

# Marital Status and Social Networks

Stone Neilon<sup>1</sup> Anand E. Sokhey<sup>1</sup> Matthew T. Pietryka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Colorado Boulder <sup>2</sup>University of Wisconsin-Madison



## Marital Status and Social Networks

### How does marital status influence social networks?

Married individuals tend to converge in their political beliefs [1, 2], but divorce and widowhood reflects the literal loss of social ties[3]. Previous work has not fully evaluated the extent to which social and political network differences may be linked to relationship status.

Prior work between relationship status and social networks indicates married individuals tend to converge in their political beliefs [1, 2]. However, divorce and widowhood reflects the literal loss of a social tie and can trigger social network isolation which may result in a dejection from the political process and other various social activities [3]. However, previous work has not fully evaluated the extent of these social and political network differences. We suspect these relationship status likely produce different social networks and can powerfully translate into predictable political behaviors.

## Data and Measurement

### Data: Core and Acquaintance Networks: The Covid States Project

Items were included on wave 24 (fielded 8/11/22 to 9/13/22).

- **Core network** information was collected via a name generator, and asked individuals to “think about the 3 people living outside your household with whom you have the strongest, closest relationship.”
- **Social support network** was measured using an aggregate relational data battery. Respondents were asked: “Now please think of your complete social circle of family, friends, neighbors, and other acquaintances. Approximately how many of them could you count on for the following things?” Respondents reported the number of people they could count on for each of the following:
  - Caring for them if they fell ill
  - Lending them money if needed
  - Talking with them if they had a problem or felt sad or depressed
  - Helping them find a job

Response options ranged from *none* to *11 or more*.

- **Acquaintance network** information was gathered with an aggregate relational data (“ARD”) battery [e.g. 4]: “Think of all the people that you are acquainted with (meaning that you know their name and would stop and talk at least for a moment if you ran into the person on the street or in a store). How many of these people are you pretty sure have the following attributes?” We asked about 23 different attributes related to COVID, demographics, partisanship, politics, and social/cultural features of the network.

### Measurement

- **Relationship Status:** Six options: engaged, married, living with partner, divorced, widowed, and single. We combined the engaged (64 respondents) with the married category.
- **Political Diversity:** Measured using Blau’s Index, a standard measure of heterogeneity in the network literature. The index is calculated by taking the proportion of alters in each party category, squaring those proportions, summing them, and subtracting from one:  $1 - \sum p_i^2$ . Scores range from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates a completely homogeneous network (all alters share the same party identification) and higher values indicate greater diversity across party categories. Alters reporting “not sure” for party identification are excluded from the calculation.

## Demographic Composition by Marital Status

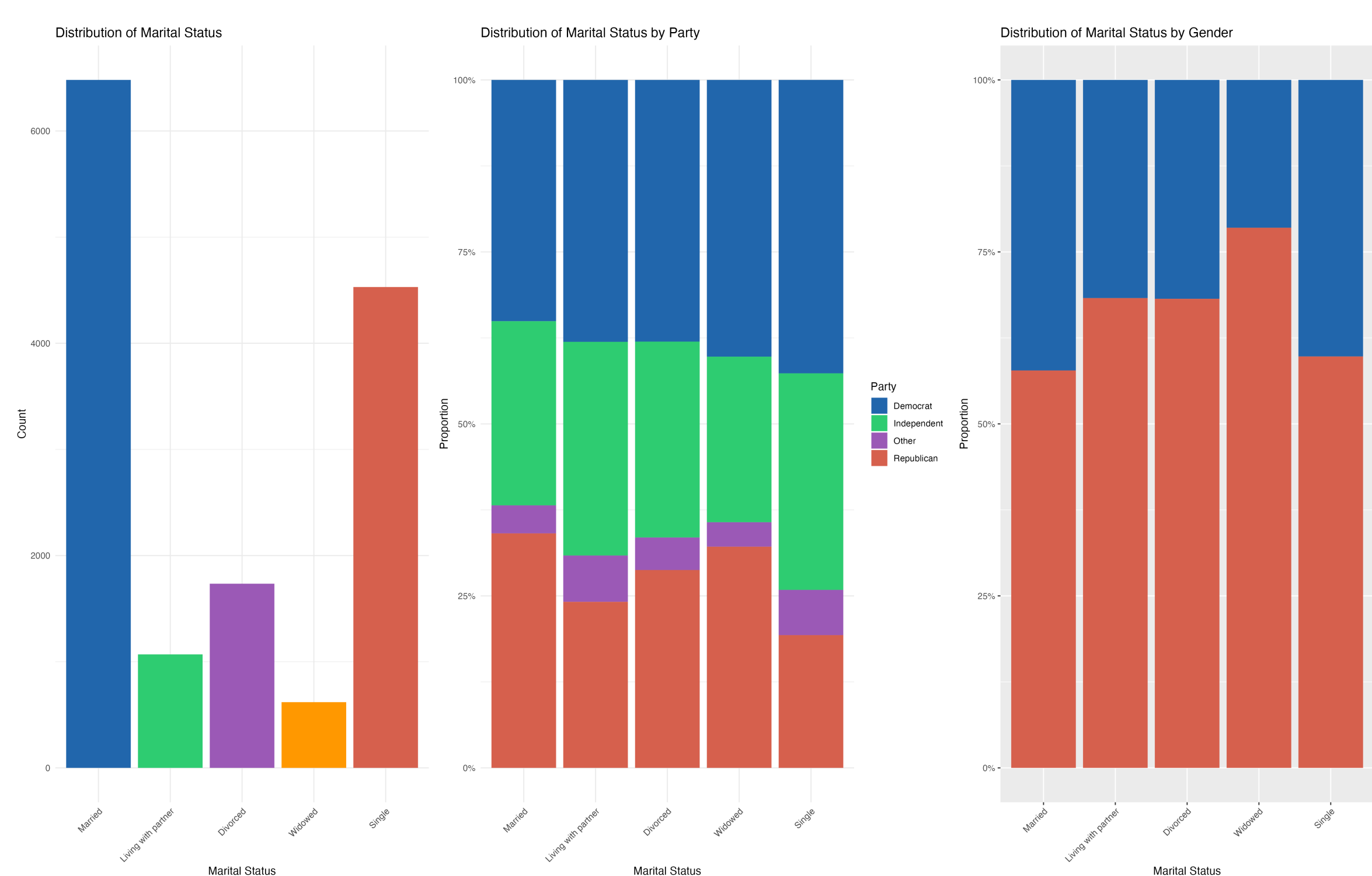


Figure 1. Respondent Descriptive Statistics: Marital Status; Marital Status x Party ID; Marital Status x Gender

## How Marital Status Structures Core Network Ties

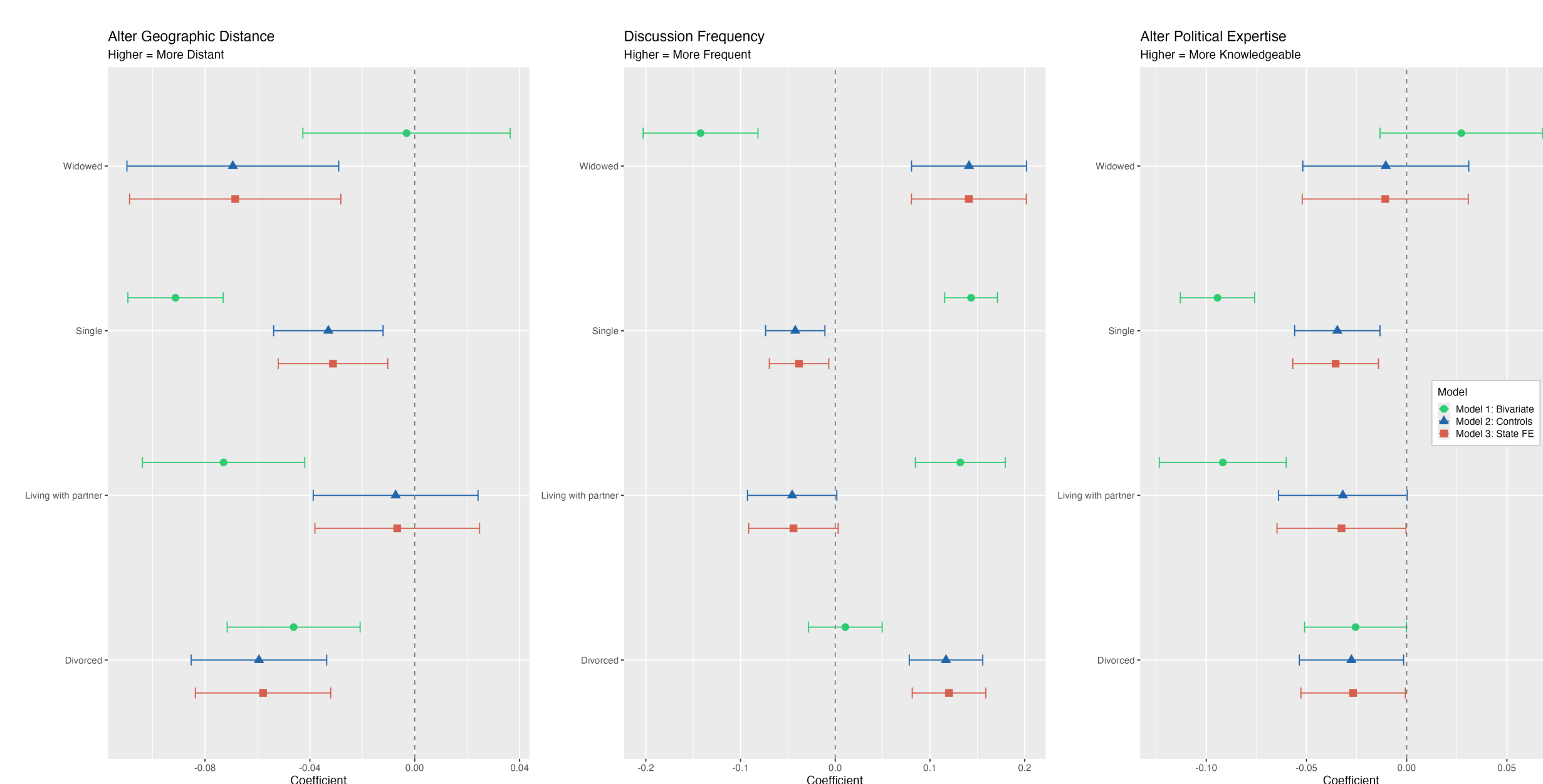


Figure 2. Core network differences across marital status by geographic distance, discussion frequency, and political expertise. Marriage is reference category for each model.

## Marriage is Associated with Lower Political Diversity in Core Networks

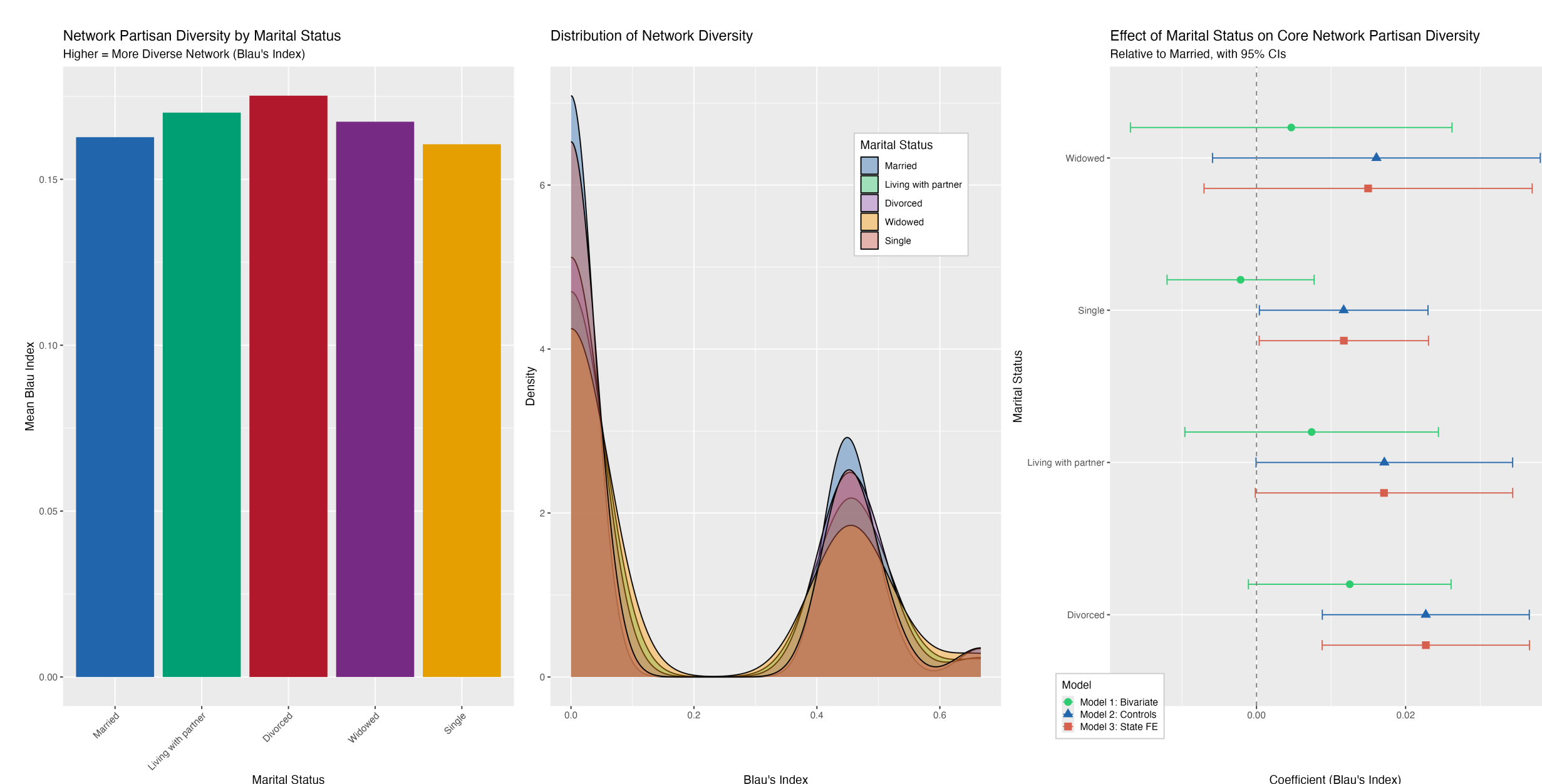


Figure 3. Political Diversity Differences across marital status.

## Acquaintances Network Composition Differs Across Relation Type

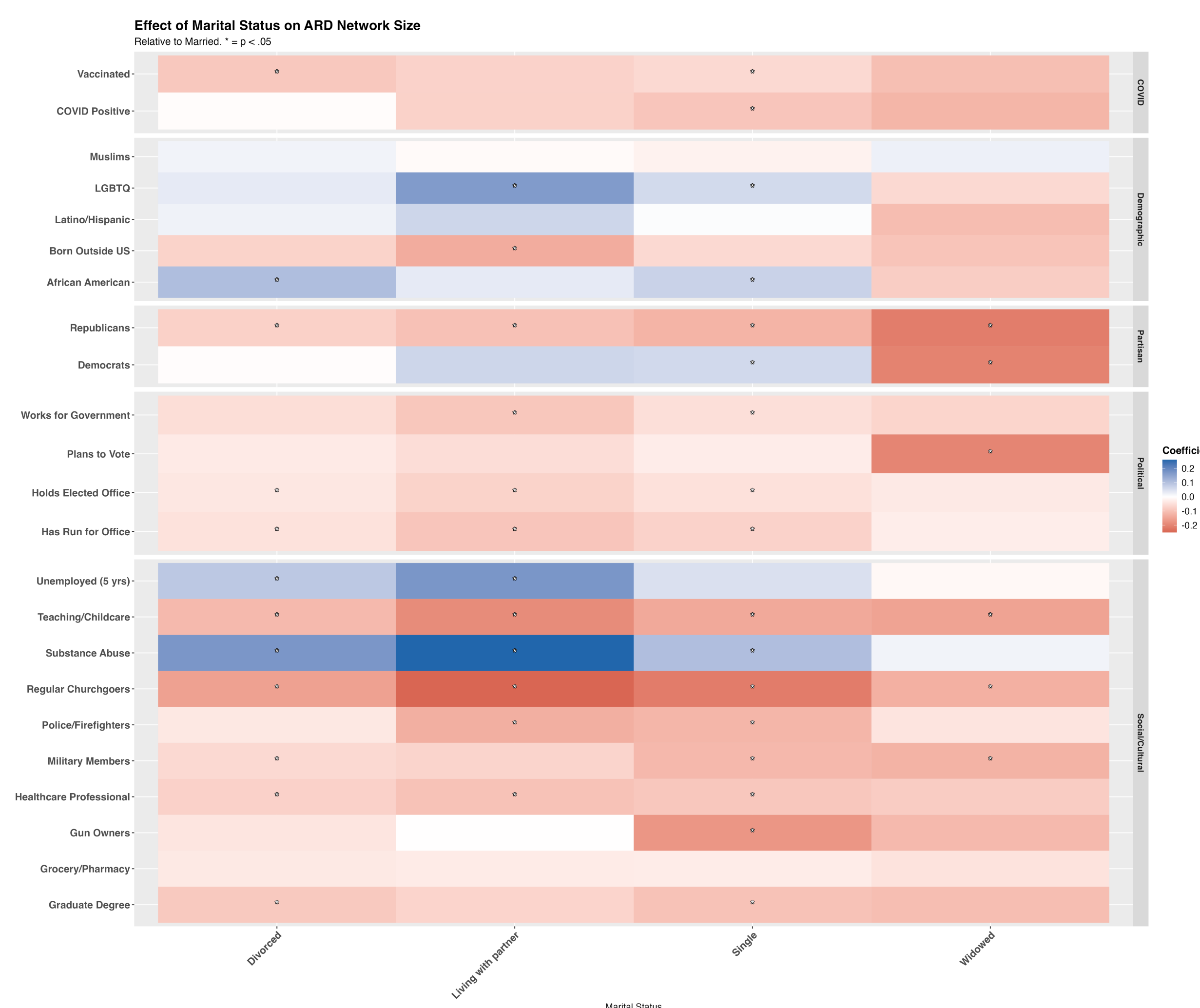


Figure 4. Heatmap of coefficients from each ARD model

## Marriage is Associated with a Larger Social Support Network

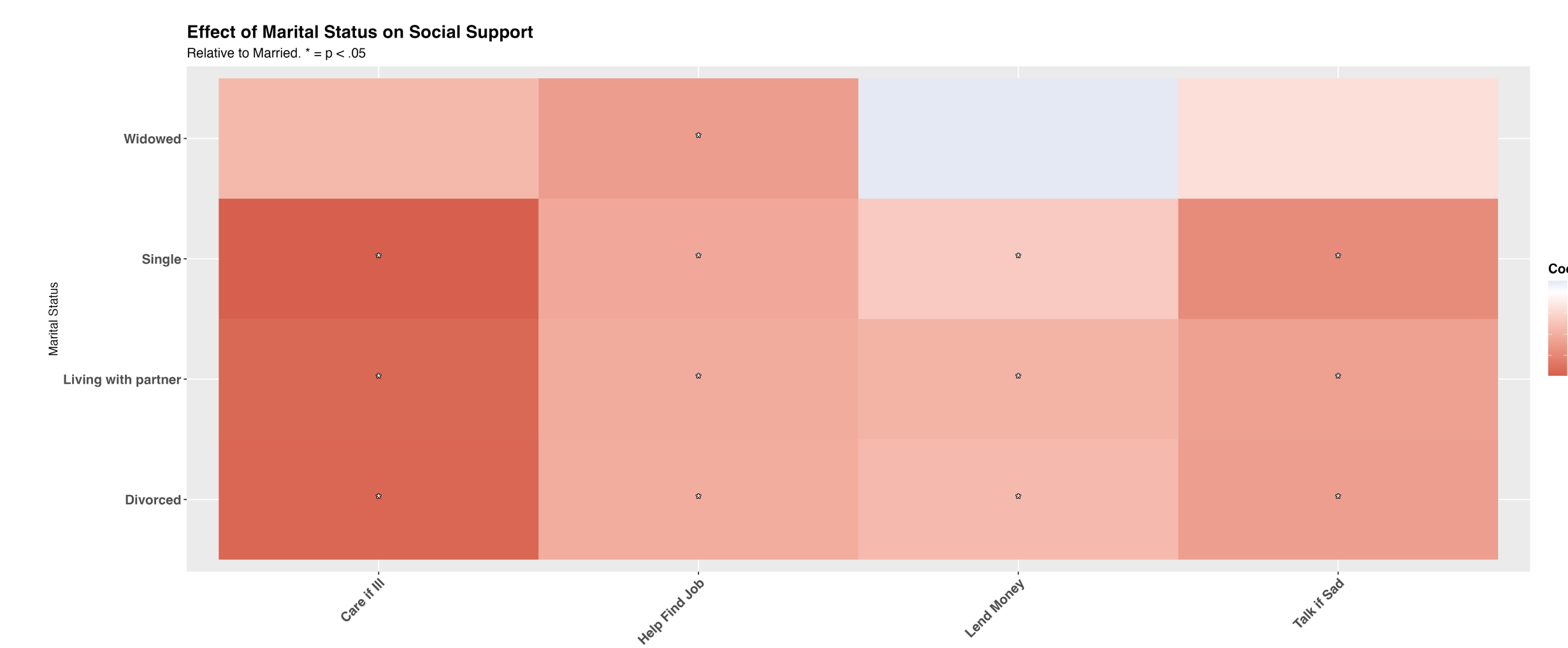


Figure 5. Heatmap of coefficients from each ARD model

## Results

- For **married respondents**, core social networks are less politically diverse, geographically distant, and composed of more politically knowledgeable alters, while social support networks are larger relative to other marital groups.
- For **divorced respondents**, core networks are more politically diverse, geographically proximate, and characterized by more frequent discussion. However, their social support networks are significantly smaller than those of married respondents, and they report fewer ties to churchgoers and those in teaching/childcare.
- For **widowed respondents**, core networks are more geographically proximate and characterized by more frequent discussion relative to married respondents. Social support networks are largely similar to married individuals, except for smaller job-finding support, and widowed respondents are less likely to know both Democrats and Republicans net of partisanship.
- For **single respondents**, core networks are more geographically proximate but characterized by less frequent discussion, lower political expertise, and greater political diversity relative to married respondents. Similar to divorced individuals, single respondents report smaller social support networks across nearly all dimensions and are more likely to know LGBTQ individuals or those with substance abuse histories, while being less likely to know churchgoers, gun owners, or those in teaching/childcare.
- For **living with partner respondents**, core social networks do not significantly differ from married respondents ( $p < .05$ ) across models. However, social support networks are smaller, and respondents report more ties to LGBTQ, unemployed, and substance-abusing individuals, alongside fewer ties to churchgoers and those in teaching/childcare.

## Discussion

- Our findings regarding marriage seem to align with previous work, marriage tends to create a homogenizing social and political effect. However, our data provides additional insight into the social network dynamics of married individuals, contributing to a richer understanding of how this life status can influence behavior.
- The results among widowed individuals comports with our previous findings from the ANES panel dataset. In that analysis we found widowed individuals tended to disassociate from the political process and be generally less interested in politics. The results indicating widowed individuals knowing less partisans and individuals planning to vote, indicate a similar result.
- Among respondents that are living with their partners, we observe little differences in core network composition compared to married individuals. However, we do observe differences across the other batteries. Our ability to make conclusions about this group is severely limited as we do not know if these are individuals that are eventually going to get married or those that might consider themselves “life-partners” but won’t get married.
- Divorced individuals having the highest amount of political diversity within their core network is somewhat surprising, especially coupled with our social support network findings.

## References

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