

Mating and Political Inequality

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For my father, Allan.

Abstract

Political equality is one of the cornerstones of a well-functioning democracy. Yet, very few democracies live up to this ideal. In this dissertation, I show that a central part of human behavior, mating, can help us explain why political inequalities are difficult to change. I provide a theoretical argument of why mating structures and family formation patterns are crucial to our understanding of unequal turnout and unequal political representation. In three different research papers, I study the relationship between mating and political inequality between socioeconomic groups as well as mating and political inequality based on gender. The results show that mating structures are a key aspect when explaining why political inequality is persistent in many democracies. I conclude that mating cannot be overlooked when seeking answers to why political inequalities are difficult to change.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Politisk jämlikhet ses ofta som en förutsättning för en välfungerande demokrati. Trots detta är det få demokratiska stater som lever upp till ett sådant ideal. I den här avhandlingen studerar jag hur en av mänsklighetens mest grundläggande beteenden, att välja en partner, skapar förutsättningar för en mer eller mindre jämlik politisk arena. Avhandlingens teoritiska utgångspunkt är att strukturer för familjebildning är en betydelsefull faktor för att förstå både ojämlikheter i politiskt deltagande och i politisk representation. I tre empiriska artiklar studerar jag sambandet mellan parbildning och politisk ojämlikhet, mellan socioekonomiska grupper och mellan kvinnor och män. Resultat från avhandlingens empiriska undersökningar visar att parbildning och strukturer för familjebildning är en viktig faktor i att förklara varför politisk ojämlikhet är svår att förändra. Avhandlingen visar att parbildning inte bör glömmas bort när vi studerar varför politisk jämlikhet är svår att uppnå.

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1 Introduction

One of the most important decisions you make in life is whom to spend it with. Most people would agree that the choice of a life partner is crucial to one's personal well-being and happiness. Unfortunately, fewer people think about the political consequences such a choice may have. I believe this is a mistake. In this dissertation, I set out to answer the question: Does who marries whom matter for political inequality? I provide theoretical arguments and empirical support of why this previously overlooked question is crucial for our understanding of political inequalities between socioeconomic groups as well as between women and men.

If all individuals are of equal worth, then all individuals' interests ought to be equally considered in a democracy (Dahl 2006). Yet, it is well known that a major challenge for democracy is that the political inequality in both participation and representation is highly correlated with other types of social and economic inequalities (Lijphart 1997). For this reason, it is not surprising that "Who participates in politics?" is one of the central questions in political science. When looking for answers to that question, the dominance of the Michigan model (Campbell et al. 1954, 1960) has caused scholars to focus on the individual level for a long time (Campbell 2013). Following this tradition, a significant amount of important and valuable work has consistently shown that an individual's socioeconomic status, age, sex, and marital status matter for who participates in politics (Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Leighley and Nagler 2013).

Recently, however, a revival of the Columbia model (Lazarsfeld 1948; Berelson et al. 1954) has provoked a shift in focus from the individual to the social context (Campbell 2013), and scholars have highlighted the importance of social aspects of political behavior (Zuckerman 2005; Rolfe 2012; Sinclair 2012). This literature has largely been concerned with the question of *why* individuals participate in politics and has put extensive effort into identifying causal mechanisms. In this work, experimental studies (Nicker-son 2008; Klofstad 2011; Sinclair et al. 2012; Bhatti et al. 2017) and quasi-experimental designs (Hobbs et al. 2014) have convincingly demonstrated that there are important social aspects of political participation.

For obvious reasons, an increasing focus on identifying causality is beneficial for our understanding of why individuals choose to participate in politics. However, one possible drawback of such a focus is that it may cause selection bias in terms of research questions. In the (noble) cause of finding convincing identification strategies we may overlook important and interesting research questions that are somewhat less convenient to answer. I believe that mating and political inequality is a research area with plenty of such questions. Is an individual's political participation influenced by the political participation of their spouse? Are individuals with high education more likely to marry someone who votes? Does social structure matter for who you marry? If so, what makes such social structures differ over time and space? How do such structures affect political representation? When studying political inequality, marital status is one of the most common covariates (Smets and van Ham 2013); however, the relationship between who marries whom and political inequality has been given far less attention.

I suggest three main reasons why mating matters for political inequality. First, if we overlook the relationship between mating and political participation, we may draw erroneous conclusions about some of the most widely acknowledged findings from previous political participation research. Second, studying mating and political participation helps us understand how political inequalities are reproduced. Third, we shed light on the persistence and change of such inequalities. In this dissertation, I present empirical support of each of these arguments.

This introductory chapter proceeds as follows: First, there will be an overview of theoretical literature and empirical findings from previous research. Second, I will present my argument for why we need to study the

relationship between mating and political inequality. Third, I present short summaries of the three articles in the dissertation and subsequently discuss how the articles combined show that mating and marriage markets matter for political inequality in both participation and representation. To conclude, I summarize the main contribution of the dissertation and discuss the implications of the findings.

2 Theoretical overview

Humans are social beings, and our political behavior is not isolated from our social context. We think that we can determine our own fate, at least in the sense that when we find a life partner, we may think that the decision to spend our life with this person is entirely our own choice. However, our choices in life are limited, and who we spend our life with is to a large extent decided by who we meet. Who we meet is, in turn, decided by the social structure.

This theoretical overview mainly focuses on two different research areas. The first one draws from previous research on the social aspects of political participation and the second one from research on assortative mating and marriage markets. Before presenting the previous literature in more depth, I provide short introductions of the main concepts used in the dissertation.

Political inequality can be described in general terms as “structured differences in the distribution and acquisition of political resources” (Dubrow 2007, 4). In this dissertation, I focus on two main areas of political inequality: inequality in turnout and inequality in political representation. *Political participation* can be defined in many ways, yet it is a concept that is relatively easy to grasp. The classical definitions of political participation focus on actions performed by citizens that has the purpose of influencing government actions. For example, Verba et al. (1995, 9) states that “political participation is activity that is intended to or has the consequence of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action.” Thus, unequal turnout can be defined as when some citizen groups turn out to vote at a

higher rate than others. In this dissertation, my main focus is on inequalities in turnout based on education and income. *Political representation* is a concept less easily defined, with various aspects of importance. For example, influential work by Pitkin (1972) identifies four main dimensions: formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive representation. My focus in this dissertation is on the descriptive aspects of representation. In other words, I will focus on whether a representative holds similar characteristics as the represented. My main focus in the dissertation is on unequal representation based on gender.

Assortative mating is a term commonly used in sociological literature that study the question of “who marries whom?” and can be thought of as “the nonrandom matching of individuals into relationships” (Schwartz 2013, 452). *Marriage markets* is a common term in the economic literature that studies same phenomenon. In his seminal work, Becker (1973, 814) argues that as marriage is voluntary, and “since many men and women compete as they seek mates, a market in marriages can be presumed to exist.”¹ In this dissertation, I use both the sociological literature studying assortative mating and the economic literature that focuses on marriage markets. Theoretically, both highlight the importance of the individual choice of a partner, and how the social structure determines the boundaries of that choice.²

¹Of course, not all married (or cohabiting) couples consist of one man and one woman. This is, however, the most common type of relationship, and the main empirical focus in this dissertation.

²*Marriage or cohabitation?* The main argument I present in this dissertation applies to individuals who live together as a couple, regardless of whether they are formally married. In this introductory chapter, when I use the term marriage, I have no intention of making the argument that the political behavior of married people (within a couple) differ in any substantial way from that of unmarried people who live together as a couple. I study this individual behavior in papers 1 and 2. In paper 3, I focus on aggregate levels of marriage. In this case, I suggest that marriage as an institution matters, and when I discuss the marriage rate, I mean the rate of individuals who are formally married (excluding those living as a couple).

2.1 Humans are social beings

Following Zuckerman (2005), recent literature on political behavior has highlighted the importance of the social aspects of participation in politics. In literature on turnout, experimental studies find spillover effects of mobilization within households in Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) experiments (Nickerson 2008; Sinclair et al. 2012), and a large amount of research confirms that there are social elements of turnout (Bhatti and Hansen 2012; Fieldhouse and Cutts 2012; Hobbs et al. 2014; Bhatti et al. 2017; Fieldhouse and Hansen 2020). Experimental designs provide convincing evidence of the social mechanism of political mobilization (Nickerson 2008; Sinclair et al. 2012; Bhatti et al. 2017). If you mobilize one voter in a household, that person is likely to mobilize others. Moreover, these spillover effects within households can be found in real-life situations. Looking at the turnout of the individuals in married couples, Hobbs et al. (2014) show that the negative impact of losing a spouse on turnout is dependent on the previous voting participation of the spouse you lost.

Another strain of literature highlights how access to social networks can explain who participates in politics. For example, following Nie et al. (1996), numerous scholars have questioned the traditional interpretation of the relationship between education and political participation (see Persson 2015, for an overview).³ Nie et al. (1996) argue that what explains the relationship between education and political participation is social status. In a hierarchical system, where education is important for one's relative position, social status will determine one's access to social networks where political participation is encouraged.

There are social aspects of political participation, and individuals are often mobilized through their social interactions. Moreover, social network position can explain why some socioeconomic groups participate in politics more than others.

³That education increases the individual's knowledge and skills and thus provides the individual with the necessary resources to participate in politics.

2.2 We think we can determine our own fate

Marriage is (in most cases) a voluntary act where you choose to spend your life with someone. Finding this someone is an important part of many peoples' lives and a choice that has a large impact on your future. A non-negligible share of individuals in a society choose a partner at least once.

A central question when studying who marries whom is on what basis individuals make their partner choice. Research on assortative mating shows that active assortment (the choice) is based on things such as personality, physical attractiveness (Buss and Barnes 1986), wealth, social background, ethnicity, religion, education (Blossfeld 2009; Smith et al. 2014), political interest, political engagement, and ideology (Alford et al. 2011; Huber and Malhotra 2017). We may now note that some of the things listed above are directly related to political participation (political interest, political engagement), some things indirectly related to political participation (wealth, education, social background, etc.) and some might not be related to political participation at all (physical attractiveness).

Positive assortative mating, or homogamy, is the most common sorting pattern (likes marry likes) and is found in, for example, education. However, not all preferences are for someone similar to ourselves. Heterogamy, sorting on differences, is, for example, most common when sorting on sex. In other words, it is common that we seek to marry someone of the opposite sex who has a similar education level to ourselves.

2.3 Our choices in life are limited

Can we really choose who to spend our life with? No, not entirely; our choices are constrained. First, since marriage is voluntary, our choice is limited to someone who also chooses us. Second, our choice is restricted to the people we meet. Thus, we ought to think of mating not as a random process but a process that is influenced both by active choice and social structure.

A theory of marriage that has had large impact in studies on marriage patterns is Becker's (1973) economic model of marriage. According to the model, marriage is a union of two individuals who make the rational decision to form a household. The two individuals have the same choice, to form a marriage or to remain single. They will marry if, and only if, they are both

better off married to each other than if staying single. In other words, the individuals try to increase their utility through marriage. But what is utility in marriage? Becker (1973) assumes that utility includes income and goods but also things such as happiness and love. An important objective and one of the largest gains from forming a marriage is having your own children. Individuals compete with each other to obtain the best possible mate, and thus, what we have is a market of marriages.

A second constraint to our choice of life partner is who we meet. Due to geographical constraints, the marriage market is best thought of as local. In other words, geographical propinquity in mating is strong (Becker 1973). In addition, interest has been taken in the role of education in structuring the marriage markets. As a substantial amount of marriages are formed during the same time period in life that many people go to school or attend higher education, the educational system plays an important role in shaping who marries whom (Blossfeld and Timm 2003). Thus, who marries whom is not entirely determined by active choice but also by who we are likely to meet. Geographic proximity and social groups, based on education, for example, matter for who we meet.

2.4 Why we need to study mating and political participation

Previous research on political inequality has largely overlooked the relationship between mating and political participation.⁴ In this dissertation, I provide an argument for why this relationship deserves more attention. Theoretically, there are two main reasons why studying mating and marriage markets can provide valuable insights to research on both unequal politi-

⁴This is not to say that political scientists have ignored the relevance of mating patterns to understand politics. It is just the case that when studying mating and politics, the main focus has been on assortative mating and ideology (see, for example, Alford et al. 2011; Klofstad et al. 2012, 2013; McDermott et al. 2014) or marriage structures and class identification (see, for example, Goldthorpe 1983; Erikson 1984; De Graaf and Heath 1992).

cal participation and inequalities in political representation. First, studying mating and political inequality increases our understanding of how political inequalities are reproduced. Second, studying structures of family formation and marriage markets provide insights for why political inequality varies across contexts and how such structures can persist over long time periods.

2.5 The limited choices can reproduce political inequalities

Following Becker (1973), assortative mating has received great attention due to its potential to explain reproduction of social inequalities (Mare 1991, 2016; Schwartz and Mare 2005; Blossfeld 2009). An increase in educational homogamy, in combination with an increase in dual-earner households, is expected to lead to an increase in economic inequality between households. Educational inequality is transmitted across generations, which explains why inequality is persistent over long periods of time (Fiel 2018). This argument is not necessarily dependent on an increase in active marital sorting. Educational homogamy may increase as a consequence of a change in the distribution of education levels. Also in a hypothetical case, with no active sorting on education, it is true that the more similar the distribution of education levels among men and women, the more likely is homogamy (Liu and Lu 2006). Breen and Salazar (2011) test this in the case of Denmark and find that changes in income inequality were explained by changes in the distribution of education rather than changes in mate preferences. This implies that increased marital homogamy (likes marry likes) may not actually be active sorting (likes choosing to marry likes) but the distribution of available mates (likes happens to marry likes).

What is important to note here is that, regardless of whether this relationship is driven by preferences and/or the distribution of available mates, in societies where homogamy in education is high, there are larger income inequalities between households. A society where most couples consist either of two individuals with high education (and large earnings potential) or two individuals with less education (and less earnings potential) will produce larger income inequalities than a society where most couples consist of one individual with high education (and large earnings potential) and one individual with less education (and less earnings potential). However, we do

not know from previous research whether this logic is limited to economic resources or if it travels to political resources and behavior.

In this dissertation, I hypothesize that the same argument can be applied to the case of political inequality. Since we know that political participation is to some extent socially driven, and we know that some socioeconomic groups participate more than others, we ought to find a reproduction of unequal political participation through mating patterns. If most couples consist either of two individuals with high education (and large political potential) or two individuals with less education (and less political potential), this ought to produce larger political inequalities than a society where most couples consist of one individual with high education (and large political potential) and one individual with less education (and less political potential).

This argument, however, applies only to those socioeconomic characteristics, such as education, where assortative mating is based on a preference of homogamy. Theoretically, the opposite is expected when the mating patterns are based on a majority preference for heterogamy (such as mating by sex). Suppose that men are more likely to participate in politics and that most couples are formed so that they consist of one man and one woman. If political participation is to some extent socially driven, and interpersonal mobilization occurs within couples, then the differences in participation levels between women and men ought to decline over time.

There are some assumptions that need to be clarified and some limitations to the scope of the theory to be stated. I assume that mate selection is not random but based (directly by active choice or indirectly via the distribution of available mates) on some characteristic related to political participation; yet I simultaneously assume that mate selection is not based only on political participation. An important scope condition to keep in mind is that the theory is only applicable to forms of political participation that are social in nature.

In sum, the process of mating can be expected to reproduce or to reduce political inequalities between social groups. If mating preferences are based on homogamy (matching on similarities), inequalities in participation are expected to be reproduced. If mating preferences are based on heterogamy (matching on differences), inequalities in participation are expected to be reduced.

2.6 The social structure determines the degree of inequalities

When it comes to mating by sex, which is largely based on heterogamy, we would expect a decrease in differences in political participation between women and men over time. This argument is consistent with the historical development of gender differences in voter turnout. The gender gap in turnout has diminished or is sometimes reversed in many industrialized countries (Norris 2002; Burns et al. 2018). However, in more demanding forms of political participation and in political interest, the decline in political inequality between women and men has been much slower (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Oskarson and Wängnerud 2013) and gender gaps are common in political representation (Hughes and Paxton 2019).⁵⁶ This could be due to these forms of political engagement not being social in nature, or because of other obstacles that exclude some social groups from political life. Such obstacles may arise from the mating structure, or in other words, the patterns of family formation.

Once again, I want to highlight the importance of mating structures and marriage markets to understand political inequality. Despite numerous policies promoting gender equal representation, women are underrepresented in many parliaments, and it has been argued that the low supply of female candidates plays an important role in explaining the gender gap in representation (Lawless and Pearson 2008).⁷ One explanation to the lack of supply of female candidates can be found in traditional family structures. For example, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) argue that women in dual-earner households have incentives to do a larger share of the housework if gender

⁵There were approximately 25 percent women in parliaments worldwide in 2019 (IPU 2019)

⁶The lower the turnout, or the lower the participation rates in different types of participation, the larger inequalities are expected. This logic is known as the law of dispersion (Tingsten 1937)

⁷For several reasons, women have to be more competent than men to fare equally well in US primary elections. This is likely to affect the incentive structure for running in a gendered way.

norms are traditional. Not complying with the norms on the labor market puts pressure on the marriage, and this can be balanced by doing a larger share of work in the household. If women in dual-earning households do a larger share of the housework, this limits their possibilities to combine a family with a political career.

Becker's (1973) theory states that likes will marry likes only when that maximizes total utility over all marriages. The utility will be maximized at different levels of specialization between labor market skills and skills needed for housework, depending on the wage levels of women and men. Following a similar logic, Bertrand et al. (2015) argue that depending on how traditional a society is in terms of policy and social norms, different mating patterns ought to maximize overall utility. For example, in a gender equal society, utility may be maximized when both spouses work and contribute equally to household work; while in a traditional society, utility may be maximized with a division of labour where one spouse works outside the home and the other specializes in housework. Bertrand et al. (2015) show that the relative income distribution is related to patterns of marriage, women's labor force participation, and the division of housework between women and men. Bertrand et al. (2016) show that traditional gender norms are related to the marriage rates among high- and low-skilled women. Where norms are traditional, women with less education are more likely to get married, and where gender norms are less traditional, women with higher education marry at a higher rate. One way to interpret this is that women in traditional societies are punished on the marriage market for having higher education.

I suggest that entering politics is in many ways similar to entering the work force. Thus, the above-stated logic about gender norms, marriage markets, and women's labor force participation ought to be applicable also to women's political representation. Of course, there are some important particularities regarding political representation. For example, previous research on women's representation shows that political institutions and party structures are important determinants of gender balance in politics (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006, 2008, 2010). In addition, representation is different to labor force participation in that representatives have to be re-elected on a regular basis. If there is an advantage in being the incumbent — and most

incumbents are men — then this will be to women’s disadvantage (Burrell 1992).⁸

In the case of political representation and candidacy, family structures and marriage markets can help us understand why some citizens are less likely to be politically engaged than others. In a gender-traditional society, women may face more constraints and lower incentives in pursuing a political career. Thus, once again, mating matters for political inequality.

2.7 The social structure is persistent over time

While some societies have achieved gender balance in political office, others are far from equal representation. Why are some societies more gender traditional than others? To answer this question, recent work studies the historical roots of variation in attitudes towards women’s role in society. For example, the influential work by Alesina et al. (2013) highlights the importance of historical agricultural technology for the development of gender roles. They show that plough-based agriculture, compared to shifting techniques, lead to higher specialization of labor between women and men and that this has had long lasting consequences for women’s labor force participation.⁹ Following Alesina et al. (2013), plough use has been shown to have an impact on family formation patterns, such as the use of dowry, the rules for inheritance, and the social acceptance of polygamy (see Giuliano 2015, for an overview). A male-biased sex ratio indicates that girls are less valued than boys, and the use of the plough is related to the present-day sex ratio among children (Alesina et al. 2018).

The importance of intergenerational transmission of social status and political behavior has been highlighted in the literature on political socialization (Westholm 1991; Westholm and Niemi 1992; Verba et al. 2005). The

⁸Women may face disadvantages if they focus on different policy questions than men. For example, previous research finds that transparency in decision making is beneficial for political legitimacy only in policy areas with less difficult trade-offs (de Fine Licht 2014).

⁹The argument is based on earlier work by Boserup (1970).

propensity to participate in politics is transmitted from parent to child and so are inequities in participation between different socioeconomic groups. Using the example of the civil rights movement, Verba et al. (2005) argue that political events can change these patterns. With a similar logic, Fernández et al. (2004) highlight the importance of the marriage market as transmitter of social norms over time. They study women's increased labor market participation as a consequence of men drafted to World War II and argue that women's entry into the labor market had long-term consequences due to the intergenerational transmission of values. Men who grew up with working mothers were more likely to form dual-earner households later in life.

Some societies are more traditional than others, and some societies have more gender balance in political representation than others. The roots of such variation can be explained by historical developments that may be technological, demographical, or political. Some of these events affect political engagement directly, while some affect the opportunity structures for political participation indirectly through family formation patterns. Social structures are consequently found to be persistent over time.

2.8 Summary of the argument

So why do I think mating structures and family formation are crucial to understand political inequality? First, as marital status is one of the most common covariates to include in models of "who participates?," it is crucial that we understand the relationship between marriage and political participation. Previous research on political participation often assumes that the positive relationship between living with a partner and participating in politics is homogeneous. At the same time, previous research on assortative mating and marriage markets shows that not all partners are the same. Some partners may indeed have a positive impact on one's political participation, but it may just as well be the case that some partners have a negative impact on one's political participation. Thus, to understand who participates in politics, we also need to understand how marital partners are distributed to the population. Mating is not a random process but largely influenced by both individual choice and social structure. For this reason, I believe that overlooking a heterogenous partner effect on political participation limits our understanding of unequal political participation in an

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unfortunate way. Second, if patterns of who marries whom are transmitted across generations, then marital sorting is one key aspect that explains why social structures are difficult to change. At the same time, patterns of family formation can entail obstacles that limit some social groups' possibilities of entering political life. Thus, to understand who runs for political office, we cannot overlook the importance of persistent structures of family formation.

3 Three papers in brief

The three papers in this dissertation all contribute to show that studying mating and marriage markets is crucial to understanding political inequality. There are many different ways, at both the individual and societal level, in which mating and marriage markets matter for political inequality. For this reason, I consider both historical, geographical, and individual variation using a triangulation of methods. The argument is supported in a variety of contexts using different research designs and methods. Before introducing the papers in more detail, I provide a short summary of the data and methods used in the dissertation.

When looking for answers to the question of “Who participates in politics?,” previous research has put focus on explaining individual political participation. The interest in individual behavior has gone hand in hand with the strong tradition of survey research in political science. In the first two papers (Frödin Gruneau 2018, 2020a), I take advantage of the immense availability of high quality survey data that has been collected over several decades. The use of survey data allows me to study mating and political participation in different contexts over time and to follow the same individuals over several years. In addition, there has been an increased interest in using data from population registers to study political behavior. In the third paper (Frödin Gruneau 2020b), I follow this trend, using data from Swedish population registers. The data provides information of relevant social characteristics for the entire population and allows aggregating the individual measures to study the social contexts where those individuals spend their

lives. In addition to the use of present-day administrative data, I add historical demographic data to study the persistence of social structures over a time period that covers several centuries.

In this dissertation, I ask the question: Does who marries whom matter for political inequality? Answering such a personal question relying only on statistical analysis may seem odd. Yet, asking people this question directly is probably not a better solution. Individuals are not likely to provide reliable answers to why they choose to be politically active (Verba et al. 1995). As most previous research on political inequality, I answer my research questions indirectly, studying the relationship between individual characteristics, social contexts, and political inequality. I do this using several different statistical methods such as regression analyses, matching techniques, and difference-in-differences estimations. The argument is supported in a variety of contexts, using within-country analysis, at the individual and aggregate levels, and cross-country comparisons, all covering extensive time periods.

3.1 Paper 1: Reconsidering the partner effect on voting

Married people are more likely to vote than unmarried people (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Leighley and Nagler 2013), and people with partners who vote are more likely to vote than people without partners (Stoker and Jennings 1995). The correlation between partnership and turnout is well established, and marital status is one of the most commonly included covariates in models of “who participates” (Smets and van Ham 2013). Previous research often assumes that the positive relationship between having a partner and turning out to vote is homogeneous. In this paper, I argue that the relationship between partnership and turnout is theoretically underdeveloped and that previous research has overlooked the importance of who one’s partner is.

The key argument in the first paper is that partners who vote are not distributed randomly throughout the population. Instead, active sorting and the social structure determines who is likely to marry someone who votes. Given that education is one of the most common predictors of voting (Leighley and Nagler 2013) and of mate choice (Blossfeld 2009), I argue that we ought to expect a positive relationship between one’s partner’s education level and individual turnout (Frödin Gruneau 2018).

The relationship between a partner’s education level and individual turnout

has not been given much attention in previous research. One exception is Knack (1992) who shows a positive association in the US in 1988. In this paper, I contribute empirically by studying the relationship between a partner's education level and individual turnout in the US from 1968 to 2012 and in 24 European countries from 2002 to 2014. To cover a large number of countries and a long time span, I use cross-sectional survey data from two large and well-established surveys: the General Social Survey (GSS) in the US and the European Social Survey (ESS) in Europe.

The results show that who your partner is matters for your probability to turn out to vote. Among less-educated individuals, the positive association between having a partner and turnout is in many countries limited to those whose partners are highly educated. Most pronounced are the results in the US, and the relationship is consistent over time. In other words, not all partners are the same. The correlation between partnership and turnout is mainly driven by the small proportion of a population who marries up educationally.

I conclude that disregarding the impact of mate choice when studying turnout makes us overlook heterogeneity in the relationship between having a partner and voting.

3.2 Paper 2: Self-reinforcing patterns of unequal voting participation

In the first paper in the dissertation, I show that there is a positive relationship between one's partners' education level and turnout. The results are driven mostly by the small group of individuals with less education who marry up educationally. What the results from the cross-sectional analysis cannot tell us, however, is whether this association is due to sorting or a behavioral change. Frödin Gruneau (2020a) follows up on this question.

The theoretical focus in this paper is how social inequalities can be reproduced through marriage. According to Fowler (2005), turnout is a social event, and this has important implications for the aggregate turnout levels. In countries where turnout is high, most people will interact with voters, and are thus likely to vote. In countries where turnout is low, people are less likely to meet voters. In other words, where turnout is low, it is likely to stay low.

In this paper, I argue that the same logic ought to be true within socioeconomic groups. Although the aggregate turnout level may be high, there can be large differences across groups in society. Individuals are more likely to meet other individuals from the same socioeconomic group (in the neighbourhood, at work, etc.). Thus, the following ought to be true: If turnout among the highly educated is high and turnout among the less educated is low (Leighley and Nagler 2013), then unequal voting participation between socioeconomic groups is likely to stay unequal. I test this argument using the case of marriage (Frödin Gruneau 2020a) .

In this paper, I answer two questions. First, to what extent do assortative mating and social influence, respectively, account for correspondence in turnout behavior of couples? Second, does the combination of assortative mating and social influence contribute to social inequalities in turnout? I argue that previous research has overlooked the importance of mating for the reproduction of social inequalities in turnout. To answer the questions, I use the British Household Panel Study (BHPS) and the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). The structure of the data allows me to follow individuals over time, before and after entering marriage. I use a difference-in-differences strategy to identify whether marrying a eventual voter increases one's likelihood of voting.

The results show that the relationship between marriage and turnout is dependent on the turnout of the spouse, and that, regardless of previous voting participation, well-off citizens are more likely to marry voters. In other words, I study the turnout among individuals before and after they enter a relationship and find that there were differences in turnout between those who married an eventual voter and those who married an eventual non-voter already before entering the relationship (selection), but the differences were larger after entering marriage (behavioral change). I also show that previous non-voters with high education and income levels who enter marriage are more likely to marry a voter than previous non-voters with less education and lower incomes (social structure). Additional analyses show that the behavioral changes are similar in size among different education groups but larger among the more well-off in terms of income.

I conclude that active mate choice can explain some of the selection into marrying an eventual voter, but the social structure, to some extent, influences who is likely to marry an individual who votes. Such a social

structure implies that in social groups where turnout is low, it is likely to stay low. Thus, studying couple formation and turnout can help us understand how social inequalities in turnout are reproduced.

3.3 Paper 3: Marriage markets and political representation in Sweden

There has been recent interest in understanding the historical origins of gender norms. Following Alesina et al. (2013), who showed that pre-industrial gender structures can be persistent over long time periods, scholars have studied the historical structures of agricultural technology, societal characteristics, and pre-industrial family structures as determinants of gender roles today (Giuliano 2017). Moreover, it has been shown that marriage markets can play an important role in intergenerational transmission of gender roles and affect women's labor market participation (Fernández et al. 2004).

To maximize the benefits of a marital union, a specialization of labor where one spouse specializes in work outside the home and one in housework, may be rational (Becker 1973). In gender traditional societies, such specialization of work between men and women is more common (Bertrand et al. 2015). In dual-earner households, it is expected that women do a larger share of the housework if gender norms are traditional (Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Women in gender traditional societies may therefore be discouraged from and face larger constraints if running for political office.

As the structure of family formation has been suggested to have deep historical roots and to be an important factor in explaining differences in gender balance in political assemblies, I suggest that long-term persistence in patterns of family formation can explain gender inequality in political representation. Despite numerous national level policies promoting gender equality, there is still substantial variation in women's political representation across Swedish municipalities. I show that the local marriage markets can help us understand why there is a large variation in women's political representation across municipalities as well as to understand the persistence of gender norms over time (Frodin Gruneau 2020b).

In the analysis I, combine data from Swedish administrative registers from 1982 to 2014 with historical registers from 1749 to 1859. The results show that in municipalities where the patterns of family formation were

more traditional in the past, the political representation of women is lower today. Where gender norms, measured as structures of family formation, were male-biased in the past, the structure of family formation are also more traditional today. I conclude that persistence of gender norms, transmitted by family formation across generations, can explain why gender balance in political representation is not easily achieved. I conclude that studying mating and political participation can help us understand inequality in political representation and that historical gender structures can explain present-day outcomes.

3.4 Summary of the results and how the papers fit together

In this dissertation, I show that mating and family formation should not be neglected when studying political inequality. The three papers highlight different aspects of the importance of mating structures. In the first paper, I show that an individual's propensity to turn out to vote is not just related to whether one has a partner or not or whether one's partner votes but also to the education level of one's partner. Less educated individuals with a highly educated partner are substantially more likely to vote than individuals with equally low education who has a partner with low education (Frödin Gruneau 2018). What the results from Frödin Gruneau (2018) cannot tell us, however, is whether the relationship between partner education and individual turnout is due to selection into such marriages or if individuals who marry up become more likely to vote after entering marriage.

In Frödin Gruneau (2020a) the use of panel data enables a comparison of turnout among the same individuals before and after entering marriage. The results show that individuals who vote are more likely to marry voters but also that, on average, turnout increases among those who married voters. Individuals with high socioeconomic status are more likely to marry voters, regardless of whether they voted in the previous election. Thus, the results indicate that the relationship between a partner's education and turnout is to some extent due to selection but also due to the social structure.

I find that among individuals who were non-voters in one election and who enter relationships, the more well-off are more likely to vote than the less-well off in the next election (Frödin Gruneau 2020a). However, I also

find a positive association between having a highly educated spouse and turning out to vote among the less educated (Frödin Gruneau 2018). How can these somewhat contradictory results be interpreted? Does marrying up lead to a higher probability of turning out to vote? Or is marriage just reinforcing the differences between the more and less affluent? I think there are a number of different possible explanations here. First, Frödin Gruneau (2018) is based on correlational analysis using cross-sectional data. Thus, the correlation between having a highly educated spouse and individual propensity to vote can be driven by selection. In other words, individuals who marry up educationally may already be more likely to vote. Second, it could be the case that many of the high income individuals who marry voters in fact marry up in terms of education. The correlational analysis focuses on education only (Frödin Gruneau 2018), while the difference-in-difference analysis includes both education and income (Frödin Gruneau 2020a). Third, in the difference-in-difference analysis I use the case of the United Kingdom (Frödin Gruneau 2020a) and I cannot rule out that the differences from the cross-country analysis are due to the case selection.

In the first two papers, the empirical focus is on the individual; however, the social structure is given substantial theoretical attention: Who marries whom is dependent on who we meet, and mate choice matters for political inequality. I follow up on the previous papers by studying the role of the social structure in more detail (Frödin Gruneau 2020b). The results show that the the structure of family formation is related to political representation. Where family formation is more traditional, less women run for local office, and women’s political representation is lower. I show that a focus on marriage structures can explain how social norms can be persistent over time. Thus, in the third paper I study the relationship between mating and political inequality from a somewhat different angle than in the first two papers. First, the focus is on political gender inequality rather than on political inequalities based on socioeconomic factors. Second, the outcome of interest is political representation rather than turnout. Third, I study differences between municipalities instead of individual variation. In spite of these differences, there are several ways in which the findings (Frödin Gruneau 2020b) complement the other two papers. First, the theoretical focus on structures of family formation is prominent in all three papers. In Frödin Gruneau (2020b), I study the social structures of family

formation in more detail. Second, there are different aspects of political inequality. In the third paper, I show that family formation structures are relevant also when studying political gender inequality. The third paper also shows that mating matters not only for unequal turnout but is also relevant when studying inequality in political representation.

In this dissertation, I theorize that mating structures matter for political inequality. The three papers provide support for the argument using several different methodological approaches and a range of different data sources. The results support the theory in several different contexts, which suggests that the argument is not limited to one specific time and place. Thus, the papers combined provide a strong case for the importance of studying the relationship between mating and political inequality. Overall, the results from the three papers suggest that a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between marital status and political participation is called for. The correlation between marriage and political participation is not homogenous, and considering the question of who marries whom is important for our understanding of who participates in politics. Another important aspect, highlighted by the third paper, is that marital choice is not only relevant to study at the individual level. The structure of the marriage market and the patterns of family formation can explain persistent inequalities in political representation.

3.5 Limitations

Where the main strengths in the dissertation are found, so are the weaknesses. In my attempt to cover many different contexts, answering causal questions, and study the persistence of social norms, I have run into a number of challenges. In the following section, I discuss what I believe are the main weaknesses of the dissertation and how those may have an impact on the results.

Previous literature that aims to identify a social effect of turnout has focused mostly on experimental approaches (Gerber et al. 2008; Nickerson 2008) or identification strategies using the termination of relationships (e.g., death of a spouse (Kern 2010; Hobbs et al. 2014)). When applying the theories of a social voter to the case of marriage, causal identification is more difficult. This is due to selection into “treatment”. In experimental studies, selection is not a problem, and in the case of the death of a spouse, selec-

tion is less problematic than in the case of marriage.¹⁰ This is not as easily argued when it comes to entering marriage or falling in love. However, I do not believe that not studying the case of marriage is a solution to this problem, and I believe that the case of marriage is well worth studying. Thus, a more reasonable solution than avoiding the difficult questions must be to study those questions but to be cautious when making causal claims. In this dissertation, I show that there is a correlation between mating structures and political inequality. Although it is theoretically plausible, I cannot, empirically and with certainty, conclude that mate choice, marriage structures, or patterns of family formation cause political inequality.

In this dissertation, I have not explicitly set out to study mechanisms. From previous research, we know that there is a social element to turnout. However, we do not know exactly what mechanism is at play. It could be that having a partner leads to increased political interest through discussions with the partner (Beck 1991). It could be an increased exposure to norms of voting as a duty (Knack 1992) or to peer-pressure (Gerber et al. 2008). Another explanation is that people simply prefer to go to the polling station together rather than going alone (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2012). These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; they could all be at play simultaneously. I do, however, believe it would be beneficial to know more about the mechanisms.

If the main reason for the relationship can be found among mechanisms, such as peer-pressure or a preference not to go to the polling station alone, we would expect the behavioral changes to be short term. If the main mechanism that explains the relationship is exposure to norms of civic duty or an increased political interest, a behavioral change ought to be more long term. Some individuals may have developed a habit of voting or a persistent increase in political interest through marriage. If the latter is the case, divorced and widowed individuals who were in a relationship with a voter ought to be more likely to vote than the individuals who never married.

¹⁰It is likely that there is a randomness to whether the spouse one lost was a voter or not (voters are not more likely than non-voters to pass away).

Without knowing the mechanisms, a comparison of the effect sizes between marrying someone who votes and previous research on losing a partner who votes (Kern 2010; Hobbs et al. 2014) is difficult.

Another aspect when discussing possible mechanisms is whether we ought to think of a couple as two individuals or as one family.¹¹ Throughout this dissertation, I have made the assumption that the world consists of individuals who may or may not enter relationships with other individuals. If we instead think of a couple as one family unit, then we may interpret a partner's education and income as a family resource rather than as potential social influence on the individual.

Previous research has shown that marriage markets play a key role in intergenerational transmission of gender norms (Fernández et al. 2004) on the individual level and that political behavior is transmitted across generations (Westholm 1991; Westholm and Niemi 1992). This previous work does not, however, cover such an extensive time period as I do (Frödin Gruneau 2020b). I suggest family formation patterns as an aggregate level mechanism of norm transmission across time. Unfortunately, it is difficult to pinpoint the mechanism relying on aggregate-level measurements only. Ideally, to identify a mechanism that transmits social norms over hundreds of years, I would provide empirical support for transmission of norms at the individual level during the entire time period covered.

¹¹For example, following the logic of Becker (1973), who argues that couples maximize their joint utility through specialization.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Implications for research on political inequality

This dissertation provides an argument for why a previously understudied research area in political science, mating, and political inequality ought to receive more attention. The three papers contribute empirically to previous research in several ways, showing that understanding mating structures is crucial to understanding political inequality. In addition to the empirical contributions, the dissertation makes a theoretical contribution, providing an argument for how and why mating matters for political inequality. The theoretical framework is applicable both to understanding individual behavior, how individuals may be affected by social context, and how such contexts may be persistent over time.

Overlooking mating structures may make us draw erroneous conclusions (Frödin Gruneau 2018). Previous research often assumes that the relationship between having a partner and tuning out to vote is homogeneous. This dissertation shows that is not the case. Individuals with low education who marry up educationally are substantially more likely to vote than individuals with low education whose partner has equally low education. Including marital status as a control variable in studies of who participates is a rule rather than an exception (Smets and van Ham 2013). If we do not know what we measure, we may also misinterpret the results of studies of other aspects of political participation. For example, the positive association between education and political participation is one of the most established

relationships in the research of who participates (Smets and van Ham 2013). Using marital status as a covariate in such a model may be problematic due to the heterogeneity of the effect. In a model of education and participation, marital status ought to be seen as a post-treatment variable as the individual's education level influences the probability of having a partner who votes.

Another way in which we may draw erroneous conclusions when overlooking mating structures is when discussing the implications of a social voter. If voting is a social act, and individuals who live together tend to vote together, we may draw the conclusion that increasing marriage rates would increase turnout. As long as people marry at high rates, a lot of people will vote, and thus, turnout will stay high. I show that it is not that simple (Frödin Gruneau 2020a). If assortative mating is based on homogamy, such as in the case of education, increasing the marriage rates may increase turnout among the highly educated, but not among the less educated. Thus, we would expect increasing political inequalities. Who marries whom matters for how we ought to interpret the implications of increasing or decreasing marriage rates.

I show that gender traditional structures of family formation are persistent over more than 200 years (Frödin Gruneau 2020b). These structures, in turn, are related to women's political representation and candidacy. Where social structures of family formation were more traditional in the past, there are fewer women in politics today. In other words, family formation matters for political inequality in the case of gender balance in representation, and these structures have deep historical roots.

4.2 Policy implications

Throughout this project, I have received the question about policy relevance numerous times. The question is often asked mentioning the unrealistic scenario of policy makers changing mating patterns by force. Yet, I do not believe we should dismiss the question of policy relevance that easily.

Unequal political participation is commonly argued to be one of democracy's greatest challenges (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Lijphart 1997). It is not likely (or even desirable) that this dissertation would convince policy makers to promote random distribution of partners in an attempt to increase political equality. However, there is more to mating than

active choice. The social structure determines the constraints for our partner choice. In a society where the social structure encourages and facilitates individuals from different social groups to interact, mating may not reinforce social inequalities to the same extent as in a society where individuals from different social groups do not meet.

In addition, social structures may put larger constraints on some citizens than others. If the structure of the marriage market can explain why some social groups have lower political representation than others, policy makers who want to increase equality of representation ought to look not only to questions of discrimination or bias against certain groups but also to the underlying social structure and how that structure may affect who runs for political office.

4.3 What next?

The dissertation highlights important issues for future research. First, we need to know more about the individual-level mechanisms. This is crucial for understanding the extent to which unequal political participation is reproduced through marital sorting. If short-term mechanisms, such as peer-pressure (Gerber et al. 2008) or having a voting companion (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2012), are at play, mate choice matters for political participation during the time two individuals live together. For more long-term mechanisms, such as increased political interest (Beck 1991) or increased exposure to norms of voting as a duty (Knack 1992), mate choice may matter for political participation also after a divorce or in widowhood.

Second, the dissertation highlights the question of what causes variation in social structures and how these structures are related to political behavior. Previous research in economics shows that many different aspects of societies today have deep historical roots (Alesina et al. 2013, 2018; Giuliano 2017, among others), however, it is less clear how this relates to political inequalities. The work in this dissertation contributes to this literature by showing that persistent structures of family formation is related to gender balance in political representation today. Yet, this is merely one of many ways history may matter for present-day political inequality. If we want to know not just whether social structures are persistent over time but what can change them, we need to know more about possible explanations to variation in family formation patterns across regions. To what extent is such

variation explained by differences in policies that promote gender equality? Can historical developments of agricultural technology, pre-industrial societal characteristics, and pre-industrial family structures, industrialization processes, or economic shocks explain why there are differences in family formation patterns today?

Third, it would be of great interest to know whether the mating structures can influence the political outcomes. Previous research shows that ideology is one of the most important cues in mate choice (Alford et al. 2011; Klofstad et al. 2012, 2013; Mcdermott et al. 2014). This dissertation shows that mating matters for who participates in politics. Yet, whether some political parties benefit more than others from interpersonal mobilization through marriage is an open question. Vote choice may be directly affected by whom we marry, and there could be spillover effects not only in mobilization of voters, but also in party choice.

Finally, the results from the dissertation highlight that mating structures based on homogamy in combination with increasing education levels of women may increase political inequalities in turnout between socioeconomic groups over time. At the same time, gender equality in the marriage market may be key to gender inequality in political representation. Thus, it could be the case that increasing gender equality in representation goes hand in hand with increasing socioeconomic inequalities in turnout. It would be worthwhile knowing whether such a trade-off exists, and what role the marriage market plays in the persistence and change of such inequalities.

The results in this dissertation show that mate choice and the structure of marriage markets matter for who participates in politics. Yet, there are plenty of unanswered questions. For this reason, I argue that a more nuanced approach to studying the relationship between marriage and political participation is needed and that we cannot fully understand inequality in political participation or unequal political representation without taking mating into account.

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1. Frödin Gruneau, M. (2018). Reconsidering the partner effect on voting. *Electoral Studies*, 53:48–56.
2. Frödin Gruneau, M. (2020a). Assortative mating and turnout: A self-reinforcing pattern of unequal voting participation. *European Political Science Review*, 12(2):1–17.
3. Frödin Gruneau, M. (2020b). Persistence of social norms, family formation, and gender balance in politics. Unpublished Manuscript.