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Partisan Demographics*

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Abstract

This chapter defines and reviews partisan demographics as an emerging field at the intersection of political demography, political economy, and population economics. Whereas political demography examines how population change affects politics, partisan demographics studies how political events, party control, political climates, and policy regimes influence demographic behavior in ways that vary with the partisan alignment of individuals, households, or local populations. The chapter asks under what conditions partisan events become demographic shocks and organizes the evidence around five mechanisms: economic expectations, policy anticipation, affective identity, social matching and sorting, and risk perception and health behavior. The strongest evidence currently concerns fertility and reproductive behavior, including conceptions and abortions, while studies of marriage, partnership formation, residential sorting, health behavior, wellbeing, and mortality extend the field with varying degrees of empirical support. Evidence on migration, integration, and naturalization remains more limited. Particular attention is given to empirical credibility, including the timing of political shocks and demographic responses, the distinction between behavior and attitudes, the measurement of partisan exposure, and the separation of partisan effects from pre-existing demographic differences. The chapter concludes by identifying the conditions under which partisan politics becomes a consequential determinant of demographic behavior and by outlining priorities for future research.

Keywords: Partisan demographics, political demography, political economy, political shocks, fertility, health, demographic sorting.

JEL: D72, J11, J13, I12, J61

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Introduction

The primary inquiry in political demography concerns the way in which population changes influence political dynamics. Specifically, it examines how demographic factors such as fertility, mortality, age structure, migration, ethnic composition, religious composition, and spatial settlement impact political conflict, representation, state capacity, and international security (Goldstone, Kaufmann, and Toft 2012; Goerres and Vanhuysse 2021).

Partisan demographics examine how demographic responses are influenced by political events, party control, political climates, or policy regimes, which systematically correlate with the political opinions, partisan identities, voting behaviors, ideological stances, or partisan contexts of individuals, households, couples, or local populations. These demographic responses may encompass fertility, abortion, marriage, health, wellbeing, mortality, migration, integration, or naturalization. Within the health domain, this chapter considers health behavioral responses and health-related wellbeing as components of demographic response. This is because behaviors such as risk avoidance, vaccination, physical distancing, and subjective wellbeing can impact morbidity, mortality, family life, and population health. Attitudinal opinions on health policy were included only when they were linked to behavioral or demographic outcomes.

The selected definition intentionally distinguishes partisan demographic responses from three related literatures. General policy effects on demographic outcomes are relevant in this context only when the response is influenced by partisan alignment or environments. The demographic composition of party coalitions is primarily a subject of political demography, as it examines how demographic groups influence politics rather than how partisan politics affects demographic behavior. Although studies on immigration attitudes, reproductive attitudes, or health-policy preferences offer mechanisms and context, they do not constitute evidence of demographic response unless they link attitudes to behavioral outcomes.

The principal studies in this emerging field remain limited. The foundational contributions are Dahl, Lu, and Mullins (2022) and González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026), while Rackin et al. (2025) and Baszczak and Weychert (2026) provide important extensions on fertility and political alignment. Key studies on partnership and spatial sorting include Alford et al. (2011), Huber and Malhotra (2017), Bernstein et al. (2022), and McCartney, Orellana-Li, and Zhang (2024). Allcott et al. (2020), Barrios and Hochberg (2021), Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky (2021), and Gollwitzer et al. (2020) are included because they examine partisan differences in health-related behavior, risk perception, information acquisition, and observed mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005) examine wellbeing as a health-related response to partisan control. Mortality evidence is provided by Millimet and Whitacre (2025), who study partisan political regimes and county mortality, and Wallace, Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Schwartz (2023), who link individual voter registration directly to individual mortality outcomes.

The organizing question is not whether politics broadly influences demography, as this is evidently the case, but rather under what specific conditions partisan events result in demographic shocks. Such shocks occur when a political event alters anticipated future constraints, perceived status, institutional trust, health-risk assessment, social matching, or residential location in a manner contingent upon partisan alignment. Additionally, this occurs when the relevant demographic margin can adjust within the observed timeframe, and when

the empirical design effectively differentiates partisan responses from pre-existing demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic disparities among partisan groups.

Conceptual boundaries and mechanisms

Partisanship as identity, information filter, and alignment with power

Partisanship extends beyond mere voting records or positions on a left-right ideological spectrum. According to the Michigan school of political behavior, party identification is conceptualized as a stable psychological attachment that influences political perceptions and electoral behavior (Campbell et al. 1960). Subsequent research has refined this perspective by framing party attachment as a social identity that organizes in-groups, out-groups, affect, and information processing (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes, 2012; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe, 2015; Mason, 2018). This conceptualization is significant for partisan demographics, as demographic behavior is observed following political events, which are interpreted through partisan attachments. Consequently, the same election, party control, or policy regime may alter expectations, trust, risk perception, and behavioral choices differently for politically aligned and misaligned individuals or regions.

Gidron, Adams, and Horne (2020) place affective polarization (partisans' hostility towards political opponents and likeness for their own party) in comparative perspective using Comparative Study of Electoral Systems data for 20 Western democracies over 1996–2017. They find that the United States is not exceptionally affectively polarized in levels, but that partisan dislike has increased more rapidly there since the mid-1990s than in most other Western democracies. Their comparative evidence also shows that affective polarization varies systematically with economic conditions, cultural conflict, and political institutions, indicating that partisan identity and hostility are not uniquely American phenomena.

It is essential to differentiate partisan alignment with power from ideology. A conservative individual may respond differently to the victory of a conservative party compared to its defeat, even if their ideology remains unchanged. This distinction is crucial for understanding expectations, as supporters of the ruling party often exhibit increased optimism about the economy, whereas supporters of the opposition may become less optimistic or trusting (Gerber and Huber, 2009, 2010; Gillitzer and Prasad, 2018; Mian, Sufi, and Khoshkhou, 2023; Guirola, 2025). The demographic implication is challenging: a political event should be considered a demographic shock only when partisan alignment alters expectations, trust, identity threat, policy anticipation, or risk behavior in a manner that can plausibly influence demographic choices.

Demographic responses as behavioral margins

Demographic response should be primarily conceptualized as behavior rather than opinion. While fertility intentions, attitudes towards abortion, immigration preferences, and evaluations of health policy may contribute to understanding behavior, they are insufficient to define the field comprehensively. Events such as births, conceptions, abortions, marriages, divorces, relocations, naturalization decisions, health-protective behaviors, and mortality outcomes are more pertinent as they alter life-course trajectories, household structures, population health, and population composition.

The definition includes local populations as units of response, acknowledging that many administrative datasets are unable to simultaneously capture individual party identification and demographic behavior. County or municipal partisan exposure can be considered credible when it is predetermined, measured prior to the event, and employed to compare areas with varying levels of support for the affected party. Nevertheless, ecological designs necessitate caution, as partisan regions differ in terms of religion, education, income, race, age structure, urbanicity, and family norms. Consequently, the most robust studies employ unexpected events, high-frequency outcomes, pre-trend tests, and mechanism evidence to mitigate the risk that partisan exposure merely serves as a proxy for long-standing demographic composition.

Mechanisms

To structure the analysis in this chapter, five mechanisms are proposed as a framework to integrate established findings on partisan expectations, policy feedback, social identity, social sorting, and health-risk behavior into the study of demographic responses.

The first mechanism concerns *economic expectations*. Decisions related to childbearing and marriage involve forward-looking commitments, and even abortion decisions may be influenced by anticipated resources, employment security, housing prospects, and the perceived economic competence of future governments. However, whether partisan differences in economic expectations reflect genuine beliefs or merely partisan cheerleading remains debated. For instance, Gerber and Huber (2009) find that partisan differences in economic expectations lead to changes in consumption, suggesting that partisan beliefs may have behavioral consequences. McGrath (2017), however, questions the robustness of this finding when a single state-year observation (Texas in 1996) is excluded, while Mian, Sufi, and Khoshkhou (2023) find no effect on actual household spending. This mixed evidence highlights the importance of distinguishing reported expectations from actual behavioural response. In this context, demographic decisions provide a particularly informative test. Decisions such as having a child or relocating involve substantial costs and are difficult to reverse. Evidence that such decisions respond to electoral outcomes would therefore suggest that partisan expectations extend beyond political preferences and may influence economic and demographic choices.

A second mechanism involves *policy anticipation*. Citizens may anticipate changes in abortion access, family benefits, immigration enforcement, health regulations, welfare generosity, or citizenship procedures by the incoming party, leading to demographic adjustments before any formal policy enactment. This channel is conceptually distinct from the actual effect of policy, as demographic responses may occur during the anticipatory period when the policy regime remains unchanged but its expected future trajectory is evident. Studies on reproductive control and family benefits illustrate why such anticipated policy environments can influence fertility and abortion decisions (Myers 2017; González and Trommlerová 2023).

The third mechanism deals with *affective identity*. Electoral outcomes can alter perceived belonging, social status, institutional trust, psychological security, and subjective wellbeing, particularly when party competition aligns with race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, education, gender, or region. This mechanism differs from a short-term mood effect, as temporary emotional responses may influence sexual activity or wellbeing briefly, whereas identity threats and reduced institutional trust can impact long-term decisions, including fertility timing, partnership formation, migration, and health-protective behavior (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2018).

The fourth mechanism covers *social matching and sorting*. If individuals prefer politically similar partners, neighbors, friends, schools, and local institutions, partisanship becomes a demographic sorting principle influencing marriage markets, residential locations, and local population compositions. In this mechanism, the political event need not be a single election, as the relevant condition may be a persistent partisan climate that renders certain locations or relationships more appealing than others (Huber and Malhotra 2017; Bernstein et al. 2022).

The fifth mechanism pertains to *risk perception, health behavior, and wellbeing*. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this mechanism, as partisan identity influenced assessments of health risks, willingness to engage in social distancing, masking and vaccination behaviors, and trust in scientific and governmental guidance. These behaviors can affect morbidity, mortality, subjective wellbeing, fertility planning, and social interaction, thus fitting within partisan demographics under the health-behavior component of the definition. However, general health opinions without behavioral or demographic linkage should remain outside the primary evidentiary base (Allcott et al. 2020; Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky 2021; Gollwitzer et al. 2020).

Fertility, abortion and family formation

Fertility is an optimal issue to start with due to its private nature and forward-looking implications. The economic analysis of fertility (Becker 1960; Becker and Lewis 1973) conceptualized childbearing as a household decision made under constraints, with wages and non-labor income as major factors, while subsequent research included preferences, norms, identity, uncertainty, housing, labor-market conditions, and policy incentives. The concept of partisan demographics introduces a political dimension, suggesting that political events may alter expectations regarding future income, security, policy, and social belonging, with varying impacts across partisan groups.

Dahl, Lu and Mullins (2022) establish a contemporary framework by examining the unexpected 2016 election of Donald Trump in the United States to assess whether a shift in political power influenced childbearing decisions. Their primary contribution lies not merely in observing fertility changes post-election but in identifying differential fertility shifts across partisan regions and social groups. Specifically, counties with Republican leanings experienced a relative increase in fertility, whereas Hispanic fertility declined compared to non-Hispanic fertility. The study is influential because it treats electoral surprise as a shock to expectations and identity, aligns the timing of births with the election shock, and moves the analysis from political attitudes to realized demographic behavior. Additionally, Gemmill et al. (2019) provide complementary evidence on birth outcomes by examining whether the 2016 US presidential election was associated with an increase in preterm births among Latina women. Using US singleton live births from 2009 to 2017, they find approximately 2,337 additional preterm births among Latina women during the nine months following the election, representing an increase of 3.2–3.6% more preterm births than expected. These findings complement Dahl, Lu and Mullins (2022) by suggesting that electoral outcomes may influence not only fertility decisions but also maternal and infant health. However, unlike Dahl et al. (2022), Gemmill et al. (2019) do not identify differences by partisan affiliation or political alignment.

González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026) expand upon Dahl, Lu and Mullins' (2022) framework by analyzing Spain's unexpected 2004 election outcome using administrative data on registered abortions, births, conceptions, and marriages. Their design involves comparing municipalities with varying levels of support for the losing conservative party, utilizing high-frequency outcomes surrounding the election. The key empirical contribution is the distinction between conceptions and abortion decisions: municipalities with greater support for the defeated party experienced an immediate rise in abortions, a decrease in pregnancies, and a short-term decline in shotgun marriages. Additionally, the election induced partisan shifts in economic expectations and trust. This makes the study a valuable reference model for future research because the behavioral margin is immediate, the event is unexpected, the partisan exposure is predetermined, and the mechanism is empirically validated.

This evidence from Spain illustrates why abortion should be considered within the context of partisan demographics rather than solely as a matter of reproductive politics. A shift in attitudes towards abortion following an election remains a political opinion. However, a change in the number of registered abortions represents a demographic response that influences pregnancy trajectories and potential births. This logic similarly applies to shotgun marriages: the significance lies not in marriage as a political attitude, but in the apparent impact of the partisan shock on household responses to unintended pregnancies and future uncertainties.

Baszczak and Weychert (2026) examine the relationship between political alignment and first conception using individual-level panel data from the United Kingdom between 1991 and 2020. Linking women's reported party preferences to the party in government and estimating conception timing from birth histories, they find that women whose preferred party was in power had a 24% higher monthly hazard of first conception than those whose preferred party was not in government. However, the analysis is observational and conception dates are approximated as nine months before birth, so the findings should be interpreted as evidence of an association rather than a causal effect of electoral outcomes.

The study by Rackin et al. (2025) provides the most relevant extension to fertility research, as it examines partisan divergence in fertility changes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States (Florida). Unlike election-shock designs, this setting involves a combination of health risks, policy restrictions, economic disruptions, school closures, and partisan information environments. Although this makes it less straightforward as a single-event design, it remains highly pertinent due to its focus on fertility responses when political identity and health behavior are simultaneously significant. The study reinforces the argument that partisan demographic responses extend beyond elections, while also highlighting the necessity for future research to distinguish between health-risk mechanisms and policy restrictions or economic uncertainties.

Taken together, these reproductive studies suggest three conditions required for a partisan demographic response. First, the political event must be sufficiently salient to alter perceived future constraints. Second, the demographic margin must be adjustable within the relevant timeframe. Third, the design must exclude or at least control for alternative explanations based on pre-existing partisan differences in socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, urbanicity, or family norms. When these conditions are not met, the evidence may still hold value, but it should be categorized as adjacent political demography rather than definitive evidence of partisan demographic response.

Partnership, marriage and residential sorting

Partisan demographics may influence partnership and marriage primarily through a social-matching mechanism rather than a short-term expectations mechanism. The key question is whether partisanship has become a criterion for intimate association and household formation, thereby influencing partner selection, household formation, and the impact of political disagreement on union stability.

Alford et al. (2011) demonstrate for the United States that political similarity among spouses is not merely a result of convergence post-marriage but is evident in mate selection. This is demographically significant because assortative mating influences household composition, intergenerational socialization, fertility environments, and the transmission of political and social identities. If political similarity becomes a strong selection criterion in partnership markets, partisanship can affect family formation even in the absence of an electoral shock. Huber and Malhotra (2017) reinforce this argument (again for the United States) by examining online dating behavior, where potential partners are observed prior to relationship formation. Their findings indicate that political similarity influences romantic interest and social connection, integrating partisanship into the matching function of intimate life. The demographic effect, though indirect, is substantial: political homophily can decrease cross-partisan household formation, increase social segregation, and render partisan identities more enduring through family and friendship networks. González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026) connect partnership sorting to event response by demonstrating that the 2004 Spanish election influenced shotgun marriages and, to a lesser extent, total marriages. This links partisan shock to actual union formation, not merely partner preferences. Collectively, the partnership studies suggest that partisanship functions both as a persistent matching criterion and as an event-triggered force that can alter marriage timing when future expectations or unintended pregnancies are involved.

Spatial sorting serves as the residential counterpart to political homogamy. Bernstein et al. (2022) investigate for the United States whether climate-change partisanship is reflected in residential decisions and find that partisan beliefs correlate with sorting based on climate risk. Houses exposed to sea level rise are increasingly more likely to be owned by Republicans and less likely to be owned by Democrats. Migration is a key demographic behavior, and residential choice alters population composition across locations. However, it is also a boundary case as the mechanism involves the interaction between political beliefs, risk assessment, and location choice, rather than merely electoral outcomes.

The evidence from partnership and spatial sorting illustrates why partisan demographics should not be reduced to elections. While elections are useful for identification due to their timing, surprise, and alignment, partisan climates also operate continuously through dating markets, residential markets, neighborhood preferences, and perceived risk. A comprehensive theory must therefore encompass both event responses and gradual partisan sorting.

Health behavioral responses, wellbeing and mortality

Health behavioral responses are part of demographic responses due to their direct implications on population dynamics, as they influence exposure to illness, disease spread, psychological

wellbeing, and mortality. However, this inclusion is restricted to studies that examine behavior, wellbeing, or demographic health outcomes, while excluding those that merely document partisan disagreements over health-policy opinions.

The study by Allcott et al. (2020) integrates mobile-location data for the United States, survey evidence, and a heterogeneous pandemic response. A key finding for partisan demographics is that Republican-leaning areas exhibited less social distancing compared to Democratic-leaning areas during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the potential mortality implications of such behavior. This study demonstrates how partisanship can influence risk behavior prior to the full realization of demographic consequences.

In a similar study, Barrios and Hochberg (2021) use population-level Google Health Trends search data and geospatial mapping data to explore how politics shapes perceptions of risk and behavioral responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings reveal that counties with a higher share of Trump votes exhibited lower perceptions of COVID-19 risk, as reflected in lower search intensity for information about the virus and its potential economic consequences, and were initially slower to alter their behavior in response to the pandemic. These differences remained significant after controlling for COVID-19 cases and deaths, population size and density, income per capita, and other local characteristics. In particular, a higher Trump vote share was associated with smaller decreases in daily travel distances and visits to non-essential businesses, indicating less behavioral adjustment in response to rising local COVID-19 risk. The differences diminished, and partly reversed, once the pandemic became more salient among prominent Republican political actors and the White House issued federal social-distancing guidelines.

Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky (2021) provide for the United States individual-level evidence indicating that partisanship influenced health behavior and policy attitudes during the early pandemic. Their contribution shows that partisan identity itself can structure risk perception, compliance, and protective action. However, because the study relies on self-reported behavior rather than directly observed actions, its findings are best understood as evidence of a potential behavioral pathway rather than direct evidence of demographic change. The relevant implication is not the attitude difference alone, but the behavioral pathway through which political identity may influence infection risk, family contact, mobility, and eventually population health.

Gollwitzer et al. (2020) establish for the United States a link between partisan differences in physical distancing and subsequent health outcomes. This connection enhances the demographic relevance by associating partisan behavior with health consequences, while also highlighting the limitations of ecological designs where county vote shares serve as proxies for individual partisan identity. Consequently, this paper should be regarded as evidence that partisan health behavior can have demographic implications, rather than as proof that every individual health outcome is attributable to individual partisanship.

Wellbeing constitutes a health-related demographic response, particularly when shifts in political control influence subjective happiness or psychological security along partisan lines. In an early contribution, Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005) assume social happiness functions for left-wing and right-wing individuals to test the root assumption of partisan business cycle models. They demonstrate for OECD countries that individuals report increased happiness when their preferred political party is in power, even after controlling for macroeconomic

conditions. This is relevant because wellbeing shapes health, partnership, fertility intentions, migration satisfaction and the perceived costs of political exclusion.

Millimet and Whitacre (2025) contribute to understanding mortality for the United States, yet conceptually diverge from the event-response studies reviewed so far. It investigates partisan mortality cycles using county-level panel data and the political ideology of federal and state officeholders, thereby exploring whether partisan political regimes correlate with mortality differences. This study is relevant to the chapter as mortality is a primary demographic outcome. However, it should be understood as regime-based evidence rather than direct evidence of individuals modifying mortality-related behavior based on their partisan opinions. Complementing the county-level evidence, Wallace et al. (2023) examine the association between individual partisan affiliation and excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic by linking voter registration records to mortality data in Florida and Ohio. The authors find that excess death rates among registered Republican voters were 2.8 percentage points (15%) higher than among registered Democratic voters between March 2020 and December 2021. The partisan mortality gap widened substantially after COVID-19 vaccines became widely available, reaching 7.7 percentage points (43%) after April 2021, with larger differences in counties with lower vaccination rates.

The evidence concerning health and mortality thus establishes an important distinction. Health behavior and wellbeing fit the definition through behavioral or psychological responses with demographic implications. The mortality evidence operates at two levels: Millimet and Whitacre (2025) identify associations between partisan political regimes and population mortality, whereas Wallace, Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Schwartz (2023) link individual partisan affiliation directly to mortality outcomes. The latter therefore provides particularly direct evidence of partisan differences in a fundamental demographic outcome.

Migration, integration and naturalization

While the evidence on migration, integration, and naturalization remains less developed than that on fertility or health behavior, several studies now provide direct or closely related evidence of partisan demographic responses. Partisan identity and political events may influence decisions to relocate, remain, or choose particular residential environments. Bernstein et al. (2022) illustrate this by linking partisan beliefs about climate risk to residential sorting in the choice of houses exposed to expected sea-level rise. McCartney et al. (2024) examine how political polarization affects homeowners' decisions to sell their properties. Using property transaction records linked to voter registration data, they find that homeowners are more likely to sell their homes following the arrival of nearby neighbors affiliated with an opposing political party than following the arrival of politically unaffiliated or same-party neighbours. McCartney et al. (2024) provide particularly direct evidence because both partisan affiliation and an observed residential response are measured at the household level.

Further evidence from Auer and Tetlow (2023) shows that international migration and naturalization may also respond to major political events. Examining the 2016 Brexit referendum, they estimate that UK-to-EU migration increased by approximately 16% relative to intra-EU migration after the referendum. They also document a sharp rise in naturalization among British citizens residing in EU/EFTA countries: naturalizations increased by more than 800%, and the UK share of naturalizations relative to other non-British naturalizations rose from about 0.5% to 4%. Their qualitative findings suggest that uncertainty about future

economic and political conditions, concerns about residency rights, and changing social conditions contributed to these demographic responses.

In contrast, the broader literature on geographic political sorting offers context rather than direct evidence of demographic response. Discussions on naturalization and integration should be approached with caution. Although political climates and party control may impact the perceived value of citizenship, institutional access, and the willingness to naturalize, it is crucial to avoid interpreting every study of naturalization policy as evidence of partisan demographic response unless it explicitly identifies partisan conditionality in behavior.

This focused treatment is necessary to prevent the chapter from becoming a general review of migration policies. While restrictive immigration policies may influence migration flows and inclusive citizenship regimes may affect naturalization, these are policy-demography relationships unless the demographic response varies by political identity, partisan environment, or alignment. Future research should investigate whether immigrants respond differently to political events based on their political preferences, perceived alignment with governing parties, or the partisan climate of their residence.

Empirical credibility: when evidence is persuasive

The empirical challenge is rooted in the pre-existing differences between partisans prior to political events. Republican and Democratic regions exhibit variations in race, religion, education, income, population density, age distribution, family norms, immigration exposure, housing costs, health conditions and local institutions, to list a few factors. Without explicitly addressing these differences, partisan exposure may merely serve as a proxy for demographic composition rather than accurately identifying a partisan response. Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006) show a strong association between family formation, fertility patterns, and Republican voting across U.S. states. They find that states with greater support for George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections tended to have higher fertility, stronger religious conservatism, and lower levels of marriage and childbearing postponement. This relationship remained substantial even after accounting for income, education, urbanization, ethnicity, and religion, although the study does not claim this proves direct causation.

An optimal research design involves an unforeseen political shock as the first requirement. For instance, Dahl, Lu, and Mullins (2022) utilize the unexpected outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, while González, Guirola and Zapater (2026) examine the unanticipated change in the Spanish government in 2004. Both studies leverage timing to differentiate between post-event responses and pre-event differences. The element of surprise is crucial, as anticipated elections may already influence the measured demographic change.

The second requirement for credibility is temporality, since demographic outcomes adjust at varying speeds. Changes in abortions and health behaviors can occur within days or weeks, conceptions may adjust within a month, births reveal conception decisions only after a gestational period, marriage may reflect both immediate and planned decisions, and migration or naturalization typically progresses more slowly. A convincing study must align the timing of the political event with the feasible timing of the demographic response, rather than assuming all outcomes react uniformly.

The third requirement is mechanism discipline. An observed change in fertility following an election may reflect economic expectations, policy anticipation, identity threat, health risk, migration, or compositional changes. Strong evidence, therefore, combines outcome data with measures of expectations, trust, subgroup patterns, placebo tests, and institutional knowledge regarding policy timing. González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026) are particularly informative in this regard, as they document changes in economic expectations and trust, while also arguing that the timing of abortions is difficult to attribute solely to mood effects.

While electoral outcomes can generate substantial immediate emotional reactions, these effects may be short-lived. Pierce et al. (2016), examining the 2012 U.S. presidential election, find that Republican supporters experienced a significant decline in day-to-day happiness after their party's defeat, whereas Democratic supporters experienced relatively little change after their party's victory. However, the negative effect on happiness dissipated within approximately one week, highlighting the importance of distinguishing short-term emotional responses to electoral outcomes from more persistent behavioral and demographic adjustments.

The fourth requirement is boundary discipline. Studies examining party control and mortality are significant, but they should not be interpreted as individual partisan responses unless they observe behavior or outcomes by individual or local partisan alignment. Conversely, studies of political attitudes are not demographic evidence unless they connect to behavior. The field will remain analytically useful only if it distinguishes principal studies of partisan demographic response from broader studies of political determinants of demography.

Partisan Demographics: Review in two tables

The following tables summarize the fifteen studies that constitute the core evidentiary foundation of the chapter. Table 1 indicates that the literature on partisan demographics remains limited and empirically concentrated, particularly on the two-party system in the United States. Most comparative evidence comes from Spain, the United Kingdom, and other OECD countries. The field is structured around several demographic dimensions: fertility and reproductive behavior, partnership and mate selection, residential sorting and migration, health behavior, wellbeing, and mortality. The strongest direct evidence comes from studies that combine a clear partisan alignment or political shock with an observed demographic response, while the expanded evidence base also strengthens previously thinner areas through individual-level studies of fertility, residential mobility, and mortality.

The most direct studies on reproductive responses are Dahl et al. (2022), which examine U.S. partisan fertility following the 2016 election, González et al. (2026), which investigate abortions, conceptions, and marriages after the unexpected 2004 Spanish government change, and Baszczak and Weychert (2026), which relate individual political alignment to first conceptions in the United Kingdom. McCartney et al. (2024) strengthen the evidence on residential mobility by linking household partisan affiliation to observed home-selling behavior, while Wallace et al. (2023) provide individual-level evidence connecting partisan affiliation to mortality. The tables deliberately exclude important background contributions on partisanship and affective polarization, such as Gidron et al. (2020), because these studies help explain why partisan responses may arise but do not themselves examine demographic behavior.

Table 2 explains why these studies belong together despite their different outcomes. The mechanisms differ: expectations and electoral outcomes are predominant in the fertility and abortion studies; political homophily and sorting are central to the partnership and residential-location studies; risk perception and trust are pivotal in the COVID-related health-behavior studies; and mortality evidence operates through both partisan political regimes and individual partisan affiliation. This separates the mechanisms from the outcomes and prevents the analysis from treating all "politics and demography" evidence as equivalent.

Table 1.

Partisan Demographics studies with country/region, demographic domain and partisan exposure

Study and country/region of data	Domain	Political or partisan condition	Main estimated effect	Demographic response	Role in chapter
Dahl, Lu, and Mullins (2022) United States	Fertility	Surprise 2016 U.S. presidential election; county and group partisan alignment	Fertility rose relatively more in Republican-leaning counties after Trump's election, by 1.2–2.2% of the national fertility rate.	Births and fertility by partisan geography and group	Foundational event-shock study of fertility response to partisan turnover.
González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026) Spain	Abortions, conceptions, births, marriage	Unexpected 2004 Spanish government change; municipal support for losing party	Abortion rates rose by 0.05 and conceptions fell by 0.14 per 1,000 women in municipalities strongly supporting the losing party.	Registered abortions, conceptions, shotgun marriages, and marriages	Central reproductive-behavior study; separates conceptions from abortions and links responses to expectations.
Baszczak and Weychert (2026) United Kingdom	Fertility	Individual preferred party in government	The monthly hazard of first conception was 24% higher when women's preferred party was in government.	First conception and conception timing	Individual-level extension linking partisan alignment with government to fertility; observational evidence.
Rackin et al. (2025) United States (Florida)	Fertility	COVID-19 pandemic in a polarized political environment	Fertility declined less in Republican-leaning Florida counties during the early pandemic; Trump-majority counties had 0.82 more births per 1,000 women than other counties.	Fertility change by partisan geography	Closest fertility extension beyond election shocks; combines pandemic disruption and partisan context.
Alford et al. (2011) United States	Partnership	Political similarity as a mate-selection trait	Spouses are politically and socially similar mainly through assortative mating rather than convergence during marriage.	Spousal political similarity	Shows that partisanship structures mate choice and household formation.
Huber and Malhotra (2017) United States	Partnership and dating	Political homophily in online dating	Sharing the same ideology increased contact likelihood by 0.014 on a 0–1 scale; political disinterest had weaker, statistically uncertain effects.	Romantic interest and relationship formation	Direct evidence that political similarity affects partner selection before union formation.
Bernstein et al. (2022) United States	Residential sorting and migration	Partisan beliefs about climate-change risk	Sea-level-rise-exposed properties show a partisan ownership gap exceeding 5 percentage points toward Republican residents.	Residential sorting by climate risk	Connects partisan beliefs to location choice, a demographic sorting behavior.
McCartney, Orellana-Li, and Zhang (2024) United States	Residential mobility	Arrival of a nearby opposite-party neighbor	A nearby opposite-party neighbor increased the two-year home-sale probability by 0.314 percentage points (4.0%).	Home sale and residential mobility	Direct household-level evidence that partisan dissimilarity affects residential mobility.
Allcott et al. (2020) United States	Health behavior	COVID-19 polarization and partisan geography	Higher Republican vote shares were associated with less distancing and 11.5–15.2% more point-of-interest visits at the pandemic peak.	Social distancing behavior	Shows partisan differences in protective behavior with population-health implications.
Barrios and Hochberg (2021) United States	Health behavior	County Trump vote share during the COVID-19 pandemic	Responses to rising COVID-19 cases were weaker in high-Trump-vote counties: reductions in daily travel were about 50% smaller and in non-essential visits about 40% smaller.	COVID-19 information search, daily travel distance, and visits to non-essential businesses	Links partisan risk perception and information acquisition to observable health-related mobility behavior.

Study and country/region of data	Domain	Political or partisan condition	Main estimated effect	Demographic response	Role in chapter
Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky (2021) United States	Health behavior	Partisanship during early COVID-19	Across 38 health-related outcomes, LASSO analyses identify partisanship as more predictive than demographic factors.	Protective health behavior and policy attitudes	Provides individual-level evidence that partisan identity structures health behavior.
Gollwitzer et al. (2020) United States	Health behavior and outcomes	County partisanship during COVID-19	Trump-leaning counties showed a 24% drop in movement and non-essential visits versus 38% in Clinton-leaning counties—a 14 percentage-point gap.	Physical distancing and health outcomes	Links partisan behavioral differences to health consequences.
Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005) OECD countries	Wellbeing	Preferred party in power	Life satisfaction was higher when respondents' preferred party was in power, controlling for unemployment and inflation.	Subjective happiness	Shows a health-related wellbeing response to partisan control.
Millimet and Whitacre (2025) United States	Mortality	Partisan political regimes at federal and state levels	A one-standard-deviation increase in liberalism was associated with 1–2 fewer all-cause and 0.8–1.0 fewer short-term deaths per 100,000 annually.	County mortality	Central mortality study, but closer to regime effects than to individual partisan response.
Wallace, Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Schwartz (2023) United States (Florida and Ohio)	Mortality	Registered party affiliation during COVID-19; vaccine availability	Republican voters' excess death rates were 2.8 percentage points (15%) higher overall and 7.7 points (43%) higher after April 2021.	Excess mortality	Strong individual-level mortality evidence linking voter registration directly to death records.

Table 2.

Mechanisms, credibility, and scope conditions in the main studies

Study	Main mechanism	Empirical strength	Main limitation or scope condition
Dahl, Lu, and Mullins (2022)	Expectations and partisan victory or defeat after a surprise election	Strong event timing; demographic outcome is realized births	County-level partisan exposure; mechanisms are partly indirect.
González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026)	Economic expectations, trust, policy anticipation, and rejection of a pure mood interpretation	High-frequency administrative data; abortions and conceptions separately observed	Municipality-level partisan exposure; terrorist-attack context cannot be fully separated.
Baszczak and Weychert (2026)	Partisan alignment with governing party and fertility expectations	Individual-level longitudinal panel links political preferences to first-conception timing	Observational association; conception dates are reconstructed and political preferences extrapolated between survey waves.
Rackin et al. (2025)	Pandemic disruption interacting with partisan political context	Fertility outcome observed in a polarized health and policy environment	Mechanisms are bundled because pandemic, economic, health, and policy shocks coincide.
Alford et al. (2011)	Political assortative mating	Shows political similarity as part of mate choice	Not an event-response design and not a short-run demographic shock.
Huber and Malhotra (2017)	Political homophily in partner selection	Observes pre-relationship dating preferences and behavior	Dating behavior is an upstream margin, not completed marriage or fertility.
Bernstein et al. (2022)	Partisan risk perception and residential sorting	Connects beliefs to location choice and climate-risk exposure	Sorting can reflect correlated income, information, amenities, and housing-market constraints.
McCartney, Orellana-Li, and Zhang (2024)	Affective polarization, partisan animosity, and residential mobility	Links voter registration to deeds records and observes home sales after opposite-party neighbor arrivals	Not an electoral-shock design; scope is U.S. homeowners and local neighbor exposure.
Allcott et al. (2020)	Partisan risk perception and protective behavior	Combines mobility and survey evidence during a salient health shock	Place-level partisanship can proxy other local differences.
Barrios and Hochberg (2021)	Partisan risk perception, information acquisition, and political cues	Combines high-frequency Google search data with observed mobility behavior and local pandemic exposure	Partisanship is measured geographically through Trump vote share; pandemic conditions bundle health, economic, and political shocks.
Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky (2021)	Partisan identity shaping health-risk behavior	Individual-level evidence on behavior and policy attitudes	Relies on self-reported behavior; strongest for early pandemic response and may not generalize.
Gollwitzer et al. (2020)	Partisan distancing behavior linked to health outcomes	Connects behavior with subsequent health consequences	County-level inference limits individual-level interpretation.

Study	Main mechanism	Empirical strength	Main limitation or scope condition
Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005)	Partisan alignment with governing party and subjective wellbeing	Large comparative happiness framework with political alignment	Wellbeing is health-related but not a demographic event in the narrow fertility-mortality-migration sense.
Millimet and Whitacre (2025)	Partisan regimes, policy environments, and mortality	Mortality is a fundamental demographic outcome; long panel structure	Closer to party-control regime effects than to individual response by own partisan identity.
Wallace, Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Schwartz (2023)	Partisan affiliation, pandemic health behavior, and vaccine availability	Individual voter registration is linked directly to mortality records; timing identifies widening after vaccine availability	Observational evidence from Florida and Ohio; specific behavioral mechanisms are not directly identified.

Both tables also show the evidentiary hierarchy maintained in the chapter: The strongest studies under the strict definition of partisan demographics combine a clear partisan shock, alignment, or exposure with an observed demographic response, including fertility, conceptions, abortions, marriage, residential mobility, health behavior, and mortality. Other studies require more cautious interpretation: dating behavior precedes marriage and fertility, wellbeing is health-related but not a demographic event in the narrow sense, and some mortality evidence reflects partisan regime effects rather than individual responses. Wallace et al. (2023), however, strengthen the mortality evidence by linking individual partisan affiliation directly to individual mortality. This structure enables readers to discern both the potential and the limitations of the field: partisan demographics is not yet an established literature but rather a coherent research frontier.

Discussion: The case for research and society

The scientific argument for partisan demographics is that political conditions are not only institutional or attitudinal variables; in polarized societies, they can become demographic determinants. The policy argument follows from timing. If demographic behavior responds to anticipated policy regimes, then pre-policy periods are not neutral. Electoral campaigns, electoral surprises, court decisions, partisan public-health messages, and changes in institutional trust may influence reproductive behavior, marriage, health behavior, wellbeing, and migration before formal policy change is observed. Policy evaluation that starts only after implementation may therefore overlook anticipatory demographic responses.

The social argument is that polarization reaches into household formation and population health. Political homogamy, residential sorting, and partisan health behavior suggest that partisan identity organizes private life, social networks, and physical risk environments. If political identity structures intimate association, neighborhood selection, and compliance with health-protective behavior, then demographic change may reinforce political segregation, making polarization more durable across households and places.

The democratic argument is reciprocal but should be analytically distinct. Demographic changes influence partisan coalitions and representation, as political demography has long contended. Partisan conditions may also impact demographic behavior, as this chapter contends. While the two directions can create feedback loops, conflating them would dilute the concept.

The research agenda should be selective. Further research is necessary beyond the United States and Western Europe, where party systems, fertility regimes, health systems, migration institutions, and citizenship rules differ significantly. More individual-level linked data are

required, building on studies such as Wallace et al. (2023) and McCartney et al. (2024), as local partisan exposure provides informative but incomplete insights. Greater focus should be placed on couples and households, given that many demographic decisions are joint decisions. Finally, studies should differentiate between political shocks, policy anticipation, health behavior, and social sorting, rather than employing partisanship as a generic label for all political contexts.

Summary

Partisan demographics is a specialized area within the broader disciplines of political demography and political economy. It does not investigate whether demographic groups exhibit different voting patterns, nor does it encompass all political determinants of fertility, migration, health, or mortality. Instead, it examines whether demographic behaviors are influenced by political events, party control, political climates, or policy regimes in ways that systematically correlate with the partisan opinions, identities, voting choices, ideological positions, or partisan environments of individuals, households, couples, or local populations.

The most compelling evidence currently pertains to fertility and reproductive behavior. Dahl, Lu, and Mullins (2022) demonstrate that an unexpected U.S. presidential election influenced fertility patterns along partisan lines. Similarly, González, Guirola, and Zapater (2026) reveal that an unforeseen change in the Spanish government impacted abortions, conceptions, and shotgun marriages in municipalities aligned with the ousted party. The field extends beyond reproductive decisions to social matching through partnership and spatial sorting, while health behavioral responses, wellbeing, and mortality indicate that partisan identity and regimes can significantly affect population health in both behavioral and demographic contexts. In addition, research on migration, integration, and naturalization remains comparatively limited, highlighting important opportunities for future research.

The field is still in its infancy, and its evidentiary base remains selective until more studies meet the rigorous criteria of demographic outcomes, partisan conditionality, credible timing, and mechanism discipline. Its potential lies in demonstrating that in polarized societies, politics not only reflects demographic composition but also influences the private and population-level decisions that drive demographic change.

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