

Partisan Identity Impedes Labor Market Transition

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A bright pink short-sleeved t-shirt is displayed against a white background. The t-shirt has a crew neck and a straight hem. Centered on the chest is a black text graphic.

The binding constraint
on resolving many
global challenges
is labor market
transition

A bright pink short-sleeved t-shirt is shown from the back, laid flat against a white background. The text "but labor transition is very hard" is printed in black, centered on the upper back of the shirt.

but labor transition
is very hard

Question

Jobseekers often reject labor market opportunities in **growth sectors**.

Why might this be?

Known Challenges of Labor Transition

- Declining **geographic mobility** (Kaplan, G., Schulhofer-Wohl 2017)
- Growing **skills mismatch** (Ansell and Gingrich 2017)
- Under-provision of **labor adjustment programs** (Kim and Pelc 2021)
- Doubts over governments' **commitment** (Gazmararian and Tingley 2024)



Our focus:

Cultural / Identity Barriers

On transition from coal jobs to green energy jobs:

“in coal country, such efforts to establish solar have not been an easy sell, not least because of the **cultural association of renewable energy with urban, elite liberalism**” (Whittington and Oguz 2024)

“Many people are deeply skeptical” (ibid)

(May be changing thanks for places like... **Texas**?)

CLIMATE CHANGE STORIES

Mining the Sun: Clean Energy on Mines and Brownfields



Partisan Identity as Entry Barrier

- (i) Affective Polarization :
People less willing to **hire, work for, do business with, buy goods from, or date** out-partisans
(Iyengar et al 2012, McConnell et al. 2018).
 - (ii) Partisan Heuristics:
people increasingly perceive non-political items (**coffee, sports, baby names**) through a partisan lens (Oliver & Bass 2016, Hiaeshutter et al. 2021)
- We see partisanship as an **increasingly efficient heuristic** tracking a range of individual traits.

Empirical Questions

- **1. Perceptions:** do people associate jobs with partisan identities?
- **2. Effects:** do these associations make workers more/less willing to shift to occupations?
- **3. Malleability:** Can elite cues affect partisan heuristics?

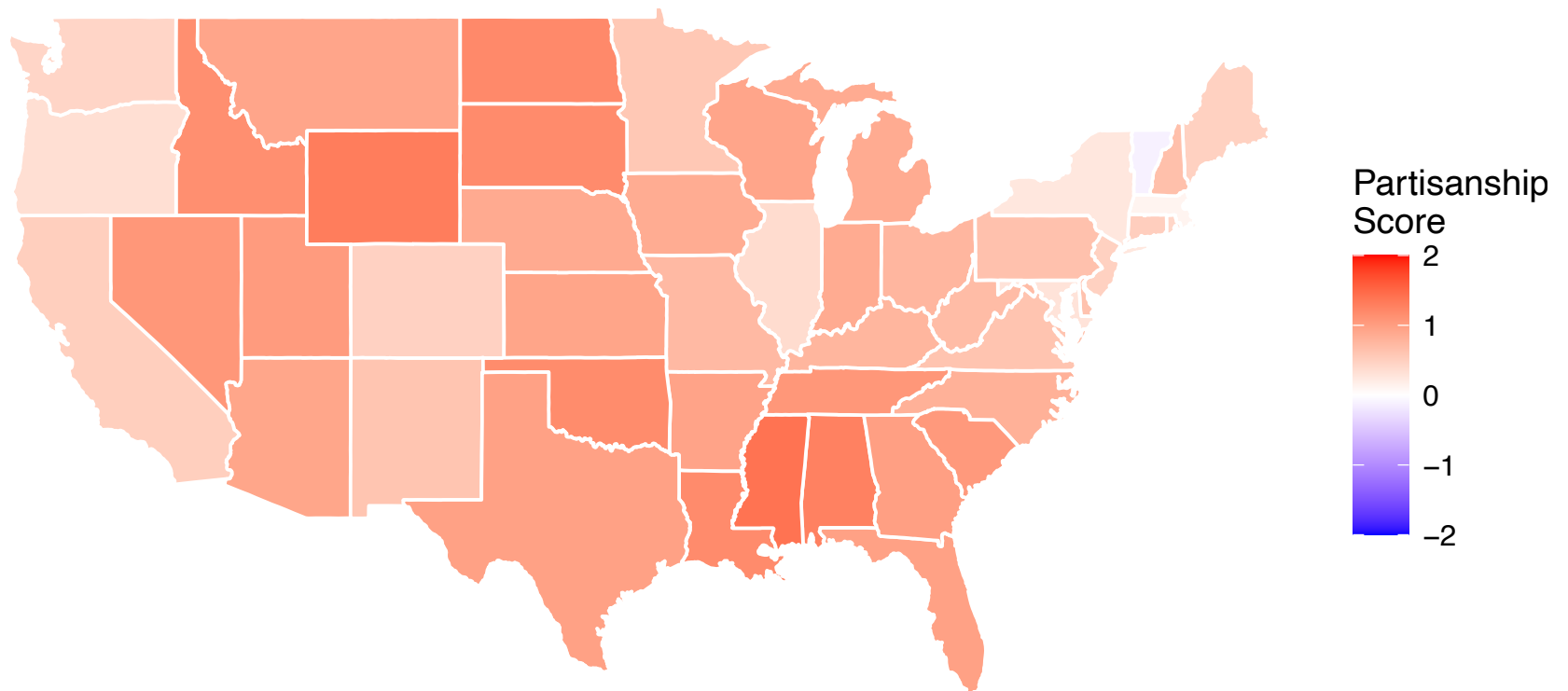
Measuring Occupational Partisanship

- DIME dataset maps FEC donors and recipients to obtain L-R **ideal points** for each.
- We rely on over **14.9 million unique political donors** reported in 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections.
- We match these individuals to standard O*NET occupations: human coding (37%) and automated using NIOSH (63%).
- Result: an **occupational partisanship** measure.

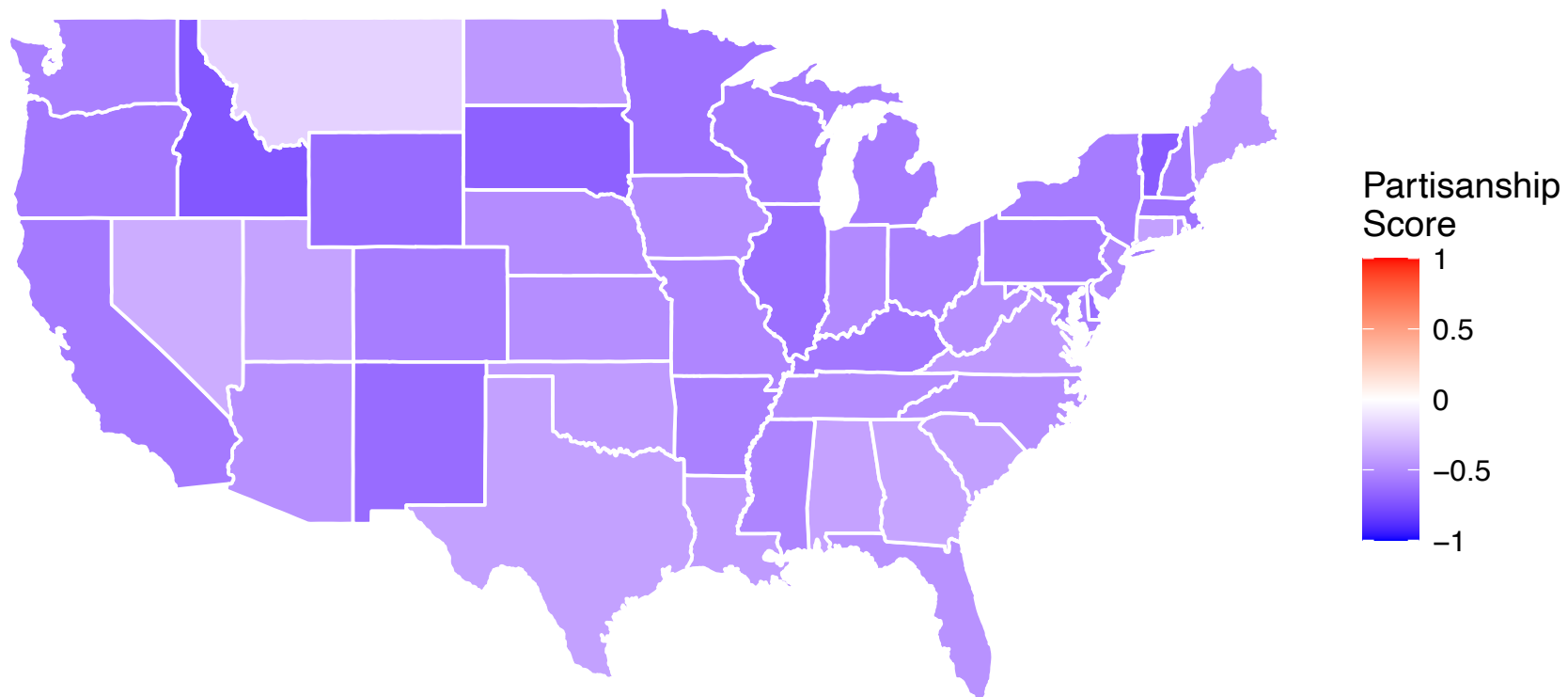
Stylized facts from our occupational partisanship measure

- **ALL majority female jobs** lean “Democratic”.
- Occupational partisanship appears highly **consistent across geographic regions**.
- Economic prospects are not evenly distributed across occupations: all 20 “fastest growing occupations” (BLS) are “Democratic” (even once we scale partisanship around a mean of zero)

US State-Level Partisanship Map for Construction Managers



US State-Level Partisanship Map for Library Assistants

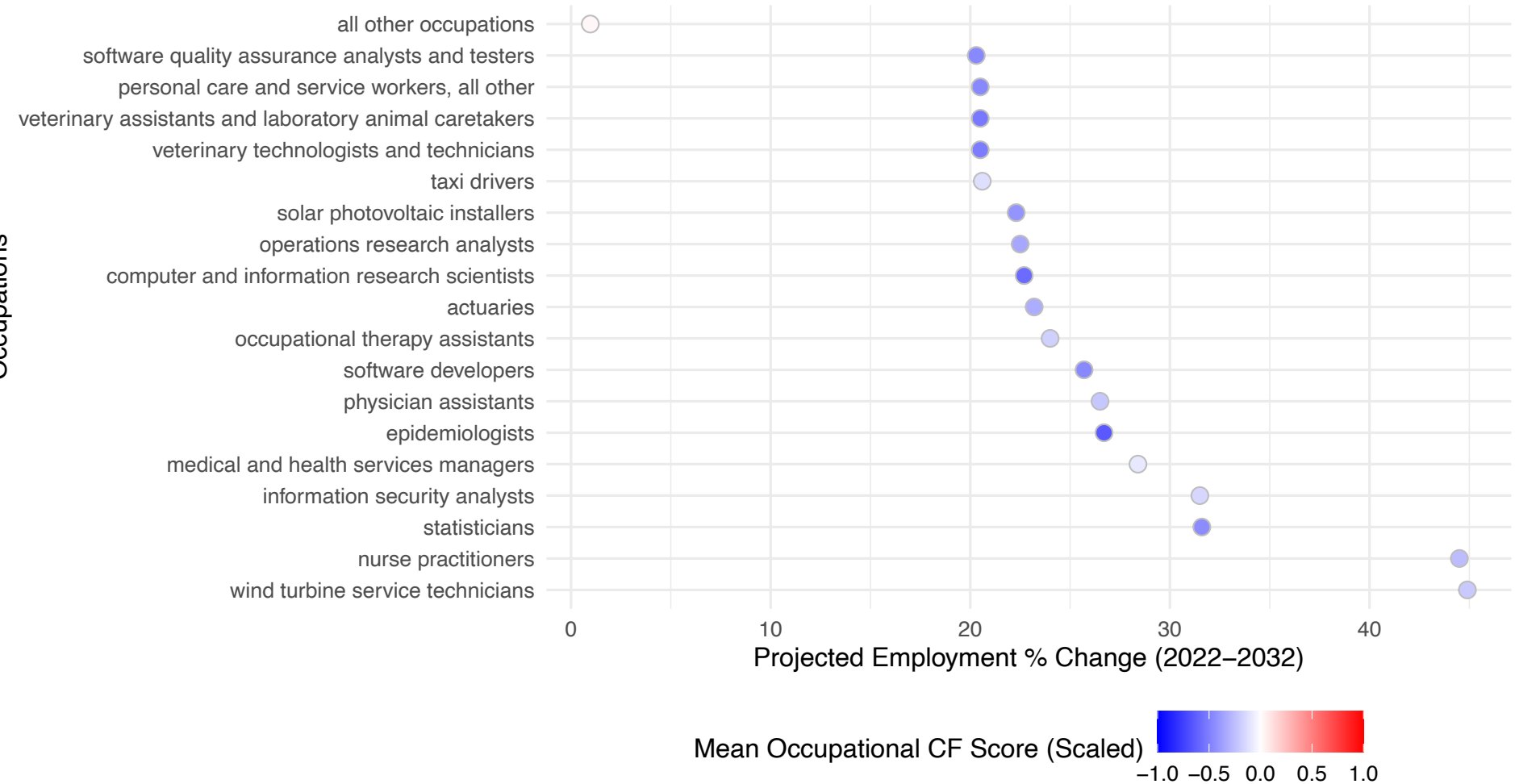


In fact, **occupation** (O*NET) seems more predictive of partisanship than **geography** (county)

Stylized facts using an occupational partisanship measure

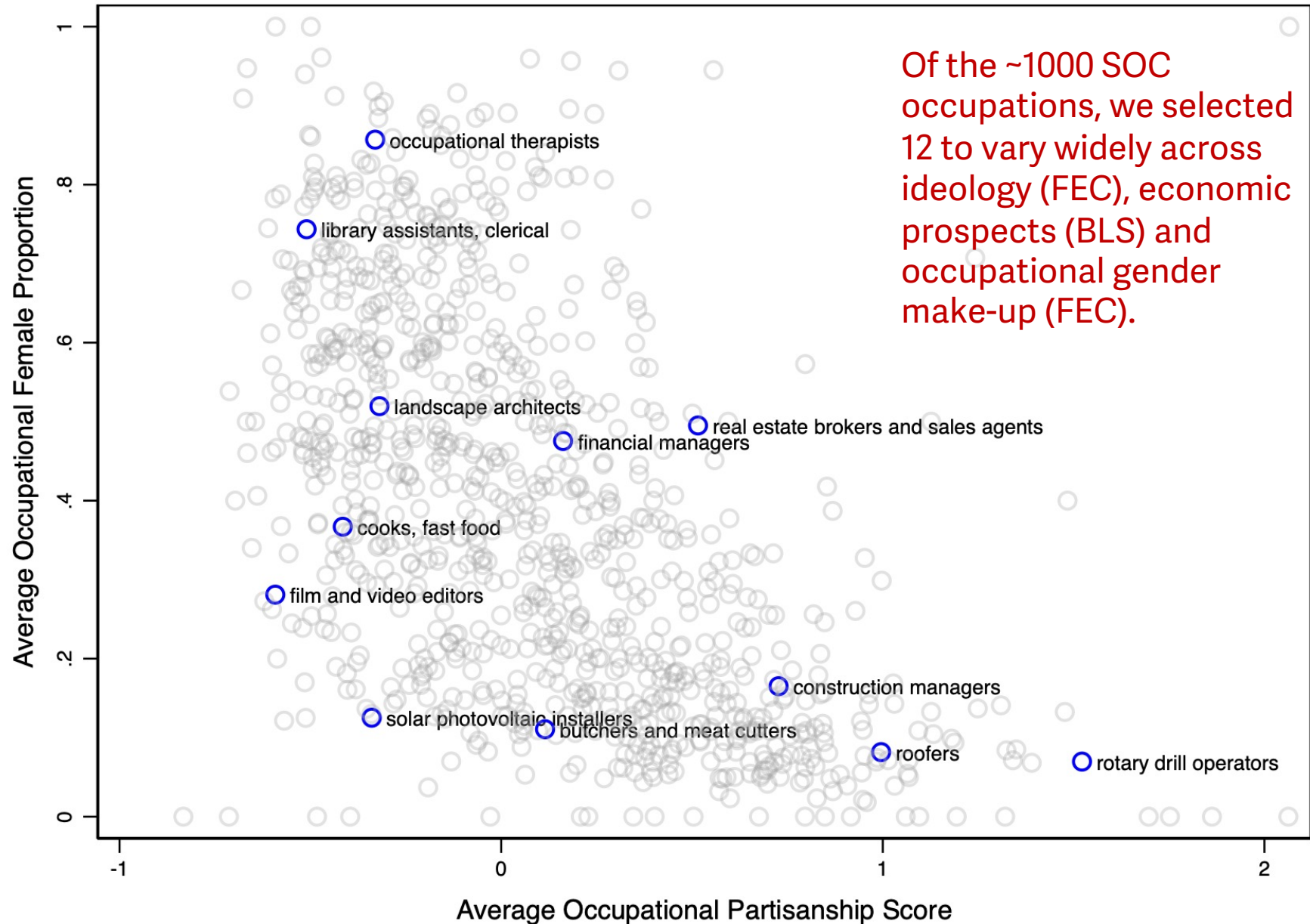
- More “Democratic” jobs lean heavily female.
- Occupational partisanship appears remarkably consistent across geographic regions.
- Economic prospects are not evenly distributed across occupations: **all 20 “fastest growing occupations”** (as per the BLS) **are “Democratic”**.

The Jobs of the Future Code Left-of-center



Survey Experiment

- US survey (n = 3,199), quota sampled by party identity, June, 2023:
40% Democrats, 40% Republicans, and 20% Independents (based on ANES)
- Each respondent randomly assigned to one of 12 selected occupations.



Perceptions of Occupational Partisanship

“Imagine 100 people who work as [roofers].
Please estimate how many among them are:
Democrats / Republicans / Independent /
Other.”

We use this to measure how “Republican” each
occupation codes as.

We ask the same about **gender, race, class,
education, and urban/rural.**

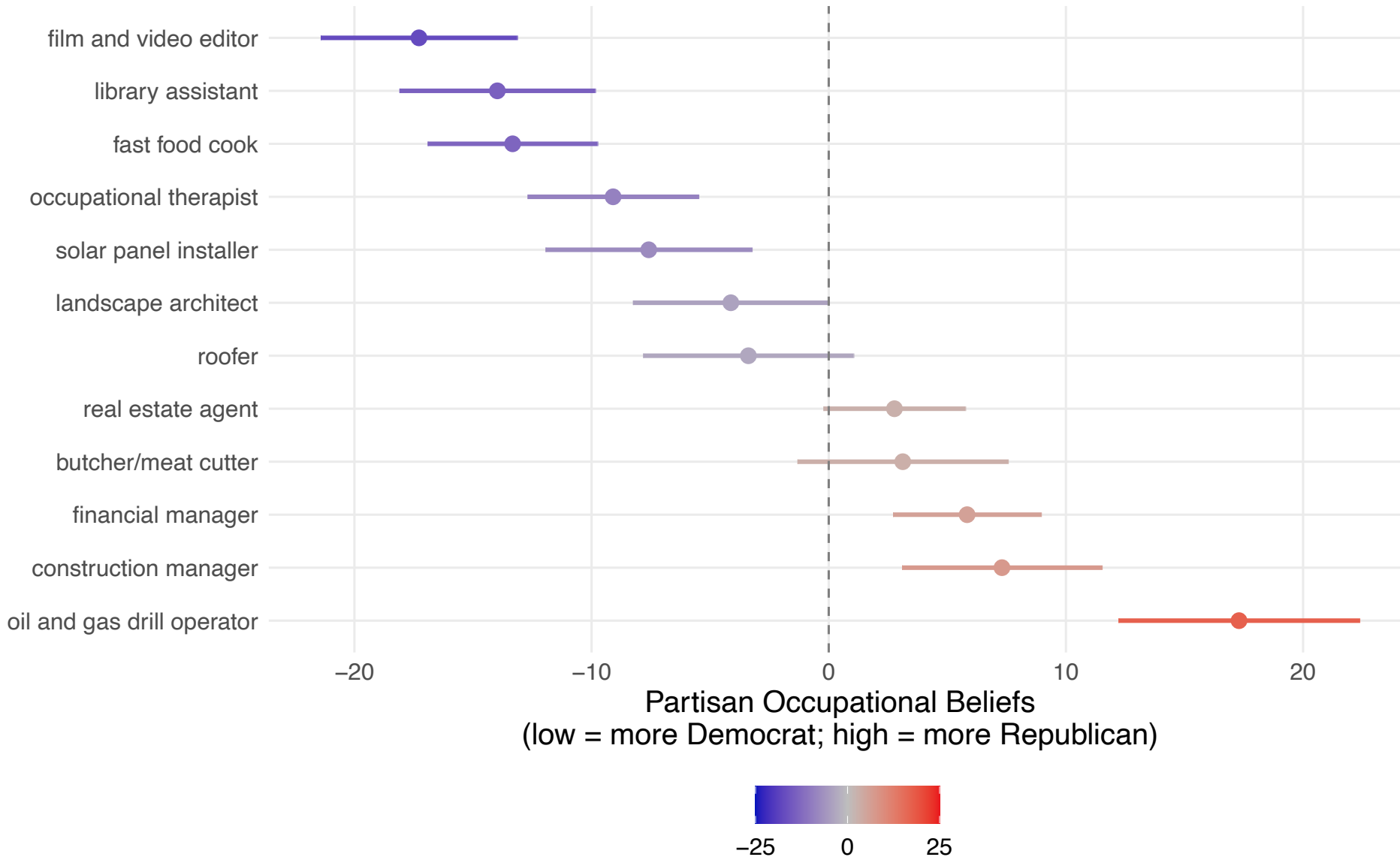
Willingness to Retrain

“Consider a program to increase the number of [roofers] in your community. As part of this program, residents can apply for free training in the sector. The training program provides a monthly stipend for the cost of living. If you were picking a new career, how likely or unlikely would you be to consider this training program?”

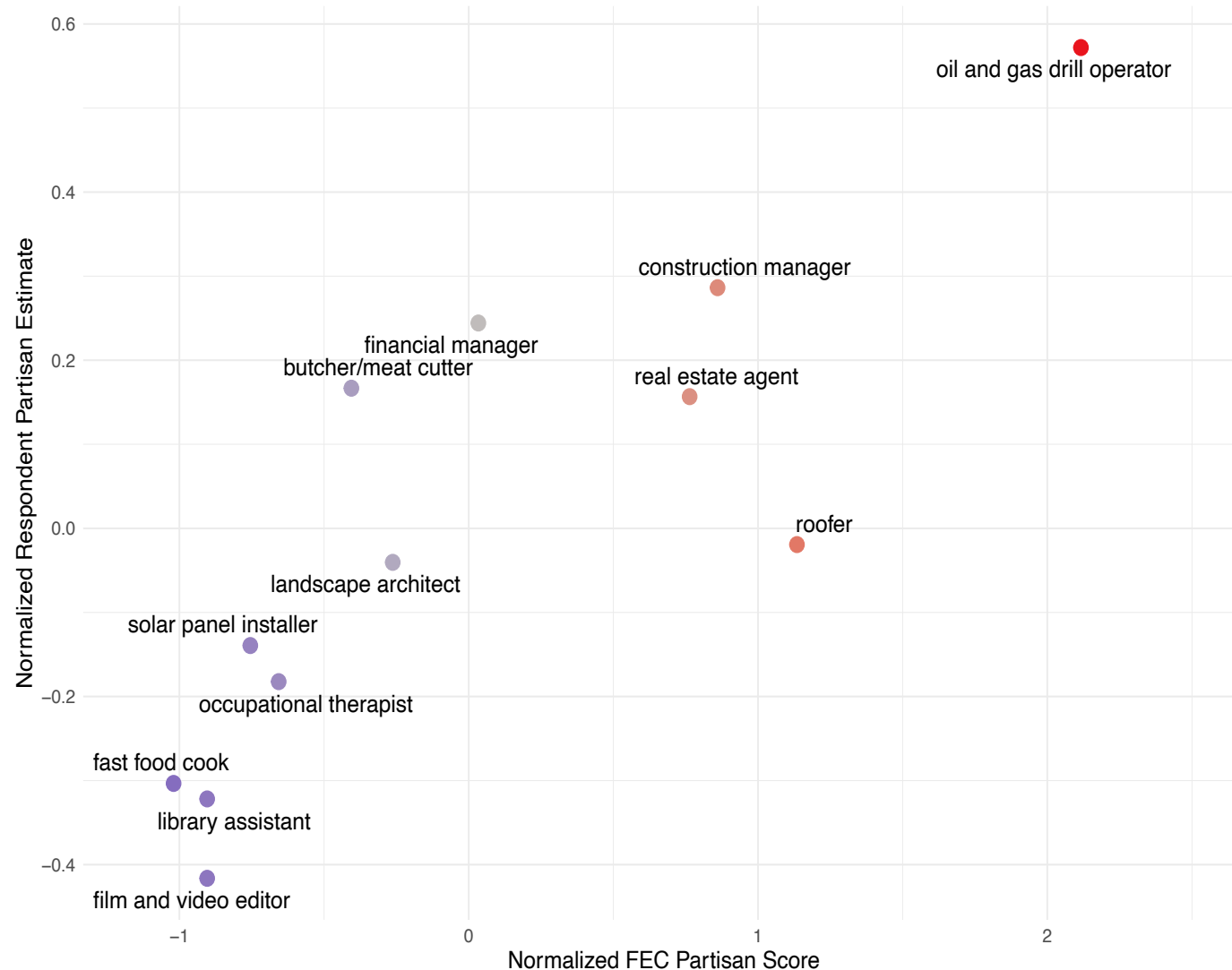
Partisan Elite Cue

Everyone who completes this training program will be offered full-time work as a [roofer] in your community. Your local [Democrat / Republican] representative has called the program 'a great jobs initiative, with proven results,' adding that 'our community needs more [roofers]. This is what the [Democratic / Republican] Party will deliver.

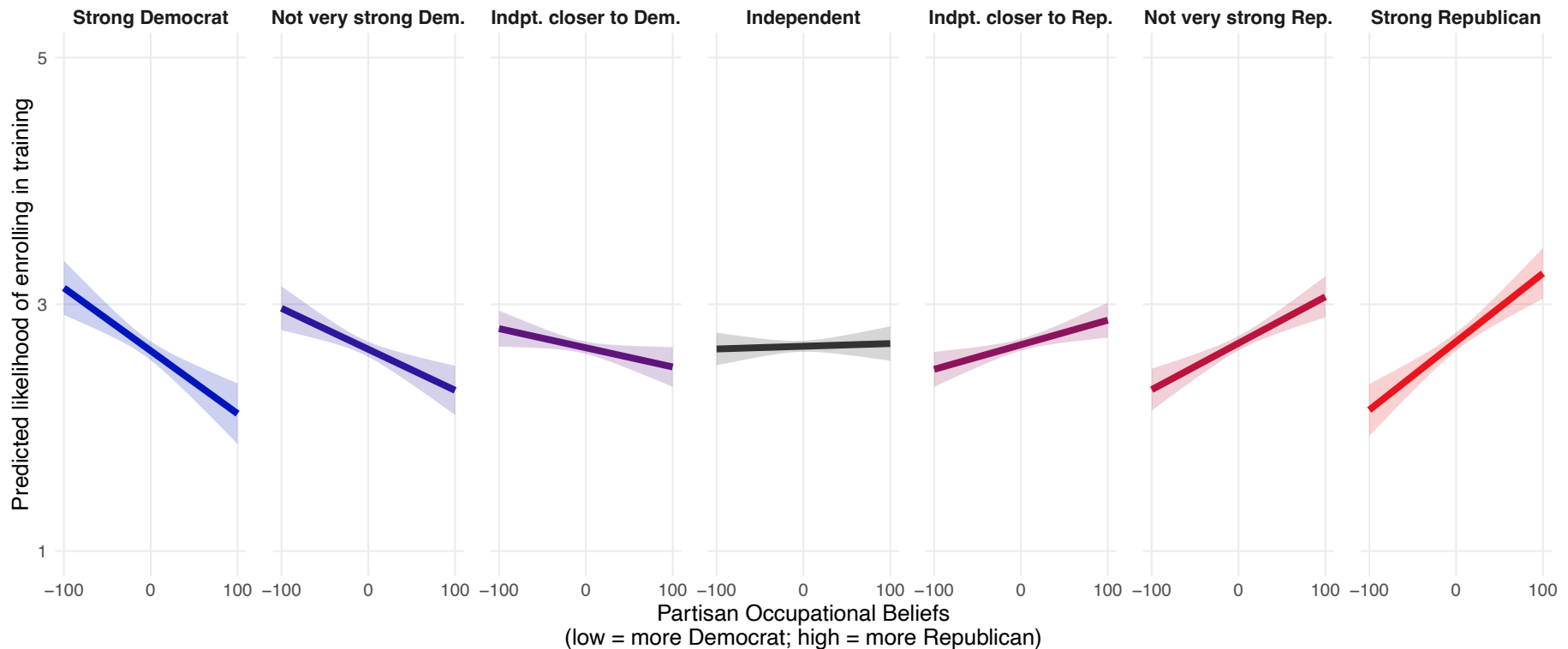
Finding 1: Individuals hold consistent partisan occupational beliefs



Finding 1.1: Partisan occupational beliefs are accurate (compared to FEC/DIME data)



Finding 2: Partisan beliefs influence willingness-to-transition across labor sectors



Partisans are consistently favorable (averse) to retraining towards in(out)-partisan occupations. 95% confidence intervals

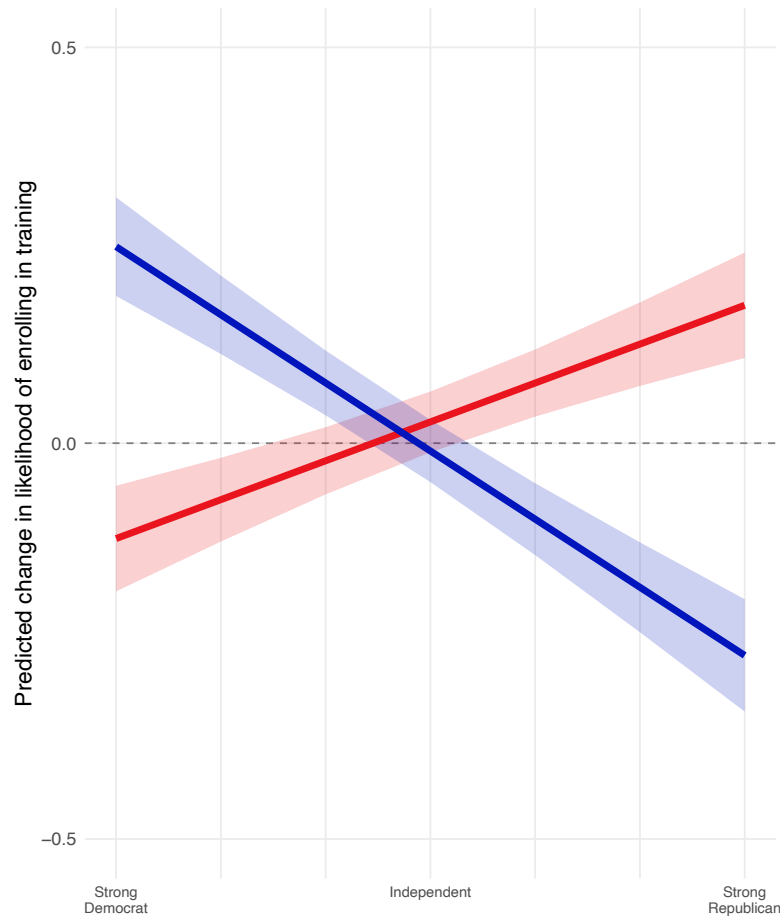
Large magnitude: equivalent to gender effect.

Finding 3: Partisan elite cues shape willingness-to-transition

a

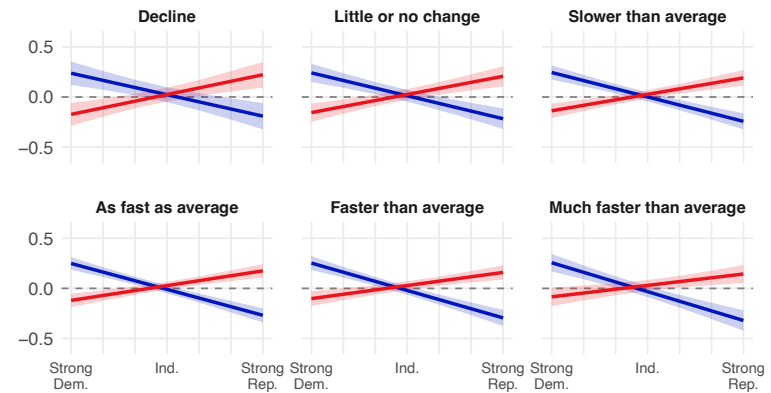
Treatment effects by party identity
(within subject difference)

Republican Endorsement Democrat Endorsement



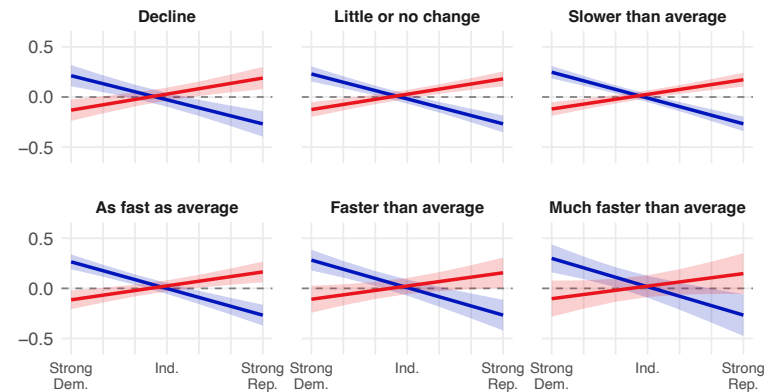
b

Treatment effects by party identity and economic prospects,
using US Bureau of Labor Statistics data



c

Treatment effects by party identity and economic prospects,
using survey response data



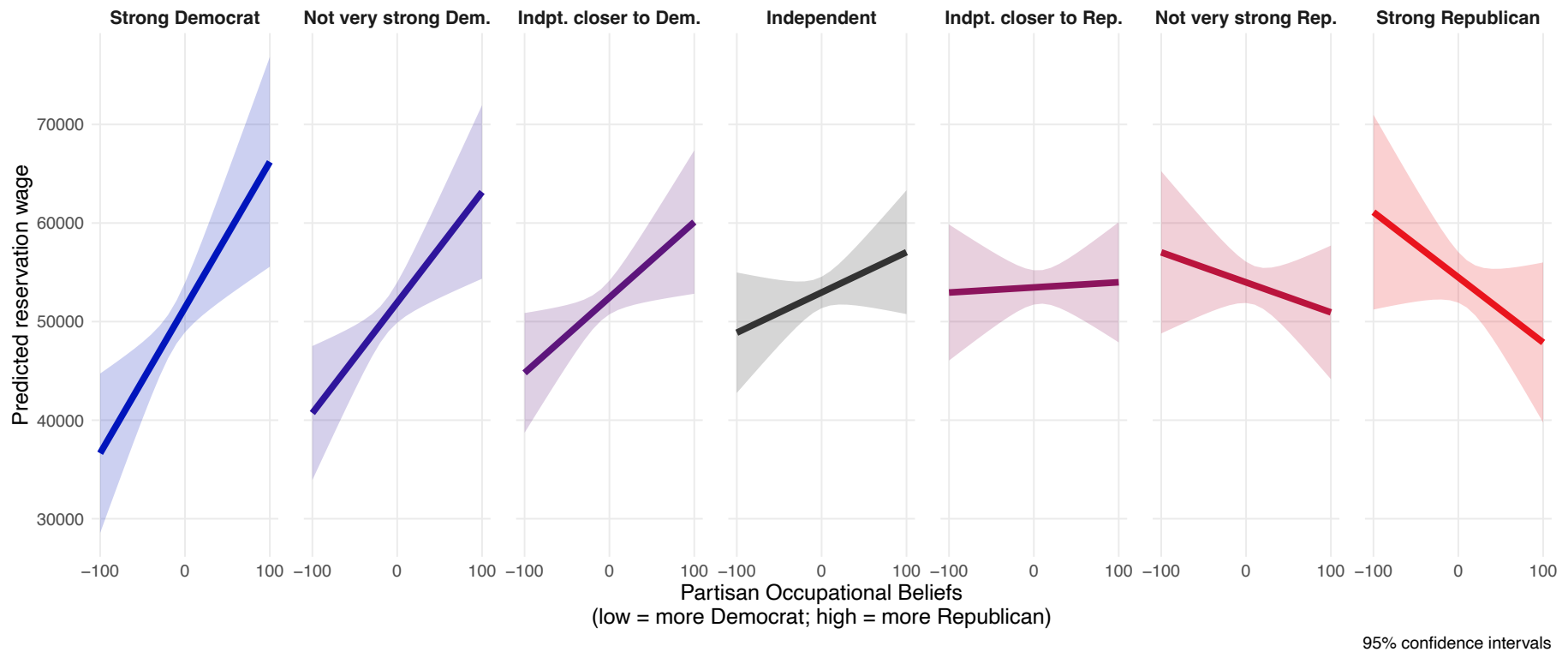
Elite Cue Takeaways

- Out-partisan elite endorsement **reduces people's willingness** to retrain for a new job.
- Endorsement effects remains **consistent across occupations with strong vs weak economic prospects**.
- Potentially **bad news**: elite cues can drive people into jobs with poor economic prospects.

Reservation Wage

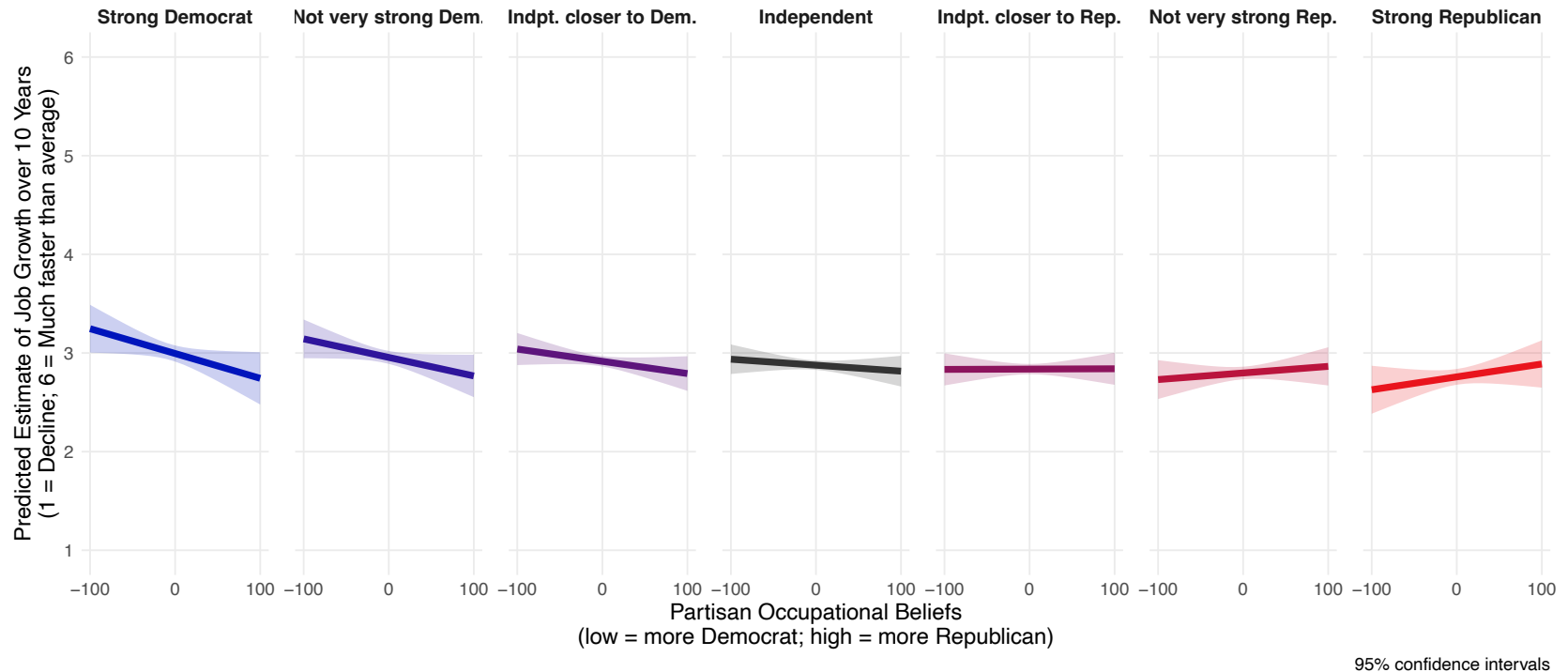
Imagine that you did enroll in this training program, which your local [Democrat/Republican] representative called 'a great jobs initiative.'

What is the lowest annual salary, in dollars, that you would accept to work as a [roofer]?



Strong Democrats who think an occupation is fully Democrat report a reservation wage of \$36,640. As perceived occupational partisanship grows Republican, the reservation wage increases by roughly **\$30,000**.

Is partisanship skewing economic perceptions?



... YES, but **not enough** to account for the observed effects.

Conclusion

- Partisanship is an **increasingly efficient heuristic**: i.e. a behavioral shortcut.
- Partisan identity affects occupational choices, at **potentially high economic cost**.
- Elite cues can **backfire** in two ways:
 - **dissuading out-partisans** from growth occupations.
 - **pushing co-partisans** towards in-partisan but economically declining occupations.

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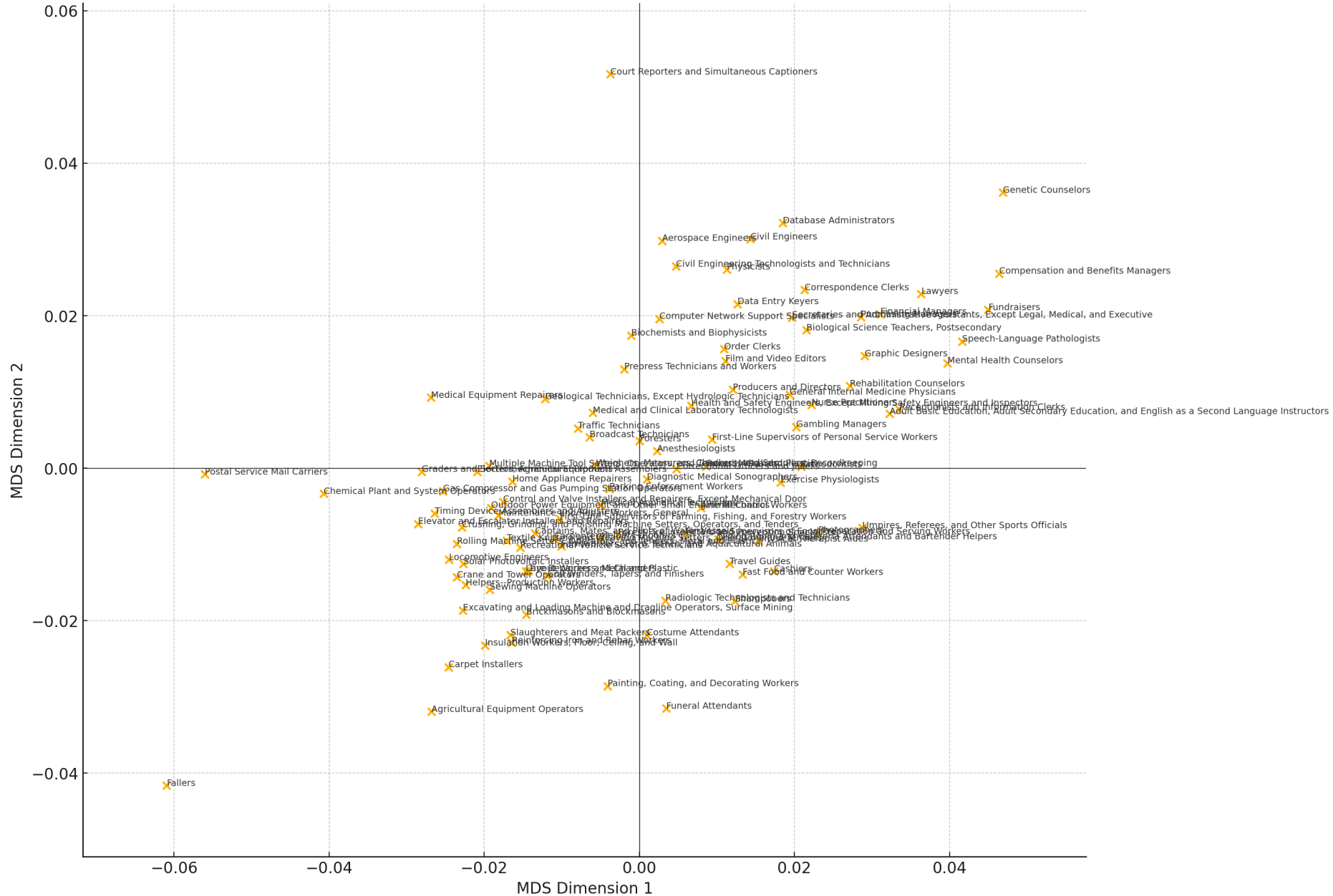
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Can we control for Skill Distance?

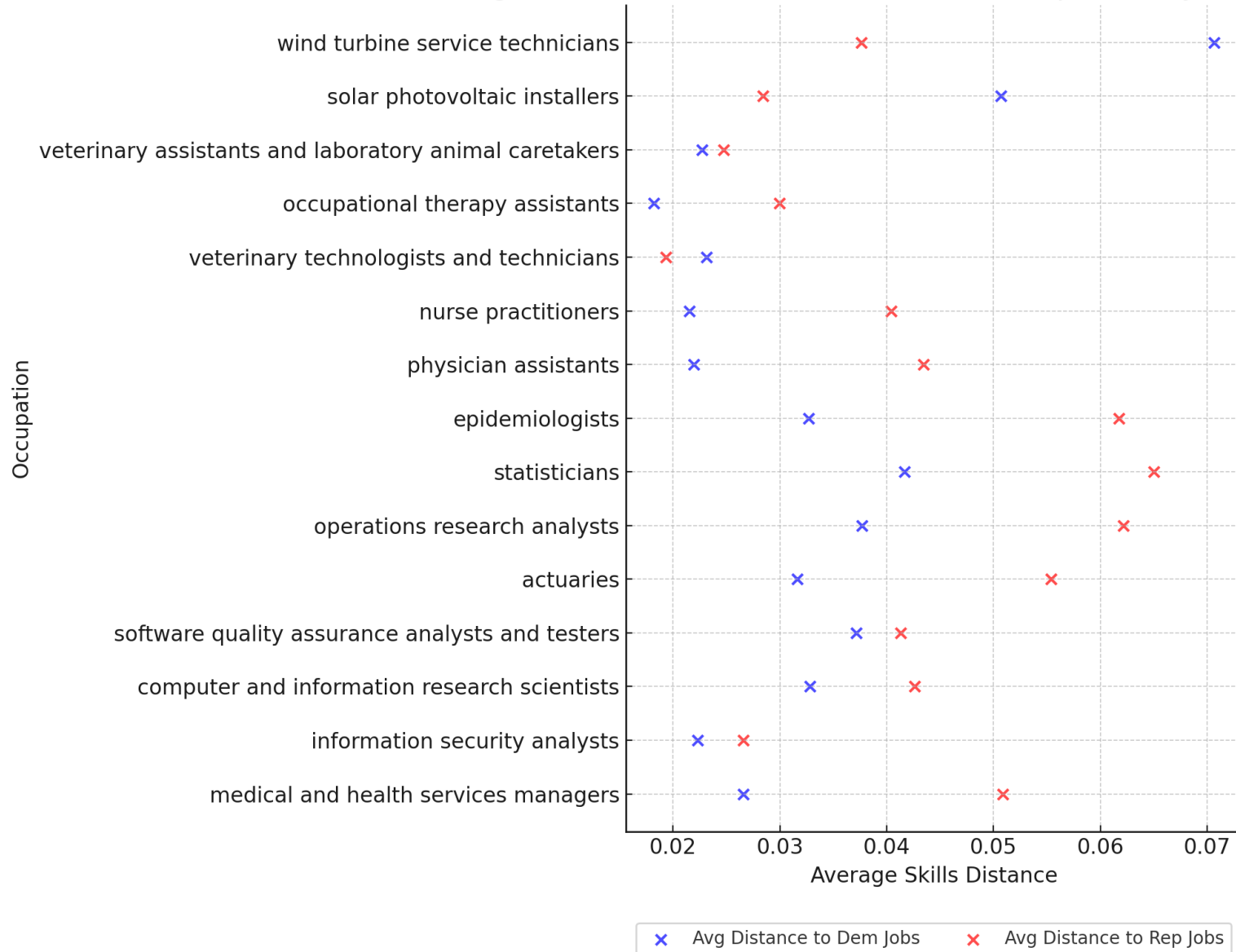
- Occupations are randomly assigned in survey, but **skill distance** may still inform people's willingness to transition.
- Using BLS data, we create **vectors of occupational skills**, and calculate the distance for every pair of occupations.
- Findings:
 - (i) greater distance to an occupation leads to significantly less willingness to move to it.
 - (ii) controlling for skills distance does not affect results on partisanship.

Activity-Based Distance Between 100 Random O*Net Occupations

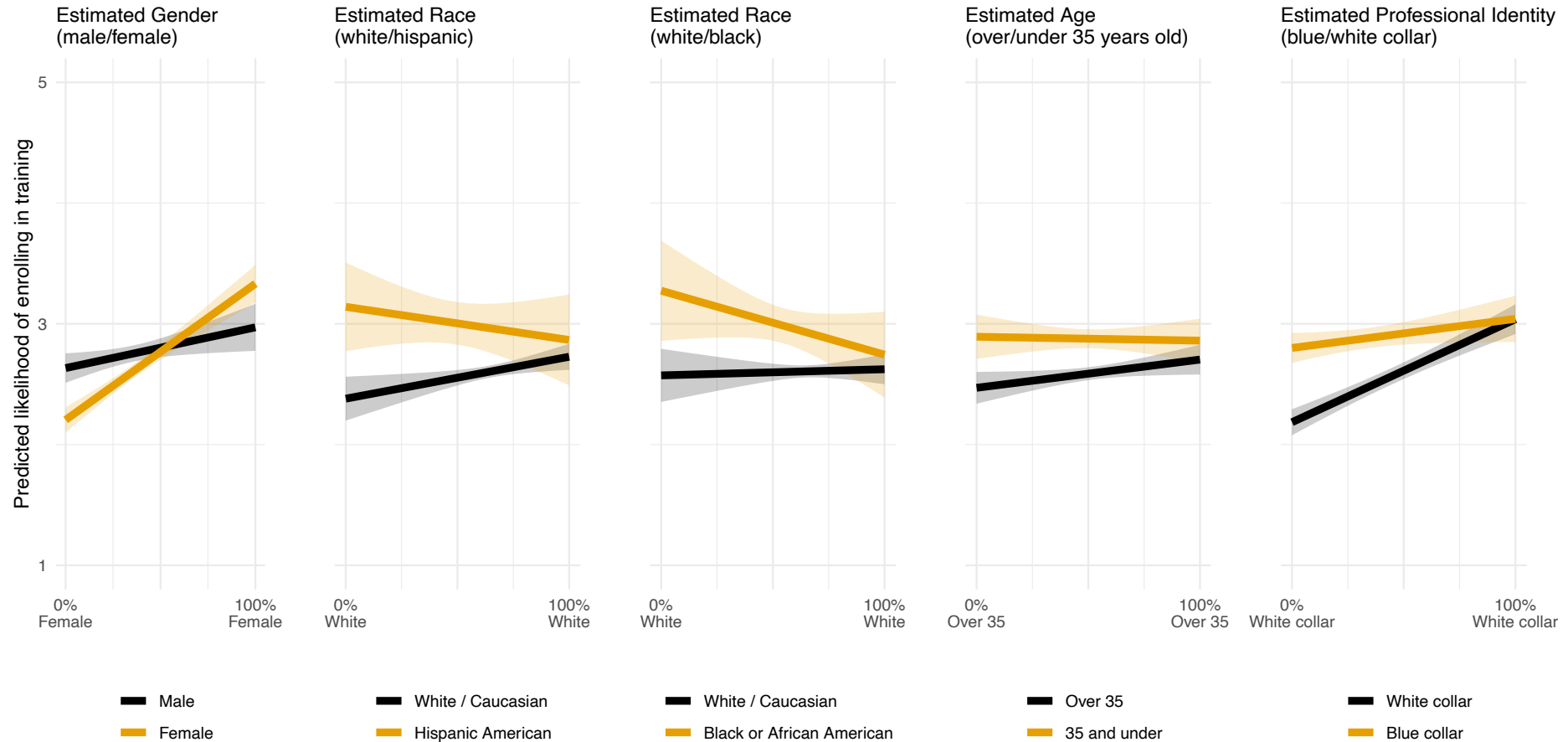


Jobs of the Future Require “Democratic” Skills

Average Skills Distance to Democratic and Republican Jobs by Occupation



Compare to other identity cleavages



Partisanship vs Gender

We standardize both gender and partisanship variables to a range of 0-1. We incorporate them into a single regression model with two interaction terms: **gender × occupational gender beliefs** and **party identity × occupational partisanship beliefs**.

	Party ID	Gender	Party ID and Gender
(Intercept)	3.073*	2.633*	2.908*
	(0.100)	(0.062)	(0.114)
Party ID	−0.874*		−0.846*
	(0.145)		(0.141)
Partisan Occupational Beliefs	−0.891*		−0.671*
	(0.201)		(0.194)
Party ID x Partisan Occupational Beliefs	1.881*		1.760*
	(0.279)		(0.272)
Gender		−0.429*	−0.387*
		(0.082)	(0.081)
Gender Occupational Beliefs		0.337*	0.413*
		(0.145)	(0.143)
Gender x Gender Occupational Beliefs		0.791*	0.689*
		(0.188)	(0.186)
R ²	0.014	0.030	0.044
Adj. R ²	0.014	0.030	0.042
Num. obs.	3197	3197	3197
RMSE	1.268	1.258	1.250

* $p < 0.05$

Table A7 Willingness-to-Transition (between-subject) by partisan and gender identity and occupational beliefs

Partisanship appears as strong as **gender**,
... and **stronger than racial or class homophily**.

FEC data: limitations

- Donors are **not representative**: tend to be wealthier, more educated, older, and more politically engaged than non-donors.
- Yet we are interested in average partisanship **within occupation**.
- Assumption: the distribution of donors is symmetrical across the political spectrum **within each occupation**.

Alternative Data Approaches

- Other efforts to merge partisanship and occupation use the **US voter registration file**, as compiled by private data firms (Revelio Labs) matched to individual employment records based **on online professional profiles** (e.g. LinkedIn)
- L2 data offers a product that links voter registration with **L2 consumer data** file.

Data Pros and Cons

- Voter registration data offers **blunt party ID**.
 - FEC / DIME offer a fine-grained measure of **revealed partisan preferences**.
 - L2 consumer data tends to have sparse information on occupation (e.g. 16% for NY state), raising potential selection issues.
 - Proprietary data sources don't allow easy replication.
 - FEC is **transparent and replicable**.
- Ultimately: use all approaches and triangulate.

Experimental Design

