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The Group-Basis of Political Behaviour among Minoritized Communities: The Case of LGBTQ+ Linked Fate and Sexual and Gender Minorities

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Abstract

LGBTQ+ individuals often display consistent political behaviour despite being internally diverse. We theorize about the importance of group-based heuristics to understand this cohesiveness by proposing the concept of LGBTQ+ linked fate. First, we argue that LGBTQ+ linked fate is stronger among privileged individuals within the LGBTQ+ community (white, cisgender, gays/lesbians) and among those whose life experiences have made their LGBTQ+ identity salient. Then, expanding on social identity theory, we posit that individuals with greater LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to hold group-based political attitudes and voice these preferences through electoral participation. We provide support for these claims using a novel oversample of ∼2,000 LGBTQ+ Americans from the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey. We show that stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate is associated with higher voter turnout, leaning ideologically liberal, and identifying with the Democratic Party. This study contributes to understanding group identity, solidarity, and political behaviour among marginalized communities.

Introduction

LGBTQ+ individuals are a growing demographic group in the US. According to Gallup, 7.6 per cent of the US population identified as LGBTQ+ in 2023, up from 3.5 per cent in 2012. The increase is partly due to the high number of young people who have come of age in the last decade. Today, one in five Gen Z individuals identifies as LGBTQ+[1] and the size of the LGBTQ+ community in the US is comparable to that of some racial and ethnic minority groups. This growing demographic trend has translated into the increasing electoral importance of LGBTQ+ people. Exit polls from the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections revealed that between 7 per cent and 8 per cent of all voters were LGBTQ+.[2] These numbers help explain why LGBTQ+ individuals have become a powerful voting bloc, with research suggesting that LGBTQ+ voters were a key component of a coalition that comprised several minority groups and that was likely determinant

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[1]Jones J (2024) 'LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6%'. *Gallup*. Available online: Gallup. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024).
[2]'National Exit Polls: How Different Groups Voted'. *The New York Times*. Available online: National Exit Polls 2020. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024); 'National Exit Polls: Election 2024 Results'. *NBC News*. Available Online: Exit Polls 2024. (Last accessed: 18/11/2024). 'Equality Electorate: The Projected Growth of the LGBTQ+ Voting Bloc in Coming Years'. *Human Rights Campaign*. October 2022. Available online: HRC 2022. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024).

in the 2020 Presidential election.[3] Exit polls from 2024 revealed that 86 per cent of LGBTQ+ voters supported Democratic candidates.[4] While their support did not lead Kamala Harris to win the election, it likely boosted Democratic Senate candidates in close races in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Nevada.

Despite their increasing demographic and political importance, studies on the political preferences and behaviour of LGBTQ+ individuals remain limited. This is partly due to the scarcity of reliable data, which has long limited scholars' ability to conduct quantitative analyses. However, a few existing studies have shown that lesbian, gay, and bisexual voters are more likely to hold liberal attitudes (Hertzog 1996; Egan 2012; Schnabel 2018), engage in politics (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008), and vote for Democratic candidates (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; Lewis, Rogers and Sherrill 2011; see also Magni 2020). Recently, scholarship has started to examine political diversity within the LGBTQ+ community (Jones 2021).

Building on this important yet under-researched area, we argue that LGBTQ+ political behaviour often has group-centred origins because of the long-standing marginalization of LGBTQ+ people. In particular, the political engagement of LGBTQ+ individuals is often motivated by group identity and solidarity. To explore these claims, we focus on the concept of LGBTQ+ linked fate. We define LGBTQ+ linked fate as the extent to which LGBTQ+ people think that their individual life chances are essentially connected to the fate of other members of the LGBTQ+ community. We then theorize about the determinants of LGBTQ+ linked fate and the political consequences of LGBTQ+ linked fate.[5]

We rely on an oversample of ~2,000 LGBTQ+ Americans collected within the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, one of the largest samples of LGBTQ+ individuals introduced in political science. Our results show that LGBTQ+ linked fate is stronger among those who have occupied a more central position within the LGBTQ+ community, that is gays and lesbians relative to bisexual individuals, cisgender compared to transgender people, and white sexual and gender minorities relative to people of colour. LGBTQ+ linked fate is also stronger among those whose life experiences have made their LGBTQ+ identity more salient, including individuals who have come out and have experienced discrimination because of their LGBTQ+ identity. We then find that LGBTQ+ individuals who hold a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to turn out to vote, lean ideologically liberal, and identify with the Democratic Party.

These results offer an important window into the political behaviour of LGBTQ+ Americans. The findings on the group-centred politics of LGBTQ+ people help explain the striking similarities in the political preferences of a community that has significant socio-demographic diversity (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; Egan 2012; Magni and Reynolds 2021). At the same time, varying degrees of LGBTQ+ linked fate offers nuances with regard to varying preferences among minorities within the LGBTQ+ community (Jones 2021).

Our results align with key findings on the impact of linked fate, group identity, and group consciousness on political behaviour among racial and ethnic minorities (Dawson 1995), gender minorities (Gurin 1985), religious minorities (Jamal 2005), and Indigenous groups (Jones-Kerwin and Peterson 2023). However, our results for LGBTQ+ Americans deviate in a substantial way from existing scholarship. While prior work produced mixed findings on the effect of linked fate on voter turnout among racial and ethnic minorities (Chong and Rogers 2005; Wong, Lien, and

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[3]Flores A, Magni G and Reynolds A. 2020. 'Had LGBT Voters Stayed Home, Trump Might Have Won the 2020 Presidential Election'. *The Washington Post*. Available online: Washington Post, 2020. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024).

[4]'National Exit Polls: Election 2024 Results'. *NBC News*. Available Online: Exit Polls 2024. (Last accessed: 18/11/2024).

[5]We use the label LGBTQ+ throughout the manuscript to include individuals who see themselves as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community (i.e., do not identify as straight and cisgender) and do not adopt the labels lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to describe themselves. To further capture the Q+, the survey instrument we used in the empirical section had an additional option for sexual orientation beyond LGB. In particular, the option 'Something else' allowed respondents to describe their sexual orientation in an open answer, which led some respondents to present themselves as queer, pansexual, asexual, same-gender loving, etc.

Conway 2005; Sanchez 2006; Ocampo, Garcia-Rios, and Gutierrez 2021; Chan, Nguy, and Masuoka 2024), we show that linked fate is associated with greater electoral participation among LGBTQ+ individuals.

More broadly, the study of LGBTQ+ political behaviour can help us understand issues that are central in both politics and political science as a discipline (Sherrill, Somerville and Bailey 1992). Our study builds on foundational theories that emphasize the group-based nature of political behaviour (Converse 2006). It extends research that has applied social identity theory to political science (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Huddy 2001), showing that identity is politically consequential for marginalized social groups, including sexual and gender minorities. In particular, this article sheds light on how group identities that are chosen rather than inherited (Egan 2012) can lead to linked fate and shape political behaviour even in the absence of clear group mobilization. This study also helps us understand the reasons behind the remarkable cohesiveness in the political behaviour of groups that may share a common identity but also display significant diversity among their members.

The Political Attitudes and Behaviour of LGBTQ+ Individuals

The study of LGBTQ+ politics has been marginalized in political science for a long time (Sherrill, Somerville, and Bailey 1992; Mucciaroni 2011; Ayoub 2022). Recently, a growing number of studies have investigated the political attitudes and behaviour of LGBTQ+ individuals, but this work remains limited. A 2021 meta-analysis found that only 1 out of 245 articles on public opinion in the US published between 2009 and 2019 in the *American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics,* and *Public Opinion Quarterly* included LGBT identities as an independent variable in quantitative analyses (Jones 2021). Another analysis found that LGBTQ+ research accounted for only 0.55% of published research in political science's "top" six journals between 2017-2023 (Piscopo 2025). Data limitations often dictated this choice, as national surveys only recently began to collect information on sexual orientation and gender identity (beyond a binary sex or gender question). When this information was available, standard-size samples often yielded too small of a number of respondents openly identifying as LGBTQ+, which posed significant challenges to quantitative analyses.

Despite these limitations, prior research has produced some key findings. First, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) voters are more likely to identify as Democrats and to vote for Democratic candidates. Exit polls in the 1990s revealed that LGB voters strongly embraced Democratic candidates (Hertzog 1996), a voting pattern that continued in the 2000s and 2010s (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; McThomas and Buchanan 2012). A vast majority of LGB voters supported Al Gore in 2000 (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011), Barack Obama in 2008 (Egan 2012), and Hillary Clinton in 2016 (Swank 2018). In 2020, the strong LGB support for Joe Biden helped the Democratic candidate secure a victory (Flores, Magni, and Reynolds 2020). In 2024, Kamala Harris secured a share of the LGBTQ+ vote, higher than any Democratic presidential candidate since 2008.[6]

Second, LGB voters hold more liberal views than the average American. Early work in the 1990s based on exit polling found that LGB voters were more liberal (Hertzog 1996). Later research showed that the liberalism of LGB voters applied to the rights of sexual minorities as well as to issues unrelated to LGBTQ+ rights, including income redistribution, foreign policy, and the environment (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; Egan 2012). More recent work has corroborated such findings, confirming that LGBT Americans are distinctively more liberal than non-LGBT Americans with regard to ideology, vote choice, and policy preferences on issues unrelated to LGBTQ+ populations (Schnabel 2018; Jones 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2024b). Several explanations may help account for why LGB voters are more liberal, including selection effects

[6]'National Exit Polls: Election 2024 Results'. *NBC News.* Available Online: Exit Polls 2024. (Last accessed: 18/11/2024); '2024 Fox News Voter Analysis'. *Fox News.* Available Online: Voter Analysis. (Last accessed: 18/11/2024).

(Egan 2012), group mobilization, social embeddedness (Hertzog 1996; Sherrill 1996; Bailey 1999), and the conversion effects spurred by the transformative experience of coming out (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; Swank 2018).

Third, some evidence suggests that LGB people engage more in politics. The first academic survey on the political behaviour of LGB adults based on a nationally representative sample in 2007 found that LGB individuals were more interested and engaged in politics than the general population (Egan, Edelman, and Sherrill 2008). Various factors help explain the 'electoral activism' of gays and lesbians, including educational levels, experiences with hate crimes, and political group membership (Swank and Fahs 2013).

More recent studies have examined political diversity within the LGBTQ+ community, disaggregating along sexual orientations and gender identities. Cisgender gay men and lesbian women tend to be more liberal than bisexual and transgender Americans. At the same time, bisexual women tend to be more liberal than bisexual men (Jones 2021; see also Swank 2018). Although both male and female LGB individuals have more progressive gender views than heterosexual men, lesbian and bisexual women are most aware of gender inequality (Grollman 2019).

We still know little about how race and sexual orientation interact to shape political preferences. However, the intersection of Americans' race, gender, and sexuality affected vote choice in the 2016 election, when Black lesbian women were especially supportive of Hillary Clinton (Strolovitch, Wong and Proctor 2017; see also Cassese and Barnes 2019). A study focused on LGBTQ+ Latinos in a southwestern state found that LGBTQ+ individuals at the intersection of multiple minoritized identities had lower levels of political engagement (Bergersen, Klar, and Schmitt 2018). Similarly, Flores and Sherrill (n.d.) found that Black LGBT individuals participated less in the 2012 election than White LGBT individuals. We therefore build on scholarship on LGBTQ+ political behaviour to examine how LGBTQ+ linked fate impacts the political preferences of LGBTQ+ individuals. To do so, the next section first reviews the literature on linked fate.

Setting Precedent for the Group-basis of Political Behaviour

Scholarship on the political behaviour of minoritized communities in the US has long noted that its origins are largely group-centred. This means that the propensity for participating in political activities of the marginalized tends to be motivated by considerations such as the degree of group identity and perceptions of group solidarity (see McClain et al. 2009 for a comprehensive review). Minorities often prioritize issues related to groups they belong to and identify with over individual considerations, which, much of the time, has consequences for political behaviour.

Early on, Michael Dawson's (1995) foundational work, 'Behind the Mule', developed the concept of *linked fate.* The perception of linked fate is defined as the extent to which one thinks their individual life chances are essentially connected to the fate of others within their racial group. Scholarly work has shown that increases in the sense of group-based solidarity or linked fate among Black Americans shape public opinion and political participation (Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981; Chong and Rogers 2005; Austin, Middleton, and Yon 2012; Smith et al. 2024). Other group-based factors related to, but separate from, linked fate, such as racialized social pressure, also influence political outcomes (White and Laird 2020). Scholars of racial and ethnic politics have noted a stronger sense of group solidarity and a more consistent link between such solidarity and political behaviour among Black Americans because of their unique experiences with oppression and discrimination (Masuoka and Junn 2013). Nonetheless, this group-centred approach has also been applied to other racial and ethnic minorities. With careful consideration, research has considered the indicators of Latino identity and linked fate, or what some scholars have called the 'Brown Utility Heuristic' (Masuoka 2006; Beltran 2010; Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019). Latinos who perceive a stronger sense of

linked fate are more likely to hold political opinions that benefit their racial group and participate in a plethora of political activities (Sanchez 2006; Masuoka 2008; Bowler and Segura 2011; Ocampo, Garcia-Rios, and Gutierrez 2021; Gutierrez 2024).

Researchers have also demonstrated that this link between group centrality and political behaviour can be relevant for Asian Americans. 'Group-based resources' via group consciousness or linked fate can mobilize certain forms of political participation among Asian Americans (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2005; Wong et al. 2011), even though the relationship between group-based considerations and political behaviour is contingent upon specific political contexts (Junn and Masuoka 2008; Chan, Nguy, and Masuoka 2024). Additionally, a recent paper by Jones-Kerwin and Peterson (2023) assesses group consciousness and linked fate among American Indians and finds that such perceptions are related to higher rates of voter turnout. This research is complemented by a growing recognition of a politicized 'people of color' identity (Perez 2021; Chan and Jasso 2023).

The group-based nature of politics has also been explored with regard to social identities apart from race and ethnicity. For example, researchers have assessed degrees of gender consciousness and linked fate among women (Gurin 1985; Harnois 2015; Stout, Kretschmer, and Ruppanner 2017; Ruppanner et al. 2019; Jenkins, Poloni-Staudinger, and Strachan 2023) as well as linked fate based on class (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016). Existing scholarship has also considered how group consciousness among religious minorities like Muslims mobilizes their political participation (Jamal 2005; Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018).

By contrast, the concept of linked fate has not been fully explored with regard to LGBTQ+ people. We are aware of only two studies that have started to examine how LGBTQ+ group consciousness and linked fate may influence the political preferences and behaviour of LGBTQ+ individuals. An unpublished paper reported that, in 2012, LGBTQ+ individuals with higher group consciousness were more likely to be Democrats, support Barack Obama, and support same-sex marriage (Flores and Sherrill n.d., 2). A second study on LGBTQ+ Latinx individuals found that LGBTQ+ linked fate increased participation among both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ Latinxs (Moreau, Nuño-Pérez, and Sanchez 2019). While a good starting point, this work does not fully account for why and how LGBTQ+ linked fate produces these political outcomes.

Toward a Comprehensive Group-Centric Theory of LGBTQ+ Political Behaviour

We must first establish the premise for which the group-based framework of linked fate is applicable to the study of LGBTQ+ political behaviour. Research notes that external threats to social groups foster the link between identity and politics (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Klandermans 1997; Huddy 2013; Huddy 2001). In particular, the continued discrimination against minoritized communities makes their in-group identity salient for political behaviour (Perez 2015a; White 2016).

Despite progress in recent decades, LGBTQ+ people still face severe marginalization. From an economic standpoint, LGBTQ+ people on average earn significantly lower wages than straight, cisgender individuals[7] and are more likely to live below the poverty line.[8] In terms of legal discrimination, in dozens of states, no explicit prohibitions exist for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity regarding housing, public accommodations, credit, and lending. As of 2024, twenty-six states had no law providing LGBTQ+ inclusive insurance protections and about a third of the LGBTQ+ population lived in states that explicitly excluded gender-affirming care from state employee health benefits. Even though superseded by the 2015

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[7]'The Wage Gap Among LGBTQ+ Workers in the United States'. *Human Rights Campaign*. Available online: HRC. (Last accessed 28/09/2024).

[8]Wilson, BDM, Bouton JAL, Lee Badgett MV and Macklin ML. 2023. 'LGBT Poverty in the United States'. *The Williams Institute*. Available online: Williams Institute. (Last accessed 28/09/2024).

Supreme Court's ruling that made marriage equality the law of the country, state bans against same-sex marriage remain on the book in about half of the states.[9] And, in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of a Christian web designer who refused to provide services for same-sex weddings.[10]

LGBTQ+ people also often confront prejudice and violence in society. Data from 2017–2019 revealed that LGBT people experienced 6.6 violent hate crime victimizations per 1,000 persons, compared to 0.6 per 1,000 persons for non-LGBT people (Flores et al., 2022). A 2023 report from the Anti-Defamation League and GLAAD counted more than 350 incidents of harassment, vandalism, or assault against LGBTQ+ people from June 2022 to April 2023.[11]

Recent years have also witnessed an exponential increase in the number of legislative bills against LGBTQ+ people and their rights. In 2024, almost 600 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in state legislatures around the country.[12] The introduction of anti-LGBTQ+ bills has often been accompanied by anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. Conservative politicians, religious leaders, and Republican lawmakers have increasingly resorted to the old trope that depicts LGBTQ+ people as 'groomers'' to justify the need for anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Republican governors Greg Abbott from Texas and Ron DeSantis from Florida have also threatened to send child protective services against parents of transgender kids and parents taking their kids to drag shows. In October 2023, the election of Rep. Mike Johnson to the Speaker of the House, with his history of extreme anti-LGBTQ+ positions and his work with Alliance Defending Freedom – classified as an anti-LGBTQ+ hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center – has brought a leader and symbol of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination to the forefront of American politics. In the 2024 election cycle, Donald Trump and Republican candidates spent a record $65 million on anti-trans television ads.[13] This negative rhetoric from political elites can further spur the link between identity and political behaviour (Barreto and Woods 2005; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Perez 2015b).

Theorizing the Determinants of LGBTQ+ Linked fate

The consistent marginalization of LGBTQ+ people likely makes this community aware of their subordinate positioning in American social life. It is because of this context and treatment that group-based heuristics such as LGBTQ+ linked fate are likely to shape the political attitudes and behaviour of LGBTQ+ people. However, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals may operate differently than racial discrimination. Indeed, a key feature of LGBTQ+ identity is that this is a chosen group identity, rather than inherited from parents (Egan 2012).

As Sherrill noted, LGBTQ+ people are 'born as if into a diaspora – probably randomly distributed about the population at birth' (Sherrill 1996, 469). As a result, an LGBTQ+ individual is sometimes the only one in the family to be potentially subjected to discrimination because of their LGBTQ+ identity, unlike the case for racial minorities, where most family members are to some extent potentially exposed to racial discrimination. LGBTQ+ individuals who are

[9]'Underneath Obergefell: A National Patchwork of Marriage Laws'. *Movement Advancement Project*. March 2022. Available online: MAP. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024).

[10]Additionally, the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey shows that among non-LGBTQ+ individuals, only 47 per cent of respondents say that LGBTQ Americans as a group support their vision of American society, 37 per cent of respondents say LGBTQ Americans neither support nor threaten their vision of American society, while 16 per cent of respondents think that LGBTQ Americans threaten their vision of American society.

[11]'ADL and GLAAD report: More than 350 anti-LGBTQ+ hate and extremism incidents recorded as anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric soared'. 22 June 2023; Available online: GLAAD. (Last accessed: 28/09/2024). It is also worth noting that the numbers might be even higher. Indeed, data may be undercounting the actual number of incidents against LGBTQ+ people, if LGBTQ+ people do not report some incidents due to low trust in the authorities.

[12]'Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2024'. *American Civil Liberties Union*. Last updated 5 September 2024. Available online: ACLU. (Last accessed: 18/11/2024).

[13]'Trump and Republicans Bet Big on Anti-Trans Ads Across the Country'. *The New York Times*. 8 October 2024.

marginalized in society may therefore be incentivized to build a community with other chosen LGBTQ+ people because that community is often not readily available in the family.

The extent to which this possibility of community outside the family is available to LGBTQ+ individuals often varies depending on sexual, gender, and racial identities. This implies that, while societal marginalization is often a necessary step for LGBTQ+ linked fate to develop, it may not be a sufficient condition. In particular, over time, white gay men and to some extent lesbian women have occupied a more privileged position in the LGBTQ+ community, often shaping the priorities of the movement (Murib 2023).

By contrast, other minorities have faced marginalization within the LGBTQ+ community. Bisexual individuals were initially regarded with suspicion by gay and lesbian activists in the years following Stonewall and consequently marginalized in the movement (Weeks 2011, 13–16; see also Murib 2023). Moreover, some bisexual individuals who are in relationships with opposite-sex partners may feel less pressure to come out and may feel less connected to the community. Transgender individuals were also quickly marginalized in the years following Stonewall and in subsequent decades. The decision to focus on assimilation strategies made gays and lesbians more palatable to lawmakers and the wider society but, as a result, often marginalized transgender people (Murib 2023). Indeed, the focus on marriage equality and the decision to pursue incremental gains emphasizing the similarity of gays and lesbians with a straight, cisgender majority often led to the isolation of transgender individuals in the LGBTQ+ movement.

A community was also less readily available to LGBTQ+ people of colour than to white LGBTQ+ people. Long-standing racism in the LGBTQ+ community has often generated barriers to the creation of a community between the white LGBTQ+ majority and LGBTQ+ Black, Latino, and Asian individuals. It has also challenged a feeling of connection to the LGBTQ+ community among non-white LGBTQ+ people (Felipe, Garrett-Walker, and Montagno 2022). More broadly, the marginalization of non-white LGBTQ+ people has also been a consequence of the strategic decision of LGBTQ+ leaders to prioritize the fight for white middle-class issues, such as marriage, rather than issues more central to LGBTQ+ communities of colour (Proctor 2022; Murib 2023).

All of this implies that not all LGBTQ+ people may have the same degree of connection to the LGBTQ+ community. In particular, we expect cisgender gay and lesbian individuals to have stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate than bisexual and transgender individuals, and we anticipate that white LGBTQ+ people have stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate than LGBTQ+ people of colour.

H1. Cisgender gay and lesbian individuals have a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate than bisexual and transgender individuals.

H2. White LGBTQ+ individuals have a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate than LGBTQ+ people of colour.

There is another key point that differentiates LGBTQ+ people and racial minorities with regard to identity salience and potential discrimination. Unlike most racial minorities, some LGBTQ+ individuals have a certain degree of control over the decision and the extent to which they can or want to be out. Many LGBTQ+ individuals go through the unique process of coming out (or deciding not to). Coming out often increases the salience of one's LGBTQ+ identity, as the identity becomes known in interactions where it was previously unknown or not discussed, such as in relationships with family members, friends, and co-workers.

Even after coming out, the salience of LGBTQ+ identity may vary among LGBTQ+ individuals. Some LGBTQ+ people may be more immersed in LGBTQ+ networks; for instance, by having more LGBTQ+ friends, living in areas with greater LGBTQ+ communities, or becoming more involved in LGBTQ+ activism. While the degree of visibility often strengthens one's own ties to the LGBTQ+ community, it might also elicit experiences of homophobia and transphobia. In turn,

experiences of discrimination that target individuals for being LGBTQ+ may further intensify the salience of one's LGBTQ+ identity.[14]

H3. LGBTQ+ individuals whose life experiences have made their LGBTQ+ identity more salient (that is, having come out, having a deeper LGBTQ+ network, or having experienced discrimination for being LGBTQ+) have a stronger sense of LGBTQ+ linked fate.

LGBTQ+ Linked Fate, Political Preferences, and Voting Behaviour

This section develops our theoretical expectations about the group-centred political behaviour of LGBTQ+ individuals by bringing together scholarly work on linked fate with theories on social embeddedness and LGBTQ+ political behaviour. Social identity theory emphasizes a natural tendency for individuals to classify themselves into groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1987). This is especially the case for individuals who experience marginalization due to identification with particular social groups (Huddy 2013; Perez 2015a). Strongly identified group members seek to elevate the status of their subordinate group they are attached to, which often leads to group-centred political behaviour in the form of pursuing policies to improve the lives of said marginalized social group (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Brewer 1999; Doosje et al. 2002; Leach et al. 2010; Mason 2018).

Consistent expectations were suggested in the 1990s by scholars of LGBTQ+ politics. These scholars advanced explanations for LGBTQ+ political distinctiveness based on social embeddedness theories. For instance, to explain gay political distinctiveness, Hertzog (1996) proposed the concept of gay group consciousness. Bailey (1999) emphasized the importance of the gay subculture that developed in American cities, where networks and social ties emerged. Sherrill (1996) focused on group consciousness, which required a shared sense of conditions and grievances most likely to develop in American cities and college towns. These scholars, therefore, speculated – without fully testing – that LGBTQ+ individuals who interact in the LGBTQ+ community develop social ties, experience acculturation, and acquire group consciousness. This, in turn, would make gay identity salient and lead LGBTQ+ individuals to perceive their fate as tied, which then would explain the political distinctiveness of LGBTQ+ voters. Bringing together these streams in previous scholarship, we expect that LGBTQ+ people who perceive greater LGBTQ+ linked fate will more likely hold political positions consistent with improving the conditions of this marginalized group. We also expect LGBTQ+ linked fate to spur political behaviours that improve the status of LGBTQ+ individuals.

First, LGBTQ+ linked fate should be positively related to increased electoral political participation. LGBTQ+ people who see their life as tied to that of other LGBTQ+ individuals should behave not just as a function of individual self-interests but also to benefit other group members. Politics is often the setting that can bring change benefiting one's community at large, and to participate in politics is a step that can promote change for their group beyond the individual. In recent years, this argument has been made with regard to voting, especially in presidential elections. Following Trump's appointment of conservative justices to the Supreme Court, Democrats have highlighted the importance of presidential elections to determine future judicial appointees who would determine the fate of women's and minorities' rights.

LGBTQ+ voters are likely especially sensitive to this argument since progress on LGBTQ+ rights – from decriminalization of homosexuality to marriage equality to bans on employment discrimination – has often happened through the Supreme Court. More recently, threats of

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[14]It is also plausible to hypothesize that for some people, the opposite might be the case. In fact, experiences of discrimination may lead some individuals to hide and repress their LGBTQ+ identity. The analysis will help shed light on the empirical patterns.

reversal of gains on LGBTQ+ rights have also come from the Court. LGBTQ+ individuals who see their life chances connected to other LGBTQ+ people are therefore expected to be more politically engaged and are more likely to turn out to vote to ensure positive outcomes for their community. Hence:

H4. LGBTQ+ individuals who have a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to turn out to vote in elections.

Second, we expect LGBTQ+ linked fate to be positively associated with more liberal ideological views. As discussed above, LGBTQ+ individuals tend to be more liberal on a wide set of issues that go beyond LGBTQ+ rights. Ideology often provides a lens that helps individuals make sense of their standing in the political world. Hence, LGBTQ+ individuals who feel their interests are tightly connected to other LGBTQ+ people and see other LGBTQ+ people leaning liberal should be more likely to adopt similarly liberal positions. Considering that other LGBTQ+ people may have adopted such positions because they are in their own interest, LGBTQ+ people with stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate should also be more likely to embrace similar positions considered in the interest of the LGBTQ+ community to which they feel connected. Hence, we expect that:

H5. LGBTQ+ individuals who have a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to lean ideologically liberal.

LGBTQ+ linked fate should, lastly, be associated with stronger identification with and support for political parties and candidates that advocate for LGBTQ-affirming policies. In the US, this translates into greater support for the Democratic Party. In the past, mobilization for gay rights was for some time relatively bipartisan. However, the alliance between Republicans and the Christian Right has solidified the framing of gay rights as a civil rights issue. In turn, this has led to a strong association between LGBTQ+ rights and the Democratic Party (Proctor 2022; for a broader discussion on the partisan transformation of civil rights, see Baylor 2013). Democrats and Republicans have then grown further divided on gay rights. This followed a change in party positions that occurred almost entirely within the Democratic Party in recent decades when many elected officials have become substantially more supportive of LGBTQ+ rights (Karol 2012).

Data from the Williams Institute consistently shows that, compared to LGB Democrats, LGB Republicans are less likely to feel part of the LGBTQ+ community, consider participation in the community positive, and believe it is important to be politically active in the LGBTQ+ community. LGB Republicans are also significantly less likely to consider their LGB identity an important aspect of their life (Meyer and Choi 2020). For all these reasons, we expect LGBTQ+ individuals with stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate to be attached to and stronger supporters of the Democratic Party.

H6. LGBTQ+ individuals who have a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to strongly identify with and support the Democratic Party.

Data and Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we rely on an oversample of 1,968 LGBTQ+ Americans collected within the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey – hereafter CMPS (Frasure et al. 2021). The online survey was administered between April and October 2021. The survey, as well as the invitation to participate in the study, was made available in a variety of languages. The data collection effort started with a large sample of registered voters from online sources that were pre-matched to the voter file during the 2020 election but also comprised samples of non-registered

adults, including non-citizens.[15] The CMPS has sought to collect the most diverse samples of Americans across various social groups and has been utilized heavily in research on marginalized populations in the US. To date and to the authors' best knowledge, this is one of the largest samples of LGBTQ+ Americans in political science.

The LGBTQ+ sample was identified through demographic questions on sexual orientation, transgender identity, and gender identity. For sexual orientation, the 2020 CMPS asked: 'Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?' Respondents were included in the analysis if they answered: Gay or Lesbian; Bisexual; or Something Else. The questionnaire also asked: 'Some people describe themselves as transgender when they experience a different gender identity from their sex at birth. For example, a person born into a male body, but feels female or lives as a woman would be transgender. A transgender person may be of any sexual orientation – straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Are you transgender?'. Those who selected yes were included in this analysis. LGBTQ+ respondents were asked about their gender identity. The response options included: Man, Woman, Non-Binary, or Something Else. We provide further information about the 2020 CMPS LGBTQ+ oversample in the appendix. Table A displays the number of respondents by sexual orientation and gender identity. Table B displays the number of respondents by sexual orientation and transgender identity.

We utilize survey weights constructed by Frasure et al. (2021) that are recommended for descriptive and multivariate analysis. For groups that cannot draw directly on in-depth demographic information from the U.S. Census Bureau, Frasure et al. (2021) relied on extant literature and social group-specific research centres such as the Pew Research Center and the Williams Institute, which specializes in research on LGBTQ+ populations. The provided survey weights for the LGBTQ+ oversample therefore is an approximation based on the best-known estimates from publicly available demographic information about this community.

Variables and Models

Our main variable is LGBTQ+ linked fate. To operationalize this concept, we draw from existing measures of linked fate that originated with Dawson (1995) that have been used to gauge both the group basis of racial/ethnic and non-racial/ethnic minorities' political behaviour. We used a survey question that asked respondents to choose among the following five options: "What happens to LGBTQ people will have . . . Nothing to do with what happens in my life (0); A little to do with what happens in my life (0.25); Something to do with what happens in my life (0.5); A lot to do with what happens in my life (0.75); A huge amount to do with what happens in my life (1)."

Hypotheses 1–3 treat LGBTQ+ linked fate as the dependent variable. In these multivariate models where we examine what predicts LGBTQ+ linked fate, we control for standard socio-demographic indicators such as age, gender, education, income, religious attendance, sexual orientation, whether the respondent identified as transgender, and race/ethnicity.[16] Model 2 in Table 1 on the correlates of LGBTQ+ linked fate also controls for political interest. Model 2 also includes a list of variables related

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[15]In the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, 60 per cent of the LGBTQ+ sample was registered to vote, while 40 per cent of the LGBTQ+ sample was not registered to vote.

[16]The co-PIs of the study note that the oversamples of non-racial groups in the 2020 CMPS are not probability samples. The weights constructed utilize the best-known parameter estimates for LGBTQ+ Americans as a whole, and the LGBTQ weight is not stratified by race. Therefore, while we recognize the heterogeneity within the LGBTQ+ community across race and ethnicity, we take caution in presenting disaggregated results. We urge future survey research to further conduct specific oversamples of, for example, Black, Latinx, Asian American, and White LGBTQ+ Americans. We also advocate for future investigation of potentially competing identities on the political behaviour of Black, Latino, Asian, and White LGBTQ+ Americans (for example, comparing the influences of racial/ethnic and LGBTQ+ linked fate). For now, in Appendix Table K, we computed the mean levels of LGBTQ+ and racial linked fate across Black, Latino, Asian, and White LGBTQ+ Americans, which may serve as a starting point for future investigation.

Table 1. Determinants of LGBTQ+ Linked Fate

	Dependent variable:	
	LGBTQ+ Linked Fate	
	Model 1	Model 2
SO - Bisexual	−0.189***	−0.114***
	(0.018)	(0.018)
SO - Other	−0.103***	−0.005
	(0.027)	(0.052)
Transgender	−0.108***	−0.084***
	(0.028)	(0.030)
Woman	0.033**	0.011
	(0.016)	(0.016)
Black	−0.083***	−0.067***
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Latinx	−0.049***	−0.059***
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Asian	−0.036	−0.028
	(0.030)	(0.033)
Native	0.021	−0.084
	(0.042)	(0.067)
Pacific Islander	−0.145*	−0.082
	(0.078)	(0.092)
Hawaiian	0.148**	0.136*
	(0.074)	(0.071)
Middle Eastern	0.045	0.044
	(0.057)	(0.058)
Age	−0.261***	−0.147***
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Education	0.173***	0.119***
	(0.033)	(0.033)
Income	0.035	0.028
	(0.027)	(0.027)
Religious Attendance		−0.128***
		(0.024)
Political Interest		0.029
		(0.026)
Came Out		0.147***
		(0.021)
Perceived Discrimination LGBTQ+		0.242***
		(0.026)
Experienced Discrimination - Sexual Orientation		0.109***
		(0.018)
LGBTQ Friends		0.021
		(0.033)
Constant	0.688***	0.328***
	(0.027)	(0.041)
Observations	1,795	1,486
R^2	0.112	0.266
Adjusted R^2	0.105	0.256
Residual Std. Error	0.296 (df = 1780)	0.268 (df = 1465)
F Statistic	15.969*** (df = 14; 1780)	26.509*** (df = 20; 1465)

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. For categorical variables, the following are the reference categories: women are in comparison to men; racial/ethnic groups are compared to whites; for sexual orientation, lesbian and gay are the referent categories; and transgender individuals are compared to cisgender individuals.

to the life experiences of LGBTQ+ people such as coming out; the share of LGBTQ+ family, friends and co-workers; and perceived and experienced LGBTQ+ discrimination.

Hypotheses 4–6 treat LGBTQ+ linked fate as the main independent variable. In these hypotheses, we analyze political preferences and behaviour with several dependent variables.

To measure electoral participation (Hypothesis 4), we rely on respondents' self-reported voter turnout in the 2020 election. The variable is coded 1 for respondents who reported voting and 0 for those who reported not voting.[17] We capture ideological preferences (Hypothesis 5) on a five-point scale ranging from very conservative (0) to very liberal (1). We measure the strength of Democratic party identification (Hypothesis 6) with a standard measure of partisanship. The variable is continuously scaled so that 0 indicates individuals who identify as Strong Republicans and 1 as individuals who identify as Strong Democrats. Pure Independents are at the middle of the scale. Moreover, we further measure party support with a variable on vote choice, which is coded 1 for respondents who voted for the Democratic presidential ticket and 0 for respondents who voted for the Republican or another ticket in the 2020 presidential election.[18]

The models analyzing the association between LGBTQ+ linked fate and political behaviour (Hypotheses 4–6) include the socio-demographic controls described in the previous paragraph. Additionally, the robustness check for the model on voter turnout (Table 2, model 3) includes political controls for the strength of partisan identity,[19] interest in politics, and whether or not the respondent was asked/recruited to participate in the last general election. The robustness check for the model on political ideology (Table 3, model 3) includes additional controls for partisanship,[20] political interest, and racial attitudes. The robustness tests for the model on partisanship (Appendix Table G, models 2 and 3) also controls for ideology, political interest, and racial attitudes. Finally, the robustness tests for the model on presidential vote choice (Appendix Table H, models 2 and 3) add controls for partisanship, ideology, political interest, and racial attitudes. We included the specific wording of the new LGBTQ-related questions, along with the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of these variables in Appendix Table C and Table D.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

We start by providing information on the distribution of answers to the question on LGBTQ+ linked fate. Of the almost 2,000 LGBTQ+ respondents, 12 per cent said that what happens to other LGBTQ people would have nothing to do with their own lives, and 14 per cent said that it would have little to do. Twenty-six per cent of respondents selected the middle option on the five-point scale. The remaining half of respondents had stronger degrees of LGBTQ+ linked fate. Twenty-two per cent said that what happens to other LGBTQ people would have a lot to do with what happens in their own lives, while 26 per cent said that it would have a huge amount to do. Hence,

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[17]We recognize that, in some cases, measures of self-reported turnout may face issues of social desirability bias. However, the wording of the turnout question in the 2020 CMPS tries to mitigate this risk as much as possible. Before asking respondents to report whether or not they voted, the question stated: 'This year a lot of people said they did NOT vote in the election, because they were just too busy, not too interested in politics, or frankly don't like their choices'. This should help address some of the social desirability concerns by making it more acceptable for respondents to report that they did not vote, similarly to many other Americans. While we hope to be able to use a measure of actual turnout in future research, the 2020 CMPS did not provide validated turnout for this election cycle. For now, we join a 'long tradition of political science research using self-reported turnout' (Ocampo and Barreto 2018; see also: Brady, Schlozman, and Verba 1995; Leighley and Nagler 2013; Dawson 1995; and Chan and Phoenix 2020).

[18]This variable, 'Democratic Party Strength' (which measures how strongly an individual identifies with the Democratic Party), is not to be confused with 'Partisan Strength', which measures the degree of identification with any political party.

[19]'Partisan Strength' measures the degree to which members are attached strongly, weakly, or not at all to any political party. 'Partisan strength' is used only as a control in our models predicting voter turnout.

[20]We include partisanship as a control to avoid the risk of proposing a spurious relationship; that is, to examine the impact of LGBTQ+ linked fate on ideology when partisanship is held constant. In other words, this allows us to verify whether, when two respondents have the same party ID, a respondent with a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate is more liberal than the one with a weaker linked fate. If this is the case, we can show that the effect of LGBTQ+ linked fate on political ideology is not entirely captured by partisanship.

Table 2. LGBTQ+ Linked Fate and Voter Turnout

	Dependent variable:		
	Voter Turnout		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
LGBTQ Linked Fate	1.037***	1.341***	1.186***
	(0.147)	(0.191)	(0.204)
Socio-demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes
Political controls	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,785	1,629	1,536
Log Likelihood	−1,211.60	−861.655	−765.345
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,427.195	1,757.311	1,570.690

Note: Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table 3. LGBTQ+ Linked Fate and Liberal Ideology

	Dependent variable:		
	Liberal Ideology		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
LGBTQ Linked Fate	0.271***	0.217***	0.061***
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Socio-demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes
Political controls	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,783	1,650	1,582
R2	0.098	0.147	0.330
Adjusted R2	0.098	0.139	0.322
Residual Std. Error	0.255 (df = 1781)	0.254 (df = 1633)	0.225 (df = 1562)
F Statistic	194.148*** (df = 1; 1781)	17.628*** (df = 16; 1633)	40.57*** (df = 19; 1562)

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

while a quarter of our LGBTQ+ sample had lower perceptions of LGBTQ+ linked fate, a plurality of LGBTQ+ respondents held a stronger sense of LGBTQ+ linked fate.

Correlates of LGBTQ+ Linked Fate

The numbers above indicate a certain degree of heterogeneity within the LGBTQ+ community with regard to linked fate. Who within the LGBTQ+ community feels a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate? Model 1 in Table 1 presents the results from the analysis modelling LGBTQ+ linked fate as a dependent variable. Looking at variations along sexual orientation, as anticipated in Hypothesis 1, bisexual people are less likely than gay and lesbian individuals to hold LGBTQ+ linked fate. Regarding gender identity, transgender individuals are less likely to hold LGBTQ+ linked fate than cisgender LGBQ+ respondents. In terms of other demographics, differences emerge along racial and ethnic lines. Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ people are less likely than White LGBTQ+ people to hold LGBTQ+ linked fate, confirming Hypothesis 2. Higher education is correlated with a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate, while older age and religious attendance are associated with lower levels of LGBTQ+ linked fate.

Model 2 in Table 1 also considers how life experiences shape the emergence of LGBTQ+ linked fate. LGBTQ+ individuals who have come out are more likely to hold LGBTQ+ linked fate compared to those who have not come out. Those who perceive stronger levels of discrimination

against the LGBTQ+ community and those who have personally experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation also hold a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate. Surprisingly, a higher share of LGBTQ+ friends, co-workers, and family members is not significantly correlated with a stronger LGBTQ+ linked fate. While the first two findings confirm the expectations outlined in Hypothesis 3, the lack of significance in the last one fails to provide convincing evidence.[21,22]

LGBTQ+ Linked Fate and Political Behaviour

How does LGBTQ+ linked fate shape the political behaviour of LGBTQ+ individuals? We first examine voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election among LGBTQ+ Americans. Table 2 presents the results for abbreviated logistic regressions across several model specifications (see Online Appendix Table E). Model 1 in Table 2 shows that LGBTQ+ linked fate is positively and significantly correlated with the likelihood of turning out to vote, offering support for Hypothesis 4. The result holds even when we control for numerous established predictors of political participation, including socio-demographic characteristics (model 2), as well as political interest, partisan strength, and recruitment (model 3).

Figure 1, which is based on results from the model with a full set of controls (model 3 in Table 2), shows the estimated likelihood of turning out to vote in 2020 across various levels of LGBTQ+ linked fate, moving from the lowest to the highest. Each level of increase in linked fate among LGBTQ+ Americans is related to about a seven-point increase in the likelihood of turning out to vote, holding all other control variables at their means. LGBTQ+ Americans with the strongest degrees of LGBTQ+ linked fate are about 29 percentage points more likely to turn out (68 per cent) than LGBTQ+ Americans with the lowest degrees of LGBTQ+ linked fate (39 per cent).

Table 3 shows that LGBTQ+ linked fate is positively and significantly related to liberal political ideology, as anticipated by Hypothesis 5. This is the case even when we control for socio-demographic predictors (model 2) as well as political predictors and racial resentment (model 3; see full models in Online Appendix Table F). Model 3 in Table 3 reveals that there is about a 6 percentage point difference in liberal ideology between respondents with the strongest degree of LGBTQ+ linked fate and those who hold the weakest LGBTQ+ linked fate.

We next analyze how LGBTQ+ linked fate shapes partisan attitudes, specifically examining whether LGBTQ+ individuals with more LGBTQ+ linked fate more strongly identify with and support the Democratic Party (Hypothesis 6). Figure 2 displays the change in the predicted likelihood of identifying as a strong Democrat and voting for the Democratic candidate for president during the presidential election in 2020 after accounting for control variables. The predictions in Fig. 2 are drawn from Appendix Table G, model 3 (strength of Democratic partisanship)[23] and Table H, model 3 (vote choice). We find that LGBTQ+ Americans who hold the strongest degree of LGBTQ+ linked fate are about 8 percentage points more likely to identify as a Strong Democrat, relative to LGBTQ+ Americans who hold the weakest degree of LGBTQ+ linked fate.

Lastly, Table H in the Appendix models vote choice as a function of LGBTQ+ linked fate. In models 1 and 2, we find a positive and significant correlation between LGBTQ+ linked fate and

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[21]The lack of significance might be due to the vagueness of the indicator that likely fails to capture the depth and intensity of one's LGBTQ+ network. Having LGBTQ+ co-workers, for instance, may not increase the salience of one's LGBTQ+ identity if the relationship is rather weak.

[22]As a robustness test, we also ran the models in Table 1 as ordered logistic regressions where the dependent variable LGBTQ+ linked fate is an ordinal dependent variable with five categories. This additional analysis, presented in Appendix Table J, reveals that the results remain largely unchanged. The direction of the coefficients and the significance levels (p-values) are similar in the ordered logistic models and in the OLS regression models.

[23]To reiterate, this dependent variable ('Strength of Democratic Partisanship') is a continuous variable that ranges from strong Republican to strong Democrat.
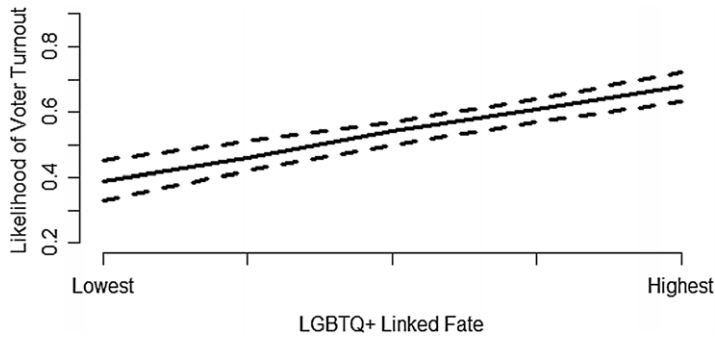
Figure 1. Predicted Likelihood of Turning Out to Vote by Levels of LGBTQ+ Linked Fate.
Note: The predicted likelihood of turning out to vote in the 2020 presidential election at each level of LGBTQ+ linked fate, holding control variables at their means, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.
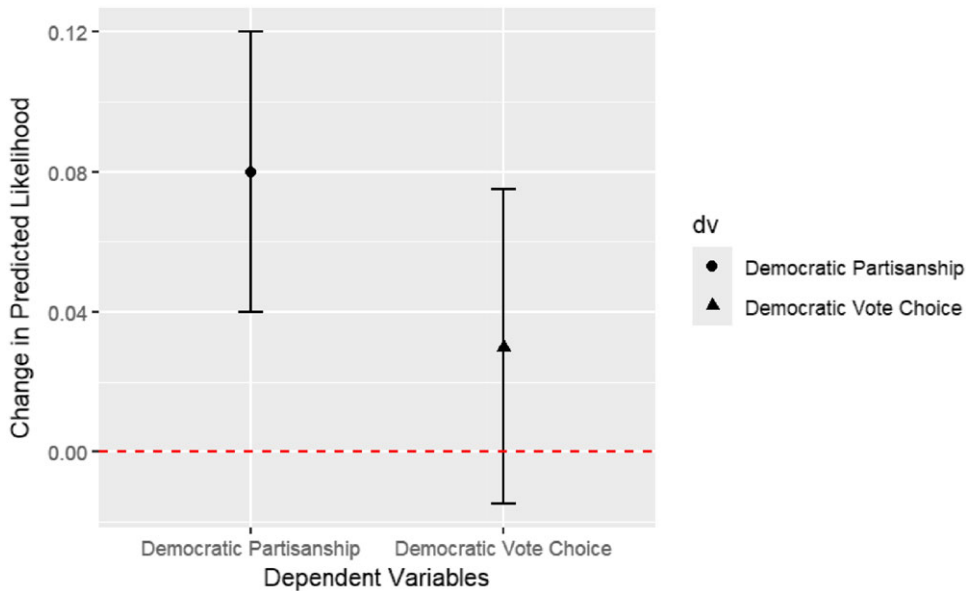
Figure 2. Change in Predicted Likelihood of Strength of Democratic Partisanship and Vote Choice as a Function of LGBTQ+ Linked Fate.
Note: Change in the predicted likelihood of strength of Democratic Partisanship and voting for the Democratic presidential candidate during the 2020 Presidential Election, comparing LGBTQ+ Americans with the strongest perceptions of LGBTQ+ linked fate to LGBTQ+ Americans with the weakest perceptions of LGBTQ+ linked fate, holding control variables at their means, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

support for the Democratic ticket. However, in model 3, when we control for partisanship, the coefficient for LGBTQ+ linked fate on vote choice drops to 0.76 ($p = 0.10$). As mentioned above, Fig. 2 reflects the results in Appendix Table H, model 3 by displaying the marginal changes in predicted probability. Those who hold the strongest LGBTQ+ linked fate are 3 percentage points more likely to vote for Joe Biden in 2020, accounting for other factors. Since the p-value for LGBTQ+ linked fate on vote choice is 0.10, we do not draw strong conclusions about the relationship between LGBTQ+ linked fate and vote choice in 2020. This may be due to ceiling effects, as LGBTQ+ voters already strongly supported Joe Biden in the 2020 election against Donald Trump.

Discussion

Our analysis based on the 2020 CMPS oversample of LGBTQ+ Americans shows that individuals with stronger degrees of LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to turn out to vote, hold more liberal viewpoints, and identify strongly with the Democratic party. These results are consistent with work that emphasizes the group-based nature of political behaviour (Converse 2006). The findings reveal the importance of a group-based heuristic, LGBTQ+ linked fate, in the political decisions of a marginalized social group – sexual and gender minorities – that has so far received relatively little scholarly attention in political science (Piscopo 2025). The impact of LGBTQ+ linked fate on political preferences and behaviour helps us understand why LGBTQ+ people are often cohesive in their political behaviour despite being a very diverse group.

Our results align with findings on how linked fate, group identity, and group consciousness affect political behaviour among racial and ethnic minorities (Dawson 1995), women (Gurin 1985), and religious minorities (Jamal 2005). While there is heterogeneity among LGBTQ+ Americans, there are also ties that bind, and these are politically consequential. This study contributes to research on the application of social identity theory to political science (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Huddy 2001) by showing that identity is politically salient for groups with lower social status, including sexual and gender minorities.

Results for LGBTQ+ Americans also partly deviate from prior work on linked fate. Existing scholarship has produced mixed findings on the effect of linked fate on electoral participation. For example, among Latinxs, Sanchez (2006) found mostly null relationships between group consciousness and turnout, and Ocampo, Garcia-Rios, and Gutierrez (2021) showed no influence of group identity on turnout in general elections. While Chong and Rogers (2005) found only a modest effect on voting for Black Americans, research on group-based heuristics for Asian American political behaviour is mixed and dependent on the specific political context (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2005; Chan, Nguy, and Masuoka 2024). Our result showing that linked fate increases electoral participation among LGBTQ+ individuals, however, aligns with work on Muslim Americans by Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto (2018), which finds that a stronger connectedness to a religious community is positively associated with voter turnout.

Our findings also contribute to the still limited but growing literature on the political behaviour of sexual and gender minorities. In particular, we connect earlier literature on the political distinctiveness of LGBTQ+ individuals that focused on social embeddedness and group consciousness (Hertzog 1996; Sherrill 1996; Bailey 1999) with scholarship on linked fate among other minoritized communities. We also expand on research on LGBTQ+ political behaviour. While previous scholarship found that LGBTQ+ Americans are more likely to engage in politics, hold liberal positions, and support the Democratic Party (Egan, Edelman and Sherrill 2008; Lewis, Rogers and Sherrill 2011; Egan 2012; Schnabel 2018; Jones 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2024a), we show that varying degrees of group solidarity among LGBTQ+ individuals account for some variation in their political behaviour.

Conclusion

LGBTQ+ people are a growing demographic group in the US. Numerous signs also point to the increasing political importance of LGBTQ+ individuals who have the potential to be a pivotal voting constituency in key races. Their demographic and political importance is expected to grow, as younger generations more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ enter into adulthood. Yet, studies on LGBTQ+ political preferences and behaviour remain limited. This has been partly due to the scarcity of reliable data, given that national surveys often failed to collect measures of respondents' sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our study analyzes LGBTQ+ political preferences and behaviour, leveraging what is arguably the largest political dataset of LGBTQ+ Americans to date. Using the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, we show that members of the LGBTQ+ community who have a

stronger sense of LGBTQ+ linked fate are more likely to vote in elections, lean liberal, and identify as Democrats. These findings provide evidence of the importance of group-based political behaviour for a marginalized community largely ignored by political science scholarship.

More work will help us better understand the political priorities and behaviour of sexual and gender minorities. For instance, future research could examine how LGBTQ+ linked fate mobilizes other forms of political participation. Future scholarship could also further examine what shapes LGBTQ+ linked fate; for instance, by exploring how new opportunities for connections, which have become available through social media, influence LGBTQ+ political preferences and behaviour.

In addition, future work could investigate political diversity within the LGBTQ+ community by focusing specifically on racial and ethnic minorities as well as transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Early evidence suggests that gay and lesbian people, on the one hand, and bisexual and transgender people, on the other, hold different political attitudes (Jones 2021), perhaps due to their societal marginalization and sense of connection with the LGBTQ+ community. Work on the intersectional challenges faced by double-marginalized racial and sexual minorities could be especially fruitful.

Relatedly, future studies could explore how such challenges influence the political participation of transgender individuals. Even though this is beyond the scope of this article, Table E in the appendix showed a negative and significant impact of being transgender on voter turnout. This is consistent with recent findings showing that transgender individuals face heightened bureaucratic barriers when registering to vote and are disproportionately more likely to report problems when trying to vote (Strode and Flores 2021; Strode, Storm and Flores 2024). Future work could further explore to what extent transgender individuals exhibit lower voter turnout because of concerns about voter identification and legal gender recognition laws.

Future work could also examine how certain events and their timing affect LGBTQ+ linked fate. Indeed, it is plausible to expect that some circumstances or decisions may increase (or decrease) perceptions of LGBTQ+ linked fate. For instance, this could happen as a consequence of positive events advancing LGBTQ+ rights, such as the 2015 Supreme Court decision on marriage equality or the 2020 Bostock decision affirming protection for employees against discrimination because of sexuality or gender identity. The salience of LGBTQ+ identity – and, consequently, the strength of LGBTQ+ linked fate – could also vary in response to growing attacks against the LGBTQ+ community, as has happened in recent years with regard to transgender rights, especially amidst Trump's second administration. Future work could therefore examine the impact of such changes on LGBTQ+ linked fate and its relationship to political behaviour. Such work could lead to valuable insights into how group discrimination spurs political action at a time of renewed anti-LGBTQ+ attacks.

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