



# Americans' Belief in Linked Fate: Does the Measure Capture the Concept?

## Citation

Gay, Claudine, Jennifer Hochschild, and Ariel White. 2016. "Americans' Belief in Linked Fate: Does the Measure Capture the Concept?" *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 1 (01) (March): 117–144. doi:10.1017/rep.2015.3.

## Published Version

doi:10.1017/rep.2015.3

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## **Americans' Belief in Linked Fate: Does the Measure Capture the Concept**

(Running head: "Americans' Belief in Linked Fate")

Claudine Gay, Jennifer Hochschild, and Ariel White

Harvard University

November 12, 2014

Word count for text, including notes: 9535

### **Abstract**

For decades, scholars have attributed Black Americans' unified political and policy views, despite growing internal class and status differences, to a strong perception of linked fate. In recent years, the concept has been applied to other racial and ethnic groups and to gender, but not to social statuses such as class or religion. Without broad comparisons across groups and different statuses, however, one cannot determine the conceptual value or appropriate empirical test of this canonical construct.

Using a new national survey, we examine Americans' views of linked fate by race or ethnicity, and also by gender, class, or religion. We find that expressions of linked fate are similar across racial groups, robust to experimental manipulation, and as strong for class as for racial or ethnic identity. This may reflect a general tendency toward social connectedness more than deep group loyalty or rational calculation. Furthermore, in this survey, a sense of linked fate is rarely associated with political views or political participation. We conclude that the enormously fruitful theory of racial linked fate is due for both conceptual and empirical re-examination.

Maybe we should take a step back to consider the implications of employing concepts intricately intertwined with the oppressive history of Blacks in the United States, and measures developed during a time of civil rights activism, civil strife, and racial conflict between white and black Americans. . . . Scholars should acknowledge potential problems in their [concept] transference and be systematic in testing whether these measures are measuring the latent characteristic of other groups as they have for African-Americans.

--(McClain et al. 2009): 479

For decades, scholars and political actors have noted Blacks' political homogeneity despite growing social and economic heterogeneity. African Americans' consistent policy liberalism and strong loyalty to the Democratic party affect national and local elections, help to maintain whatever progressive politics survive in the United States, sustain advocacy organizations, and provide the basis for an active and mostly united Congressional caucus. Why have well-off Blacks not become more socially, economically, and politically conservative as they became upwardly mobile or as their children grew up in the middle class? That, after all, was the pattern for non-Hispanic Whites as generations moved during the twentieth century from, for example, despised immigrants to lace-curtain Irish to Reagan Democrats to Republicans.

A standard answer has been that Black political homogeneity results from the unusually strong perception that, due to historical and contemporary experiences of group disadvantage and

discrimination, one's own life chances depend heavily on the status and fortunes of Black Americans as a whole. That perception has led, in turn, to the rational substitution of group utility for individual utility in political decision-making, and often to a strong moral and emotional commitment to the group. In *Behind the Mule*, Michael Dawson formalized these connections through the concept of linked fate, which he operationalized in a pair of survey items (Dawson 1994). Those items are now canonical, having been asked of many samples in many surveys; over time, the items themselves became the inferential target.

But the theory of linked fate opens new questions even as it answers old ones. Although in principle it is not limited to Black Americans or to racial identity, there have only recently been extensions of the theory or its measurement to other racial and ethnic groups, and few investigations of perceptions of links to non-racial social statuses such as gender or class. Moreover, the few empirical applications of linked fate theory to cases other than Black racial identity have at times yielded puzzling results. For example, large majorities of survey respondents of all races or ethnicities report a sense of linked fate with the broad category of 'other people in this country' (see discussion below); the seeming ease with which expressions of linked fate can be elicited is difficult to reconcile with its conceptualization as a deep group attachment with significant cognitive effects. But the research to date makes it impossible to fully understand the source, prevalence, political salience, or underlying meaning of linked fate beliefs throughout the American public. Nor, for that matter, can we understand even Black racial linked fate if we view it in isolation both from linked fate among non-Black groups, and from Black Americans' sense of linked fate with non-racial social statuses. In short, to understand the concept of linked fate and to locate extant findings in their empirical context we

must examine it comparatively and simultaneously, across racial and ethnic groups and across social categories. That is the task of this article.

This new examination of linked fate could yield one of two conclusions. Blacks might indeed be unique in the intensity and political salience of their sense of racial linked fate, as their history in the United States might lead one to believe and as the epigraph to this article suggests. Alternatively, Blacks' racial linked fate might not be particularly distinctive in comparison with that of other racial groups, or in comparison with Black Americans' own ties to other, non-racial identities. The latter finding would call into question the longstanding scholarly consensus that attributes Black political homogeneity to the centripetal force of Black racial linked fate.

We address those issues through original survey data probing linked fate beliefs among a large, multi-ethnic, nationally representative sample of adult Americans. Respondents were asked not only about racial or ethnic linked fate, but also about linked fate based on gender, class or religion. What emerges from this analysis is a map of linked fate whose most striking feature may be commonalities across groups and identities. As a few other surveys have found, Blacks are not alone in their feelings of linked fate; Whites, Asians and Hispanics express roughly similar views. Moreover—and to our knowledge, this comparison is the first of its kind—Black racial linked fate is part of a constellation of beliefs that includes an equally strong sense of linked fate with class identity, and a substantial though lesser sense of linkage with others of the same gender or religion. Finally, in this survey at least, these beliefs, though widespread and robust, are rarely politicized and not consistently associated with disadvantaged social status. We suggest that expressions of linked fate, at least as captured in public opinion surveys, are more closely tied to a psychological predisposition toward affiliation than to a dominant or

politically salient group identity. Viewed in a broader context, Blacks' racial linked fate differs in degree but not in kind from group attachments prevalent throughout the American public. That finding has conceptual, political, and methodological implications.

The article proceeds through four sections. We begin with a review of the scholarly literature on perceptions of linked fate across racial and ethnic groups and on links between such perceptions and political views or behavior. We then describe the data and measures. Next, we report results on the prevalence of linked fate. That analysis has four foci: absolute levels and comparisons across racial and ethnic groups; a comparison of racial or ethnic linked fate with perceived linkages by class, gender, or religion; the lack of association with social status and the tendency toward high intra-individual consistency; and the (minimal) association between perceptions of linked fate and political views or behavior. Finally, we discuss the results and conclude with a reconsideration of the concept and measurement of linked fate, and suggestions for future research.

### **Current Knowledge about Linked Fate and Its Political Associations: Three Themes**

Groups figure prominently in the study of American politics, in which scholars routinely infer individuals' political preferences on the basis of their group memberships and the psychological attachments and predispositions these memberships may generate. The attachments begin most broadly with a sense of "group identity," a term used to describe the basic feeling of belonging that transforms objective group membership into a subjective reality with measurable cognitive effects. Identification, often operationalized with survey items that

assess feelings of “closeness” to particular groups, (re)defines what the individual considers personally relevant and valuable. Perceptions of linked fate are conceptualized as representing a more developed stage of identification, a deepening of group attachments to include a belief that one’s life chances are inextricably tied to the group. Whereas all but the most extreme social isolate may feel some sense of group identity, and whereas group identity may emerge from any number of group memberships (e.g. dog owners, cyclists, gourmands), feelings of linked fate, in theory, are more selective in their prevalence in the population and in the set of groups capable of eliciting this deeper connection. When psychological attachment extends beyond group identity to cognizance of shared interests with others in that group, theory predicts that an individual is more likely to think and behave in ways that distinguish members of her group from non-members or from members who merely identify with the group label. Feeling *bound* by membership, and not simply “close” to members, in sum, is an important antecedent to cooperation and prioritization of group objectives.

It is not surprising, then, that the concept of “linked fate” has become a focal point of political science research on the salience of groups in voting behavior and public opinion. The keywords “linked fate” return 1310 separate items in Google Scholar as of November 7, 2014.<sup>i</sup> Obviously, not all of these are relevant to this endeavor and one could not review even all that are relevant. Nevertheless, even cut by half or two-thirds, that figure suggests the breadth of use of this concept. To establish a base of knowledge on which to build our research, we reviewed roughly sixty articles, books, and book chapters of most relevance to political scientists. The review identified three dominant themes, each of which points to an element of the empirical investigation in this paper.

Most basically, substantial shares of non-White<sup>ii</sup> survey respondents, especially African Americans, express a sense of racial or ethnic linked fate. In seven surveys from 1984 through 2008, from 60 to 83 percent of Blacks perceived some level of racial commonality, with lower proportions in the 2000s compared with earlier decades (McClain and Stewart 2013). These surveys were either specific to African Americans or had large Black samples and a strong focus on racial issues.<sup>iii</sup> Three general population surveys find similar results; 80 percent of Blacks in the 2004 American National Election Study [ANES], and 65 percent of Blacks in both the 2008 and 2012 ANES, agreed that “what happens to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life.”

Fewer surveys have asked non-Black respondents about linked fate. Nonetheless, surveys show a sense of linked fate, sometimes at lower levels, among Asian Americans [(Kim and Lee 2001); (Masuoka 2006); (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004): 48-49; (Junn and Masuoka 2008)], Latinos [(Burnside and Rodriguez 2009); (Sanchez 2006); (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010); (Segura 2012)], Muslim Americans (Barreto, Masuoka, and Sanchez 2008), and occasionally Whites (White 2007). In the 2012 ANES, 52 percent of Latinos and 62 percent of Whites agreed, as compared with 65 percent of Blacks, that their own life chances depend at least partly on the fortunes of their racial group. Results were similar for Latinos in the 2008 ANES, and slightly higher for a small sample in 2004.<sup>iv</sup> A few researchers have taken the concept outside the United States, and found roughly similar proportions of non-Whites perceiving linked fate [(Sawyer, Pen~a, and Sidanius 2004); (Chen 2012)].

Scholars who have looked beyond the basic distribution of linked fate beliefs have found nuance within these proportions. Among Blacks, the sense of linked fate varies by gender

[(Masuoka 2006); (Dawson 1994); (Simien 2005); (Tate 1993); (Gay and Tate 1998)], nativity [(Hutchings, Wong et al. 2005), (Watts 2009)], socioeconomic status [(Tate 1993), (Chong and Rogers 2004), (Gay 2004)], education (Dawson 1984, Simien 2005), racial composition of the work environment (Hajnal 2007), religiosity (Reese and Brown 1995); or skin color (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). It may vary with context or by substantive issue (Forman Jr. 2011). Again as an example, in the 2012 ANES, 68 percent of Black men, compared with 60 percent of black women, expressed a sense of shared fate (gender differences were smaller among Whites and Latinos).

Non-Black groups similarly show internal variation. Asian Americans' and American Muslims' sense of linked fate varies by nationality, and for Muslims also by religiosity [(Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004): 48, 49); (Barreto et al. 2008); (Haynes and Skulley n.d. (c. 2012))]. Latinos' sense of linked fate varies with an array of factors, though not (unlike with Blacks) with perceptions of discrimination (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010). Some scholars are also developing comparisons across as well as within groups, thus strengthening the theoretical scaffolding around the construct of group-based linked fate [(Chong and Kim 2006); (Junn and Masuoka 2008); (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010)]. (Dovi 2002) offers another way of strengthening the theory of linked fate by developing the philosophical assumptions behind and normative implications of the perception.

In short, roughly half or more of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, American Muslims, and non-Hispanic Whites express a sense of shared fate, with some variation within each group, over time, or across surveys. Where racial or ethnic comparisons are available, usually a higher proportion of Blacks express that perception. That sets the context for

the second theme running through the scholarly literature: an important but not uniform association between a perception of shared fate and political views or behavior. As always with cross-sectional surveys, the causal relationship across attitudes or between attitudes and behaviors needs careful examination, but the literature at least shows connections between linked fate and political choices. Among Blacks a strong sense of shared racial fate is sometimes associated with support for Black nationalism (Block 2011), group solidarity (Hoston 2009), or support for descriptive representation [(Tate 2003); (Manzano and Sanchez 2010); (Schildkraut 2013b); (Schildkraut 2013a)]. It is also in some cases linked to a commitment to coalitions among people of color [(Reese and Brown 1995, Brown and Shaw 2002)], suspicion of the mainstream media [(Davis and Gandy 1999), (Skerry 1997, Harris-Lacewell and Junn 2007); Dawson 2001], support for womanist ideology [(Dawson 2001), (Gandy 2001)], preference for some or mostly black neighbors [(Gay 2004); (Krysan and Farley 2002)], support for majority-minority Congressional districting (Tate 2003), or political activities such as contributing money to a political candidate, signing petitions, and contacting a government official (Chong and Rogers 2004). These associations serve as the main empirical support for the theoretical claim that linked fate functions as a heuristic guiding Blacks' political decision-making.

Other groups also sometimes evince an association between a sense of linked fate and political behaviors or attitudes. Latinos with high linked fate are more likely to find Blacks to be palatable coalitional partners (McClain, Carter, and al. 2008) or to support co-ethnic candidates (McConnaughy et al. 2010). Asian Americans' sense of linked fate is associated with voting and other forms of political participation, and sometimes with a sense of political efficacy (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). Linked fate is associated with some policy views in some Asian

nationalities (Haynes and Skulley n.d. (c. 2012)) Interestingly, American Muslims with a strong sense of linked fate are less likely to be Republicans, but also more likely to identify with no political party than are others (Barreto and Bozonelos 2009).

As the latter finding implies, not all researchers have found connections between a perception of racial or ethnic linked fate and liberal political and policy attitudes or behaviors, even among African Americans. Blacks' sense of linked fate is not related to affect toward major political leaders (Davis and Brown 2002), to evaluations of police (Howell, Perry, and Vile 2004), or in some research to an "oppositional. . . identity"(Herring, Jankowski, and Brown 1999): 374). Linked fate is either not associated at all with, or is associated with negative evaluations of, black mayors' performance in office (Howell and Perry 2004). Perhaps most interestingly, once mobilization by a political party is included in the analysis, a sense of shared fate is not associated with Blacks' or Latinos' self-reported likelihood of voting in either the 1996 or – surprisingly – the 2008 presidential election (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009).

Asians' sense of linked fate is associated with rejection of partisan identification (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004): 115), but not consistently associated with policy views (Haynes and Skulley n.d. (c. 2012)). Latinos' linked fate is negatively related to voter registration and is not related to voting in 2004 election, although it is occasionally related to nonelectoral political action (Valdez 2011). In the 2012 ANES, Whites' perception of racial linked fate was associated with being a Republican or an Independent. In short, how linked fate connects with political views and behaviors, and whether its political valence differs across racial and ethnic groups, remains unclear; it warrants closer examination.

The fact that a majority of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Muslim Americans, and possibly Asian Americans perceive a shared fate with their group, but that such a perception varies in its political implications, leads to the third theme in the extant literature: analysts differ in their interpretation of what lies behind a sense of common fate with co-ethnics. As we noted earlier, Dawson originally framed linked fate as an assessment of rational self-interest, a “Black *utility* heuristic”(Dawson 1994, italics added). With that framing, it bears a family resemblance to other politically relevant heuristics such as the labels Republican, Democrat, socialist, or reactionary [(Popkin 1993); (Lau and Redlawsk 2001)]. Understood as a heuristic, in short, linked fate is valuable precisely because it is associated with a set of interests organized in the political arena.

Since the original formulation, however, the connotation of linked fate for many scholars has become “a sense of belonging or conscious loyalty to the group”[Simien 2005: 529. See also (Meares 1998)]. The reasoning here is that, given that the United States remains a racially discriminatory society, group solidarity (Shelby 2005) provides an essential shield against harm and a cherished emotional link to similar others. As Melanye Price puts it, “Any time individuals make normative statements about appropriate black behavior in a possessive manner, linked fate is involved. It is omnipresent” (Price 2009): 7).

Understood as an expression of group loyalty or belonging rather than as a heuristic, linked fate need not have political connotations. One can feel a strong tie to religious or gender groups, but only some of those ties are politically salient in a given society or to a particular individual. Whether people's perceptions of linked fate should be understood as a rational calculation that subsequently informs their decisions about politics, or as an assertion of social

connection whose political import is unclear, is an empirical question that remains unanswered. A broad, comparative investigation of when, how, and for whom perceptions of linked fate are connected to political behavior, and to social stratification and disadvantage, will help the analyst distinguish a general sense of belonging from a potentially salient heuristic.

This paper provides evidence on all three themes that emerged from a literature review. First, we examine the extent of perceived linked fate across four racial and ethnic groups, and with non-racial social categories – thus adding crucial new data measuring linked fate comparatively, and for evaluating the claim of Black distinctiveness. Second, we examine associations between linked fate perceptions and political views and behaviors. Finally, we compare across race or ethnicity and across gender, religion, and class in order to address the question of whether linked fate views should be understood as a heuristic device, a statement of group loyalty, or something else.

### **Data and Measures**

We draw the data for this study from a survey-based experiment called Linked Fate in Social Status (LFSS). The survey was peer-reviewed and then funded through the TESS (Time-Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences) program. It was conducted by Knowledge Networks (now GfK) in September 2009, using a racially stratified sample of their nationally representative online research panel. GfK recruits survey participants to become a part of their panel through a combination of random-digit dialing and address-based sampling. Once participants have agreed to be on the panel, they are sent surveys via email and respond through the internet.

Respondents without computers are provided with a laptop and internet connection at no cost, while those with computers are compensated for filling out surveys with "points" that can be

redeemed for cash. The linked fate results presented here are based on a single, self-contained module; GfK provided respondents' demographic characteristics based on their existing panel profiles. GfK used respondents' previously-reported racial identities to oversample minority groups in order to allow for sufficient statistical power for this survey. The sample includes 834 White, 725 Black, 788 Hispanic, and 420 Asian respondents. The response rate was 66.4 percent by AAPOR's RR3 measure.

The survey instrument included the standard two questions about linked fate, all worded as follows:

Do you think what happens to [R's RACE/ETHNICITY or CLASS or GENDER or RELIGION] people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

(If YES) How much will it affect you?

Responses to these items were coded zero (No), one (Not very much at all), two (Some), or three (Yes, a lot).

Respondents (stratified by self-reported race or ethnicity) were shown both the racial version of the linked fate item and one non-racial linked fate item, randomized to be either about the respondent's self-reported gender, religion, or class.<sup>v</sup> An item asking respondents to identify their social class always preceded the linked fate items. The order in which respondents were shown the racial and "other" linked fate items was also randomized. Whether the racial linked fate item was asked first or second affected responses only modestly and not consistently; a t-test of the experimental group means did not reject the null hypothesis that question order does not

affect racial linked fate responses. Therefore all analysis presented here combines the two question-order groups, yielding 1810 responses (550 Whites, 470 Blacks, 518 Hispanics, and 272 Asian Americans).

## **Results**

This section first reports a comparison of linked fate perceptions across racial and ethnic groups in the United States. We then examine the prevalence of linked fate beliefs about non-race social categories, and the relationship of linked fate beliefs to each other, to social status, and to politics.

*The Prevalence of Racial Linked Fate:* Consistent with the few other surveys that compare across racial or ethnic groups, Black Americans in LFSS are not unique in exhibiting a sense of racial linked fate; most Whites and Asian Americans also view their life chances as being determined to some degree by their group membership. The top left panel of Figure 1 reports the mean level of racial linked fate by racial and ethnic group, on a scale from 0 (none) to 3 (a lot). Although the literature has paid particular attention to African Americans, our analysis uncovers no statistically significant difference in average racial linked fate among Blacks, Whites and Asians. On average, responses cluster in the middle of the range, with the group's perceived influence on life chances falling between 'not very much' and 'some.' By this measure, racial linked fate among Black Americans is neither particularly strong in an absolute sense nor distinguished from views of other groups.

Figure 1 here

LFSS's most distinctive group with regard to racial linked fate is Hispanics, who express

unusually low levels. Only 45 percent of Latino respondents--compared to 77 percent of Blacks, 73 percent of Whites and 67 percent of Asian Americans--agree that “what happens to Hispanics in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life.”<sup>vi</sup> The difference between Hispanic linked fate and racial linked fate among other groups is statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

Without additional information, it is difficult to substantively interpret the mean levels of racial linked fate and the differences between Latinos and all others. Latinos may, for example, be genuinely more individualistic and less committed to deep group ties, or they may see high levels of intra-group variation and therefore perceive “other Hispanics” to be a less useful heuristic than a nationality-based one would be. (Other surveys have found higher levels of linked fate when Latinos, or Asian Americans, are asked about their own nationality than when asked about a pan-ethnic group.) What we can assert is that expressions of racial linked fate are remarkably common across three of the four groups. Moreover, given the earlier finding that responses do not vary with question order (i.e. whether the racial linked fate item was asked before or after an item about non-racial linked fate), we conclude that racial linked fate is not easily manipulated by survey context. That provides the platform from which we turn to the next question: how does racial linked fate compare with other types of possible linked fate?

*Racial Linked Fate is Not Unique:* Just as perceptions of linked fate are not limited to Black Americans in LFSS, neither are they limited to racial identity. Our analysis is summarized in the second, third, and fourth quadrants of Figure 1. The bar graphs in Figure 1 depict the mean reported levels of linked fate for each group of respondents, by identity type (race, class, gender, religion). Figure 1 shows that most Americans, including Blacks, view their life outcomes as

being shaped at least as much by their class as by their race. For Blacks, Whites and Hispanics, class linked fate rivals or exceeds racial linked fate, with an average of 77 percent of respondents agreeing that what happens to members of their social class will have at least “some” effect on their own well-being. For Whites and Hispanics, class linked fate exceeds all other types of linked fate by statistically significant margins. Furthermore, higher proportions of all groups except Asian Americans responded “a lot” with regard to class linked fate than with regard to racial or ethnic linked fate.<sup>vii</sup>

Perceptions of class linked fate are robust to experimental manipulation. That is, as we noted above, whether a respondent receives a question about class linked fate before or after a question about racial linked fate has no effect on responses. A t-test comparing mean linked fate across experimental groups indicates that one cannot reject the null hypothesis of no difference.<sup>viii</sup>

Here too, the overall findings have one exception. Although Asian Americans resemble Blacks and Whites in their views regarding racial linked fate, they stand out for their comparatively low levels of class linked fate. Asian class linked fate is statistically significantly lower than what is observed among the other three groups, and lower than Asian racial linked fate. LFSS does not provide the evidence needed to explain this distinctive pattern; it is an important subject for further research.

Rather than class commonality, Figure 1 shows gender commonality to be an unusually salient basis for perceptions of linked fate among Asian Americans. Gendered linked fate is also relatively low among Hispanics. We have no persuasive argument about the disparity in levels of

gender linked fate, but we note that the levels fall within the same overall range as linked fate for race and class.

Linked fate perceptions based on religion are the weakest for all racial and ethnic groups in LFSS. Religious linked fate is never stronger than any other type of linked fate, and is often significantly weaker both statistically and substantively. Average reported religious linked fate among Blacks, for example, who regularly report higher church attendance than most other Americans, is only 1.08 on the four-point scale— lower than that of Whites, at 1.43. The difference is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ , though not substantively large.<sup>ix</sup> However, although religious linked fate is notably weaker than any other type of linked fate, it is similar to other linked fate views in its robustness to experimental manipulation. As observed with race, class and gender, there is no statistically significant difference in mean levels of religious linked fate across experimental groups.

We can now add to the initial finding: in the LFSS survey, not only racial linked fate, but also a sense of linked fate with regard to other social statuses is similar across most groups and is robust to experimental manipulation. Overall, Americans perceive their life chances to be linked to others of their class as much as to others of their race or ethnicity; some, although fewer, also perceive their life chances to be linked to their gender or religion.

*The Tendency Toward Group Connectedness:* LFSS reveals that the best predictor of whether someone expresses a sense of linked fate with a given social group is not his or her own race, class, gender, or religion, or the object of the inquiry—but whether he or she expresses a sense of linked fate with some other social group. That is, individuals evince a general tendency toward

more or less social connectedness; neither the particular group nor the individual's own particular characteristics matters very much.

We show the evidence for this startling conclusion in two steps. First, consider intra-individual correlations on linked fate responses, organized by respondent's racial or ethnic group. Table 1 provides the relevant evidence.

Table 1 here

The correlations extend from high to very high compared with the norm in the social sciences. The average correlation for a sense of linked fate between race and the other social categories ranges from .451 to .765. Only two of the twelve pair-wise correlations in table 1 are below .50 – between race and religion among Whites (.440) and among Blacks (.299). These two slightly lower correlations may warrant further study, but they should not distract us from the overall finding of very high associations between a sense of racial linked fate and a sense of linked fate with another social category.<sup>x</sup>

Second, contrary to the original theory and most subsequent explications, a perception of linked fate is not associated with disadvantaged status. That is, LFSS respondents in both advantaged or high status groups and in disadvantaged or low status groups are equally likely to report linked fate. Figure 2 shows the LFSS evidence for all four types of linked fate.<sup>xi</sup>

Figure 2 here

As with Table 1, these results are also straightforward: members of low status groups do not report more linked fate on the relevant dimension than do members of high status groups. In fact, when all non-White respondents are combined, Whites are significantly *more* likely to

express racial linked fate than are non-Whites. Even if one discounts that result as a fluke of the survey, we have no grounds for saying that linked fate is associated with social disadvantage. Women are no more likely than are men to report gendered linked fate; poor and working class Americans are no more likely than middle and upper class Americans to express class linked fate; non-Christians are no more likely to express religious linked fate than are Christians. In the LFSS, at least, linked fate beliefs are not conditional on social disadvantage.

We see two plausible explanations for the high intra-individual correlations across linked fate items. The first is methodological; respondents received the two items consecutively, and the linked fate questions had identical wording except for the object (race or ethnicity, or one of the three other statuses of class, religion, and gender). Thus the results in table 1 may be an artifact of the survey design. The second plausible explanation is substantive; a given individual may have a strong or weak propensity for group connectedness.

LFSS does not permit us to distinguish between these two explanations; once again, we urge further research. However, the 2012 ANES provides some leverage, since it included racial and ethnic linked fate items, a question about “women in this country” (female respondents only) and a new question about “other people in this country” (all respondents). The results show the same pattern of high intra-individual associations: 82 percent of Hispanics, 87 percent of Blacks, and 91 percent of Whites who reported linked fate with their racial or ethnic group also reported a sense of linked fate with Others. Even higher proportions of women in each group who reported linked fate with their racial or ethnic group also reported a sense of gender linked fate. Pairwise correlations on the fully-scored linked fate variables (none, not much, some, a lot) among race or ethnicity, women, and Others are all above .6.

Still within the 2012 ANES, we correlated linked fate responses with additional items to clarify whether these reports reflect deep attachments to particular social groups, rational calculations about one's relationship to one's group, or an individual's tendency toward group connectedness. What we found is puzzling. Linked fate responses are very weakly related to responses on a feeling thermometer for each respective group – a result that should not obtain if high linked fate indicates emotional loyalty to that group.<sup>xii</sup> In addition, linked fate responses are very weakly related to perceptions of discrimination against each respective group – a result that should not obtain if high linked fate functions as a rational heuristic used by disadvantaged groups.<sup>xiii</sup> Finally, we ran a regression of one's linked fate score using three explanatory variables: perceived discrimination score for that social status, a feeling thermometer for that status, and linked fate with Others. Results of these regressions are presented in Table 2. The Others coefficient is by far the strongest in all cases, with a standardized coefficient several times that of the other variables, whether we look at Black, Hispanic, White, or female linked fate. All of these results combined suggest that perceptions of linked fate reflect less an individual's attachment to a particular group, or her beliefs about that group's status in society, than the individual's generic affinity for groups.

To the findings so far, then, we add another: LFSS shows not only that a sense of linked fate is similar across groups, is robust to experimental manipulation, and is not limited to racial or ethnic identity, but also that linked fate beliefs, for a given individual, are more related to one another than they are to the individual's social status or the group in question. Perceptions of linked fate may reflect a tendency toward social connectedness more than either loyalty to a particular group or a heuristic calculation.

*Linked Fate is Not (Often) Political:* Finally, LFSS shows that rarely are linked fate beliefs associated with either political views or political participation. Regardless of whether individuals feel loyal to a social group, or use the group as a cognitive heuristic, or have a tendency toward social connectedness, such a view is not consistently associated with political decision-making. As we saw in the review of the literature above, this result accords with some, though not most, of the published scholarship on linked fate.

To arrive at this conclusion, we examined the associations between a report of linked fate for each social status (race, class, gender, and religion) and for each racial or ethnic group of respondents, for six political outcomes. Two outcomes were attitudes: party identification (Democratic to Republican) and political ideology (liberal to conservative). The remaining four were behaviors: voter registration, participation in a neighborhood association, community work, and membership on a community board (on a scale ranging from no action to action). Each block plots the bivariate linear regression coefficients for each relationship, along with their 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 3 shows the results of this analysis. The columns indicate the political view or activity; the rows indicate the social status that was the subject of a particular linked fate query; the placement of the letters within each block indicate the association for a racial or ethnic group ([W]hite, [B]lack, [H]ispanic, [A]sian) between the average report of linked fate and the average report of political activity or views. (Note that within each block, the vertical dimension has no meaning; the order goes from Whites on top to Asians on the bottom simply for ease of reading.) Each circled letter indicates a statistically significant relationship (at  $p < .05$ ) between linked fate and a political activity or view.

Thus, for example, looking at the bottom left panel (party identification by religious linked fate), we see that religious linked fate has a coefficient of .7 for Asian Americans, with a 95 percent confidence interval running from .3 to 1.1. So a one-point increase in religious linked fate score (e.g., from somewhat to very) is associated with a one-point increase in the party identification score (which runs from 1 to 7, strong Democrat to strong Republican). If we move a few blocks over to look at voter registration by religious linked fate, we see that the coefficient on religious linked fate is .04 for Asian American respondents. A one unit change in religious linked fate is associated with a change of 4 percent in the probability that a respondent is registered to vote. And so on.

Figure 3 here

Although there is some variation--by respondent's group, social status being asked about, or political view or activity--what stands out is the paucity of strong associations. Among the 96 correlations (four groups x four social statuses x six political activities or views), only 9 are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. A sense of linked fate is typically unrelated to political views or behavior. Nor is there much of a pattern even among the significant results. Strikingly, LFSS shows no associations between Blacks' linked fate and their political activity. If LFSS results can be trusted, linked fate is no longer playing its traditional role of shaping consistent liberalism, Democratic partisanship, or political activity among Blacks or other non-white groups.

## **Discussion**

While attention to the source and salience of common fate perceptions originated in the field of Black politics, in recent years some scholars have applied it to other groups, especially other races or ethnicities. That is an important analytic and empirical advance; one cannot determine if Black linked fate is unique or distinctive without comparative data. Taking this advance a step further, the LFSS survey looks across other social statuses, thereby revealing patterns previously obscured by the usual focus on Black, or even racial and ethnic, linked fate. If the LFSS and other comparative surveys are correct, by the late 2000s Blacks were not distinctive in their reported levels of racial linked fate, and not distinctive in the robustness or stability of their view. Nor, we now see, are perceptions of racial or ethnic linked fate distinctive in their level, robustness, or stability. Most LFSS respondents expressed as much or more commonality with regard to class, many did with regard to gender, and some did with regard to religion. Few surveys have examined gender linked fate, and to our knowledge, none has examined perceptions of class and religious linked fate; further research will show if the findings in LFSS hold up in different circumstances.

The LFSS study also suggests that a person's expression of linked fate is more a preference for connection than anything distinctive about either the demographic characteristics of the individual or the social category in question. Intra-individual correlations are very high, and a separate national survey with similar items indicates that linked fate is associated with neither perceptions of discrimination (for heuristic use) or an expression of warmth toward that group (an indication of loyalty or belonging). By default, we suggest that it captures a psychological proclivity to connect or affiliate with others.

Perhaps the most striking result is that expressions of linked fate with regard to any of the four social statuses, for all four racial or ethnic groups, are only weakly and unsystematically related to political ideology or partisanship, or to particular political actions. Some earlier research has found this result but to our knowledge no one has looked at such an extensive array of political activities or social statuses. It is particularly noteworthy that Blacks' reports of linked fate are the most *unconnected* to politics in LFSS.

Given these results, how should scholars and political actors understand the canonical argument that Blacks have remained overwhelmingly liberal and Democratic, and disproportionately politically active, because they associate their future with that of other African Americans? Arguably that explanation works less well now than it did in earlier decades; such a possibility accords with other evidence. In a 2007 survey, two fifths of Black respondents agreed that "Blacks today can no longer be thought of as a single race because the black community is so diverse" (no other group was asked this question). Young Black adults were especially likely to agree (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2007). A year later, young Black adults were disproportionately likely to agree that "there is no general black experience in America." In the same survey, three fifths of Blacks and Latinos, compared with four fifths of Whites, agreed that they had more in common with their class than their race; that was especially true for low-income respondents (Harris and Langer 2008). In 2009, 60 percent of Blacks and 67 percent of Hispanics agreed that "in the last ten years . . . the values held by black people and the values held by white people have become more similar" (agreement was slightly lower in 2007), while only 22 percent of Blacks said that middle class and poor members

of their race have “a lot in common” (results were the same in 2007) (Pew Research Center and National Public Radio 2009).

To our knowledge, these questions were not asked in earlier years and have not been repeated, so we cannot say whether the responses reveal a genuine change since the 1980s in Americans’ group identity or use of group trajectory as a heuristic. As is so often the case, more research is needed. But what emerges most clearly from analysis of the LFSS survey is the apparent conflict between the conceptualization of linked fate as racial minorities’ deep and rationally motivated attachment to their race and the empirical fact of a mass public easily moved to express high levels of linked fate with a variety of social groups, *even one as vague as ‘other people from this country.’* The fact that expressions of linked fate are not only pervasive, but also often apolitical contributes further to the conflict between old understanding and new evidence. Have scholars misjudged the significance of linked fate beliefs, or are theory and measurement poorly aligned? Until the many questions raised by the survey on Linked Fate in Social Status are answered, we conclude that the enormously fruitful concept of racial linked fate is due for both conceptual and empirical re-examination. It is too interesting and important a concept to be abandoned, but it is also too interesting and important to be allowed to lapse into a phrase whose meaning and value are ambiguous or changing.

**Figure 1: Average Linked Fate Perceptions, By Racial or Ethnic Group, LFSS 2009**

[Figure 1 here]

**Figure 2: Comparing Perceptions of Linked Fate between High and Low Status Groups,  
LFSS 2009**

[Figure 2 here]

LFSS respondents were divided fairly evenly between those in the self-defined upper or middle classes (938) and those in the working or lower classes (866). 424 respondents reported “none” for religion; as explained in the text, they are included in figure 2. There were 2552 Christians and 215 non-Christians, and 1452 women and 1315 men.

**Figure 3: Correlations between Reports of Linked Fate for Various Social Statuses and Reports of Political Activities or Views, by Group, LFSS 2009**

[Figure 3 here]

**Table 1: Intra-Individual Correlations between Racial Linked Fate and Linked Fate with Other Social Statuses, by Group, LFSS 2009**

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Asian American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>All</i>
Race x class	.673	.514	.754	.587	.644
Race x gender	.824	.698	.619	.655	.765
Race x religion	.440	.299	.613	.629	.451
All	.646	.504	.662	.624	--

**Table 2: Predicting Linked Fate with Other Items in the 2012 ANES**

	“Women” Linked Fate	“Black” Linked Fate	“White” Linked Fate	“Hispanic” Linked Fate
Group Discrimination	0.126 (0.030)**	0.184 (0.047)**	0.047 (0.021)*	0.103 (0.051)*
Linked Fate with ”Others”	0.616 (0.026)**	0.685 (0.038)**	0.620 (0.018)**	0.525 (0.048)**
Group Feeling Thermometer	0.005 (0.001)**	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.001)**	0.006 (0.002)*
Constant	0.068 (0.093)	-0.050 (0.188)	0.104 (0.089)	-0.334 (0.215)
$R^2$	0.35	0.49	0.35	0.31
$N$	2,488	999	3,778	851

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Note: for racial/ethnic outcome variables, the “Group Feeling Thermometer” variable is based on their reported feelings toward their own racial/ethnic group (i.e. Blacks or Whites). For the Women Linked Fate regression, the feeling thermometer question asked only about feminists, not about women in general.

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## Appendix: Full question wordings

The linked fate survey item was asked of respondents with the following wording:

Do you think that what happens to [R's RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS, RELIGION, or GENDER] people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

Respondents were asked the question based on the group identity they had already provided (e.g. respondents that indicated they were female, if asked the gender linked fate item, would be asked about linked fate with women).

The dynamic text options for race/ethnicity were:

- "Caucasian"
- "African-American"
- "Asian-American"
- "Hispanic"

The options for class were:

- "lower class"
- "working class"
- "middle class"
- "upper class"

The options for religion were:

- "Baptist"
- "Protestant"
- "Catholic"
- "Mormon"
- "Jewish"
- "Muslim"
- "Hindu"
- "Buddhist"
- "Pentecostal"
- "Eastern Orthodox"
- "other Christian"
- "other non-Christian"
- "non-religious"

The options for gender were:

- "Male"
- "Female"

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> JSTOR returned 178 results from a search for “linked fate” in articles, books, and reviews in African American studies, political science, and sociology (as of November 7, 2014). The terms “shared fate” and “common fate” yielded many more in both search engines.

<sup>ii</sup> Unless otherwise noted, White implies non-Hispanic White.

<sup>iii</sup> They were: 1984, 1988, and 1996: National Black Election studies; 1993: National Black Politics Study; 2004-05: National Politics Survey; 2007: Center on African American Politics and Society Survey; and 2008: ABS News/*USA Today*/Columbia University Black Politics, and Society survey.

<sup>iv</sup> Whites were not queried on linked fate in 2004 and 2008; Asians were not included in any of the three years. For three or all four groups, see also (Hutchings et al. 2005); (Schildkraut 2013a); (Harris and Langer 2008); (Bobo et al. 2000)

<sup>v</sup> In another condition, a group of respondents received three race-related questions (about discrimination, descriptive representation, and multi-racial coalitions), followed by the racial linked fate item. Because they were not asked about other types of linked fate, results from those respondents are not reported here.

<sup>vi</sup> Fourteen percent of Latinos and 18 percent of Asian Americans, compared with 25 percent of Whites and 36 percent of Blacks agreed that what happens to others in their racial group will affect them “a lot.”

<sup>vii</sup> Thirty-nine percent of Whites and Blacks, 27 percent of Hispanics, and 18 percent of Asian Americans perceived a lot of class linked fate.

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<sup>viii</sup> We wondered if the strength and stability of class linked fate were due in part to the fact that respondents were asked to identify their class --lower, working, middle, or upper class--early in the survey. This question could have primed class linked fate. Therefore, in a subsequent experiment using the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform, we asked respondents about their class linked fate, with a random subset of those respondents first being asked to identify their class status. Whether or not respondents were asked the class status question before the class linked fate question had no effect on reported levels of class linked fate.

<sup>ix</sup> Religion is the only of the four social statuses for which a respondent could respond “none;” about 15 percent of the sample did so. Therefore we examined religious linked fate both among all respondents and among only those who reported some religious affiliation. Religion linked fate results reported here are substantively robust to excluding nonreligious respondents.

However, many respondents with no religion also reported a sense of linked fate with others who share their religious views, so it seemed reasonable to include them in the analysis. In short, all results presented include non-religious respondents.

<sup>x</sup> Evelyn Simien found a similarly high correlation (.805) between black women’s sense of racial linked fate and their sense of gender linked fate (Simien 2005): 541.

<sup>xi</sup> Figure 2 provides results for the unweighted sample; adding weights to make the sample representative of the national population does not change the results materially.

<sup>xii</sup> Using unweighted survey data, the pairwise correlations between Hispanic or Black or White feeling thermometer scores and the corresponding linked fate item, as well as "feminist" feeling thermometer scores and "women" linked fate, are all below .15. When we regressed linked fate onto a group feeling thermometer with no covariates but using the survey weights, the coefficients on the feeling thermometer answers were miniscule – again, never above .15.

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<sup>xiii</sup> Women who are one point higher on the 5-point Likert scale for "discrimination against women," for example, have a gender linked fate score about 0.2 points higher than those lower on the Likert scale. The same pattern holds for Black and Hispanic linked fate; White linked fate has a coefficient roughly half as large. All are statistically significant. However, these results explain very little of the variation in linked fate scores, with an r-squared of around .02.