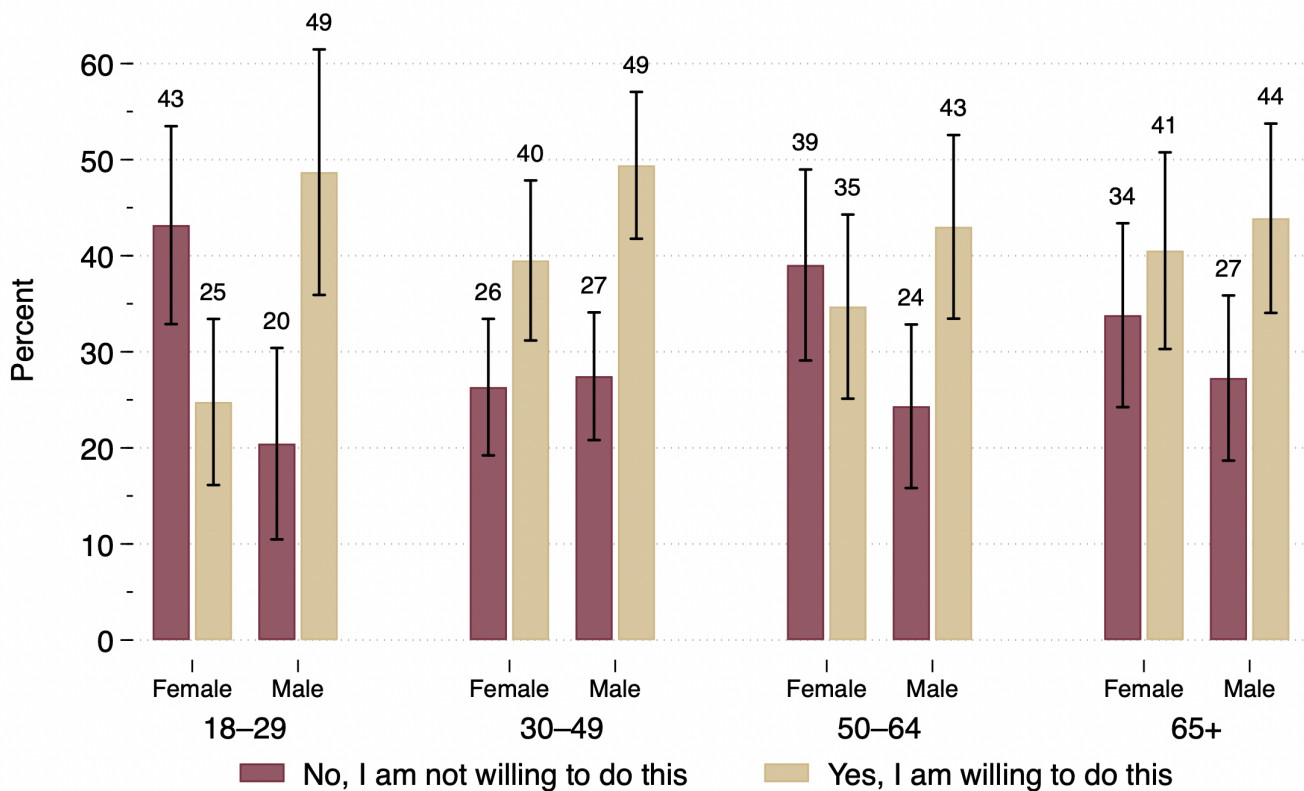
for social mixing and relationship formation.

The dating gap is especially pronounced among the youngest adults. As Figure 4 shows, among 18–29-year-olds, 43% of women say they are unwilling to date someone with different political views, compared to just 20% of men—a 23-point gap. We see the opposite pattern for willingness to date: only 25% of young women are open to dating across political lines, compared to 49% of young men. No other age group shows sharper splits. And while women in general are less open to

dating those with differing political beliefs, young woman stand out: whereas just 25% of those aged 18–29 are willing to date across, the rates jump to 35–41% among women in older age groups.

Young liberal women are by far the most resistant to dating someone with different political views: 64% say they are unwilling, and just 12% say they are willing.

Figure 4: Willingness to Date People with Opposing Political Views by Sex and Age



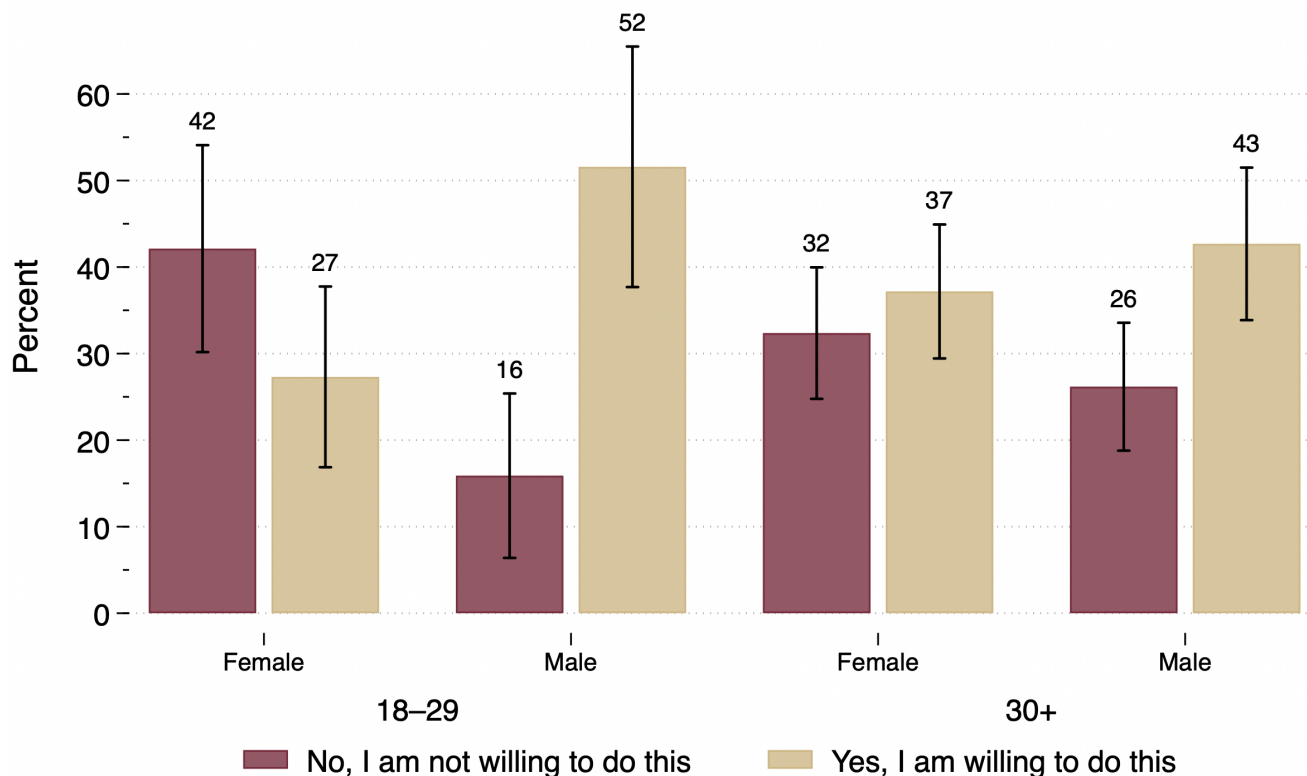
Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Responses of “Yes, but prefer not to” are included in the data but are not displayed.

Since dating questions are most relevant to those “on the dating market,” Figure 5 narrows the analysis to non-married respondents. The sharpest divide appears among the youngest cohort: 42% of non-married 18–29-year-old women say they are unwilling to date someone with different political views, compared to just 16% of their male peers. On the flip side, 52% of young men say they are willing, versus just 27% of young women. Among non-married adults aged 30 and older, the gender gaps are far narrower on unwillingness—6 points on unwillingness (32% of women vs. 26% of men) and just 5 points on willingness (37%

vs. 43%). These results suggest that opposition to dating someone with different political beliefs is strongest among young women and is not simply based on a person’s sex.

When further disaggregated by age, sex, and ideology (Figure 6), the pattern becomes even more striking. Among non-married 18–29-year-olds, liberal women are by far the most resistant to dating someone with different political views: 64% say they are unwilling, and just 12% say they are willing. Their male counterparts are markedly more open—38% unwilling, 38% willing.

Figure 5. Willingness to Date People With Opposing Political Views Among Non-Married Respondents by Sex and Age Group



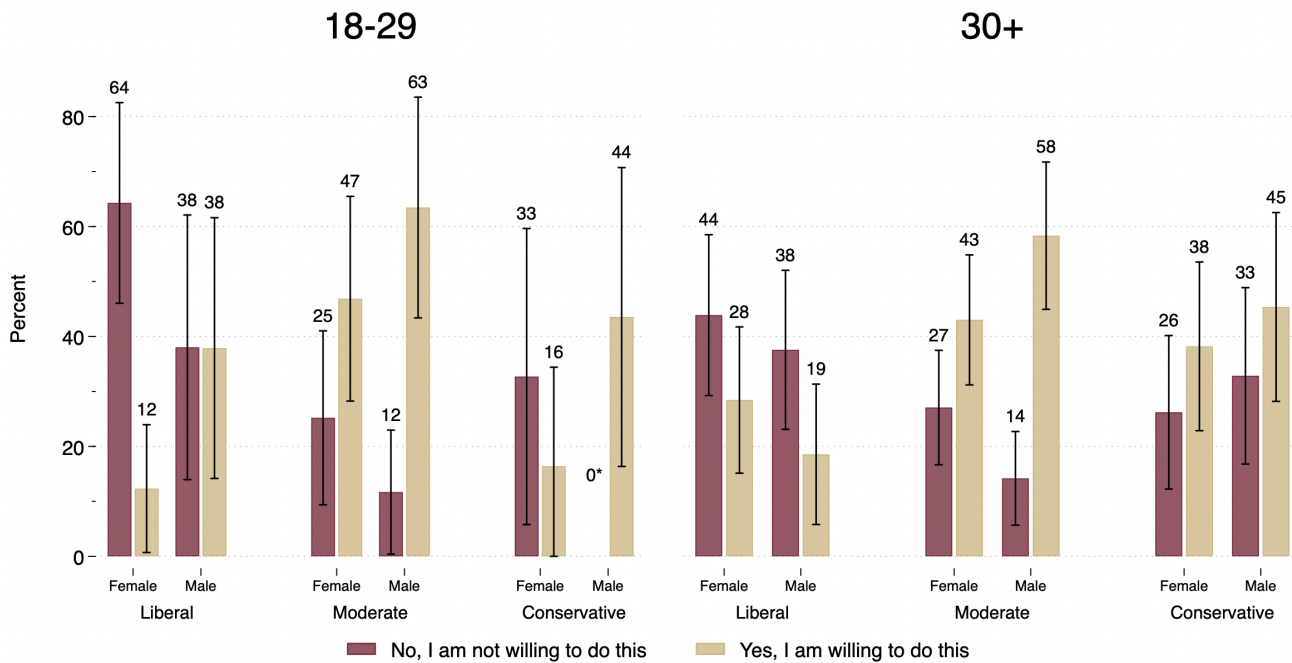
Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Responses of “Yes, but prefer not to” are included in the data but are not displayed.

This 26-point gap in aversion and 27-point gap in openness are larger than those observed between any other groups. Among 18-29-year-old moderates and conservatives, sex differences in dating tolerance are smaller and less consistent. Even young conservative women—who might be expected to exhibit similar levels of selectivity as their liberal counterparts—appear considerably more open (33% conservative women unwilling vs. 64% unwilling among liberal women) to dating across political lines. Of course, these groups had smaller sample sizes, so the

results should be interpreted with care.

Despite modest sample sizes and some statistical noise in the subgroup estimates, the size and consistency of these differences suggest a clear pattern—young liberal women are the most politically discriminating daters in the population. This kind of selectivity—especially when there are not many good matches—may help explain why more people are staying single, feeling unhappy in relationships, or struggling with their well-being.

Figure 6. Willingness to Date People With Opposing Political Views Among Non-Married Respondents by Ideological Self-Identification, Sex, and Age Group



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Responses of “Yes, but prefer not to” are included in the data but are not displayed.

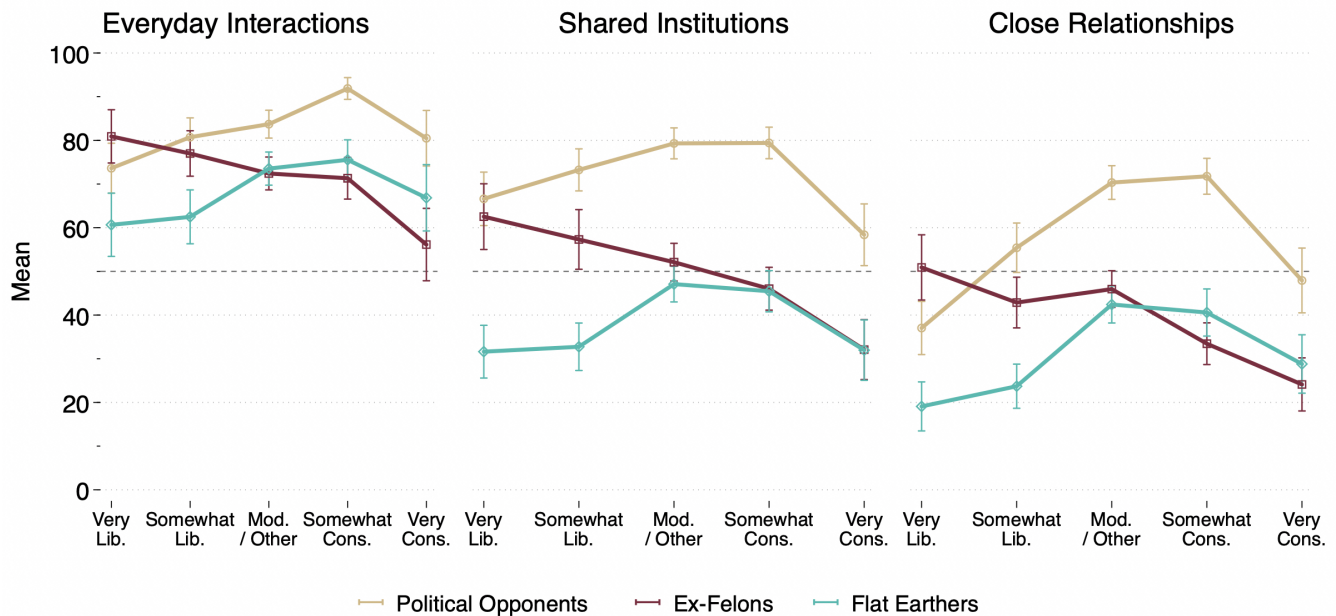
HIGHLY IDEOLOGICAL PEOPLE ARE LEAST POLITICALLY TOLERANT—ESPECIALLY IN PERSONAL DOMAINS

Among all the differences we looked at, political views showed the biggest and most consistent gaps in tolerance. Overall, liberal respondents were less tolerant than conservatives. But the bigger story is this: people at the far ends of the political spectrum—those who are very liberal or very conservative—are much less tolerant than people with more moderate views. As shown in Figure 7, tolerance follows a U-shaped pattern across the ideological spectrum. Moderates, along with Somewhat Liberal and Somewhat Conservative respondents, exhibit relatively high levels of openness toward those with differing

political views. By contrast, those at the poles—Very Liberal and Very Conservative respondents—report the lowest levels of political tolerance, particularly in everyday and interpersonal contexts. This suggests that ideological intensity, not simply left- or right-leaning identity, is most predictive of political intolerance.

Still, ideological extremes are not mirror images. On most measures, Very Conservative respondents express modestly more tolerance than their Very Liberal counterparts. The gap between the Somewhat Conservative and Somewhat Liberal respondents is even more pronounced. For example, only 26% of Very Liberal respondents say they would

Figure 7. Average Tolerance Index Scores by Strength of Ideological Self-Identification



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the level of uncertainty (i.e., margin of error) around each estimate. Tolerance indexes are scaled from 0 to 100, where a score of 0 corresponds to a “No” (i.e., not willing) response, 50 to a “Yes, but prefer not to,” and 100 to a definitive “Yes” (i.e., fully willing).

be willing to have someone with opposing political views marry into their family—compared to 36% of Very Conservative. But just 39% of Somewhat Liberal would be willing compared to 64% of Somewhat Conservative respondents. Similarly, only 47% of Very Liberal respondents say they would willingly engage in a recreational activity with someone from the other side of the political aisle, compared to 71% of Very Conservative respondents and 88% of Somewhat Conservatives. The willingness rate for Somewhat Conservative is one of the highest rates observed in the survey.

These patterns, show how political tolerance decreases as ideological identity intensifies. But there is a clear asymmetry:

conservatives—especially those in the middle—are more likely to tolerate political difference than liberals at the same distance from the center.

Just 13% of Very Liberal respondents say they would be willing to date someone with opposing political views, compared to 29% who say they would date an ex-felon.

One particularly striking pattern emerges among Very Liberal respondents: they report higher average tolerance for ex-felons than for political outgroup members on two of the three relational dimensions—Everyday Interactions (81 vs.

74) and Close Relationships (51 vs. 37). This reversal is especially visible in the dating context.

As shown in Table 3, just 13% of Very Liberal respondents say they would be willing to date someone with opposing political views, compared to 29% who say they would date an ex-felon. Two-thirds (66%) are unwilling to date across political lines, versus 42% who reject the idea of dating someone with a criminal record.

Among Very Conservative respondents, the pattern is reversed: 25% say they would date across party lines, while just 10% would date an ex-felon. Fully 67% say they are unwilling to date someone with a criminal history, compared to 46% unwilling to date across political lines.

These opposing patterns suggest that liberals and conservatives look for different things when they evaluate possible mates.

Conservatives appear more focused on past rule-breaking or antisocial behavior, while liberals—especially those further left—are more likely to see political disagreement as a disqualifier, particularly in personal relationships.

That political identity can now rival—or even eclipse—conventional social stigmas shows how deep political polarization has become. These divisions now affect more than just how Americans vote, they also shape who Americans trust, date, and welcome into their families.

In an era marked by rising loneliness, mounting mental health concerns, and declining marriage rates, political differences in dating may be playing a bigger role than we realize.

Table 3. Willingness to Date People with Opposing Political Views, Ex-Felons, and Flat-Earthers by Strength of Ideological Self-Identification

Ideological Group	Political Opponents		Ex-Felons		Flat Earthers	
	% Willing	% Unwilling	% Willing	% Unwilling	% Willing	% Unwilling
Very Liberal	13	66	29	42	7	81
Somewhat Liberal	30	34	20	45	10	74
Moderate	53	21	28	42	25	48
Somewhat Conservative	50	20	16	59	25	56
Very Conservative	25	46	10	67	13	66

CONCLUSION: THE COSTS OF POLITICAL INTOLERANCE

This report shows that political ideology powerfully shapes Americans' openness to engage with others. Whether the person has competing political views, a criminal record, or believes the earth is flat, liberals and conservatives show different tolerance patterns towards them.

Liberal respondents, on average, report lower levels of political tolerance than conservative respondents—particularly in close personal contexts. But liberals and conservatives at the ideological extremes both show greater intolerance. Across all three relational domains we studied, both Very Liberal and Very Conservative respondents tend to be less tolerant than their more moderate counterparts. These patterns suggest that how strongly someone holds their beliefs—not just which side they are on—plays a big role in how they handle political differences.

This ideological divide has important real-world consequences beyond elections and public policy. One such area is romantic relationships—particularly among young adults. Non-married young women—especially liberal women—are the most resistant to dating across political lines. Young men, particularly conservatives, tend to be more open. This creates a mismatch: women are more politically selective, while men are more likely to be excluded based on political views.

Given that there are more young liberal women than conservative women, and more young conservative men than liberal men,

the result is a kind of political bottleneck in the dating world. Many liberal women are very selective and have fewer matches they find acceptable, while many conservative men are often ruled out because of their views. In contrast, liberal men and conservative women—both smaller groups—tend to be more open to dating across political lines, making them less affected by this divide.

In an era marked by rising loneliness, mounting mental health concerns, and declining marriage rates, political differences in dating may be playing a bigger role than we realize. These patterns could shape who people form relationships with—and may create new generations of children who are even more politically divided.

Political intolerance is no longer limited to government or online debates. It increasingly affects some of the most intimate aspects of American life—friendships, families, classrooms, and romantic relationships. As politics become a bigger part of how people see themselves, it may become even harder to stay open to those who disagree politically. Understanding these changes is essential—not just for evaluating the health of our democracy, but for grasping how American social life is changing in an age of polarization.

POLL INFORMATION

This study was conducted online between May 21 and June 3, 2025 by Social Science Research Services (SSRS) using a

Probability-Based Opinion Panel. The sample consisted of 1,004 respondents age 18 or older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.4% at the 95% confidence level. Weighted demographic characteristics of the survey group are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Characteristics of Poll Participants

Category	Percent
Sex	
Male	49.3
Female	50.7
Age	
18 to 29	19.6
30 to 49	34.2
50 to 64	23.4
65 or older	22.8
Race/Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic	
White	60.9
Black	12.3
Hispanic	17.5
Asian	6.7
Other	2.6
Income	
Less than \$50,000	43.9
\$50,000-\$74,999	14.9
\$75,000-\$99,999	13.6
\$100,000 and over	27.7
Education	
Less than HS	9.4
HS Graduate	28.7
Some college	26.9
BA Degree	20.4
Postgrad / Prof. Degree	15.7
Parent Status	
K-12 Parent	29.7
Not a K-12 Parent	70.3
Stated Party	
Democrat	30.7
Republican	29.3
Independent	31.1
Something else	8.9