More Than Linked Fate: Toward A New Measure of Politicized Racial Identity

Abstract

Linked fate – the belief that one's life chances are tied to the status of African Americans – has long been used to explain Black political unity. Yet, prior research finds it only weakly predicts many forms of Black political behavior. We argue that linked fate's single-item design makes it unable to capture the *multidimensional* nature of a *politicized* Black identity. Linked fate also overlooks the central role of *grievance* in Black public opinion. In this paper, we develop and assess a new measure – *Politicized Racial Identity (PRI)*. We show that PRI not only more reliably explains a broader range of political views but also predicts costly political engagement for the racial group's benefit. Lastly, PRI differentiates African Americans with conservative racial policy preferences from African Americans with liberal racial policy preferences, which other measures such as linked fate and ideology have been unable to do.

Keywords: Black politics; linked fate; racial identity

During a 2016 speech on the Senate floor, Senator Tim Scott (SC), a Black Republican, revealed he had been stopped by the police seven times in one year as an elected official: "Was I speeding sometimes? Sure. But the vast majority of the time I was pulled over for driving a new car in the wrong neighborhood or something else just as trivial." He went on to say, "I do not know many African American men who do not have a very similar story to tell no matter their profession. No matter their income, no matter their disposition in life." (C-SPAN 2016).

Scott's statement suggests that he shares a common fate with other Black Americans because of shared experiences of discrimination. The idea that, because their life chances are highly determined by race, African Americans link their individual and group utility, is a phenomenon that political scientists refer to as "linked fate." In his seminal work, *Behind the Mule,* Michael Dawson (1994) argues that linked fate is the explanation for why an overwhelming number of African Americans identify as Democrats and express a high degree of political cohesion.

However, research indicates that linked fate does not explain the high rate of Democratic Party identification among African Americans because the construct does not do a good job of significantly differentiating between Black Americans who identify with the Democratic Party and those who do not (White and Laird 2020). For example, in the case of Senator Scott, despite indicating that he shares a common fate with other Black people through a shared history of discrimination, as a Republican, Senator Scott parts company with most African Americans in not only his party affiliation, but arguably where he stands with respect to many racialized political issues. What differentiates Senator Scott from most Black people, is what we refer to as a politicized racial identity (PRI).

We define PRI as a set of beliefs and values that constitute a framework for understanding how race and racial hierarchy work in America. The two key components of this framework are the centrality of race to one's own life (racial identity) and beliefs about the causes of and solutions to racial inequality (grievance). Thus, by our definition of PRI, a sense of linked fate is insufficient, or perhaps not even necessary to have a strong politicized racial identity. Instead, what is necessary and central to a politicized racial identity is both identification with the group *and* awareness of shared grievances for which there is an external attribution.

Returning to the example of Senator Tim Scott, his frustration about being racially profiled indicates he believes that bad things that happen to the group have consequences for him. However, unlike the vast majority of African Americans, Senator Scott does not appear to believe that discrimination is structural or systemic.[1] He has repeatedly made the argument that "America is not a racist country," [2] and has chided Black people to "get better instead of bitter."[3] Senator Scott, although frustrated by the discrimination he has experienced based on his race, largely locates the problem of discrimination with the behavior of Black people. His solution to anti-Black discrimination and pervasive racial disparities puts the onus on Black people to be "better and not bitter," as opposed to seeking structural and systemic solutions.

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[1] In the 2020 ANES, 69% of Black Americans agree with the racial resentment item that taps into structural racism: "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class."

[2] https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/28/scott-rebuttal-biden-address-484949

[3] https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/367643

In short, racially conservative Black people, such as Tim Scott *and* racially progressive Black Americans *both* feel that their fate is connected to other Black people because of a shared historical experience with slavery and a contemporary experience with racial discrimination, but they have very different beliefs about the origins, scope and pervasiveness of contemporary discrimination and racial disparities.[4] It is these beliefs about the origins and pervasiveness of discrimination, perceptions of racial disparities (*grievance*) and how each interacts with ideas about group connectedness and racial identity that define a politicized racial identity (PRI).

In this paper we develop and test our measure of PRI. In Study 1, we rely on data from the 2024 National Black Election Study (NBES), which is a national probability sample of approximately 4000 Black registered voters.[5] Here we create a multi-dimensional measure of politicized racial identity (PRI) which consists of six items that tap into our theoretical construct of PRI. We demonstrate that compared to linked fate, PRI more reliably and powerfully explains a wide range of Black political views including support for the Democratic Party and its candidates. Moreover, PRI is not simply a measure of liberalism, as it has weak explanatory power for nonracial liberal policies, such as support for foreign aid, transgender rights, and abortion but strong explanatory power for explicitly racial policies (e.g. affirmative action) and moderate explanatory power for implicitly racial policies (e.g. universal healthcare). If PRI was simply capturing a broader ideological orientation, we would expect it to have a strong

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[4] Many conservative/Republican Black Americans will acknowledge past racial discrimination such as slavery and Jim Crow but will question the impact of racial discrimination on the life chances of Black Americans today (Pew Research Center 2022).

[5] In Online Appendix A6, when possible, we replicate results for many of the figures with data from the ANES timeseries (2004-2020) (based upon question availability)

relationship with non-racial issues as well. Instead, PRI predicts what we theorize it should predict (political matters that are explicitly racial) but does not predict what it should not (political matters unrelated to race).

In Study 2, the focus shifts from policy opinions to *behavioral* outcomes—namely costly political behavior. Here we find that relative to linked fate, PRI is a better predictor of a willingness to make monetary contributions to Black versus non-Black political organizations. These findings provide additional evidence that linked fate has a limited explanatory scope, particularly relative to our PRI measure. We conclude by noting some of the shortcomings of our PRI measure and encourage other researchers to create and further refine measures of Black politicized racial identity to advance our understanding of Black political behavior.

Reevaluating Linked Fate as a Measure of Black Racial Identity

Since the publication of Dawson's groundbreaking book in 1994, linked fate has become ubiquitous in the study of race and ethnic politics. However, we argue that scholars need to reexamine the pervasive use of linked fate for several reasons: 1) Linked fate has been conceptually stretched, including being misapplied to other groups. 2) Linked fate has a weak relationship with Democratic partisanship, even though linked fate is purported to explain the high levels of Democratic partisanship among African Americans (Dawson 1994). 3) Linked fate has been misapplied as a measure of racial identity, when it is a measure of interdependence. 4) Linked fate is a single-item measure, which makes it prone to measurement error.

Linked Fate Has Been Conceptually Stretched and Misapplied to Other Groups

Building upon Rogers and Kim (2021), who wade into some of the theoretical issues underlying the limited predictive power of the linked fate measure, we offer another corrective that addresses the need for "clarifying the scope and dimensions of the theory underlying linked

fate," as Rogers and Kim (2021) suggest. Although logically it would seem that linked fate should explain Black Americans' support for race targeted political issues, its broad usage within the race and politics literature seems to imply there are few bounds to its explanatory scope. Political scientists have frequently employed the concept of linked fate to predict a wide range of Black attitudes and behaviors, including party identification (Tate 1993; Dawson 1994), Black political participation (Tate 1993; Philpot et al. 2009; Shaw et al. 2019), policy opinions (Smith 2013; Bunyasi and Smith 2019), and ideological identification (Philpot 2017). Therefore, it is unclear what linked fate should predict, as it has become a catchall for explaining everything related to Black political behavior.

Linked fate has also been misapplied to explain the political behavior of other groups for whom the concept was not developed – groups who do not have the shared historical experience with slavery and racial discrimination, in which the concept is rooted. As other scholars have noted (McClain et al. 2009; Rogers and Kim 2021), linked fate has been applied to Asian Americans (Junn and Masuoka 2008; Chan and Jasso 2020), Latinos (Stokes 2003; Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Peffley and Hurwitz 2010; Valdez et al. 2011; Maltby et al 2020), women and Muslims (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; Donnelly 2020; Kretschmer et al. 2023). Linked fate has also been used to understand the electoral and non-electoral political participation of White Americans (Berry et al. 2019), women (Simien 2005; Stout et al. 2017; Gershon et al. 2019; Bejarano et al. 2021), and the LGBTQ community (Moreau et al. 2019).[6] Applying the concept of linked fate to other groups assumes that all marginalized identities operate politically

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[6] See Online Appendix A9 Table A9.1 for a detailed review of the use of linked fate in the existing literature.

the same way, which erases important distinctions in history, culture, and context, and is yet another example of conceptual stretching.

Linked Fate Does Not Explain Black Political Homogeneity

Even though linked fate is supposed to explain the high levels of Democratic partisanship among African Americans, upon closer empirical examination, the relationship between linked fate and Democratic partisanship has been weak (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; White and Laird 2020). For example, research indicates that "linked fate is no longer showing any association with liberalism, Democratic partisanship, or political activity among Blacks and other non-White groups" (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016, 132). Since linked fate does not explain political outcomes among Black people—the very group for whom the construct is theorized to matter the most—it is not surprising that the construct, which has been stretched conceptually to explain political behavior among other groups, does a poor job of explaining political outcomes among other non-White groups. Gay, Hochschild, and White (2016) also find that the majority of Americans across racial groups express linked fate with their respective racial groups. Therefore, it seems unlikely that linked fate, which is not unique to African Americans, can explain African Americans' distinct political unity and policy views.

White and Laird (2020), drawing on six national surveys, also show that linked fate only weakly predicts Black partisanship. While Democratic identification is highest among those with strong linked fate (70-98%), it remains high (around 80%) even among those with the lowest levels of linked fate. Thus, leading White and Laird (2020) to conclude that linked fate does little to distinguish Democratic identifiers from those who do not identify with the Democratic Party. This is a patternof results that we see repeated with linked fate, whereby Black people with low levels of linked fate and Black people with high levels of linked do not have markedly

different attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, we show throughout the paper that different levels of PRI lead to markedly different attitudes and behavior regarding racial matters. Given the inconsistencies regarding linked fate and the concept's regular use as a catchall explanation of Black political behavior, we think the use of the single item linked fate measure warrants reconsideration.

Linked Fate ≠ Black Racial Identity

Linked fate has also been misapplied as a stand-alone measure of Black racial identity. In our review of the research on linked fate, we found that the most common use of linked fate by researchers was as a single item measure of Black racial identity (See Online Appendix A9 Table A9.1), which we argue is problematic because Black racial identity is more complex than simply linked fate (interdependence). For example, Dawson (1994) treats linked fate as a measure of racial identity, noting that, "[t]he greater the perceived link between one's own fate and that of the race, the more politically salient becomes racial identity" (61). Tate (1993, 25) and White (2007) also treat linked or common fate as synonymous with racial identity strength. The problem with this approach, however, is that it presumes that racial identity is limited to a sense of interdependence – what happens to the group has implications for what happens to the individual. While interdependence likely has something to do with racial identity, it is only *one* component of a Black racial identity. For example, we began this paper with a discussion of Senator Tim Scott who clearly perceives some degree of linked fate with Black Americans, yet by other definitions of a *politicized* racial identity such as shared grievance and racial centrality, Scott would be significantly less racially identified than the average Black American. Although Scott acknowledges that many Black Americans have been racially profiled, he does not see this or most other forms of racial discrimination as significantly determining Black Americans' life

chances.[7] Simply put, racial identity is multidimensional and should not be relegated to a single-item measure.

In fact, social and political psychologists have long argued for multidimensional approaches to measuring social and racial identities. These researchers have argued that, among other things, multidimensional measures better capture complex psychological concepts and ultimately better explain variation across time and space (Huddy et al. 2015; Huddy and Bankert 2017; Pérez et al. 2024). Scholars of racial identity also see race as multidimensional (Pérez et al. 2024; Pérez et al. 2023; Sullivan et al. 2018). For example, in their 1998 paper "Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity: A Preliminary Investigation of Reliability and Construct Validity," Sellers et al. make a strong case for thinking about and measuring racial identity as a multidimensional concept. As they state, "[r]acial identity in African Americans is a multifaceted phenomenon. As a result, a good measure of racial identity must be multidimensional to capture the complexity of the construct" (807). Thus, they propose a multidimensional conceptualization of Black racial identity which defines the concept as including identity salience, centrality, regard, and ideology.

Methodological Challenges with Using a Single-Item Measure

Previous research indicates that single survey items are prone to measurement error. For example, in the case of issue positions, Ansolabehere et al. (2008) found that issue scales comprised of multiple measures were more stable than individual survey items. Another source of measurement error associated with the linked fate measure may stem from the vagueness of the question. One of the arguments in Achen (1975) is that the vagueness of survey questions can contribute to measurement error. In the case of linked fate, the question, "Do you think what

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[7] https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/28/scott-rebuttal-biden-address-484949

happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" is sufficiently vague that the "what happens generally to Black people," might be political in nature for some respondents, but not necessarily so, as "what happens" could also be social or economic. In addition, the "will have something to do with what happens in your life," is also vague and not necessarily political. Thus, it is quite plausible that this single item is prone to a high degree of measurement error because many respondents do not understand the question to mean the same thing.

One way to assess the extent of this measurement error would be to examine test-retest reliability assessments of the linked fate measure. In Online Appendix A1 Figure A1.2, we show the relationship between measures of linked fate asked of the same Black respondents over two different survey waves are not highly correlated. If linked fate is a reliable measure of Black American interdependence, then responses in time 1 should be highly correlated with responses in time 2. However, across three different panel surveys, we find that the correlation between time 1 and time 2 measures of linked fate range from .37 to .46, meaning there are many respondents who provide different responses to the linked fate question across time. To put this in perspective, the same correlation in the pre- and post-election 2024 NBES for ideology is 0.68 and for party it is 0.81. Moreover, for our new measure of politicized racial identity (PRI), which we explain in greater detail later in the paper, the correlation between time 1 and time 2 is 0.76 (See Online Appendix A1 Figure A1.3).

If Not Linked Fate, Then What?

Although linked fate has been used to explain Black political behavior, for racial identity to truly inform how a person thinks about politics, that racial identity must be politicized. We argue that Politicized Racial Identity (PRI) is a framework for understanding how race works in

America, who is considered the enemy, and how it all relates to the individual. Therefore, linked

fate and other measures of racial group identification might be a necessary, but not a *sufficient*,

component of a politicized Black racial identity. The fact that two African Americans can believe

that their fate is linked to that of the race does not mean that they agree on how best to advance

their own and racial interests. As acknowledged by Dawson (2001) and Harris-Lacewell (2004),

Black ideological conflict occurs precisely over what constitutes the best political path for the

race. In short, Black people can believe that their fate is linked to other lack people, while still

disagreeing on the causes of and solutions to racial inequality. Moreover, racial group

identification is not inherently politicized. Believing one's individual interests are connected to

those of the racial group may help Black people to see common grievances, which is a part of the

politicization of identity or development of group consciousness. However, absent a belief in

racial discrimination, for instance, Black linked fate is not a politicized racial identity. That is,

without a group grievance of some kind, there is only an identity without a political dimension.

Furthermore, common fate (or interdependence) is not the only way for a group to share

grievance. One could for instance *not* believe that what happens to the group affects them, and

yet still be politically motivated by what happens to other in-group members (e.g., nonlinked

progressive Black Americans).

Black linked fate may be better suited for measuring *racial identity salience*, namely, the

importance one places on race and how relevant race is to their sense of self (Sellers et al. 1998).

Linked fate is probably best understood as capturing one's sense of interdependence with the

racial group, meaning that good or bad things that happen to the group also have consequences

for the individual. These ideas of salience and interdependence, however, do not confer

politicization automatically, and thus, we argue that this is why linked fate would likely not be

particularly useful in helping us understand how Black people think about politics and formulate political judgments. In short, we argue that while linked fate may capture an aspect of Black identity, it fails to capture how this identity is *politicized*.

Our measure of *politicized racial identity* (PRI) is inclusive of both the *racial identity salience dimension* of Black racial identity, which includes racial interdependence, racial centrality and importance of racial identity, and the *racial grievance dimension* of Black identity, which includes measures of structural attributions of Black/white inequality and ideas and feelings about racial discrimination (see Figure 1 for items of the measure; (see Online Appendix Table A4.1 for the question wordings). We argue that this multidimensional measure is more useful for explaining Black political behavior than either linked fate or the social or grievance dimensions would be on their own.[8] We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to see whether the items on our scale load onto our hypothesized dimensions (see Online Appendix A4 Figure A4.2). The results indicate that there are two underlying dimensions of PRI: *racial salience* and *grievance*. The Black identity importance variable, Black centrality variable along with linked fate load onto *the racial salience dimension*. The discrimination items, the two items from the racial resentment scale, along with a question asking the degree of anger felt about how Black Americans are treated in this country capture respondents' opinions on Black inequality and grievance load onto what we refer to as *the grievance dimension*. The PRI scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 of (2024 NBES) which indicates that the scale is reliable.
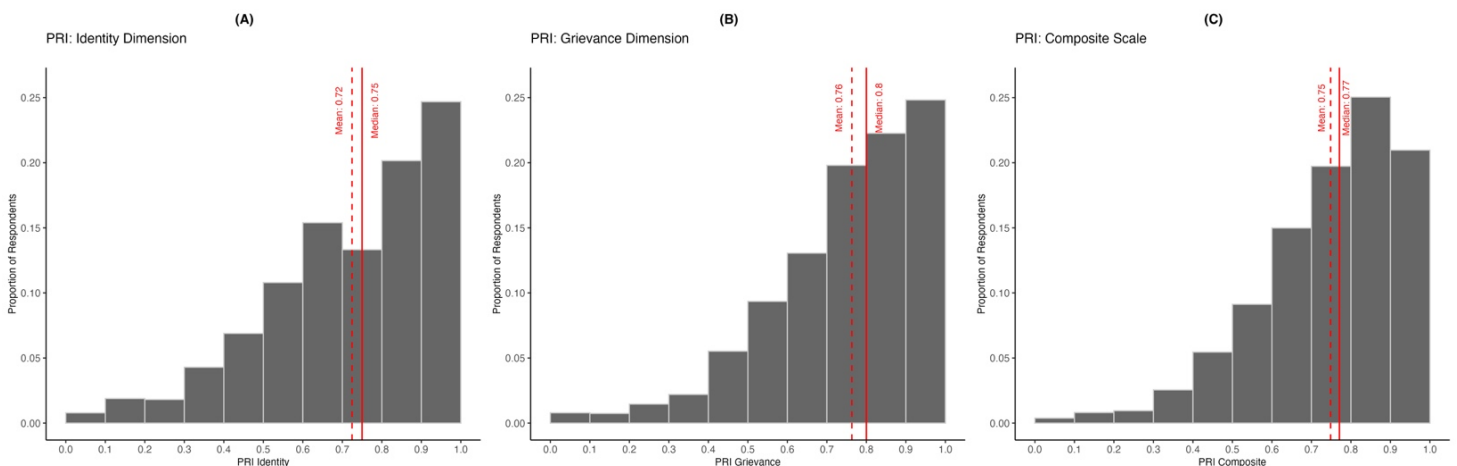
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[8] In Online Appendix A3 Table A3.1 – A3.3, we also present figures for the comparison of the predictive power of Black linked fate, PRI: Identity, PRI: Grievance and PRI scale.

Figure 1. Politicized Racial Identity Measure
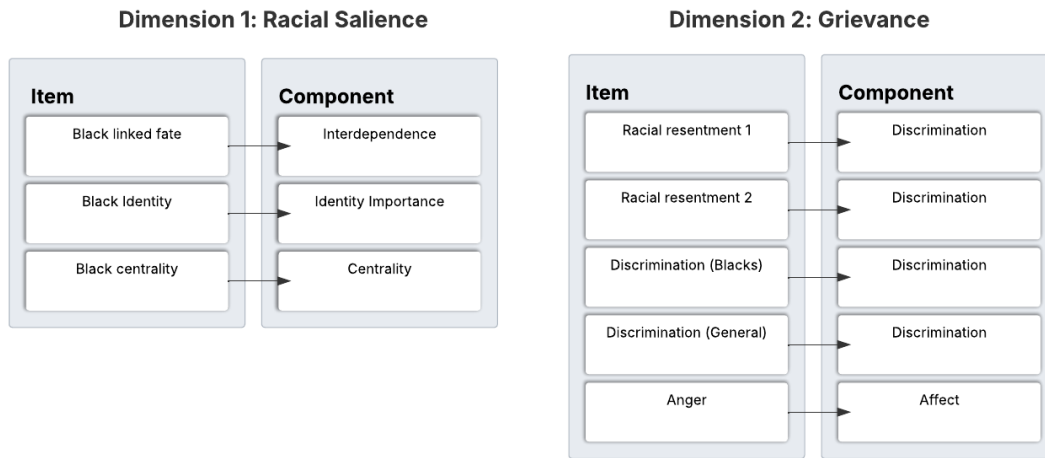
As with linked fate (See Appendix A1 Figure A1.1), the PRI measure is skewed to the high end of the scale with most Black Americans expressing high levels of PRI. This should not be surprising as most work on Black identity would argue that Black Americans as a group are strongly racially identified. As we can see in Figure 2 (panel C), the mean score on the PRI measure is .75. Only about 10% of Black Americans score below .5 on the PRI scale. This suggest that a large majority of Black Americans see race as both a salient feature of their identity and object to the way Black Americans are treated in the U.S.

Figure 2. Distribution of PRI: Identity Dimension, Grievance Dimension and PRI Scale

Unlike linked fate, however, the PRI measure exhibits high test-retest reliability. Because PRI averages across a number of measures, instability in any one measure is not likely to result in vastly inconsistent outcomes from time 1 to time 2.   In fact, there exists a strong .76 correlation between the PRI scales measured in the pre-election NBES and the post-election NBES (See Online Appendix A1 Figure A1.3). Also, recall from our earlier discussion of linked fate, that it was the time 1 low linked fate identifiers who had the highest levels of inconsistency in their responses. However, this is not the case with PRI. Respondents who expressed low PRI at time 1 generally also expressed low PRI at time two. This means that unlike linked fate, PRI should exhibit high levels of consistency as a measure of Black racial identity across both time and context, offering researchers a reliable measure of politicized Black racial identification.

Considering the discussion above and the construction of this new measure, we are interested in the following question: how does Black linked fate perform as a predictor of attitudes and engagement in costly political behavior on behalf of the group relative to our newly created measure of politicized racial identity? We hypothesize that politicized racial identity (PRI) will better explain Black partisan political unity than linked fate. Specifically, we expect that PRI will better distinguish Republican identified Black Americans from Democratically identified Black Americans. We also think that relative to linked fate, PRI will be more predictive of respondents' feelings about particularistic racial policy, implicit racial policy, and engagement in costly political behavior for the good of the group. Lastly, PRI should differentiate between African Americans who have racially conservative preferences and those who have racially liberal preferences.

In and of itself, a politicized racial identity should only be activated in cases where the policy could be interpreted as having something to do with Black Americans. Therefore, a politicized racial identity should have the strongest relationship with particularistic racial policy, a moderate relationship with Black public opinion on implicitly racial policy such as social welfare policy and issues of criminal justice, and little to no relationship between PRI and nonracial policy. In other words, we expect little to no relationship between PRI and nonracial policy because PRI is not a proxy for liberal ideology more broadly. Instead, PRI is picking up on attitudes about Black specific policies, both implicit and explicit. Finally, we expect that because PRI captures a greater investment in Black identity, it should help to explain participation in costly, individual political behavior, that is engaged in for the good of the racial group, and not just liberal causes more broadly.

Therefore, our hypotheses are as follows: (H1) Politicized racial identity (PRI) will strongly predict Black partisan identification; (H2) PRI will show a strong positive association with support for explicitly racial policies, a moderate one for implicitly racial policies, and little to none for non-racial policies; (H3) Linked fate will show weak or no association with Black Americans' policy views and political judgments. (H4) PRI will outperform linked fate in explaining participation in costly political actions undertaken for the racial group's benefit.

Study 1 (2024 NBES)

We test these expectations using survey data from a nationally representative probability sample of over 4,248 registered Black voters from 44 U.S. states. The 2024 National Black Election Study (NBES) is a panel study centered around the November 2024 presidential

election (See Online Appendix A2 Table A2.1 for the descriptive statistics and A5 for the

sampling strategy).[9]

Study 1: Results

Partisan Outcomes

The first outcomes that we examine are Democratic and Republican Party identification.

For many years linked fate was the dominant explanation for the high degree of homogeneity in

party identification among African Americans, however as noted earlier very little consistent

evidence existed to support such claims (White and Laird 2020).

Figure 3: Democratic and Republican Party Identification
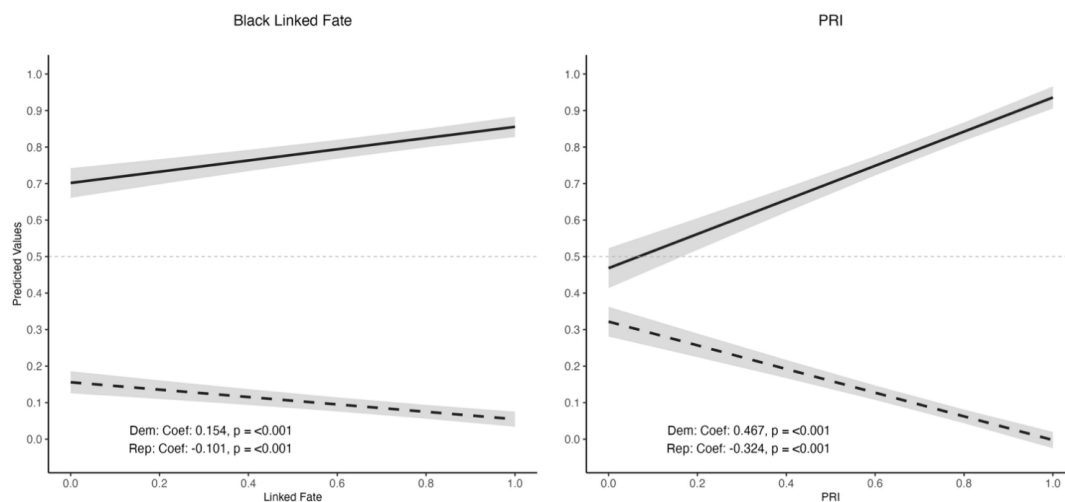
Note: Predicted Democratic (solid) and Republican (dashed) ID by Black linked fate (left) and PRI (right), from linear probability models. Models control for outgroup attitudes, ideology, income, education, sex, region, and age. Shaded areas show 95% CIs. Coefficients and p-values in figure. See Table A3.1 (full model) for details.

Given the strong arguments made by Dawson and others suggesting that racial identity

lies at the heart of Black partisan homogeneity, below we assess the predictive validity of the

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[9] The NBES is a push-to-web survey conducted using mail and cell phone solicitation, in which respondents were

recruited through a simple random probability sample of Black Americans drawn from the L2 voter file.

PRI and linked fate measures in predicting party identification. Figure 3 graphs the estimated predicted values of Democratic Party identification (solid line) and Republican party identification (dashed line) across levels of Black linked fate (left panel) and politicized racial identity (right panel). We expect that PRI will be more strongly related to increased Democratic Party identification and decreased Republican Party identification than linked fate.

The results presented in Figure 3 clearly demonstrate that PRI does a much better job of predicting Black American partisan preferences than linked fate. Although both linked fate and PRI are positively related to identifying with the Democratic Party (p<0.01 for both), PRI demonstrates a significantly stronger relationship. The coefficient for PRI in the Democratic Party identification model is roughly four times larger than the coefficient on the linked fate measure. The results for Republican Party identification are similar in magnitude, albeit negative and slightly smaller. The coefficient on PRI when predicting Republican Party identification is about three times larger than the linked fate coefficient, suggesting significantly stronger predictive power.

Moreover, recall from our earlier discussion of linked fate and PRI, that it was low linked fate identifiers who exhibited greater instability in their responses over time; suggesting that these individuals may not have particularly stable or well-formed opinions about linked fate. Because the PRI measure is more stable across responses to the scale, we would expect that PRI should better predict party identification particularly among those individuals at the low end of the racial identity scale. Indeed, this is exactly what we see. The PRI measure does a much better job of predicting Republican identification at the low end of the racial identity scale, relative to linked fate. For example, the linked fate model would predict that the lowest linked fate identifiers would be roughly 70% Democrat and 15% Republican. The lowest levels of PRI,

however, would predict 50% Democrat and about 30% Republican, which indicates that relative to linked fate, PRI is better at differentiating between Black people at the racially conservative end of the spectrum, and Black people at the racially liberal end. When interpreting these results, however, we should keep in mind the rightward skew of both the PRI and linked fate variables, with PRI being slightly more skewed to the right. Predictions for the highest levels of PRI and the highest levels of linked fate are roughly similar with about 90% of each group identifying as Democrats and less than 10% identifying as Republican. This relationship is consistent across both the NBES data and nearly two decades of ANES data.[10]

Racial Issues

Linked fate has also been well recognized as a strong predictor of explicitly racial policy (Dawson 1994; Tate 1993; White 2007). Below we will juxtapose the predictive power of linked fate for racial issue positions against the predictive power of PRI. Here we will examine two classes of racialized issues: explicit racial issues and implicit racial issues. Explicit racial issues are particularistic in that their focus is explicitly on Black Americans. The explicit issues we examine below are 1) generalized support/opposition for race targeted policy, 2) support/opposition for reparations for slavery, and 3) support/opposition for race based affirmative action policies. Implicit racial issues are issues that while ostensibly universal are in reality racialized, either through political discourse or through disparate application or benefit. The implicitly racialized issues we examine are 1) support/opposition to the police, 2) support/opposition to punitive crime policy, and 3) support/opposition for universal health care.

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[10] We replicate our findings with the ANES from 2004-2020 based data availability (see Online Appendix A6).

Explicitly Racial Issues

As with party identification we evaluate the predictive power of linked fate and PRI in estimating support for explicitly racial policy by including each in a separate OLS regression model along with a set of demographic and political controls. We then use the results from these models to predict how support for explicitly racial issues – generalized support for race targeted policy, support for reparations for slavery, and support for race based affirmative action policies – changes at different levels of the two measures. We plot these predictions in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Support for Explicitly Racial Policies
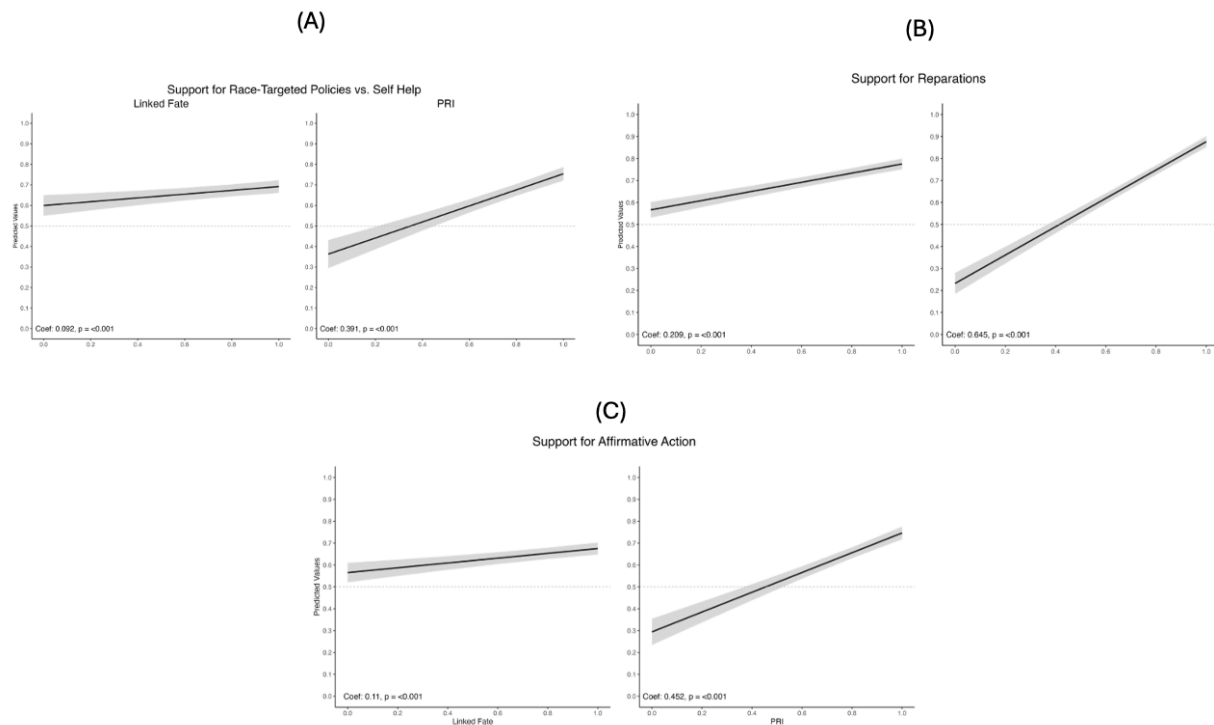
Note: Panels A–C show predicted support (scaled 0–1) for race-targeted policies, reparations, and affirmative action, across levels of Black linked fate (left) and politicized racial identity (right), from OLS models. The key predictor is either linked fate or PRI. Models control for partisanship, outgroup attitudes, ideology, income, education, sex, region, and age. Shaded areas show 95% CIs; coefficients and p-values are in the figure. See Table A3.2 (full model) for specifications.

As is obvious from Figure 4, PRI much more strongly predicts support for race targeted policy among Black respondents in the 2024 NBES. Although there is a relationship between linked fate and these policies, it is quite modest, particularly when compared to PRI. For

example, moving from the lowest to highest levels of linked fate, we observe only about an 11-percentage point increase in support for race based affirmative action policy. Whereas moving from the lowest to highest levels of PRI results in a 45-percentage point increase in support for affirmative action programs. This change is even larger for reparations policy, in which there is a 65-percentage point increase in Black support moving from the lowest to highest levels of PRI compared to a 20-percentage point increase for linked fate.

As with party identification, the most notable difference between the predictive power of PRI and linked fate is that PRI is better able to predict conservative responses to these policies. If we look at the linked fate figures, we see that, at no point does linked fate predict generalized opposition (score of below .5) to any of these explicitly racial policies. Even for those expressing the lowest levels of linked fate, predicted support remains over .5, and is as high as .6 for the race targeted/self-help measure. PRI, on the other hand, does a better job discriminating between supporters and non-supporters of these policies. For example, predicted support for reparations policy is as low as .2 for those low in PRI. Given that predicted support for those high in linked fate and PRI are similar, it would seem that these differences may be driven by the low reliability of responses at the low end of the linked fate scale.

Implicit Racial Issues

Figure 5 explores Black Americans' attitudes about implicitly racial policies such as criminal justice, policing, and healthcare. Given that these issues are racial in nature, albeit implicitly so, we might expect that both linked fate and PRI should be related to Black public opinion. However, because of the ambiguity of the racial content of these issues, linked fate and PRI should not as strongly predict support for implicitly racial issues as well as they did for

explicitly racial issues (see White 2007). PRI should, however, still do a better job than linked

fate at predicting Black opinion on implicitly racial issues.

Figure 5. Support for Implicitly Racial Policies
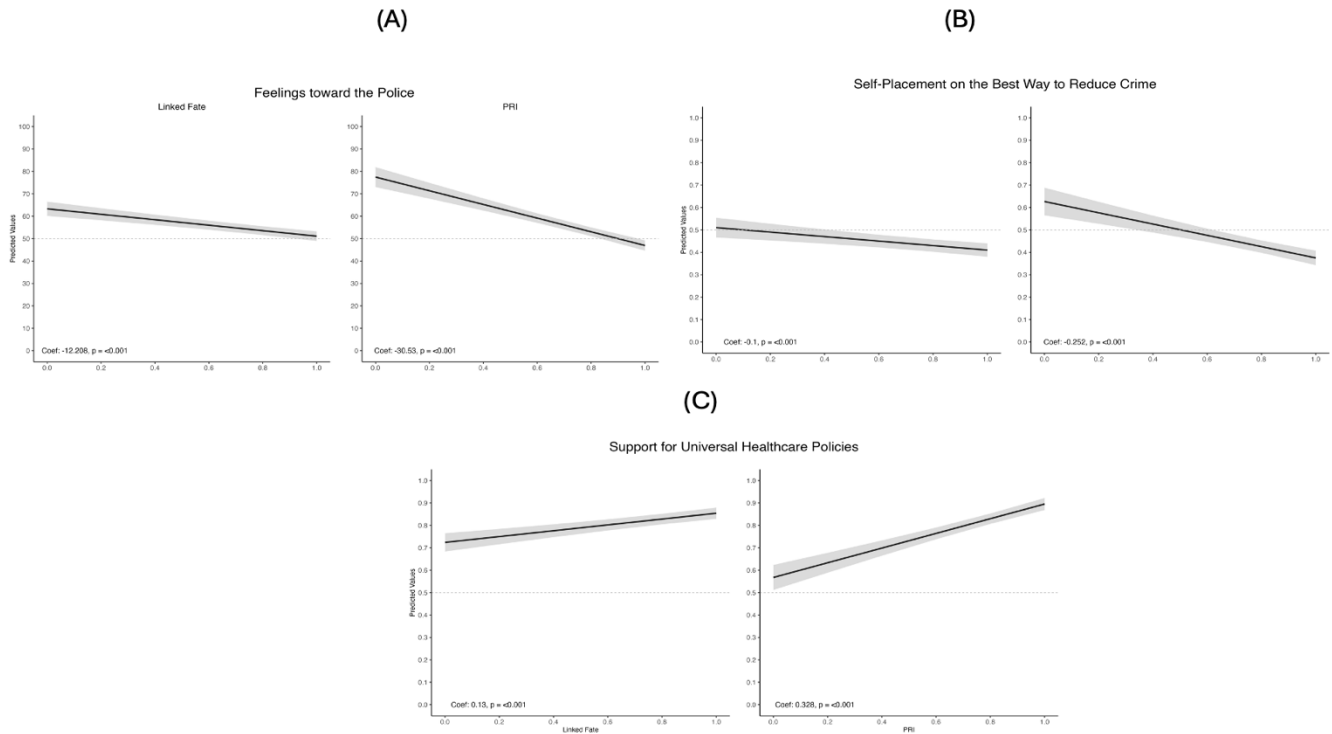
Note: Panels A–C show predicted values for feelings toward police (0–100), punitive crime policy support (scaled 0–1), and universal healthcare support (scaled 0–1), across levels of Black linked fate (left) and politicized racial identity (right), from OLS models. The key predictor is either linked fate or PRI. Models control for partisanship, outgroup attitudes, ideology, income, education, sex, region, and age. Shaded areas show 95% CIs; coefficients and p-values are in the figure. See Table A3.3 (full model) for specifications.

Beginning with an examination of Black support for the police and criminal justice

policy, we see in Figure 5 that both linked fate and PRI predict support for the police and crime

policy. Both linked fate and PRI have a negative relationship with feelings about the police.

However, the margins of the relationships found were starkly different. Among NBES

respondents, individuals low in linked fate expressed, on average, moderately warm (65 on the 0

to 100 scale) feelings about the police. Conversely, individuals low in politicized racial identity

have much warmer feelings toward the police with an average feeling thermometer of almost 80.

This difference of 15 points suggests that linked fate is suppressing higher evaluations of the police among individuals who do not hold particularly strong racialized identities. The same basic pattern holds for Black criminal justice policy support. Here we assessed whether Black Americans supported more punitive approaches to crime (1) versus addressing the social causes of crime (0). As we can see, the coefficient on PRI is more than twice the size of the coefficient on linked fate, with Black Americans with low PRI expressing, on average, moderate support for punitive crime policy.

The PRI measure also does a better job of predicting support for universal health care policy, an issue that was racialized through the political debate around the passage of the affordable care act during Barack Obama's first term as president (Tesler 2016). The coefficient on PRI is nearly three times that of the coefficient on linked fate and again we see significantly less support for universal healthcare policy among those Black Americans who score low in PRI.

Taken together, these results support our expectations and initial observations that PRI is more predictive of support for implicit and explicit racial policy than linked fate. This is consistent with the general consensus in the literature that racial identity should predict racial policy support, a claim that was often well argued but weakly supported. With our new PRI measure—a measure that is multidimensional, politicized , and reliable---we can now have more confidence in this expectation.

Non-Racial Issues

Lastly, we turn to examining the ability of linked fate and PRI to predict attitudes on non-racial policy. By "non-racial" we mean policies that are neither race targeted nor have been

racialized within mainstream political discourse.[11] Again, it is worth noting here, that we expect

PRI to have little to no relationship with non-racial issues because a politicized Black racial

identity should not be correlated with support for policies that have not been tied to Black

Americans. Here we examine three issues: support for foreign aid, transgender rights and

abortion rights. We apply the same analytical approach as we did with racial issues, modeling

the relationship between linked fate and PRI on these outcome variables, controlling for a set of

demographic and political variables. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Support for Non-Racial Issues
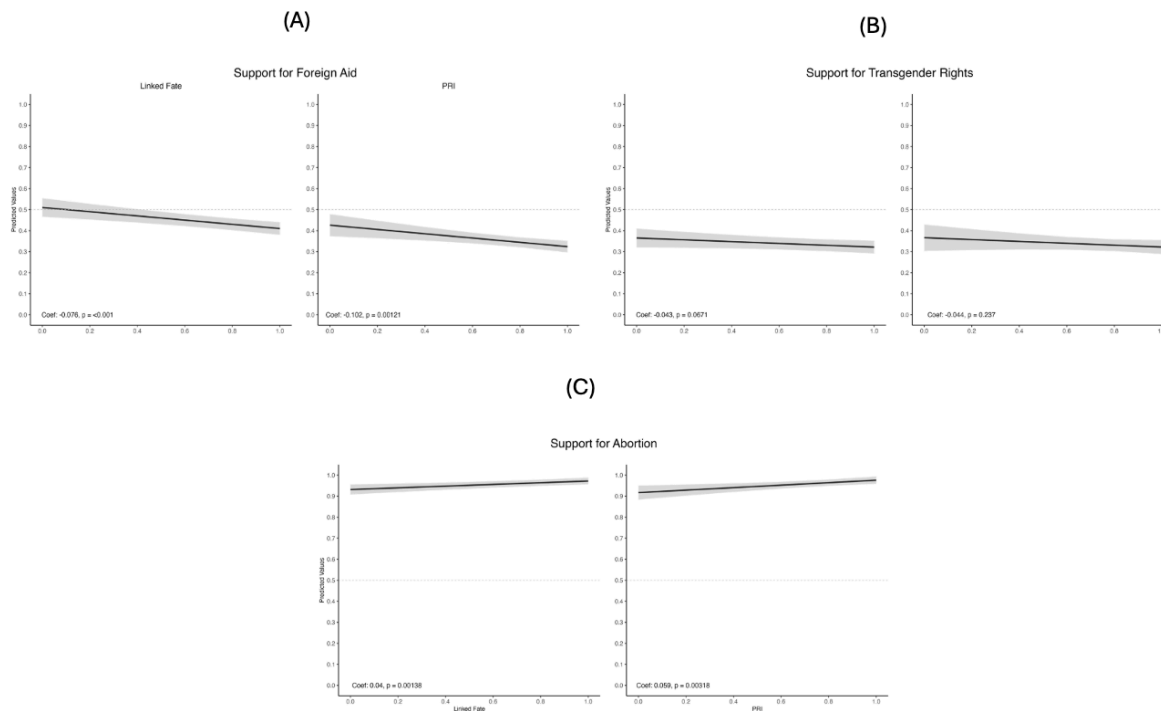
Note: Panels A–C show predicted support (scaled 0–1) for foreign aid, transgender rights, and abortion across levels of Black linked fate (left) and politicized racial identity (right), from OLS models. The key predictor is either linked fate or PRI. Models control for partisanship, outgroup attitudes, ideology, income, education, sex, region, and

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[11] Of course, nonracial policies have implications for Black people , but for most Black people, the racial

implications of these policies arenot part of their racial schema.

age. Shaded areas show 95% CIs; coefficients and p-values are in the figure. See Table A3.4 (full model) for specifications.

Although both linked fate and PRI exhibit statistically significant relationships with foreign aid and abortion rights, these relationships are small. Support for increased foreign aid decreases only by about 10 points across the PRI measure and 7 points across the linked fate measure. This is small compared to the 65-point increase we saw from reparations or even the 25-point decrease we saw in crime policy. Support for transgender rights is unrelated to PRI and only marginally related to linked fate. This analysis generally supports our expectation that PRI is less effective at explaining issues that are non-racial. The lack of a relationship between PRI and these non-racial issues is especially noteworthy because it indicates that PRI is not simply a measure of a liberal ideological orientation. Transgender rights and abortion—two issues which have been important to liberals in recent years, have a weak relationship with PRI.[12] Although there is some relationship between PRI and these issues, these relationships are relatively small and may simply reflect the covariation of PRI with omitted variables that would better predict these outcomes.

Study 2: Costly Political Behavior

Next, we further test our theory by comparing the explanatory power of linked fate and PRI in explaining support for and willingness to make monetary donations to Black organizations versus race neutral organizations. A pattern similar to our previous results

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[12] Moreover, one might be concerned that the lack of a relationship between PRI and these outcome variables is because of the high degree of religiosity among African Americans. We estimate additional models, where we control for religiosity, and the relationship between PRI and opinion on abortion and transgender rights remains weak.

emerges, such that we find a stronger relationship between politicized racial identity and support for and willingness to make monetary donations to a Black organization as compared to linked fate.

PRI and Monetary Contribution (Racial Empowerment Experiment)

Study 2 makes use of data from a behavioral experiment conducted by Smith et al. (2023). The experiment was conducted on 580 Black respondents from MTurk and Lucid in December 2019 (See Online Appendix A7 Table A7.1 for descriptive statistics). We leverage this study to assess whether politicized racial identity (PRI) performs better as a predictor of support for Black versus mainstream political organizations (low-cost political activity) and willingness to contribute to these organizations (high-cost political activity) compared to Black linked fate.

In Smith et al. (2023)'s experimental design, respondents were randomly assigned to see either an organization whose mission was described as increasing Black voter registration or an organization whose mission was to increase general voter registration (See Online Appendix A7 Figure A7.1 for organizations). We leverage their data to assess whether PRI better predicts support for and monetary contributions to political organizations, relative to linked fate. The main outcomes of interest were support for the organization (0–10 support scale) and the monetary contribution to the organization ($0–$10 contribution scale). For monetary contributions, the Black study participants were given $10 by the researchers and asked if they would like to contribute this money to the organization.[13] We should note that while both organizations are political in their nature, the experimental manipulation that randomly assigns respondents to a Black voter organization or a race-neutral organization enables us to compare

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[13] Respondents were told that they were under no obligation to give the money and that they could keep some or all of it for themselves (see Smith et. al. 2023 for more details).

the predictive power of Black linked fate vs. PRI on both low- and high-cost racial-group-specific and nonracial-group-specific political activity.

Study 2: Results

Figure 7 presents the results of a comparison of linked fate and our politicized racial identity measure at explaining expressive support for political organizations. Our findings are consistent with our expectation about the better predictive power of our PRI measure for explaining racialized political outcomes. Here we see suggestive evidence that PRI conditions the effect of organization type on support (p=.09). The predicted values across the levels of PRI suggest that at the low end of the PRI scale there are no differences in expressed support for the Black and race-neutral organizations. As PRI increases, support for the Black organization appears to increase a bit more than support for the race-neutral organization. When it comes to linked fate, there is little difference in how linked fate predicts support for Black and race-neutral organizations.

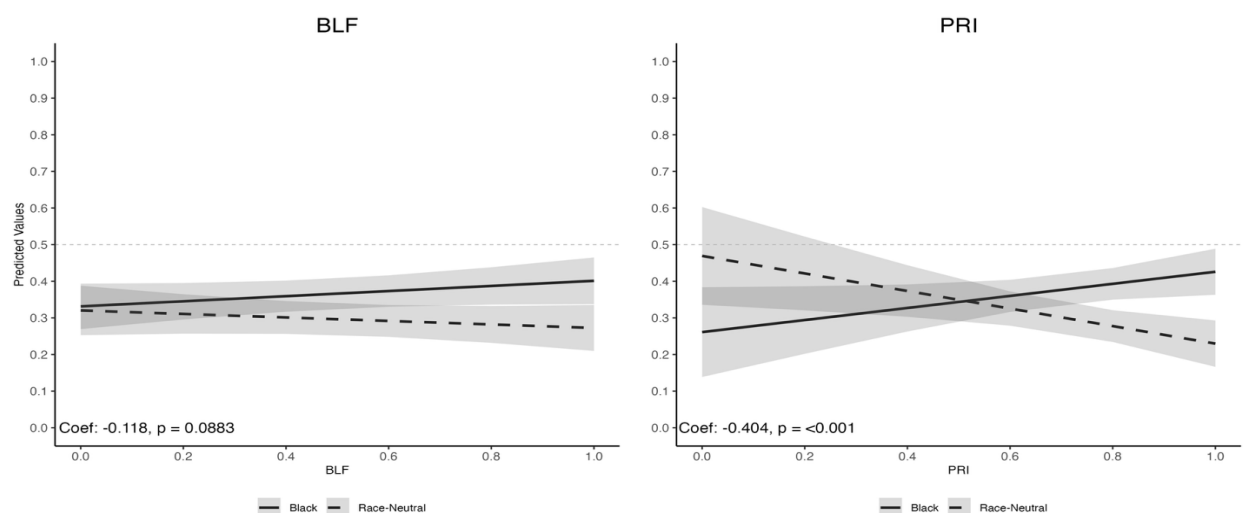**Figure 7. Expressive Support for Political Organizations**
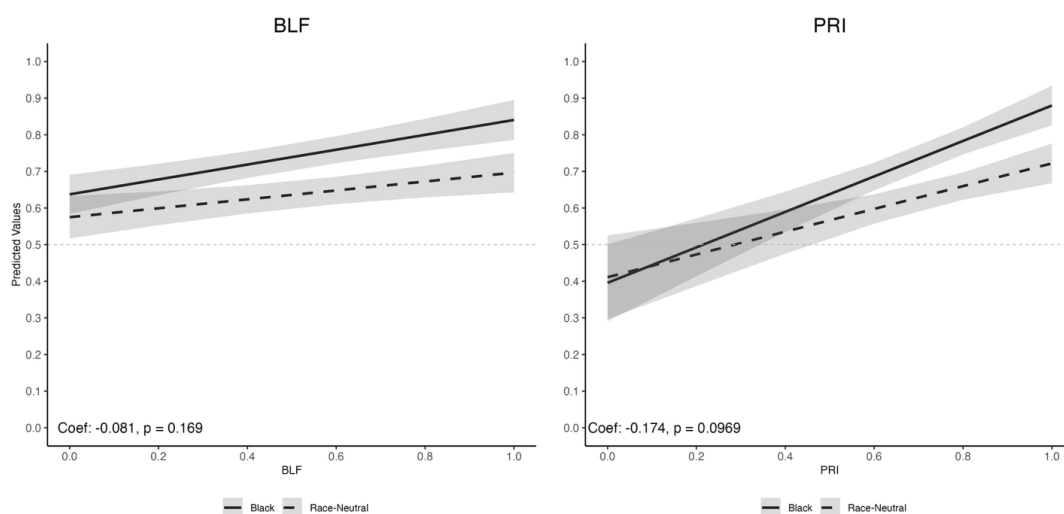
Note: Predicted support (scaled 0–1) for a Black voter registration org (solid) and race-neutral org (dashed) across levels of Black linked fate (left) and PRI (right), from OLS models with interaction terms. The dependent variable

Moreover, the politicized racial identity measure is more predictive of expressive support for both the Black voter registration organization and race-neutral voter registration organization, compared to linked fate. Linked fate yielded results for Black organization support between 0.6 and 0.8, while our politicized racial identity measure captures a wider range of support from as low as .4 to as high as .9. Consistent with the results from the NBES, PRI predicts lower organizational support, relative to linked fate, at the low end of the identity scale. This is once again consistent with PRI doing a better job of sorting out racially liberal and racially conservative Black Americans.

Next, we turn to assessing the predictive power of PRI compared to linked fate when it comes to willingness to contribute monetarily to a political organization. As Figure 8 demonstrates, linked fate does not explain contribution behavior.

Figure 8. Donation to Political Organizations

Note: Predicted donation support (scaled 0–1) for a Black voter registration org (solid) and race-neutral org (dashed) across levels of Black linked fate (left) and PRI (right), from OLS models with interaction terms. The outcome ranges from 0 (least) to 10 (most) willingness to donate. Models control for survey vendor. Shaded areas

The relationship between linked fate and contributions to either the Black or race neutral organizations is indistinguishable from zero. The interaction between linked fate and organization type is not statistically significant at p <0.05 level of significance. This difference appears to be driven by small and statistically insignificant (p=.16) increases in contributions to the Black organization and similarly small and statistically insignificant (p=.33) decreases in contributions to the race-neutral organization moving from low to highly linked study participants.

PRI demonstrates a positive relationship with the donation to the Black organization and a statistically significant (p=.00) negative relationship with donations to the race-neutral organizations. Moreover, the interaction between PRI and organization type is statistically significant (p<.01) suggesting that PRI conditions the effect of organization type on contribution amount. In other words, high and low PRI Black Americans are motivated by PRI to different ends when they are faced with contributing to a Black or race-neutral organization. High PRI Black Americans appear motivated to incur cost in the name of benefits to the racial group by donating to the Black voter registration organization, while low PRI Black Americans are motivated to incur cost in support of race-neutral organizations. Overall, the results from Figure 12 indicate that PRI does a better job than linked fate of explaining engagement in costly, to the individual, political behavior that is engaged in on behalf of other African Americans.

Conclusion

This paper introduces an important new measure to help to better explain Black public opinion, relative to longstanding measures. For decades, scholars have use linked fate –a measure of Black racial group interdependence--as a catchall explanation for Black political

behavior, despite linked fate having a relatively weak relationship with a wide range of Black attitudes and behaviors. Our approach was to develop a multi-dimensional, politicized racial identity measure that goes beyond the single linked fate survey item, and beyond interdependence.

An explanation for Black political behavior when it comes to opinion on matters of race, should consider not only racial group identification and interdependence, but also perceptions of shared grievances and whether the racial discrimination African Americans encounter is self-inflicted or structural, which is a central contribution of our new PRI measure. To do so, we constructed a new measure that includes six items – linked fate, the Black Americans' feeling thermometer, importance of Black identity, two items from the Kinder and Sanders (1996) resentment scale and perception of discrimination against Black Americans.

Through a series of analyses, we find that our PRI measure has more predictive power relative to Black linked fate, including when it comes to predicting party ID. In other words, our PRI measure better explains partisan homogeneity among Black Americans, which linked fate has historically been unable to explain, despite being the predominant explanation for Black partisan homogeneity for several decades. Moreover, our PRI measure offers a compelling, *psychological* explanation for Black political behavior, whereas recent work explaining partisan homogeneity among Black people has focused on social norms (White and Laird 2020). Although social norms are important for Black political behavior, a psychological explanation, such as PRI becomes more salient under circumstances where it is difficult to enforce norms, such as during the private act of voting.

Another contribution of our PRI measure is that relative to linked fate, it better explains Black support for racialized policies, and the heterogeneity in this support. Through a series of

analyses, we demonstrated a strong relationship between PRI and support for explicitly racial policies such as reparations and affirmative action, as well as implicitly racial policies such as crime policy and universal healthcare. We also demonstrate that people who have low levels of PRI are far more likely to have conservative opinions on racial matters, such as notably warmer feelings toward the police and being more likely to identify as Republicans. Linked fate, on the other hand is unable to differentiate between those African Americans who have conservative racial opinions and those who do not. This heterogeneity in Black public opinion is of great political import, as PRI helps to explain the behavior of those African Americans who may be more receptive to racially conservative messaging and appeals. While much of the research on Black public opinion has focused on African Americans as a highly racially identified group (Philpot 2017, Tate 1993; Gurin et al. 1989) our new PRI measure allows for more theorizing about the minority of African Americans who are not highly racially identified.

Also, of note is that our PRI measure predicts not only expressed opinions in the form of survey responses, but also costly political behavior in the form of monetary donations. Lastly, our PRI measure predicts what it should predict (issues that are implicitly or explicitly tied to Black Americans) but does not predict what it should not predict (issues that are not racialized). Therefore, we have confidence that our new measure is not simply capturing a liberal ideological orientation, as it does not predict Black public opinion on non-racial issues such as foreign, transgender rights, and abortion. In contrast, we demonstrate that linked fate has a weak relationship with racial issues and with Democratic Party identification, which are things that linked fate is argued to predict.

Despite our critiques of the linked fate measure, one should not conclude that we are dismissing the importance of linked fate. Instead, we incorporate linked fate into a larger

politicized racial identity that has increased predictive ability for Black political behavior and attitudes. Future research, of course, should continue to refine the PRI measure as well as explore conditions under which the strength of this identity will be influenced. In sum, our analysis presented here is compelling evidence that linked fate has an explanatory scope that is best suited for measuring interdependence, whereas politicized racial identity enhances our ability to predict Black political behavior and attitudes.

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