

MARITAL ALLIANCES AND POLITICAL CAREERS IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC



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April 4th, 2014

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AN ACKNOWLEDGED TRUISM

- “Marriage was one of the most important means of allying the small number of great political families that controlled Rome...**2 other famous examples** will suffice.” –S. Dixon, “The Marriage Alliance In the Roman Elite” , *Journal of Family History*, 10:4 (1985:Winter): 353.
- “Marriage or adoption might retrieve the waning fortunes of a noble family.” –R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, (Oxford, 1939) 43. (**3 examples follow.**)
- “The marriage alliance was still a political act.” –E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, (Berkeley, 1974) 60. (**3 examples follow.**)

METHODOLOGY

- Ancient Social History – increasingly data-driven and quantitative, despite limitations of sources
- Ancient Gender and Sexuality History – still largely theory-based or focused on close readings of individual sources.
- Prosopography: Study of social networks and relationships through a collection of individual or familial biographies.
- New Prosopography: More quantitative, more computer-based, less focused on elites.

DATABASE AND ITS LIMITATIONS

- 159 examples of Roman elite marriages
- 159 marriage records surviving out of a minimum of a thousand, heavily biased towards the most prominent and influential men and women in Roman history.
- “Elite” = Roman men who either achieved senatorial rank or married a woman of senatorial rank.
- “Successful” = Roman men who achieved the rank of consul or higher (censor/dictator/triumvir)
- “Unsuccessful” = Roman men whose highest rank was praetor or lower.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

- Time of Database: 300 BCE-44 BCE
- Roman Imperialism – Expanding Empire
- Patrician/Plebeian:
 - Patricians = $\sim .1\%$ of Roman population.
- Nobiles/Novi Homines
- Decayed Nobiles



MAJOR VARIABLES CODED IN THE DATABASE

- Political Career Success of Husband
- Father-in-Law's Personal Career Success
- Patrician/Plebeian Status of Husband and Wife
- Husband and Wife's Familial Political Success
 - Nobiles versus Novi Homines
- “Success”= Reaching consular rank or higher.

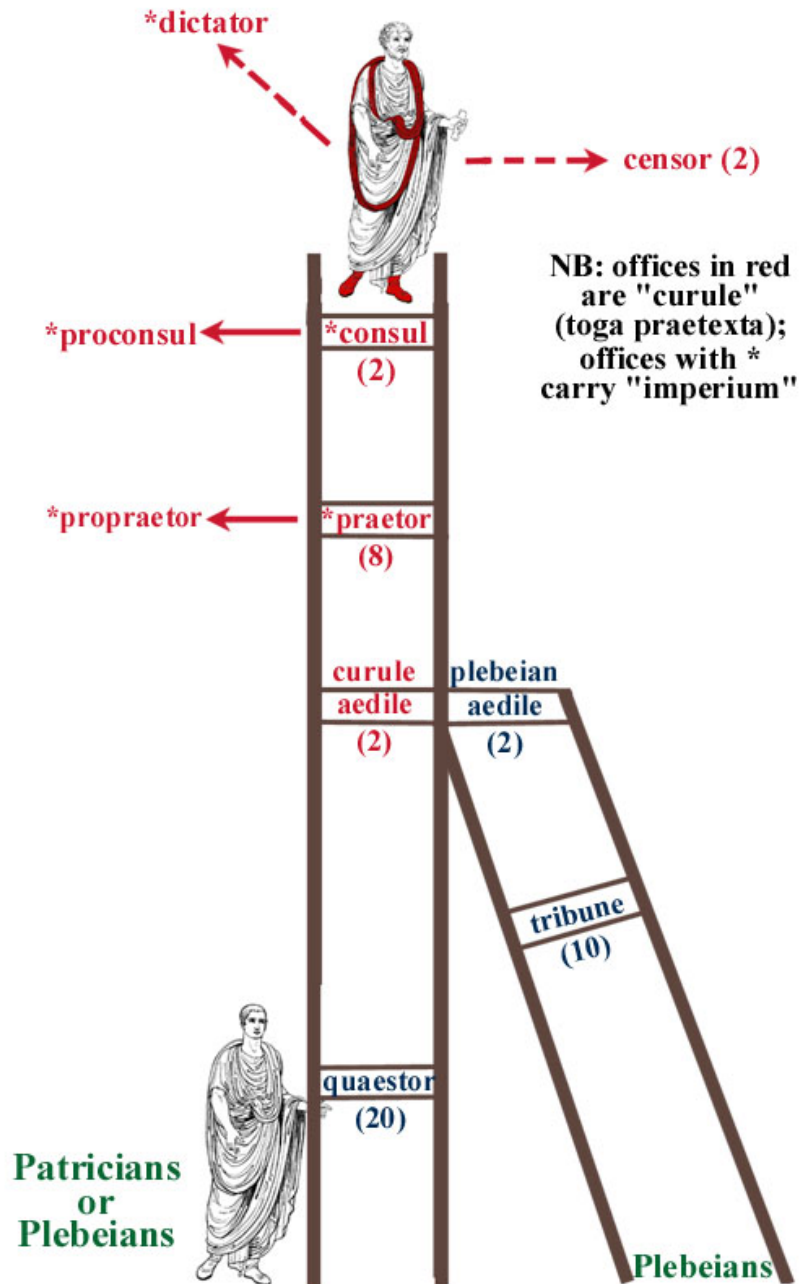


MAJOR QUESTIONS

- What were the political rationales and consequences of these marriages?
- Did certain kinds of marriages actually help a Roman politician's career and if so, which ones?
- Did patricians care about their exclusivity?



ROMAN CURSUS HONORUM



ACCESS TO THE CONSULATE, 232-133 BCE

Clans	Consulships	Consulships per clan	%
58	200	3.45	
Top 10	99	9.9	49%
Other 48	101	2.1	51%

Modern U.S. Comparison:

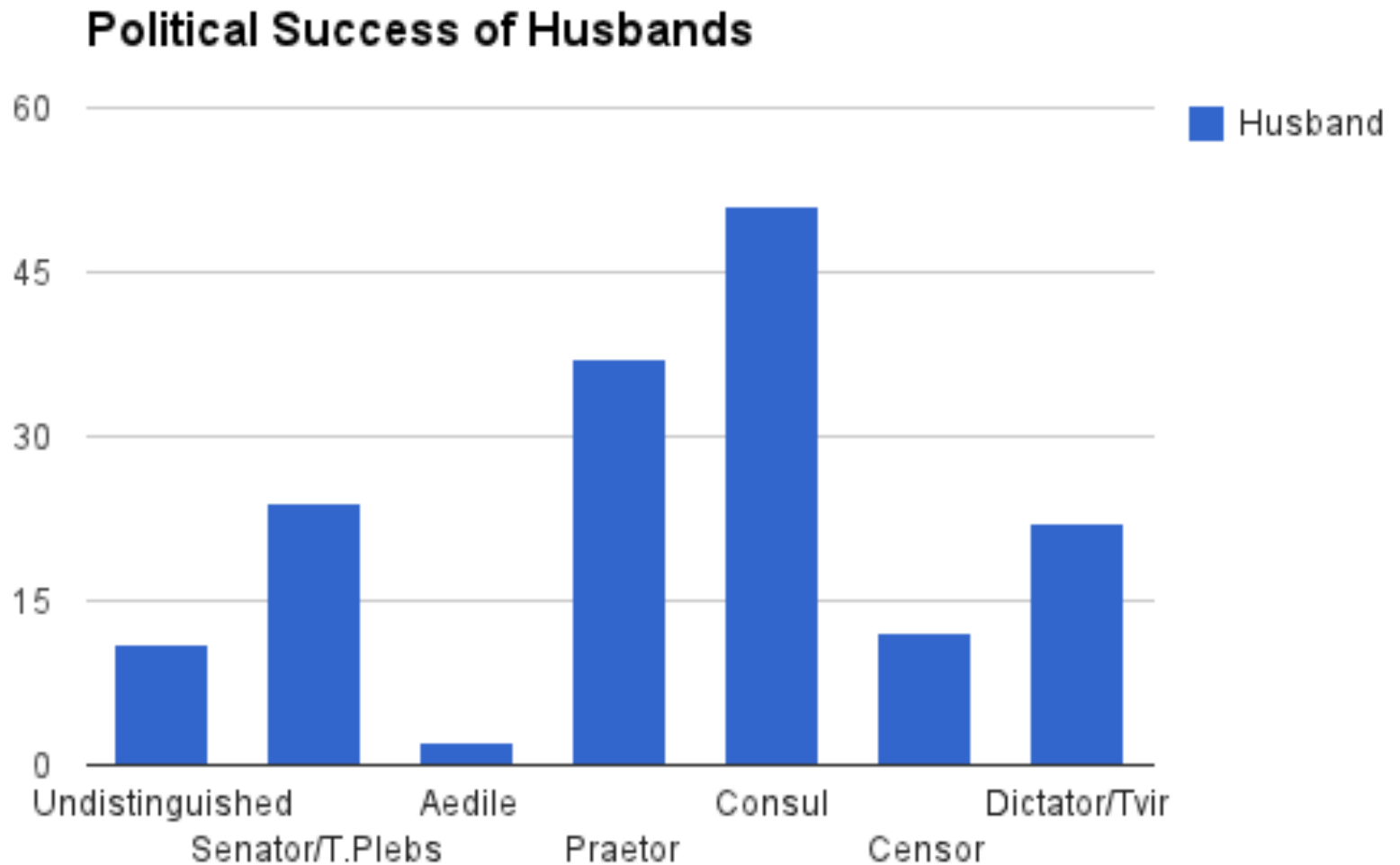
2006 election: 12% of major candidates and
18% of winners came from “political families,”
32% of Senators, 17% of Reps, 19% of Governors

Elite Female Status Markers

Why might women care about their husband's status and success for themselves?

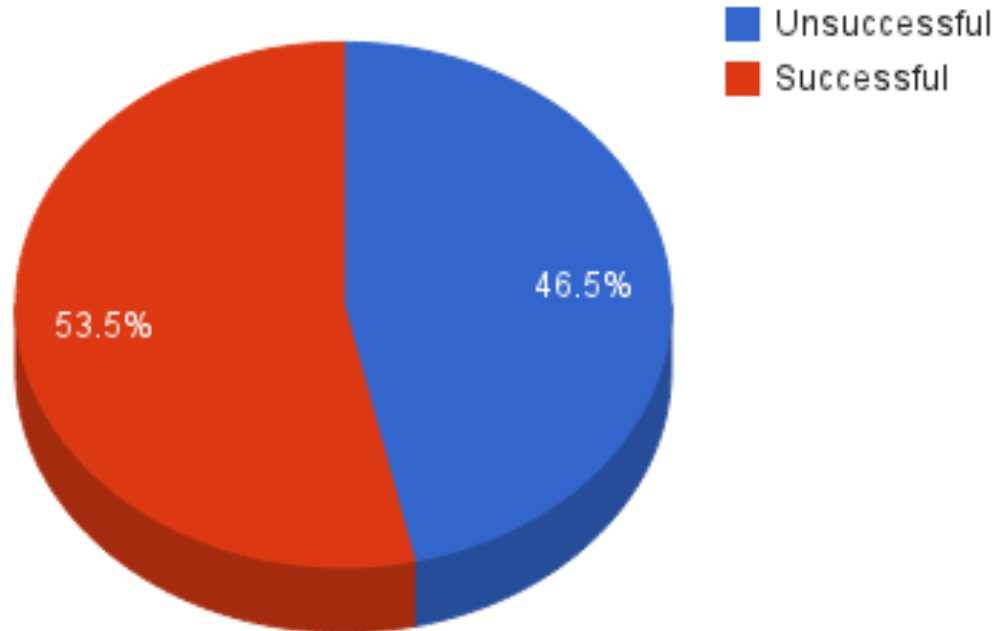
- ◆ Fabia Minor and Sororal Precedence: 367 BCE
- ◆ Verginia and the Cults of Patrician and Plebeian Chastity: 295 BCE
- ◆ Bona Dea Festival – hosted by wife of a senior magistrate.

OVERALL DATABASE PATTERNS

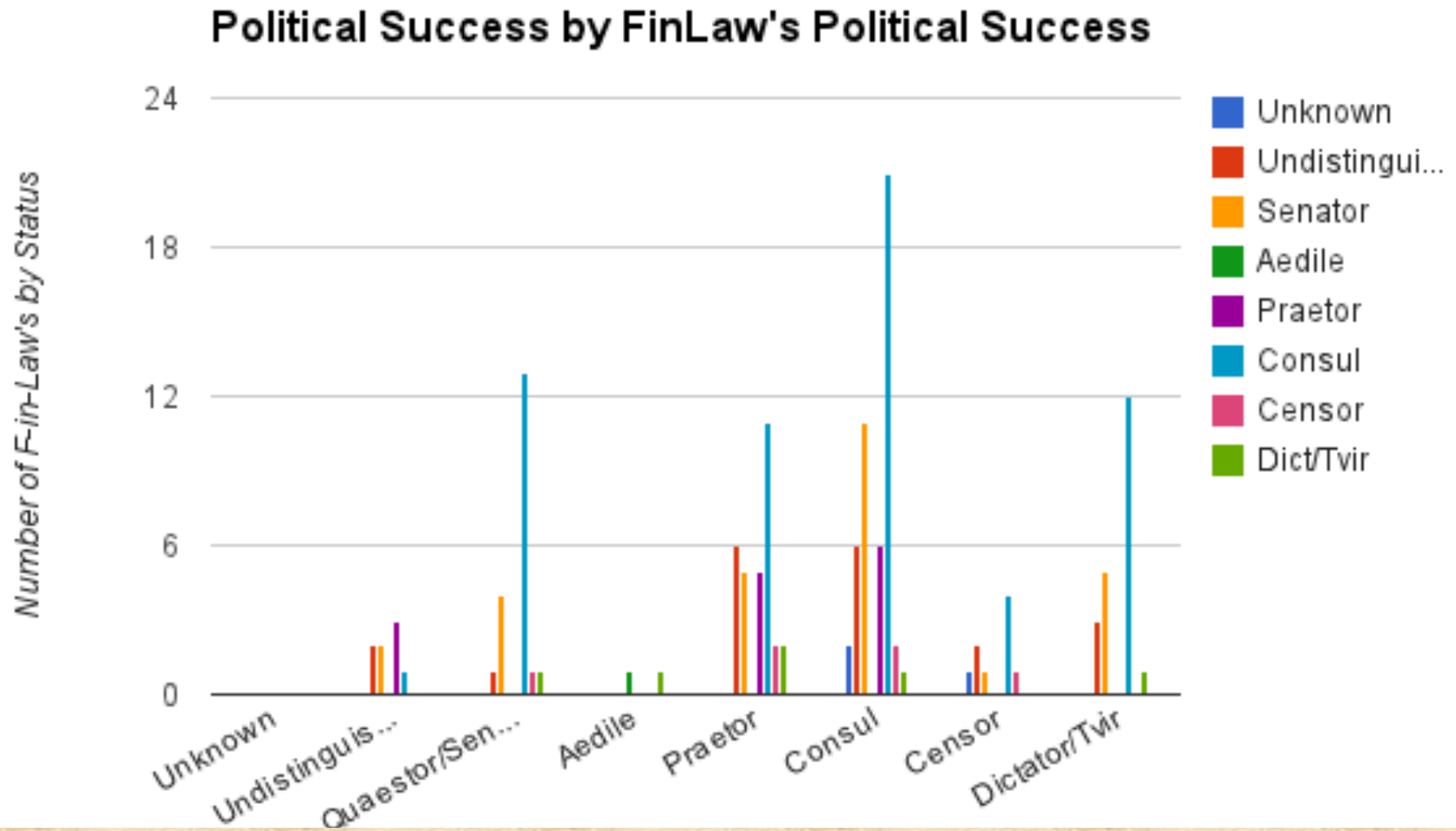


SUCCESSFUL VS UNSUCCESSFUL POLITICAL CAREERS

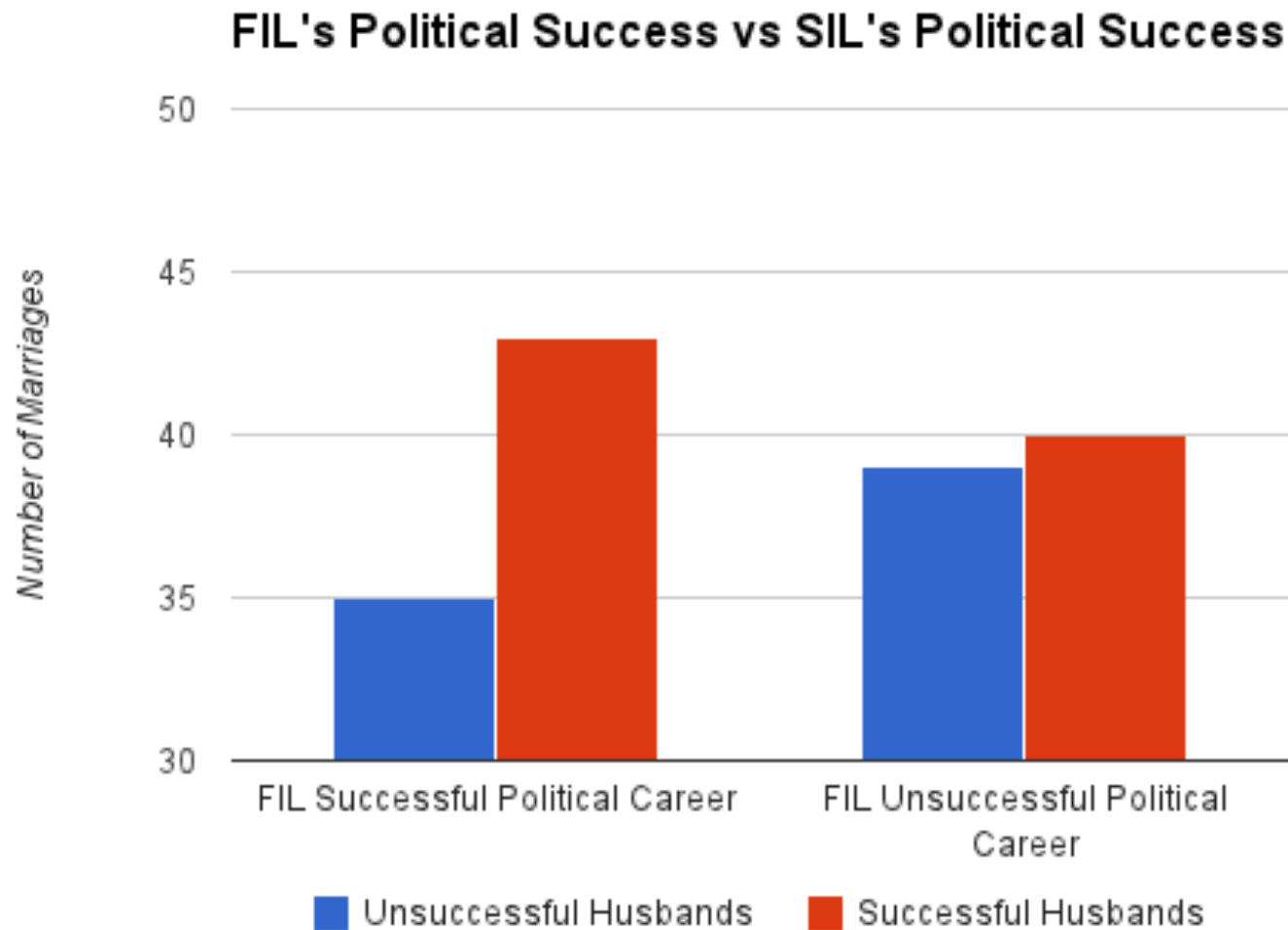
Overall Political Success Rate of Husbands



Results: Overview



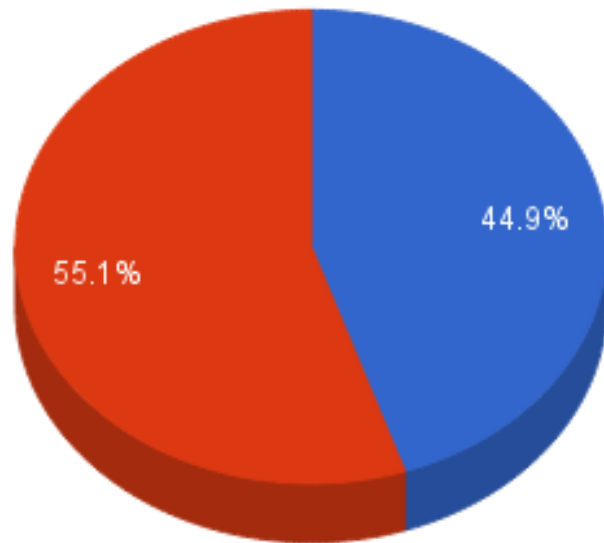
EFFECT OF FATHER-IN-LAW'S CAREER SUCCESS



Effect of Father-in-Law's Political Career

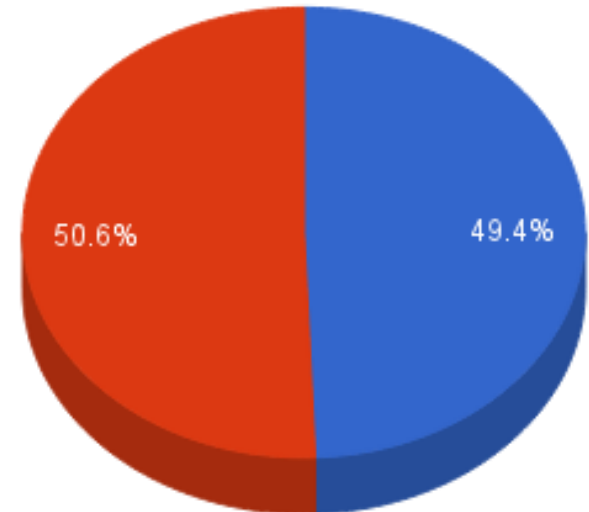
- Success= Career of Consul or Above

Successful FIL's effect on SIL's career



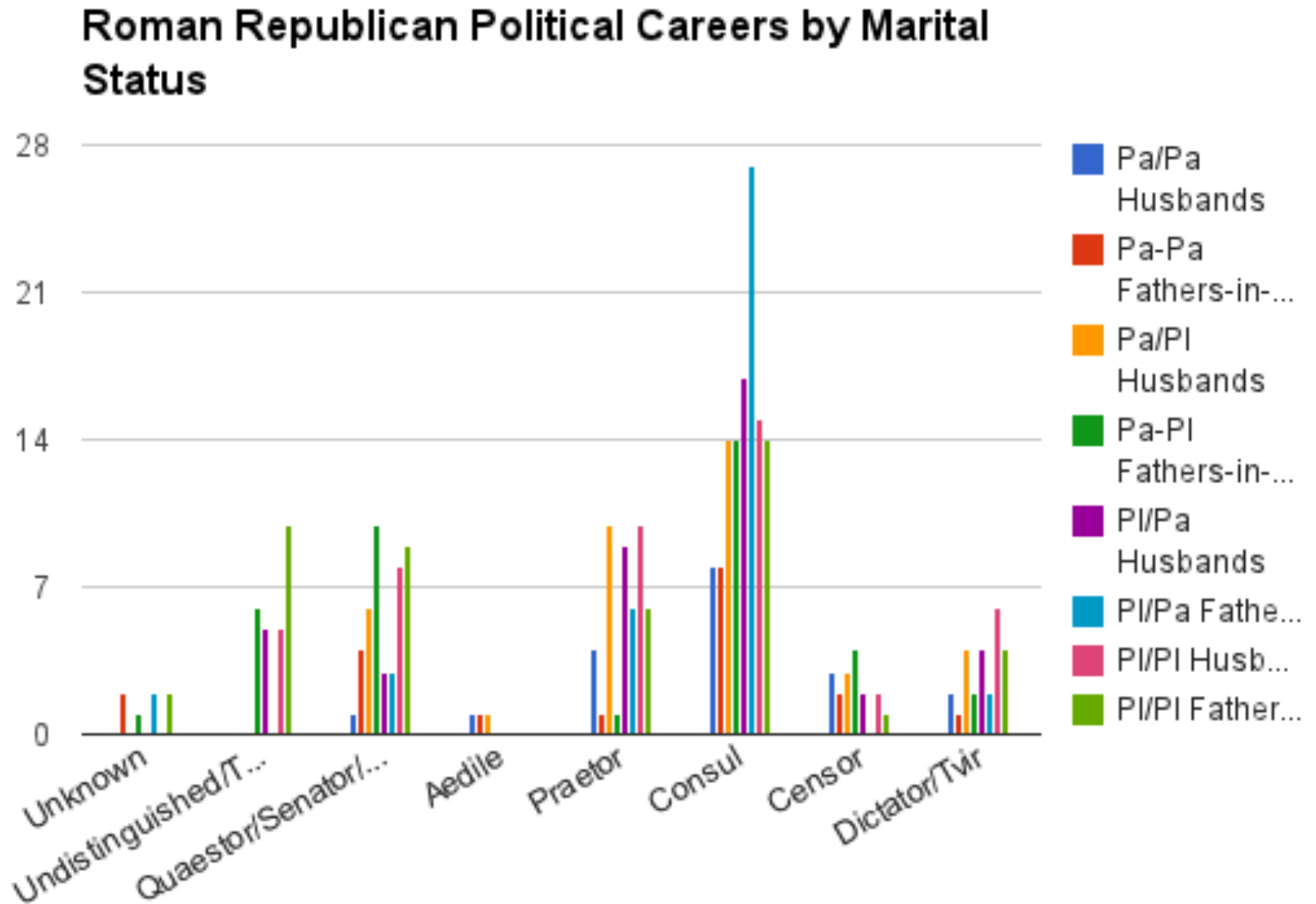
■ Unsuccessful Husbands ■ Successful Husbands

Unsuccessful FIL's effect on SIL's Career

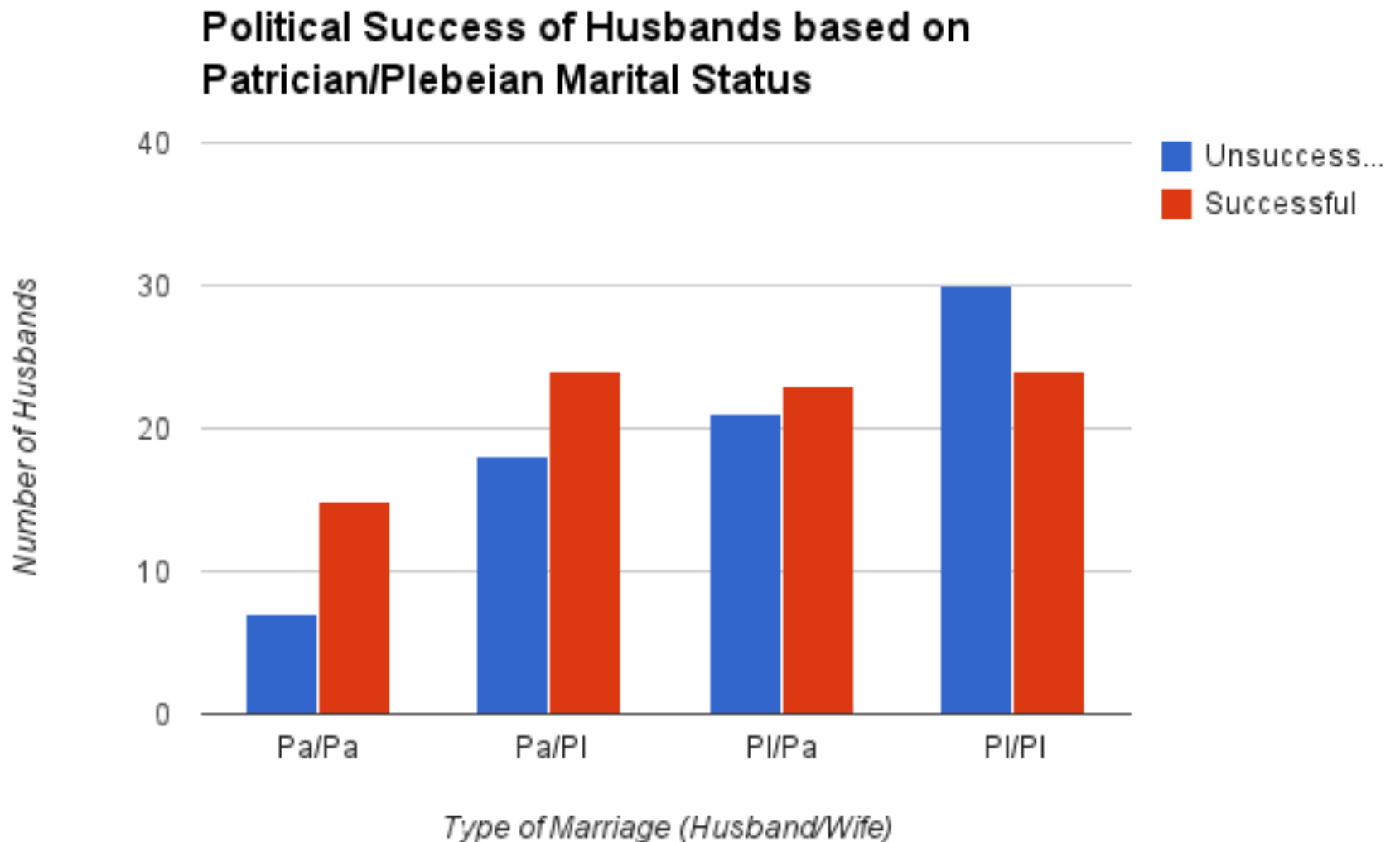


■ Unsuccessful Husbands ■ Successful Husbands

Patrician or Plebeian Status: Overview

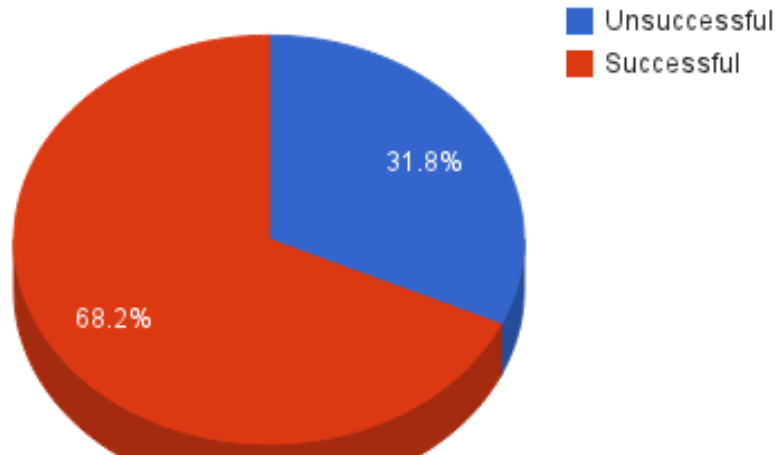


RELATIONSHIP OF PATRICIAN/PLEBEIAN STATUS TO POLITICAL SUCCESS

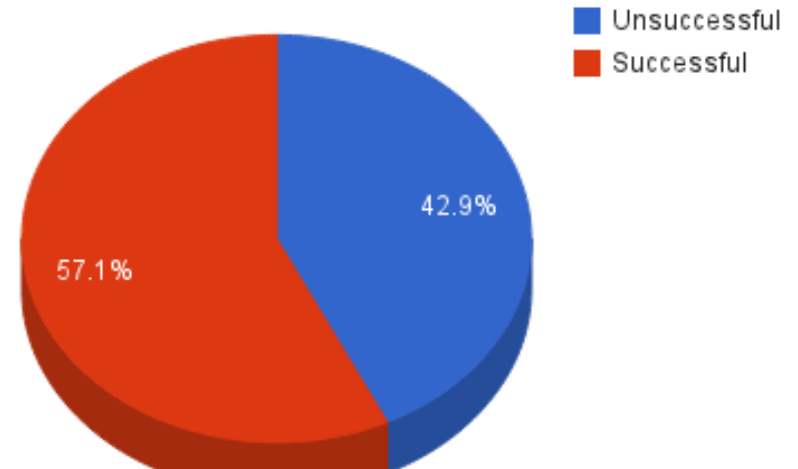


Relationship of Patrician or Plebeian Status to Marriages and Political Success

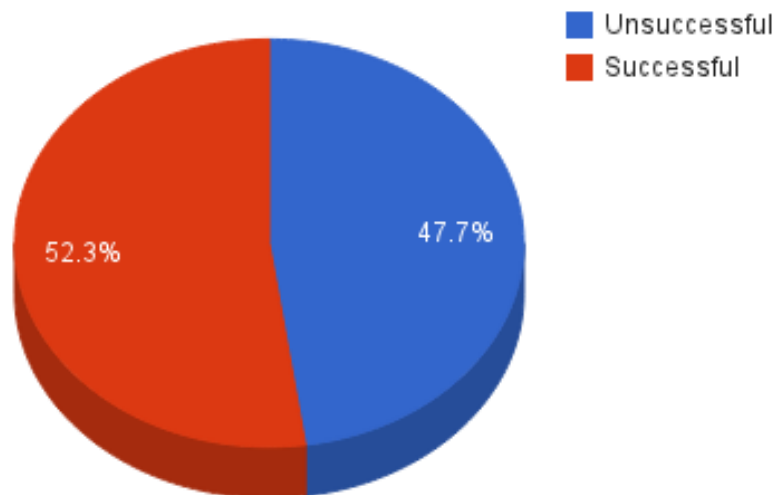
Success of Husbands in Patrician/Patrician Marriages



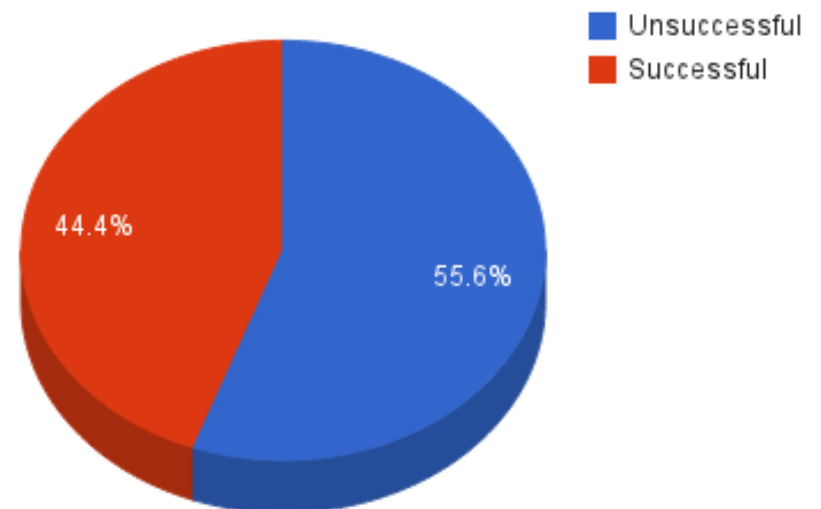
Patrician/Plebeian Marriages and Political Success



Plebeian/Patrician Marriages and Husbands' Success

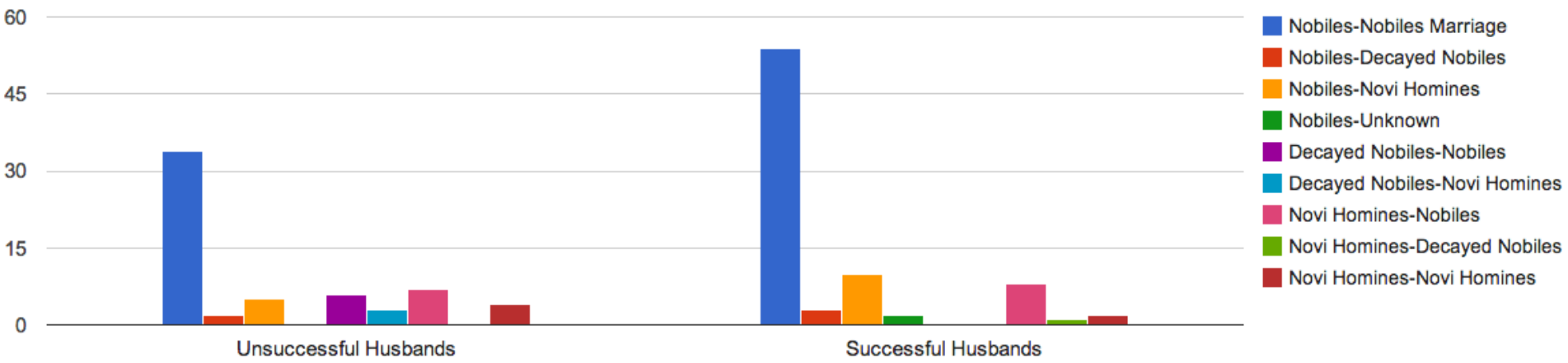


Plebeian/Plebeian Marriages and Political Success



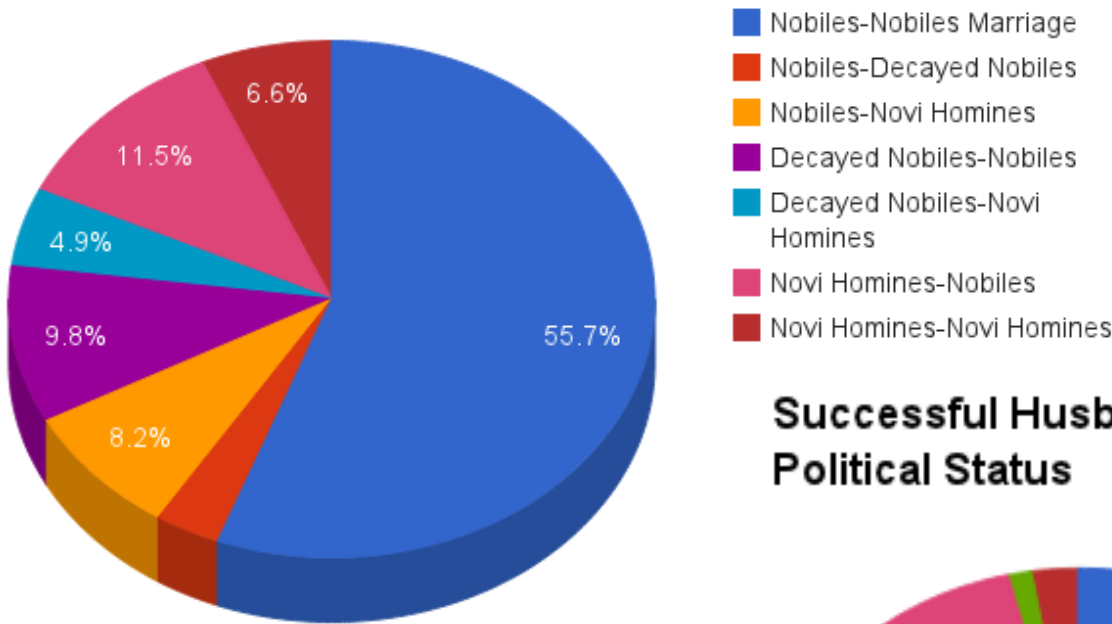
Relationship of Familial Political Success on Husband's Career: Overview

Political Success in Relationship to Familial Political Success and Marriage

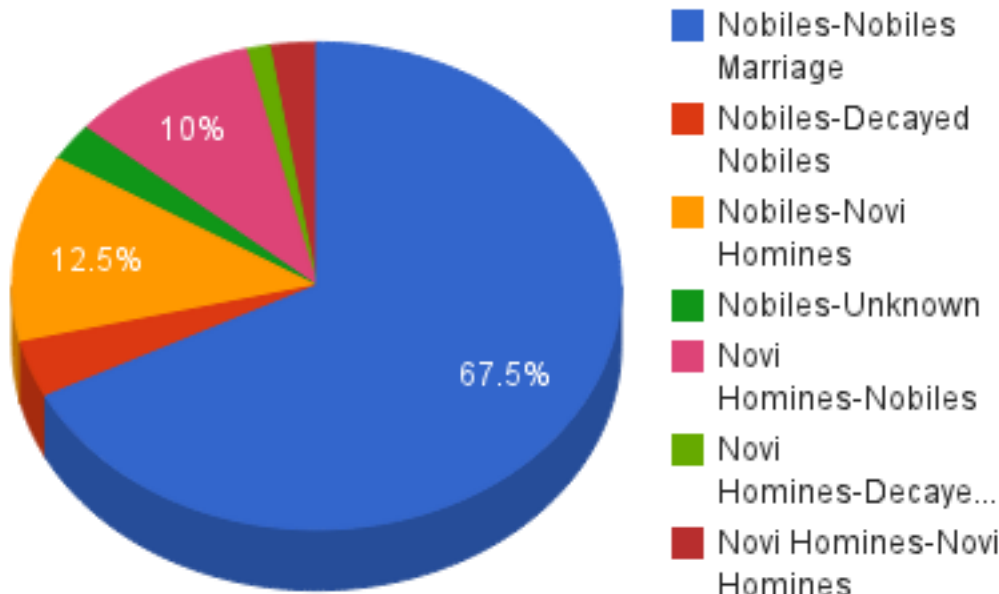


Effect of Familial Political Success on Career Success: Comparison

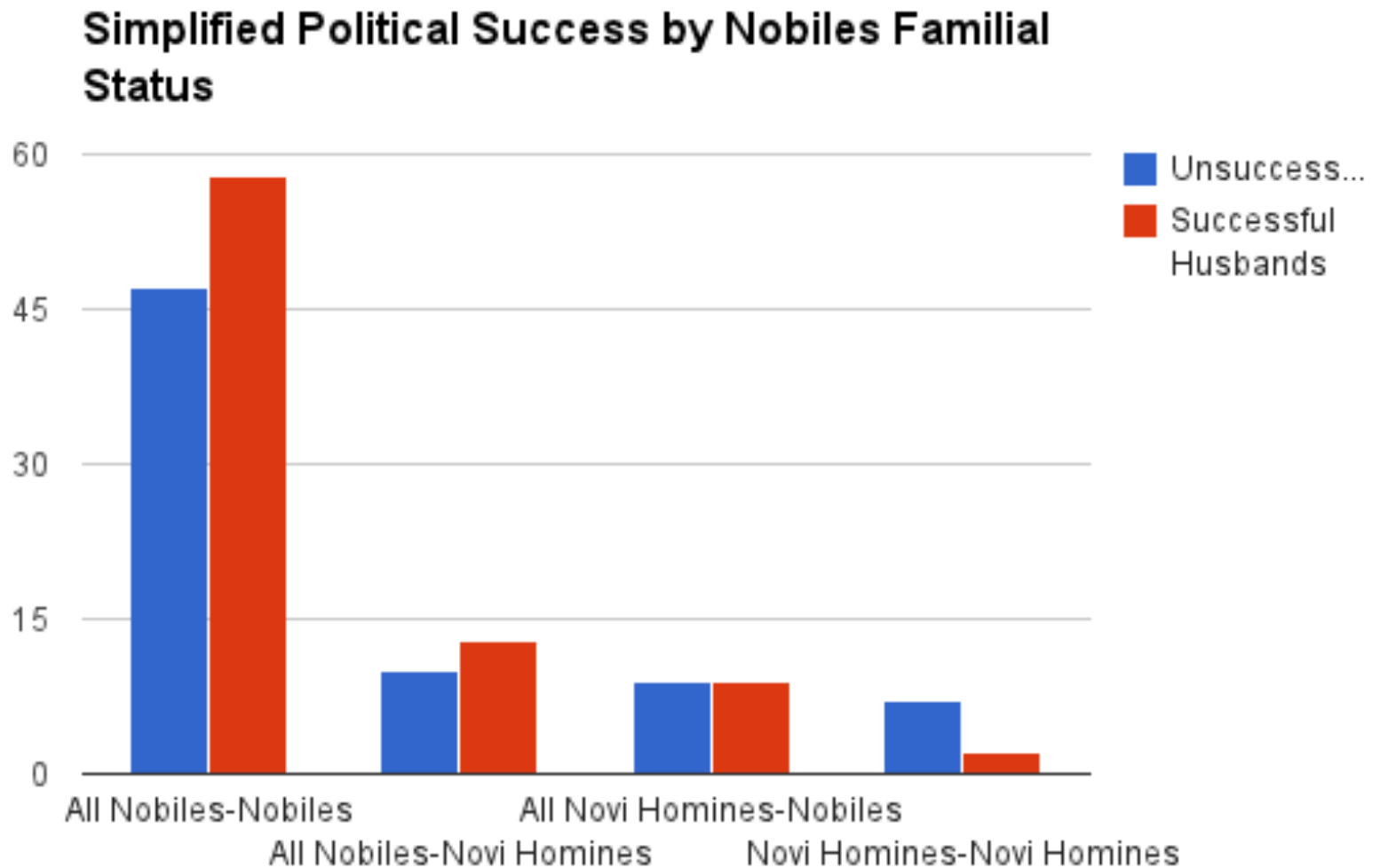
Unsuccessful Husbands in Relationship to Familial Political Success



Successful Husbands in Relationship to Familial Political Status

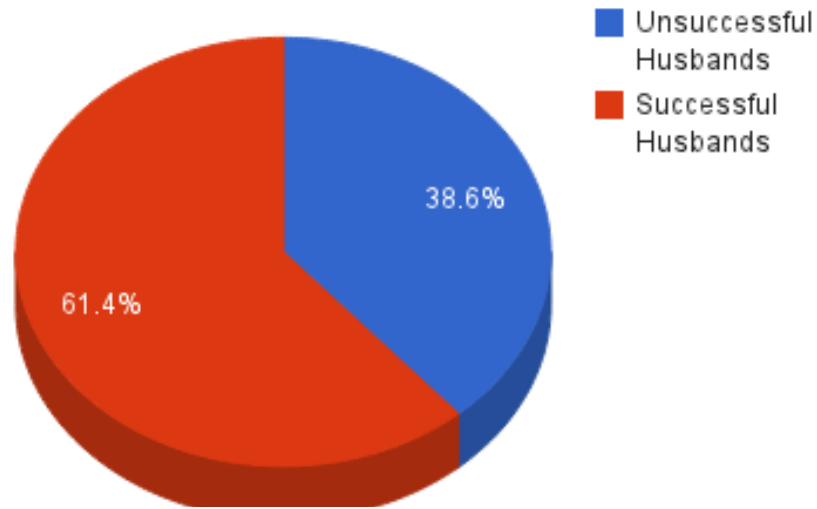


Relationship of Familial Political Success on Husband's Career: Overview

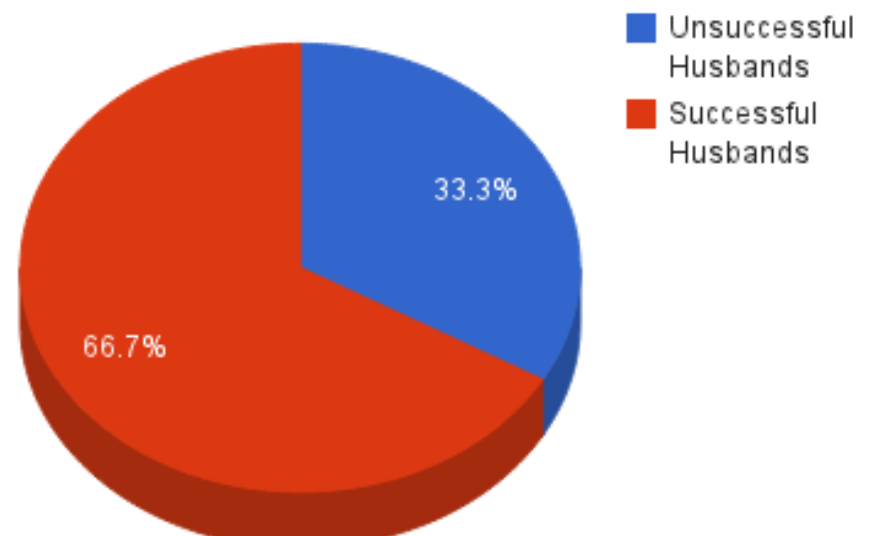


Relationship of Familial Political Status to Husband's Political Success

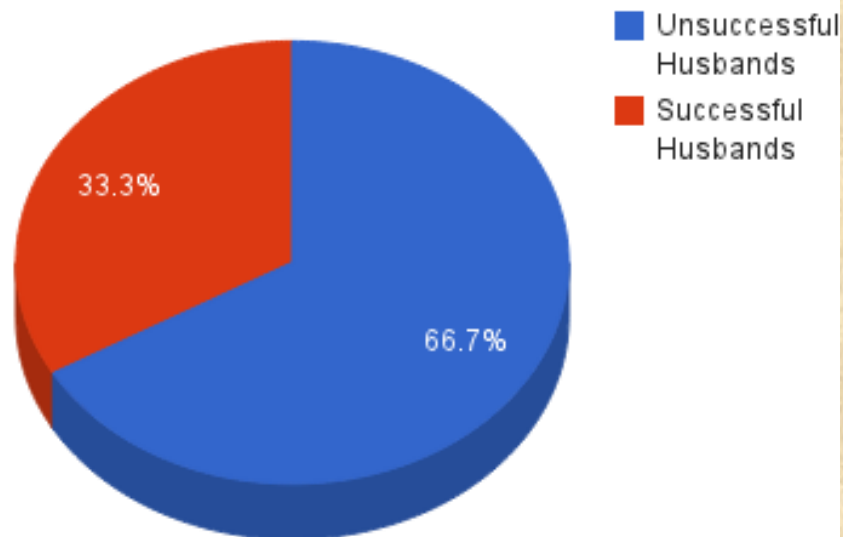
Nobiles-Nobiles Marriages



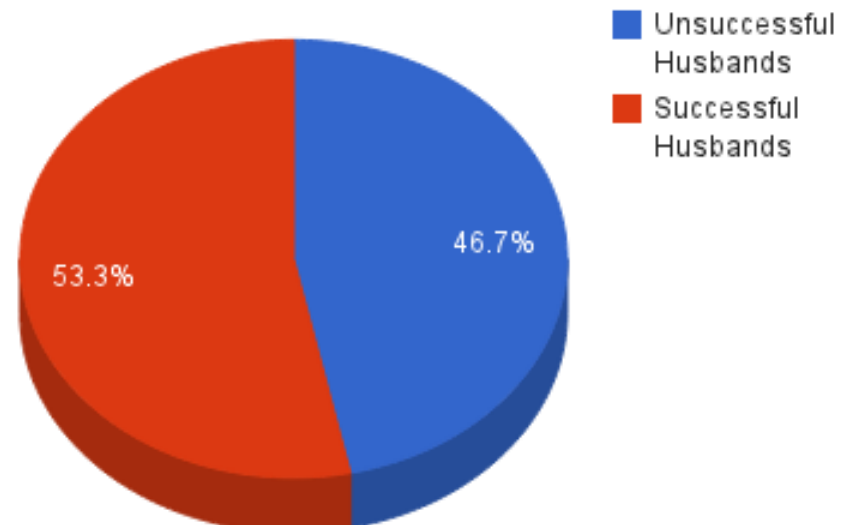
Nobiles-Novi Homines Marriages



Novi Homines-Novus Homines Marriages

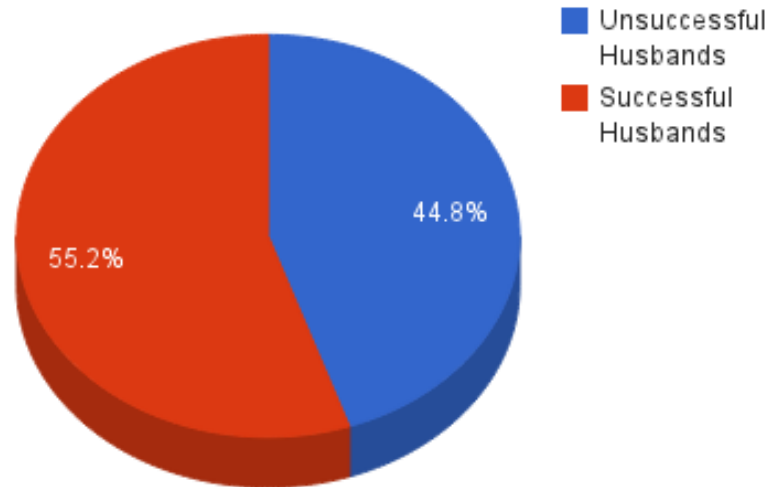


Novi Homines-Nobiles

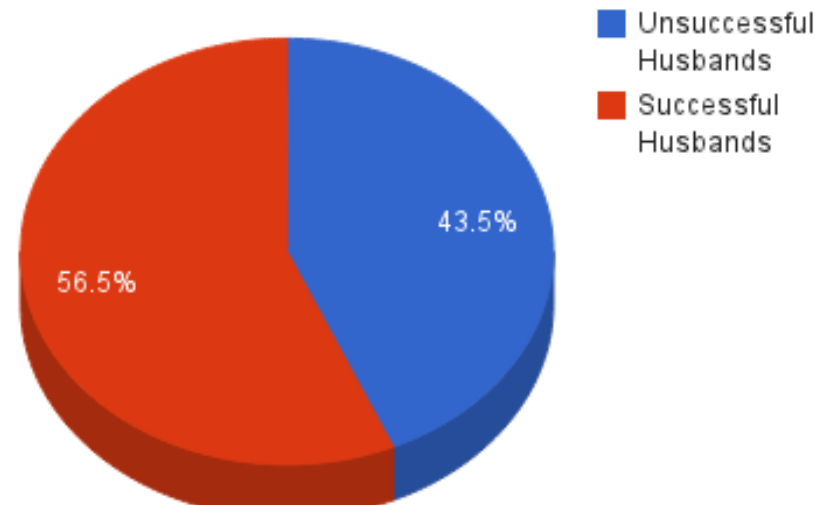


SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILIAL POLITICAL STATUS TO HUSBAND'S POLITICAL SUCCESS (AMALGAMATING ALL NOBILES)

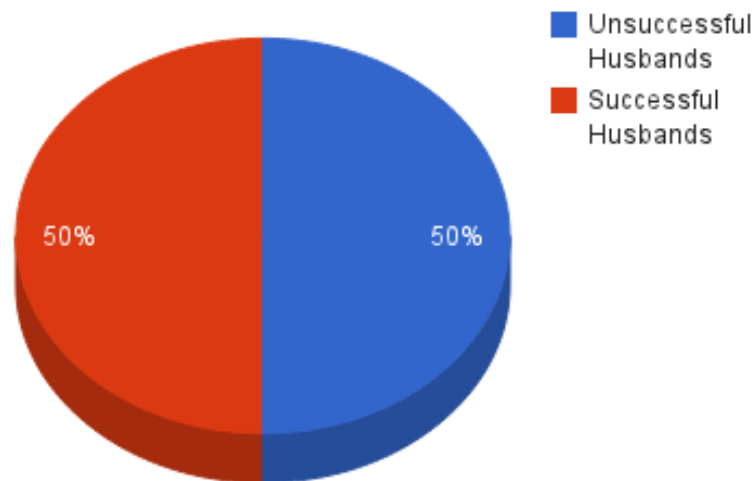
Nobiles-Nobiles Marriages



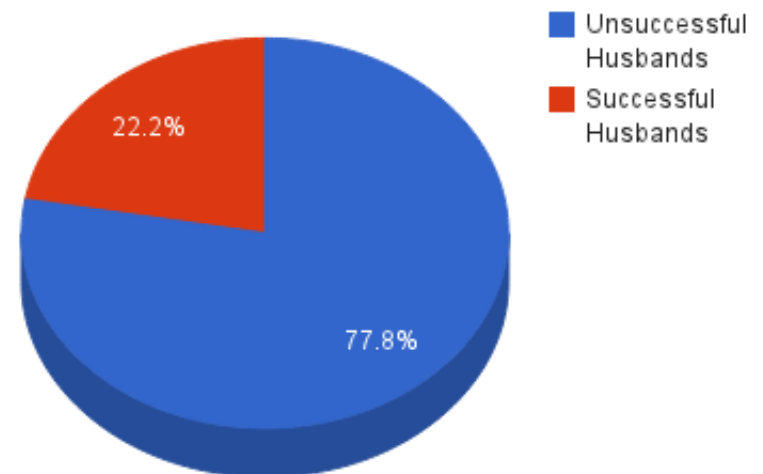
Nobiles-Novi Homines Marriages



All Novi Homines-Nobiles

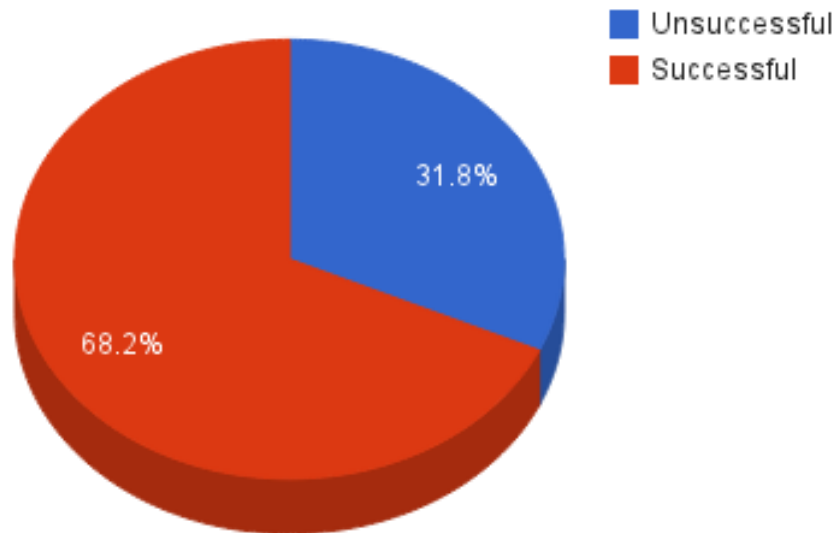


All Novi Homines-Novi Homines

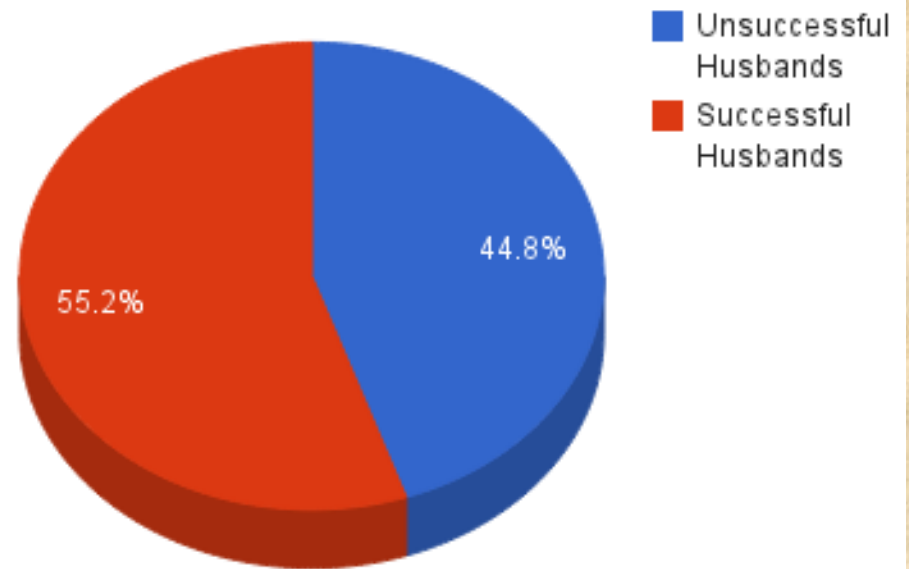


VARIOUS MEASURES OF SUCCESS

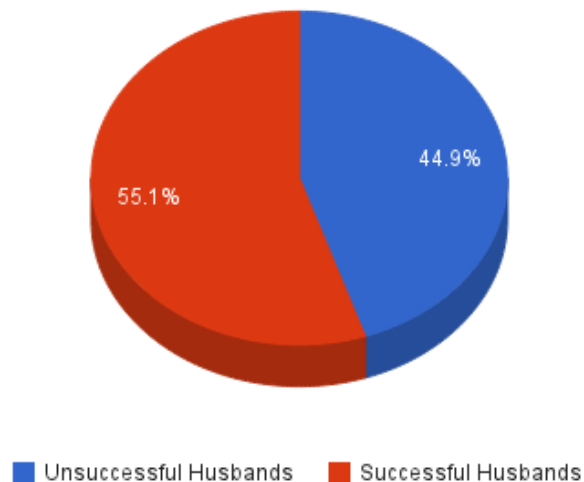
Success of Husbands in Patrician/Patrician Marriages



Nobiles-Nobiles Marriages

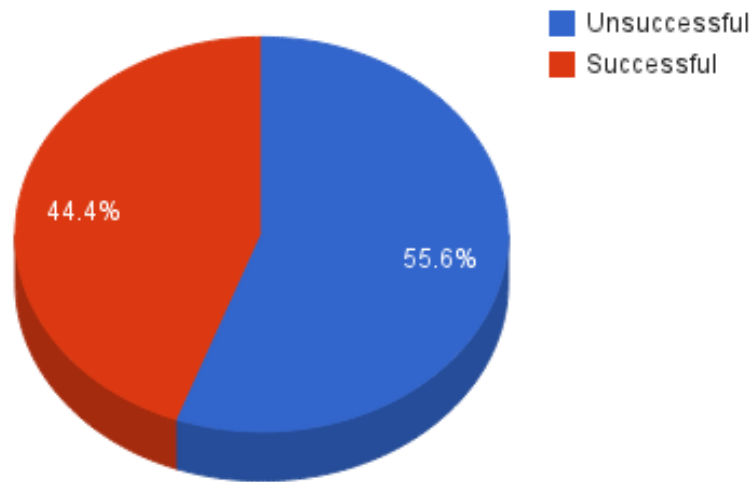


Successful FIL's effect on SIL's career

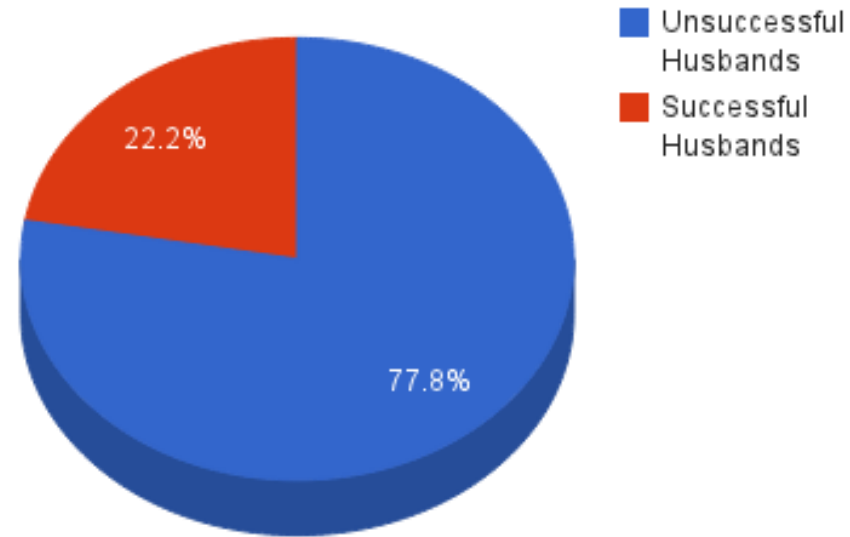


VARIOUS MEASURES OF FAILURE

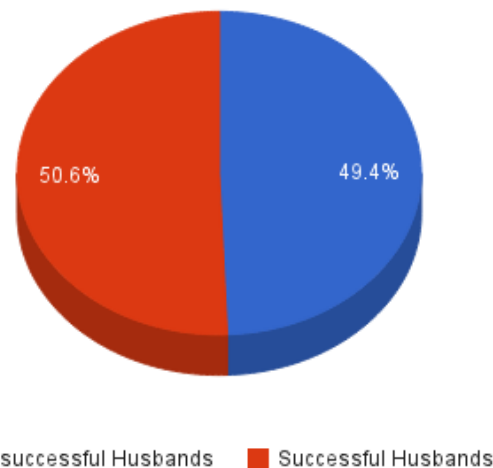
Plebeian/Plebeian Marriages and Political Success



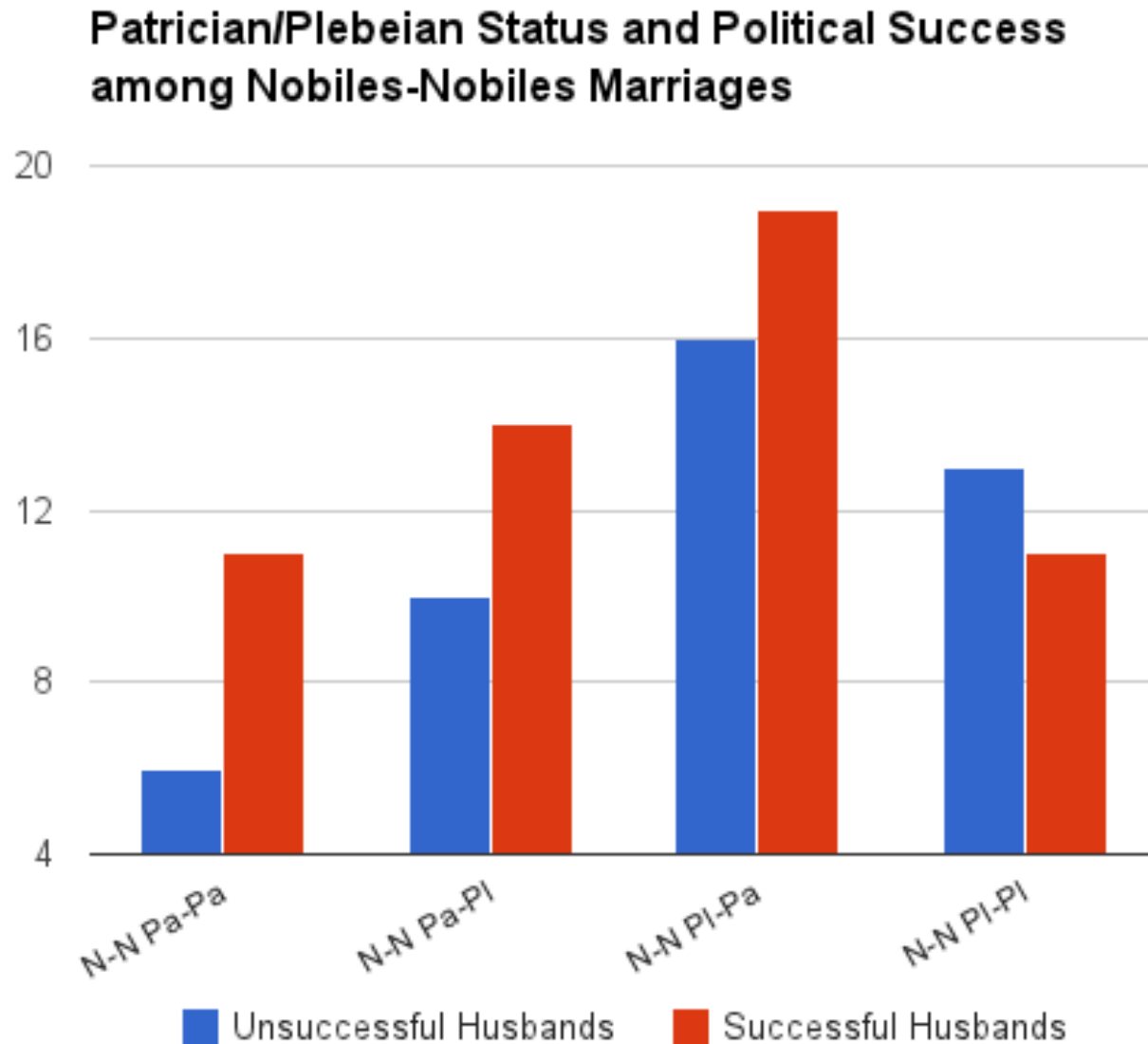
All Novi Homines-Novii Homines



Unsuccessful FIL's effect on SIL's Career



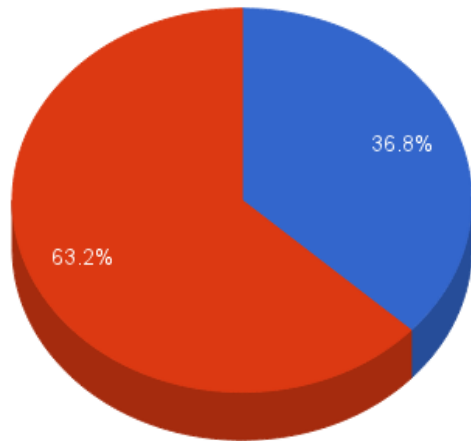
IS PATRICIAN STATUS OR NOBILES STATUS MORE IMPORTANT?



Percentage of Political Success

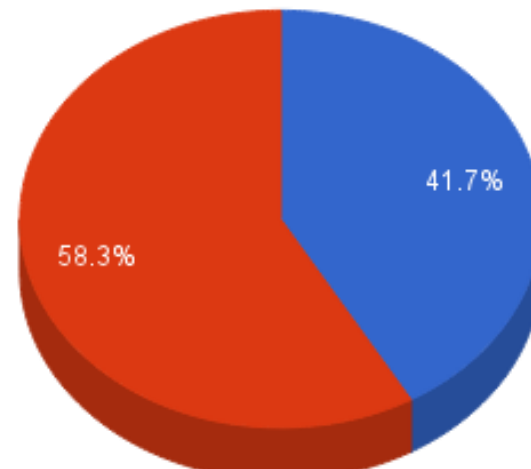
N-N Patrician-Patrician Marriages

■ Unsuccessful Husbands
■ Successful Husbands



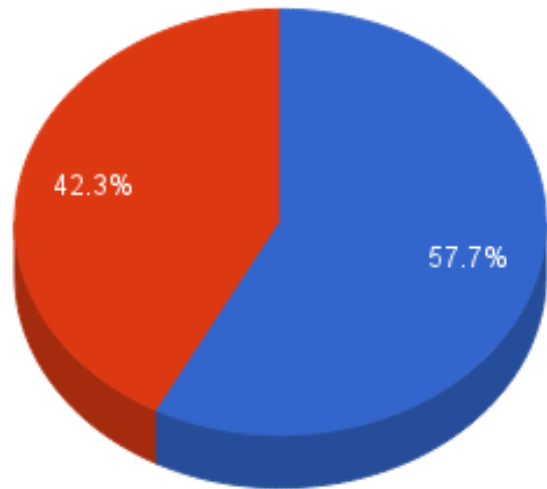
N-N Patrician-Plebeian Marriages

■ Unsuccessful Husbands
■ Successful Husbands



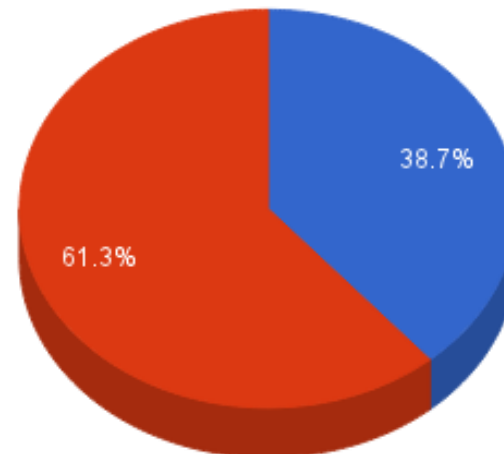
N-N Plebeian-Plebeian Marriages

■ Unsuccessful Husbands
■ Successful Husbands



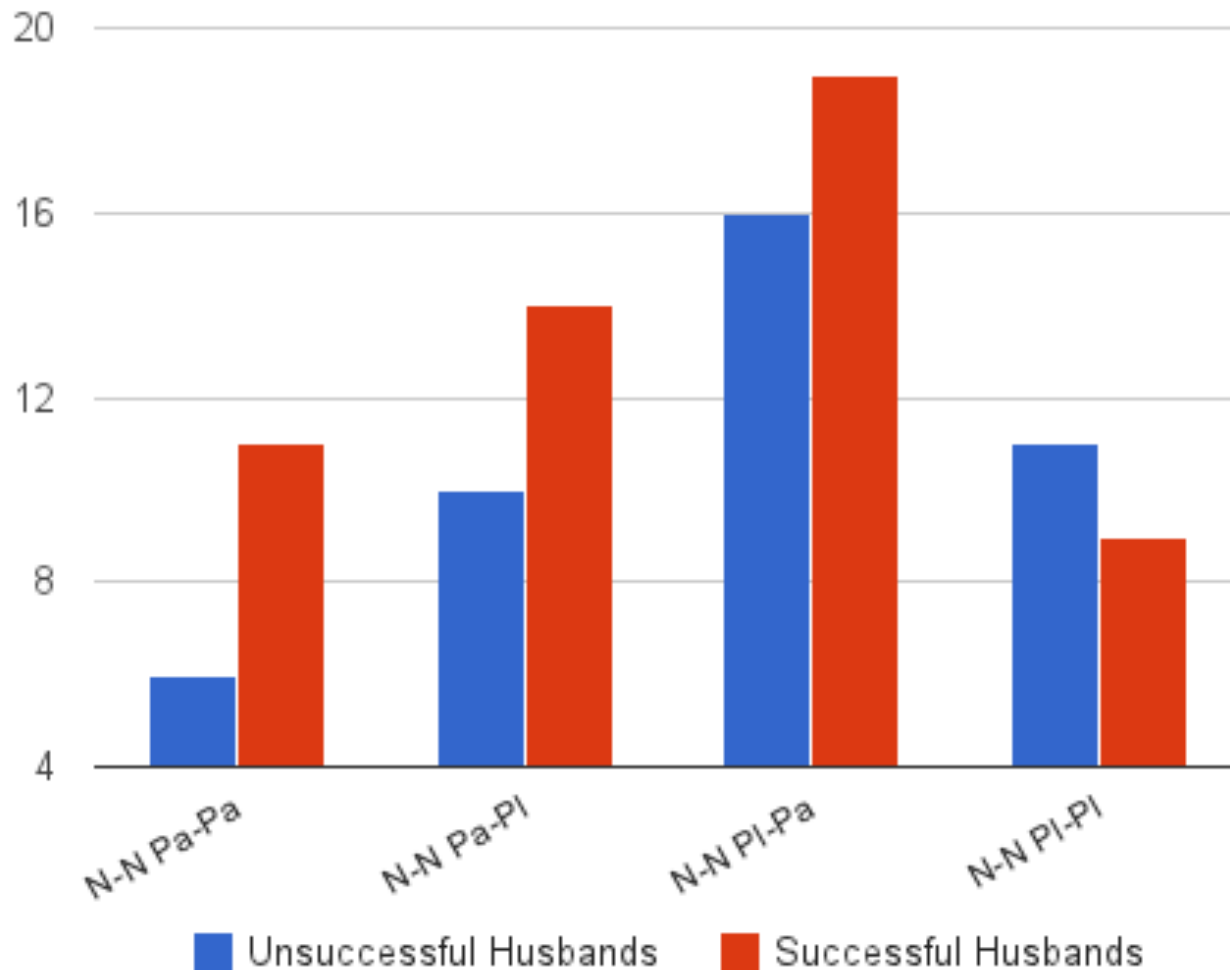
N-N Plebeian-Patrician Marriages

■ Unsuccessful Husbands
■ Successful Husbands



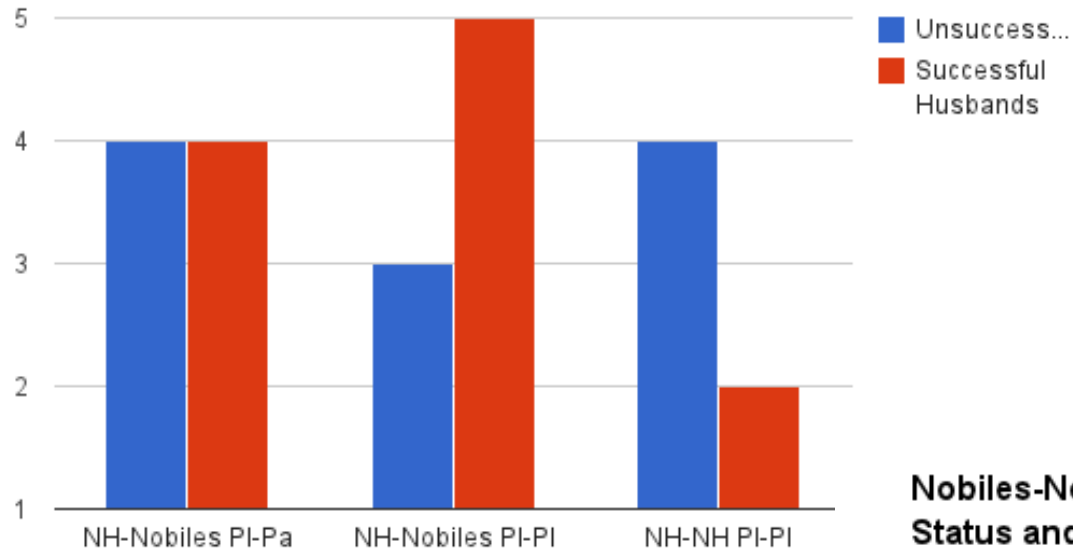
Is Patrician Status or Nobles Status more important?

**Patrician/Plebeian Status and Political Success
among Nobiles-Nobles Marriages**

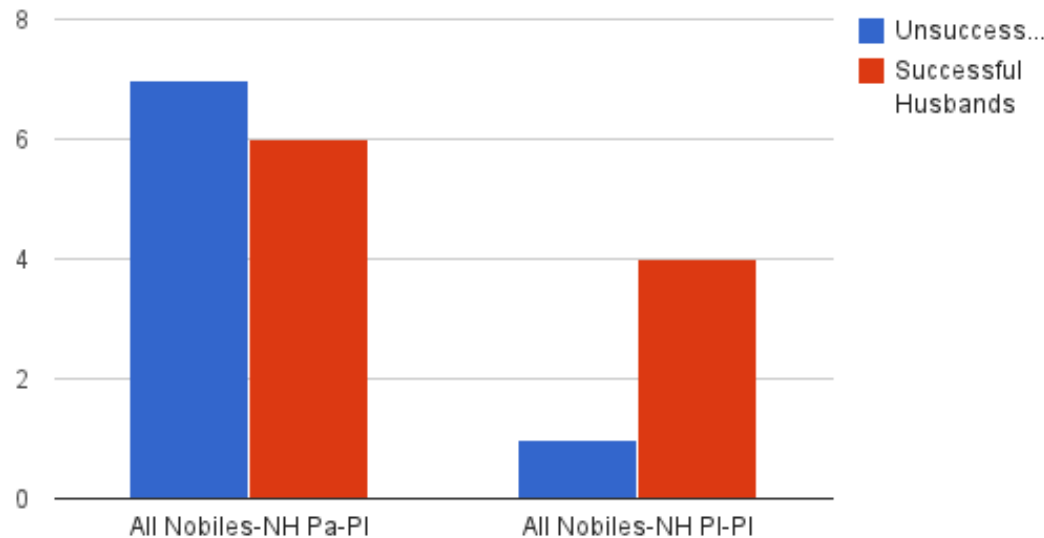


Non-Nobles Marriages

Marriages of Novi Homines by Familial Political Status and Patrician Status



Nobles-Novi Homines Marriages by Patrician Status and Political Success



LIMITATIONS OF DATABASE: SELECTION BIAS TOWARDS POWERFUL MEN AND WOMEN WITH MULTIPLE MARRIAGES

- Total Number of Marriages: 159
- Total Number of Husbands: 127
- ~ Number of Wives: 150
- Among Husbands with Multiple Marriages, the average is 2.7, with the high number being 5, slanted heavily towards dictators and triumvirs.
- Among Wives with Multiple Marriages, the average is 2.3.

LIMITATIONS OF DATABASE:
FAILURE DUE TO DEATH
RATHER THAN INCOMPETENCE

- Among the 74 men who fail to have a successful political career, 29 of them or 39% die by violence or accident before the age of eligibility for consul.

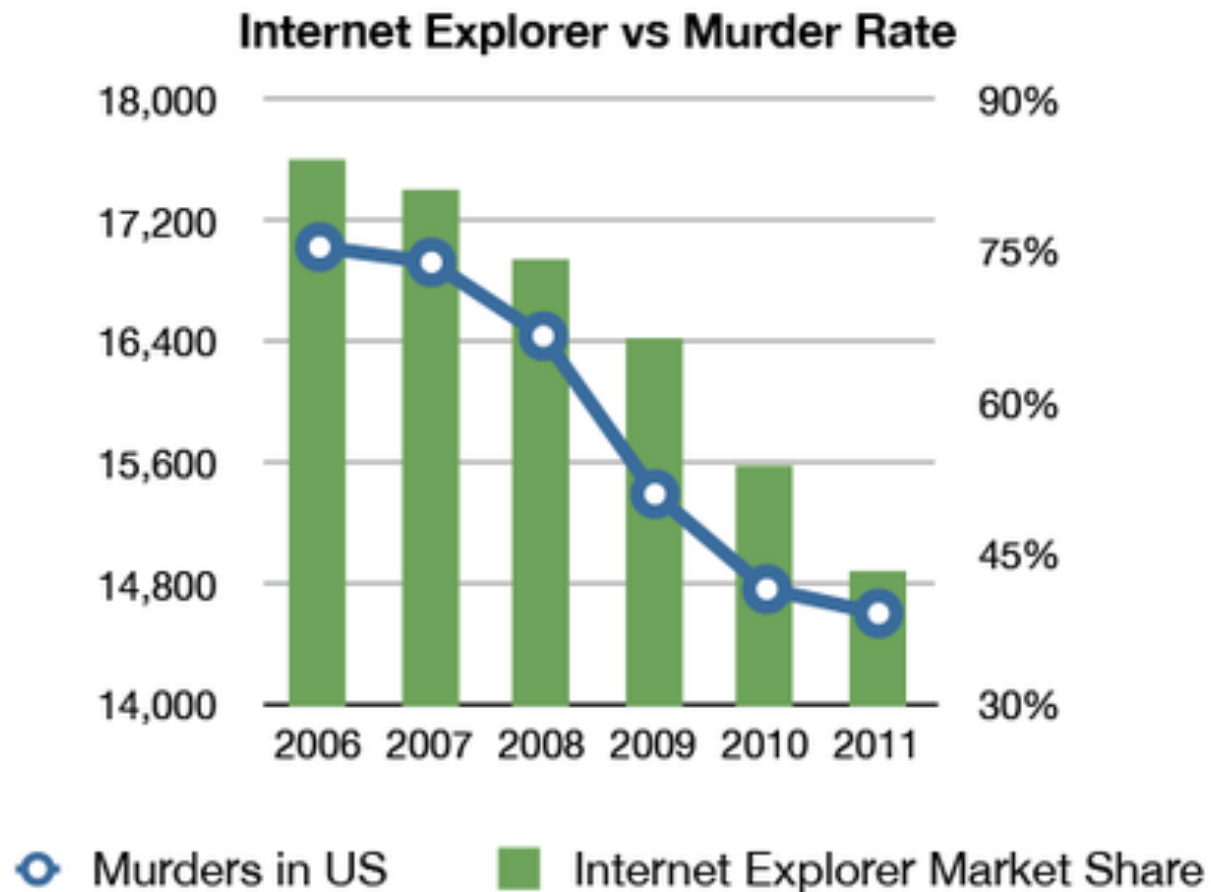
UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- How to count the marriages of Cato Minor
- How to count the status of Clodius Pulcher
- How to count broken engagements

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- Yes, certain types of Roman marital alliances seem to be correlated with political success.

CORRELATION VS CAUSATION



OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- Yes, certain types of Roman marital alliances seem to be correlated with political success.
- A father-in-law's political success appears to have only a small correlation with his son-in-law's success.
- Patrician status still matters highly, and is slightly more valuable for a man than a woman in determining the political success of a husband.
- Patrician/Plebeian status is more important than *nobiles*/novi homines status.
- The best way to get elected consul is to be a patrician man from a long line of consuls, married to a patrician woman from a long line of consuls.
- If you do not have the luck to be born patrician, marry a woman from a *nobiles* family rather than marrying for money.