

# Partisan Linked Fate in the American Mass Public

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## Abstract

American politics is characterized by myriad forms of in-group bias. However, the precise nature of these biases are unknown. Drawing on data from the 2021 Cooperative Election Study, NORC AmeriSpeak, and a unique data source of over 2,700 respondents, we argue that Americans express what we call *partisan linked fate*—the notion that what happens to one’s co-partisans throughout the country will have something to do with what happens in their own lives. We find that over 75% of Americans express this sentiment and that this metric closely mirrors the percentage of Americans who express linked fate along racial, gender, and age-based dimensions. We then provide evidence that “strong partisans” are most likely to express partisan linked fate. Finally, we highlight the attitudinal consequences of expressing partisan linked fate. Collectively, our study both introduces a new measure of American partisanship and documents its importance for understanding contemporary political behavior.

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Partisanship is a fundamental aspect of American political behavior. While this has undoubtedly been the case for some time (Campbell et al. 1960), recent analyses—both scholarly and journalistic—suggest that partisanship in the contemporary era is unique. Today, partisanship is often described as a “mega-identity” that is a bundle of racial, cultural, and ideological identities (Mason 2018). This identity, in turn, fosters antipathy (Orr and Huber 2020; Dias and Lelkes 2021) that can lead to changes in voting patterns (Abramowitz and Webster 2016) and introduce a series of behavioral biases (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Webster, Connors and Sinclair 2022). The manifold presence of this “hyper-partisan politics” has led commentators to highlight that American partisanship is now defined almost entirely by a strong sense of “loathing [the] opposing party” (Drutman 2020).

Though negativity and antipathy are both on the rise and play an important role in shaping contemporary political behavior, we argue that the over-time dynamics that have led to changes in Americans’ relationship with supporters of the opposing party have also altered how they view supporters of their own political party. We argue that Americans today express a sense of what we call *partisan linked fate*—the notion that what happens to one’s co-partisans throughout the country will have something to do with what happens in their own lives. Drawing on data from the 2021 Cooperative Election Study (CES), we establish the existence of partisan linked fate as a construct among the mass public. Specifically, we find that just over 76% of Americans express this sentiment. We then draw upon two additional samples—one from NORC AmeriSpeak and the other a sample from Lucid of over 2,700 self-identifying partisans—in order to both replicate our findings from the CES and benchmark the expression of partisan linked fate to more commonly studied expressions of linked fate (such as race, gender, and age).

After establishing its existence among the mass public and comparing it to other forms of linked fate, we then examine the correlates of partisan linked fate. We find that the expression of partisan linked fate is most common among those who identify as a “strong partisan.” Importantly, we find this patterns of results across three different sources of data. We also find evidence that

one's strength of partisanship predicts the magnitude with which partisan linked fate is expressed. Finally, we find evidence—albeit inconsistent—that living in more extremely partisan locations predicts the expression of partisan linked fate.

Finally, we point to a specific attitudinal consequence of expressing partisan linked fate. Here, we document how partisan linked fate is related to a greater belief in conspiracy theories that are endorsed by co-partisans. This is true whether the conspiracy theories are health-related (e.g. COVID-19 being created in a military research facility), explicitly political in nature (e.g. ballots are sometimes counted inaccurately, or the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were a false flag operation), or entirely fictitious and devoid of any clear *ex ante* partisan prime (e.g. birds are really spy drones, or government-mandated fluorescent light bulbs make it easier to control citizens).

Collectively, our results speak to important developments pertaining to contemporary American partisanship. In the wake of decades' worth of social sorting (Levendusky 2009), Americans' partisan identities have begun to operate in a manner similar to racial and ethnic identities. Thus, rather than being just an expression of one's political views at the ballot box, modern American partisanship has evolved into an expression both of whom one *likes* and whom one *loathes*. While previous scholarship has spent considerable time examining this latter part of partisan identity, our work both introduces and provides evidence of the empirical value of a new concept addressing the former part.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we outline prior work on linked fate in American politics. Drawing on this literature, we then develop a theory as to why we expect Americans to express linked fate along an explicitly partisan dimension. Next, we outline three different sources of data that we use to test our arguments. We then present a series of results that document the existence of partisan linked fate among the mass public and benchmark its expression to other forms of linked fate. We then highlight the correlates of expressing partisan linked fate before outlining its attitudinal consequences. Finally, we conclude with some thoughts about the implications of these findings for the future of American partisanship.

## **Partisan Linked Fate in the American Public**

The term “linked fate” originates from Dawson’s (1994) survey analyses of the 1984 National Black Election Study. These analyses showed a striking similarity in survey responses across class lines which, according to Dawson (1994), was driven by Black voters’ sense of shared fate—a fate rooted in “the historical legacy of racial and economic oppression that forged [the] racial identity of African Americans” (pg. 4). Thus, membership in a group (here, a racial group) can cause individuals to prioritize group interests above individual interests. In fact, group interests often become intertwined with individual interests to the point where individuals perceive that “what happens to the group will also affect the individual member” (Simien 2005).

Though it has been primarily studied among Black Americans (see, e.g., Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Tate 1993), linked fate can—and does—exist for other racial groups. Sanchez and Medeiros (2016), for instance, find that linked fate among Latinos predicts support for expanding health care in the United States (see also, Sanchez and Masuoka 2010). Such a finding comports with other work indicating that linked fate among Latinos predicts a desire for descriptive representation (Schildkraut 2013) and that Latinos’ sense of linked fate is shaped by (among other things) the stringency of immigration laws (Vargas, Sanchez and Valdez Jr. 2017).

So, too, has linked fate been studied among Asian Americans. Masuoka (2006) finds evidence of a “growing Asian-American ... group consciousness” (pg. 1009) and that Asian American linked fate increases when racial discrimination is present. Related work adds nuance to this finding, claiming that Asian Americans are also more likely to express a sense of linked fate when perceptions of racial discrimination are high (Lu and Bradford 2019). In addition to real and perceived discrimination, prior work argues that both education and social exclusion are positively correlated with Asian Americans’ expression of linked fate (Kiang, Wilkinson and Juang 2021).

The expression of linked fate is not limited to racial minorities. On the contrary, recent work on Whiteness as an identity in American politics suggests that even members of a racial majority

can exhibit racial consciousness to an extent that changes both their behavior and their political attitudes (Berry, Ebner and Cornelius 2019). Jardina (2019), for example, shows that the centrality of Whiteness to one's identity predicts attitudes and support for policies that defend and maintain the racial status quo. Relatedly, Schildkraut (2015) argues that Whites who feel a sense of linked fate with their racial group are among the most likely to believe that their political representative should also be White.

Accordingly, linked fate exists to a considerable degree among members of various racial groups. And, in many cases, “[l]inked fate best captures the critical cognitive components of racial group consciousness” (McClain et al. 2009). As a result, understanding whether expressions of linked fate are present—and the degree to which those expressions exist—within a group is important for understanding how members of that group engage within the political sphere.

Linked fate, then, is primarily concerned with capturing the extent to which one expresses a sense of solidarity with his or her group on a given (usually, race-based) dimension. Yet, linked fate need not be applied only to the study of racial politics. As Dawson's (1994) pioneering work notes, notions of linked fate draw largely from social-psychological theories of social identity theory (Turner et al. 1987). As a result, scholars have increasingly applied the concept of linked fate to groups other than race (Stout, Kretschmer and Ruppanner 2017; Goode et al. 2021; Ruppanner et al. 2019).

Increasingly, scholars have argued that partisanship operates as an identity in a manner similar to race, gender, or ethnicity (West and Iyengar 2020). This conceptualization of partisanship has considerable implications: Americans are biased and angry (Mason 2018), prone to exhibiting partisan-based forms of discrimination (Iyengar and Westwood 2015), likely to participate in political campaigns as a way of re-affirming their partisan identities (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe 2015), and apt to engage in myriad forms of partisan motivated reasoning (Lodge and Taber 2013; Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2016). Such group-based forms of political expression are likely to be more pronounced when elements of social pressure are present (Sinclair 2012; Connors 2020).

To the extent partisanship does operate as a social identity, as previous scholars have argued, this identity should also entail a sense of camaraderie or solidarity that is present in other group dynamics. Specifically, the nature of contemporary American partisanship and its standard conceptualization as an identity implies that linked fate should exist along purely partisan lines. Thus, the importance of partisanship as an identity in contemporary American politics leads us to our first expectation: partisans will express a belief that what happens to their co-partisans will have something to do with what happens in their own life.

In addition to expecting that linked fate will exist along a partisan dimension among the mass public, there is reason to believe that both *whether* one expresses this sentiment and the *degree* to which they do so will be dependent upon personal characteristics. Indeed, we expect one's expression of partisan linked fate to be a function of the strength of their own partisan identity. More specifically, we expect that, relative to weak identifiers and "regular" identifiers, those who identify as a "strong partisan" will be more likely to express partisan linked fate. In a similar manner, we expect those who identify as a "strong partisan" to express the greatest degree of partisan linked fate.

Additionally, we expect the expression of partisan linked fate to be related to the partisan composition of where one lives. Recent work has shown that Americans have a slight stated preference for living near co-partisans (Tam Cho, Gimpel and Hui 2013; Mummolo and Nall 2017) and that one's surroundings can shape their own partisan identification (Martin and Webster 2020). To the extent these preferences and these mechanism of social influence (see, e.g., Sinclair 2012) are at work, living in an area that disproportionately leans towards one of the two major parties should predict the expression of partisan linked fate. Thus, we expect that living in areas that are highly Democratic or highly Republican will predict a greater expression of partisan linked fate.

## Data & Measures

To examine the degree to which Americans express partisan linked fate, we draw upon three sources of data: the Indiana University module of the 2021 Cooperative Election Study (CES), a sample from NORC AmeriSpeak, and a sample of over 2,700 self-identifying partisans obtained via the Lucid Theorem platform. All three datasets contain standard political and sociodemographic information—such as race, gender, income, and educational attainment—for each respondent. In addition to these questions, our sources of data include a series of questions designed to measure respondents' expression of partisan linked fate. Because these questions require respondents to hold a partisan identity of their own, they were only presented to those who identified as a Democrat, a Republican, or an independent who leans towards either the Democratic or Republican Party.

The first question used to measure partisan linked fate captures a dichotomous presence or absence of partisan linked fate. Specifically, the question asks respondents whether they believe that “what happens to other [Democrats/Republicans] in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life.” Thus, the question was presented in a way that self-identifying Democrats were asked about Democrats and self-identifying Republicans were asked about Republicans. Response options are “yes” and “no.” The text of this question is drawn directly from the literature on racial linked fate and, aside from asking about partisanship instead of racial identity, is a verbatim copy of the traditionally used measure of linked fate.

The second question used to measure partisan linked fate is designed to capture the intensity with which one expresses such a sentiment. This question asks individuals to state whether what happens to other Democrats or Republicans (depending on one's own self-identified partisanship) will affect them “a lot,” “some,” or “not very much.” Because this question measures the intensity of one's expression of partisan linked fate, it is only shown to those respondents who answered “yes” to the initial partisan linked fate question. For the purposes of analysis, responses to this

question are coded to range from 0-2. Higher values indicate a greater degree of partisan linked fate.

To directly compare the degree to which Americans express partisan linked fate relative to linked fate along other identity-based dimensions, in our NORC and Lucid samples we also measure respondents' attachment to their own racial group, gender, and age cohort. For each of these three group-based identities, we use an identical measurement strategy to the one described above. Thus, for each group identity, respondents are asked the dichotomous linked fate question and, if the respondent indicates that they do hold a sense of linked fate for that group, they are presented with the follow-up question measuring the intensity of that sentiment.

Additionally, in order to assess the relationship between partisan linked fate and various political attitudes, in our Lucid sample we asked a series of questions pertaining to belief in conspiracy theories. Specifically, we asked questions about whether the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were a false flag operation; whether ballots were not counted as intended in the most recent presidential election; whether COVID-19 was created in a military research facility; and, additionally, whether vaccines contain microchips that allow the government to track a person's movements. We also asked attitudes about two conspiracy theories that are fictitious and, accordingly, have no *ex ante* partisan prime: whether the U.S. government has mandated the switch to fluorescent light bulbs because such lights make people more obedient and easier to control (Oliver and Wood 2018); and whether birds are really drone replicas installed by the U.S. government to spy on Americans.

In each case, the conspiracy theory was prefaced by the claim that “[Democrats/Republicans] like you sometimes believe that.” Thus, for example, when asking about the belief that vaccines contain tracking microchips, respondents were presented with a prompt that said “[Democrats/Republicans] like you sometimes believe that vaccines contain microchips that allow the government to track a person's movements.” The partisan prime was obtained from each respondent's own self-identified partisan affiliation. After each prompt, agreement with the conspiracy theories was measured on a



7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Finally, we collect data on the partisan leanings of each respondent’s House district from the Cook Political Report. Thus, for each respondent, we have a measure of how Democratic or Republican their House district is in presidential voting compared to the nation (i.e., the district’s partisan voting index, PVI). In each case, we take the absolute value of the Cook PVI in order to obtain a measure of each district’s partisan extremity. For the CES data, each respondent’s PVI score is assigned based off of their stated House district. Because congressional districts were not collected in the Lucid and NORC data, we assign respondents to a congressional district if the geographic centroid of their zip code of residence falls within a congressional district’s boundaries.

## Results

### The Existence of Partisan Linked Fate

To begin, we first present a series of summary statistics documenting the existence of partisan linked fate in the mass public. Starting with our CES data, we find that 75.8% of respondents expressed partisan linked fate ( $\sigma_{PLF} = 2.12$ ). Of those who expressed partisan linked fate, the average score on the follow-up question measuring intensity of the sentiment was 1.3 ( $\sigma_{Intensity} = .03$ ).<sup>1</sup> These figures are noteworthy, as they track closely with those measuring linked fate across racial and ethnic dimensions (see, e.g., Gay, Hochschild and White 2016). Moreover, the expression of partisan linked fate is substantively similar across partisan affiliation. Tables of partisan linked fate by partisan identification are available in the Appendix.

To examine the robustness of this finding, we now present results from our Lucid ( $n = 2,850$ ) and NORC samples ( $n = 1,005$ ). Once again, we find that a remarkably high proportion of respondents expressed a sense of partisan linked fate. In the Lucid data, 76% of respondents answered “yes” when asked whether what happens to their co-partisans in this country will have something to

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<sup>1</sup>All numbers are calculated using the appropriate survey weights.

do with what happens in their life. Additionally, we found that the average score on the follow-up measure of intensity was 1.3. In the NORC data, 78% of respondents expressed a sense of partisan linked fate. The average level of intensity (i.e., the score on the follow-up measure) was 1.2. The figures in the Lucid and NORC samples are nearly identical to the CES benchmarks of 75% and 1.3, respectively. Thus, across three datasets we are able to verify the existence of partisan linked fate and provide consistent estimates as to the percentage of Americans who express these views and the degree to which they hold them.

Though we have been able to document the existence of partisan linked fate—as well as highlight the degree to which it is expressed—across three different sources of data, how this form of partisan togetherness compares to other forms of linked fate remains an open question. To address this, we asked respondents from our Lucid and NORC samples to answer questions about their racial identification, their gender, and their birth year. Then, using this information, we generated a series of linked fate questions pertaining to each respondent’s self-declared race, gender, and age cohort.<sup>2</sup> The breakdown of each of these linked fate measures, including partisan linked fate, is shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, responses to the initial linked fate question were remarkably similar across each of the four dimensions and across our two samples. In our Lucid sample, the percentage of respondents who expressed a sense of partisan linked fate was identical to the percentage of those who expressed a sense of racial linked fate (both 76%). We find nearly identical figures in our NORC sample: 78% of respondents expressed partisan linked fate, while 77% of respondents expressed racial linked fate. The expression of linked fate for gender was slightly higher than these previous two metrics across both samples (78% in the Lucid sample; 80% in the NORC sample), while age-based linked fate showed more variation across samples (75% in the Lucid sample;

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<sup>2</sup>With two exceptions (18-20 years old and 75+ years old), age cohorts are broken down into 5-year increments. This breakdown mirrors that used by standard survey batteries such as the American National Election Studies (ANES).

	% Linked Fate		Mean Degree	
	Lucid	NORC	Lucid	NORC
Partisan	76	78	1.28	1.15
Racial	76	77	1.26	1.15
Gender	78	80	1.37	1.25
Age Cohort	75	80	1.38	1.21

Table 1: Linked Fate Across Groups. This table shows the proportion of respondents who expressed a sense of linked fate across partisan, racial, gender, and age cohort dimensions; it also shows the intensity with which respondents reported feeling each sense of linked fate. Data come from our Lucid and NORC samples.

80% in the NORC sample). Similarly, the magnitude with which respondents exhibited linked fate across these dimensions was nearly identical. In our Lucid sample, the mean response on the follow-up question (ranging from 0-2) to partisan linked fate was 1.28; this same measure was a slightly lower 1.26 for racial linked fate. The follow-up question measuring intensity was higher for both gender and age-based linked fate—1.37 and 1.38, respectively. Among our NORC sample, the mean response on our follow-up question was 1.15 for both partisan and racial linked fate. For gender and age-based linked fate, these figures were 1.25 and 1.21, respectively. Collectively, these statistics suggest that partisan linked fate exists among the American mass public and does so to a degree that is on par with more traditionally studied forms of linked fate, such as race or gender.<sup>3</sup>

## Correlates of Partisan Linked Fate

The preceding analyses have documented two things: first, that partisan linked fate exists as a construct among the American mass public; and, second, that the public expresses a sense of partisan linked fate at rates that are remarkably similar to linked fate along other dimensions (e.g.

<sup>3</sup>Additionally, we can present evidence that these results are robust to repeated within-survey measurement. See Table B.4 in the Appendix for more details.

race, gender, and age). Left unanswered is the nature of partisan linked fate in the mass public. Specifically, who is it that is most likely to express this sentiment? It is to this task that we now turn.

To address this question, we rely on data from our CES, Lucid, and NORC samples. Across each of these datasets, we run logistic regression models predicting whether or not each individual  $i$  expresses partisan linked fate. We also run a series of models predicting the magnitude of each respondent's partisan linked fate, estimated via ordinary least squares. Our set of predictor variables is the same for both the logistic regression and OLS models.

To begin, we include a dummy variable for those who identify as a "strong partisan." Derived from our 7-point measure of partisan identification, this variable takes on a values of one if a respondent indicates that they are a "strong Democrat" or a "strong Republican" and a zero otherwise. We also include a measure of each district's Cook PVI to control for a respondent's partisan context. We then add four sociodemographic predictors. We include a variable for racial identity, dichotomized as non-White or White. We also include a measure of each respondent's household income and educational attainment (dichotomized as having at least a Bachelor's degree or not). Finally, we include a variable for each respondent's gender by adding a dummy variable for women. The results of these models are shown in Table 2.

One primary pattern emerges from the models displayed in Table 2. First, our models suggest that identifying as a strong partisan predicts the expression of partisan linked fate. This is true in our Lucid sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.462; p < .01$ ), our CES sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.932; p < .05$ ), and our NORC sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.442; p < .05$ ). This finding comports with our theoretical expectations. Indeed, because those individuals who identify strongly with their political party are the most committed of partisans, their expression of partisan linked fate is to be expected. That this relationship is found in three different national samples provides robust evidence that strong partisans are the most likely to express partisan linked fate.

We find similar evidence when examining the correlates of predicting greater degrees of parti-

	Lucid		CES		NORC	
	PLF	PLF Degree	PLF	PLF Degree	PLF	PLF Degree
Strong Partisan	0.462*** (0.092)	0.281*** (0.026)	0.932** (0.464)	0.136*** (0.029)	0.442** (0.183)	0.281*** (0.053)
Cook PVI	0.009* (0.005)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.003 (0.026)	0.003* (0.002)	-0.015* (0.009)	-0.0003 (0.003)
Non-White	-0.070 (0.106)	0.031 (0.030)	-0.465 (0.502)	-0.103** (0.044)	-0.044 (0.198)	-0.070 (0.059)
Household Income	0.020*** (0.008)	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.103)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.037 (0.023)	-0.007 (0.007)
Bachelor's Degree+	0.348*** (0.107)	0.025 (0.029)	0.392 (0.339)	0.137*** (0.027)	0.192 (0.205)	0.094 (0.058)
Female	0.174* (0.092)	-0.0002 (0.026)	-0.065 (0.537)	-0.005 (0.032)	0.032 (0.177)	0.013 (0.052)
Constant	0.444*** (0.129)	1.036*** (0.037)	0.785 (1.118)	1.165*** (0.046)	0.886*** (0.299)	1.090*** (0.093)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 2: Partisan Linked Fate in the Mass Public. This table shows the correlates of expressing partisan linked fate (Columns 1, 3, & 5; logistic regression) and the degree to which one expresses partisan linked fate (Columns 2, 4, & 6; OLS). Data come from our Lucid (Columns 1 & 2), CES (Columns 3 & 4), and NORC (Columns 5 & 6) samples.

san linked fate. In our Lucid sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.281; p < .01$ ), our CES sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.136; p < .01$ ), and our NORC sample ( $\beta_{\text{Strong Partisan}} = 0.281; p < .01$ ), we find that being a strong partisan predicts expressing a greater amount of partisan linked fate. More concretely, then, this implies that those who are strong partisans are most ardently committed to the idea that what happens to their co-partisans elsewhere in the country will have something to do with what happens in their life. Thus, strong partisanship predicts both whether an individual expresses partisan linked fate and, conditional upon believing that what happens to your co-partisans throughout the country will have something to do with what happens in your life, the degree to which one holds this belief.

There is a limited amount of evidence that living in more extreme partisan districts predicts partisan linked fate. Indeed, in our Lucid sample, we find that living in a more extreme partisan district predicts a greater degree of expressing partisan linked fate. However, our measure of partisan extremity based off of a district's Cook PVI does not reach any conventional level of statistical significance in the remaining five models.

One concern with these models might be that they separate the expression of partisan linked fate from the degree to which one expresses partisan linked fate. To address concerns that the results in Table 2 are driven by this choice, we re-analyze these models but collapse our measure of partisan linked fate into one variable. In this specification, the partisan linked fate dependent variable takes on one of four possible values. Those who do not report any sense of partisan linked fate are coded as a 0 on this measure; those who express partisan linked fate but say that it will affect them "not very much" are coded as a 1; those who express partisan linked fate and say that it will affect them "some" are coded as a 2; and, finally, those who express partisan linked fate and say that it will affect them "a lot" are coded as a 3.

The results of these models, shown in Table 3, are substantively similar to those found in Table 2. Once again, the models suggest that the strength of one's partisan identity is an important aspect in terms of predicting partisan linked fate. In our Lucid sample (Column 1), our CES sample (Column 2), and our NORC sample (Column 3), identifying as a strong partisan expresses a greater

amount of partisan linked fate. And, as with the models in Table 2, the results here suggest that living in a more highly partisan congressional district predicts a greater expression of partisan linked fate among the respondents in our Lucid sample.

	Partisan Linked Fate		
	Lucid	CES	NORC
Strong Partisan	0.400*** (0.041)	0.481** (0.224)	0.376*** (0.076)
Cook PVI	0.007*** (0.002)	0.001 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.004)
Non-White	-0.001 (0.049)	-0.271 (0.261)	-0.061 (0.084)
Household Income	0.009*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.044)	0.007 (0.010)
Bachelor's Degree+	0.156*** (0.046)	0.263 (0.164)	0.150* (0.085)
Female	0.070* (0.042)	-0.032 (0.234)	0.019 (0.076)
Constant	1.256*** (0.059)	1.484*** (0.482)	1.495*** (0.132)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 3: Partisan Linked Fate, Alternative Specification. This table replicates the models shown in Table 2 but collapses the dependent variable into one measure.

## Consequences of Partisan Linked Fate

The analyses above have shown that partisan linked fate exists as a construct among the American mass public, that it exists on a level similar to that of linked fate along other dimensions (e.g. race, gender, and age), and that its expression is predicted by identifying as a strong partisan. We now address the consequences of partisan linked fate for attitudes germane to contemporary American politics. Specifically, we examine how the expression of partisan linked fate predicts attitudes about various conspiracy theories.

To examine the relationship between partisan linked fate and conspiratorial belief, we once again draw upon our Lucid sample. Here, we asked levels of agreement with six conspiracy theories: whether fluorescent light bulbs are a way for the government to control its citizens; whether birds are really spy drones; whether the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were really a false flag operation; whether ballots are sometimes counted inaccurately; whether COVID-19 was invented in a military research facility; and, finally, whether vaccines contain tracking microchips. The first two conspiracies are fictitious and, accordingly, lack any known partisan prime. The latter four conspiracies are all ideas that have been, or currently are, relevant to American politics. In each case, agreement is measured on a 7-point scale where higher numerical values indicate a greater amount of agreement.

To predict conspiratorial belief, we run a series of linear models where our measure of conspiratorial belief serves as our dependent variable. Conspiratorial belief is measured as a function of partisan linked fate. Here, our operationalization of partisan linked fate is a 4-item measure that draws upon both of the questions in our two-item battery. Those who answered “no” to our initial partisan linked fate question are coded as a 0 on this measure. Those who answered “yes” to this question and “not very much” to the follow-up question are coded as a 1. Those who answered “yes” to the initial question and “some” to the follow-up question are coded as a 2. Finally, those who answered “yes” to our initial question and “a lot” to the follow-up question are coded as a 3. To reduce bias in our estimates, we include controls for strong partisans, race, gender, household income, and educational attainment. The results of these models are shown in Table 4.

As shown in Table 4, our measure of partisan linked fate predicts a greater belief in five of the six conspiracy theories that we measured. In Columns 3-5, we see evidence that partisan linked fate predicts the endorsement of conspiracy theories that are—or were—relevant to American politics. Thus, when respondents are told that their co-partisans sometimes believe that the 9/11 attacks were a false flag operation (Column 3), that ballots are sometimes counted inaccurately (Column 4), or that COVID-19 was created in a military research facility (Column 5), they, too, are likely



to endorse these beliefs when they exhibit greater levels of partisan linked fate. In each case, these relationships are statistically distinguishable from zero at the  $p < .01$  level. Only when examining the relationship between partisan linked fate and the belief that vaccines contain tracking microchips (Column 6) do we fail to find a relationship that is statistically significant at any conventional level. Partisan linked fate, then, is a strong and reliable predictor of believing conspiracy theories that are endorsed by co-partisans.

One potential concern with these findings is that they might be driven by some unmeasured factor that is correlated with both the endorsement of the particular conspiracy theory and the expression of partisan linked fate. If this is the case, then our estimates as to the relationship between partisan linked fate and conspiratorial belief may be biased. However, this possibility is unlikely. Indeed, we find the exact same pattern of results when we examine the relationship between two entirely fictitious conspiracy theories—the Oliver and Wood (2018) conspiracy about fluorescent light bulbs allowing the government to control citizens, and a measure of whether birds are actually spy drones—and partisan linked fate. For both of these conspiracy theories, we find that endorsement is increasing in partisan linked fate. Thus, even when the conspiracy theory under consideration contains no *ex ante* partisan prime, those individuals with greater amounts of partisan linked fate are still likely to register a belief in the conspiracy theory when they are told that their co-partisans also endorse the belief.

## **Conclusion & Discussion**

The results presented in this paper suggest that partisanship's ability to operate as a key identity in American politics extends further than previously thought. Rather than operating exclusively as a heuristic or a form of self-identification, one's partisan identity speaks to how he or she views like-minded others throughout the country. As we have shown, Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly agree with the notion that what happens to their co-partisans throughout the

	Light bulbs	Birds	9/11	Ballots	COVID-19	Vaccines
Partisan Linked Fate	0.122*** (0.032)	0.105*** (0.032)	0.120*** (0.033)	0.118*** (0.037)	0.095*** (0.035)	0.056 (0.034)
Female	-0.334*** (0.068)	-0.283*** (0.067)	-0.251*** (0.071)	-0.165** (0.080)	-0.498*** (0.076)	-0.332*** (0.071)
Non-White	0.643*** (0.079)	0.750*** (0.082)	0.772*** (0.083)	0.163* (0.089)	0.464*** (0.088)	0.614*** (0.085)
Strong Partisan	0.425*** (0.066)	0.495*** (0.067)	0.392*** (0.070)	0.825*** (0.079)	0.297*** (0.076)	0.500*** (0.071)
Income	-0.012** (0.006)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.015** (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.020*** (0.006)
Bachelors' Degree+	-0.094 (0.076)	-0.077 (0.075)	-0.191** (0.079)	-0.462*** (0.090)	-0.240*** (0.086)	-0.161** (0.079)
Constant	1.299*** (0.093)	0.982*** (0.092)	1.568*** (0.098)	2.217*** (0.106)	2.191*** (0.102)	1.479*** (0.096)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 4: Partisan Linked Fate and Conspiratorial Belief. The table shows the relationship between partisan linked fate and the endorsement of various conspiracy theories. Data come from our Lucid sample.

country will have something to do with what happens in their own life. Moreover, both Democrats and Republicans appear to hold these attitudes to a considerable degree. Thus, the contemporary American mass public is characterized as holding attitudes that we have characterized as a form of “partisan linked fate.”

Additionally, our study has provided a benchmark for how widespread partisan linked fate is among the mass public. In a Lucid sample of over 2,700 Americans, we found that the rate at which Americans express partisan linked fate closely mirrors the expression of linked fate along racial, gender, and age-based dimensions. In this sample, we found that 76% of respondents expressed some degree of partisan linked fate; this is an identical number to those who expressed racial linked fate (76%) and slightly larger than the percentage who expressed age-based linked fate (75%). Only gender-based linked fate (78%) was slightly more prevalent than partisan linked fate. A similar pattern emerges when examining the degree to which Americans hold these beliefs: the strength with which Americans express partisan linked fate was on par with linked racial, gender, and age-based linked fate.

Importantly, we lend credibility to these results by replicating them in our NORC sample. In this data, we found that 78% of respondents expressed partisan linked fate. And, as with the pattern of results found in our Lucid data, this metric is on par with the expression of linked fate along racial (77%), gender (80%), and age-based (80%) dimensions. Additionally, our NORC sample suggests that the magnitude with which Americans express linked fate is nearly identical to their expression of other forms of linked fate. Collectively, then, our NORC sample corroborates the findings from our Lucid data.

Despite the widespread presence of these attitudes, we found that those who identify as “strong partisans” are the most likely to express partisan linked fate. In a similar manner, those who strongly identify as a Democrat or a Republican express the greatest degree of partisan linked fate. This finding persists across three different datasets: our CES sample, our Lucid sample, and our NORC sample. We found some evidence that living in more highly partisan areas (as measured

by the Cook PVI score of one's congressional district) predicts partisan linked fate, though this finding is limited to analyses that draw upon our Lucid sample.

Importantly, we have shown that the presence of partisan linked fate among the American mass public is not without consequence. On the contrary, expressing partisan linked fate—and expressing higher degrees of partisan linked fate—has attitudinal consequences for American politics. Indeed, the results we have presented here suggest that, when Americans express partisan linked fate and they are told that their co-partisans believe various conspiracy theories, they are more likely to endorse the same set of conspiratorial beliefs. Our results suggest that expressing partisan linked fate predicts believing in conspiracy theories across areas as diverse as foreign policy, election integrity, and the origins of COVID-19. Additionally, our results suggest that Americans who express partisan linked fate are more likely to endorse conspiratorial beliefs even when the conspiracies under question have no *ex ante* partisan prime (e.g. the question about light bulbs allowing for government control of citizens, drawn from Oliver and Wood (2018), and the question about the “birds aren't real” movement). That these findings are obtained even when accounting for an individual's strength of partisanship suggests that partisan linked fate offers a degree of explanatory purchase above and beyond what is obtained from traditional model specifications of mass-level attitudes.

Despite our documenting the presence of partisan linked fate, the correlates of expressing this sentiment, and its attitudinal consequences for contemporary American politics, plenty of work remains. To begin, future work should examine additional outcomes of expressing partisan linked fate. Does expressing partisan linked fate predict an individual's attitudes on economic policy or social policy? If so, what is the nature of this relationship? Must policies be explicitly tied to partisan groups, as the conspiracy theories in this study were, or does partisan linked fate predict diffuse support for (or opposition to) policy ideas?

Similarly, future work should explore the nature of partisan linked fate and support for specific political figures. Must a politician make explicit appeals to help the in-party in order for partisan

linked fate to predict higher levels of support for the candidate, or is simply sharing a partisan identification sufficient for partisan linked fate to shape one's views of a politician? If it is the former, then the high levels of partisan linked fate among the mass public that we have documented here might give politicians an incentive to make targeted campaign promises to his or her supporters that he or she may not feel compelled to make in the absence of expressions of partisan linked fate.

Future work should also examine the causal nature of partisan linked fate. Our results suggest that identifying as a strong partisan predicts the expression of partisan linked fate; while we suspect that this is the causal ordering driving this relationship, our empirical approach does not allow us to definitively speak to the question of whether one's strength of partisanship causes the adoption of partisan linked fate. More thoroughly interrogating this question, as well as exploring the other potential causes of partisan linked fate, appears to be a fruitful line of inquiry.

Finally, future work should examine how partisan linked fate interacts with other factors driving contemporary mass-level political behavior. For instance, prior studies have found that the incumbency advantage has declined as citizens increasingly care more about the party that represents them in Congress than the specific member (Jacobson 2015). Is this preference for party-over-incumbency magnified for those who exhibit partisan linked fate? In a related manner, examining how partisan linked fate acts as an effect moderator is likely to open a number of important questions: does partisan linked fate moderate the causal link between anxiety and news consumption, or that between ideological extremity and affective polarization? As American politics continues to become more acrimonious and divided along partisan lines, better understanding the nature of these dynamics will become paramount. After documenting its existence—and benchmarking it with other forms of linked fate—across three different sources of data in this study, it is our hope that incorporating partisan linked fate into future studies will help scholars better understand the nature of contemporary American partisanship and political behavior.

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## A Appendix

Each of our three datasets were collected after receiving approval from our institutions' IRB. In all cases, our IRB proposals were deemed exempt from review.

## B Tables

Party ID	Prop. PLF	Mean PLF Degree
Strong, weak, or leaning Democrat	0.75	1.30
Strong, weak, or leaning Republican	0.76	1.30

Table B.1: Partisan Linked Fate by Partisan Affiliation (CES). This table shows the proportion of Democrats and Republicans who expressed partisan linked fate in our CES data, as well as the average degree of linked fate expressed across partisan groups.

Party ID	Prop. PLF	Mean PLF Degree
Strong, weak, or leaning Democrat	0.80	1.31
Strong, weak, or leaning Republican	0.72	1.24

Table B.2: Partisan Linked Fate by Partisan Affiliation (Lucid). This table shows the proportion of Democrats and Republicans who expressed partisan linked fate in our Lucid data, as well as the average degree of linked fate expressed across partisan groups.

Party ID	Prop. PLF	Mean PLF Degree
Strong, weak, or leaning Democrat	0.84	1.13
Strong, weak, or leaning Republican	0.70	1.17

Table B.3: Partisan Linked Fate by Partisan Affiliation (NORC). This table shows the proportion of Democrats and Republicans who expressed partisan linked fate in our NORC data, as well as the average degree of linked fate expressed across partisan groups.

	PLF <sub>t=2</sub>	
	(1)	(2)
PLF <sub>t=1</sub>	0.472*** (0.021)	
PLF Intensity <sub>t=1</sub>		0.526*** (0.022)
Strong Partisan	0.086*** (0.015)	0.071*** (0.024)
Non-White	-0.035* (0.018)	0.037 (0.028)
Household Income	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
Bachelor's Degree+	0.035** (0.016)	-0.037 (0.025)
Female	-0.004 (0.015)	-0.018 (0.023)
Constant	0.317*** (0.025)	0.525*** (0.040)

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table B.4: Partisan Linked Fate Over Time. This table shows the relationship between expressing partisan linked fate at the beginning and end of our survey (Column 1), as well as the relationship between the degree of partisan linked fate expressed at the beginning and end of our survey (Column 2). Both models are estimated via OLS.