



The Most Invisible of the Invisibles: Skin Color and Arab American Political Ideology

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of skin color in shaping Arab Americans' political attitudes. Previous literature has confirmed the relationship between skin color and social and economic outcomes, though research on politics is more mixed. In this thesis, I argue that because of Arab Americans' racial ambiguity, skin color holds more political significance for the group relative to groups with more salient racial identities. In particular, I hypothesize that darker-skinned Arab Americans will be more likely to perceive discrimination, identify with other Arab Americans, and thus favor more liberal, anti-discrimination policies relative to their lighter-skinned counterparts. Using data from the 2003 Detroit Arab American Survey, I found that skin color had no significant effects on Arab American political ideology. Instead, the data shows that darker-skinned Arabs tend to be less politically engaged, less connected with other Arab Americans, and more distrustful of other racial/ethnic groups compared to Arab Americans with lighter skin. These findings are fascinating as they illuminate a deeper issue of intragroup isolation and political disengagement among members of an otherwise "invisible" racial/ethnic identity.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: In this paper, I will use the term "Arab American" to describe immigrants and relatives of immigrants from Western Asia and North Africa. This "Arab League" consists of 22 nations, which include but are not limited to Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Qatar, Yemen, Kuwait, Libya, and Algeria. The term "Middle Eastern" includes the Arab League, as well as individuals from Israel, Iran, and Turkey, among other states. I have selected to use the term "Arab American" as it is most frequently used – both in the literature and elsewhere – to refer to members of both groups.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“It’s tough to name a group when most people aren’t aware the group exists . . . that’s why . . . I coined this phrase for our community: The Most Invisible of the Invisibles” (Kadi, 1994).

Arab Americans are a group seldom studied in the social sciences, though they are one of the United States’ most complex and fast-growing racial/ethnic groups. The United States Census reports that the Arab American population has increased by 76% since 1990 and 25% since 2000, and the the Arab American Institute estimates the Arab American population at 3.5 million (Wang, 2013; AAI, 2018). Ultimately, Arab Americans have developed an ever-growing presence in the United States, yet continue to be ignored in discussions of race and politics, existing as “neither fully white nor recognized as people of color” (Zopf, 2001).

This feeling of Arab American invisibility is further exacerbated by the United States’ legal racial categories. While legally classified as “white,” many Arab Americans do not identify as white, nor “look” white to most Americans (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Shouhayib, 2016). This fact is supported by the 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment, which found that a “number of MENA participants did not see themselves in the current race and ethnicity response categories” (OMB). Undoubtedly, a disconnect arises between one’s legal race and a race which is self-identified or perceived by other individuals. To address such a disconnect, the Office of Management and Budget proposed the addition of a MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) category in 2015, which would give Arab Americans their own racial/ethnic designation (OMB). According to the OMB, this new category could help monitor discrimination, distribute social services, and enforce laws like the Voting Rights Act and Fair Housing Act (OMB).

This data could also help scholars better understand trends in MENA employment, health, education, as well as general population characteristics. Scholars have found difficulty in tracking Arab Americans, as data on the group is lumped into the broader “white” racial category. Not only does this erase the unique experiences of Arab Americans, but it also skews data for those who actually are and/or identify as white. Thus, while the MENA proposition has not yet passed, it does raise an important concern over the accuracy of the U.S. racial labelling system. Without accurate racial/ethnic labels, our understanding of racial/ethnic politics remains

hazy and incomplete. Thus, the goal of this project is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of racial/ethnic politics via the study of Arab Americans, a typically “invisible,” under-studied racial/ethnic group. It is also worth exploring how skin color – a vehicle of perceived race – impacts Arab Americans’ political identities. In this project, I ask how skin color interacts with Arab Americans’ political attitudes, in order to better understand the group as a unique racial/ethnic category.

Skin color has been shown to have profound effects on the social and economic outcomes of racial/ethnic minorities (Keith & Herring, 1991; King & Johnson, 1998; Krieger et al., 1998; Allen et al. 2000; Hill, 2000; Proctor & Snyder, 2000; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Gullickson 2005; Hersch 2006; Monk 2014; Burch, 2015; Monk, 2018). For example, Monk (2016) found that skin color was a strong predictor of Brazilians’ “educational attainment and occupational status,” more so than participants’ actual racial identity. Among these studies, we find implicit biases attached to skin color, which in turn produce less favorable outcomes for certain minority groups. In this project, I ask whether skin color matters not only for socioeconomic status, but also for political outcomes. In other words, is race alone an adequate measure of political ideology? Or does skin color serve to reveal important (but otherwise unknown) cleavages among racial/ethnic groups?

The answer to this question is highly contested. Some scholars have found significant effects of skin color on policy preferences and political attitudes (Piston & Strother, 2015; Hutchings et al, 2015). However, Hochschild and Weaver (2007) argue the opposite. Despite skin color mattering for socioeconomic status, skin color has little to no effect on the political attitudes of African Americans. Hochschild and Weaver (2007) name this anomaly the Skin Color Paradox, attributed to Black Americans’ strong, clearly defined racial identity. They argue that the external hierarchy of race holds more political significance than does skin color, meaning that Black Americans engage with politics as collectively Black, not as light-skinned and dark-skinned.

However, while this may be the case for Black Americans, I argue that skin color likely holds more political significance for Arab Americans, a less salient racial/ethnic identity. As opposed

to other racial/ethnic groups like Black Americans, where racial identity is strong and clearly defined, Arab American identity is neither. As Naber (2000) notes, some Arab Americans have “blonde hair and blue eyes, others have crimped hair and very dark skin.” Because racial identity is not as clearly defined, I expect the internal hierarchy of skin color to matter more than (or just as much as) the broader hierarchy of race.

Furthermore, we see skin color factoring into experiences of discrimination. Since Arab Americans have no clearly defined race, race/ethnic-based discrimination is decided on the basis of skin tone. Naber (2000) asserts that “when no allusion to an Arab or Muslim identity is made, those who ‘can pass’ as whites return to their neutral, yet privileged position as ‘white Americans.’” Arab Americans with light skin are perceived as more “American,” whereas darker-skinned Arabs are seen as more foreign, and in most cases, anti-American. We see this trend historically, beginning with Orientalism, continuing through racial prerequisite cases and lastly, manifesting in American media and other cultural projects.

When individuals experience racial/ethnic discrimination, they are more likely to perceive discrimination and thus favor pro-minority, anti-discriminatory policies. This explains why the majority of non-white groups lean liberal, while white individuals lean more conservative. Based on this mechanism, I arrive at a central hypothesis: lighter-skinned Arabs who more adequately fit the “white” racial schema will be more conservative, whereas those who are dark-skinned will face more discrimination, have stronger feelings of linked fate, and thus favor more liberal political attitudes. To test this hypothesis, I will run statistical analyses using data from the Detroit Arab American Survey (2003), which samples 1,016 Arab Americans living in Detroit, Michigan from June to December 2003.

In Chapter 3, I will outline the existing literature on skin color and its relationship to social, economic, and political outcomes. In Chapter 4, I will develop my theory on Arab Americans’ ambiguous racial identity. In Chapter 5, I will lay out my research design, then present my results and statistical analysis in Chapters 6 and 8, while introducing a new theory in Chapter 7. Finally, I will conclude with the implications of the study in Chapter 9 of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 COLORISM

Colorism is a central framework for understanding skin color skin and its social, economic, and political implications. In U.S. culture, lighter skin is preferred to darker skin “aesthetically, normatively, and culturally” (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). This preference is known as colorism, or discrimination that is “directed against African Americans with darker skin and, conversely, the benefits...granted to...[those with] lighter skin” (Blair et al., 2002). While colorism is predominantly associated with African Americans, it serves as a crucial analytical framework for other racial/ethnic groups (Hunter, 2007). Simply put, colorism establishes that lighter skin is valued, and darker skin is devalued in American society. On one hand, light skin is linked with perceptions of attractiveness, competence and friendliness (Hunter, 2007). On the other, darker skin activates more negative stereotypes (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Blair et al., 2002; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Klonoff & Landrine). Such duality is consistent with theories of prototypicality, under which “any set of physical features that clearly demarcate group membership may become associated with the group’s traits” (Blair et al., 2002). Experimental research by Maddox and Gray (2002) indicates that white and Black Americans assign more negative stereotypes to dark-skinned Black Americans rather than to Black Americans with lighter skin. These stereotypes include laziness, stupidity, criminality, and aggression (Maddox & Gray, 2002).

Stereotypes like the ones above influence how minority individuals are perceived by others, and in turn, how they experience racial discrimination. In one study, darker-skinned Black Americans were found to be eleven times more likely to report racial discrimination than their lighter-skinned counterparts (Klonoff & Landrine, 2000). In this way, those with darker skin tend to hold more “race-conscious views and higher levels of perceived discrimination” than individuals with lighter skin (Hunter, 2007).

Here, it is worth investigating not only the stereotypes themselves, but also the concrete implications of those stereotypes. Colorism extends beyond basic social cognition and infiltrates a whole host of institutions, be it entertainment, media, the criminal justice system, the job

market, or education (Keith & Herring, 1991; King & Johnson, 1998; Krieger et al., 1998; Allen et al. 2000; Hill, 2000; Proctor & Snyder, 2000; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Gullickson 2005; Hersch 2006; Monk 2014; Burch, 2015; Monk, 2018). In the next few sections, I will focus on the role of skin color in harboring such disproportionately negative outcomes, primarily as they pertain to criminal justice and socioeconomic status.

3.2 SKIN COLOR AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

First, skin color plays a significant role in the criminal justice system; for one, darker-skinned Black Americans are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than Black Americans with lighter skin (Monk, 2018; Burch, 2015). In Los Angeles specifically, darker-skinned Black respondents were more likely to report criminal records compared to their lighter counterparts, even when controlling for various demographic factors (Johnson et al., 1998). Skin color is also correlated with individuals' prison sentences, where Black Americans with darker skin tend to have longer prison sentences than Black Americans with lighter skin. In one study done by King and Johnson (2016), darker skin was associated with "harsher sanctions," especially when the victims of the crimes were white, and the perpetrators were of color.

Furthermore, skin color bias exists not only in the criminal justice system, but also in the media as it pertains to depictions of crime. For example, Dixon and Maddox (2005) found that television news viewers felt more emotional discomfort when exposed to darker-skinned Black male perpetrator than to a White male perpetrator. Viewers also reported that the dark-skinned perpetrators were more "memorable" to them than either the white, light-skinned, or medium-skinned Black perpetrators (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). Experimental research has also found that participants are more likely to judge a dark-skinned defendant as guilty of murder than a defendant with lighter skin (Proctor & Snyder, 2000). In this way, darker skin is associated with higher levels of criminality, consistent with aforementioned research on colorism and skin color stereotypes. We see the effects of these stereotypes not only in how we perceive criminals, but in how the criminal justice system actually operates.

3.3 SOCIOECONOMIC OUTCOMES

All of this has broader implications for minority group members' socioeconomic wellbeing. Previous literature confirms the relationship between skin color and socioeconomic status. Relative to their lighter-skinned counterparts, dark-skinned Black Americans attain lower levels of education and higher levels of unemployment – though more recent works have disconfirmed this relationship between employment status and skin color (Hersch, 2010; Ransford, 1970; Thompson & McDonald, 2015; Monk, 2016). That being said, a substantive body of research indicates that lighter-skinned Black Americans hold better occupations than lighter-skinned Black Americans with higher incomes, even after controlling for education level, social status, and other demographic factors (Hill, 2000; Keith & Herring, 1991; Krieger et al., 1998; Allen et al. 2000; Gullickson 2005; Hersch 2006; Monk 2014). This trend also holds true for Latinos. Latinos with lighter skin tend to have higher levels of education, income, and employment opportunities relative to those with darker skin (Murguia and Telles 1996; Hughes and Hertel 1990).

Overall, light-skinned Black Americans and Latinos earn more than darker-skinned individuals, even after controlling for various factors (Allen et al., 2000; Mason 2004). In particular, Hersch (2010) investigates skin color and the life outcomes of immigrants. He found that immigrants with the lightest skin color earned on average 16–23% more than immigrants with the darkest level skin color. These estimates controlled for participants' race, ethnicity, country of origin, education level, English proficiency, as well as the country's current labor conditions (Hersch, 2010). Given all of the research above, we see that skin color is inextricably tied to one's socioeconomic status and other institutional outcomes.

3.4 SKIN COLOR PARADOX

Given that skin color affects individuals' social and economic wellbeing, we might expect this to be the same for politics (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). If skin color has real, important consequences in the social and economic sectors, why would we not see the same effect in politics? The preponderance of evidence points to a Skin Color Paradox, or the anomaly that skin color is irrelevant to Black Americans' political attitudes, despite it mattering in social and

economic outcomes¹ (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Hochschild and Weaver (2007) find a “surprise” in their research, that “skin tone seems almost entirely unrelated to the political views of ordinary residents.” Hochschild and Weaver (2007) attribute this paradox to Black American’s strong racial identity, where Black Americans’ “commitment to racial identity overrides the potential for skin color discrimination to have political significance” (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Rather, they argue that most Black Americans see the racial hierarchy as requiring their “primary allegiance,” and conversely see skin color as irrelevant to their political decision-making. In addition to political attitudes, Black Americans’ feelings of linked fate, perception of discrimination, and “attachment to their race almost never vary by skin color” (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Hunter (2007) makes this distinction between racism and colorism, in which racism is a “larger, systemic, social process” and colorism is just “one manifestation of it.” Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch (2004) explain that any relationship between skin color and politics may be indirect through the “well-known relationship between SES and political attitudes.”

As with most skin color research, Hochschild and Weaver (2007) focus on African Americans. While of course such research is vital to understanding racial politics, it is also important to extend these findings to other racial/ethnic groups - particularly those with less salient racial identities. For example, research on Latinos indicates some relationship between skin color and Latinos’ racial attitudes. Cutaia Wilkinson & Earle (2012) hypothesized that darker-skinned Latinos would show a “heightened sense of linked fate due to being more constrained by the ethnic-based stereotypes that lighter-skinned Latinos may find easier to escape.” They found that light-skinned Latinos did feel closer to White Americans than they did to darker-skinned Latinos, consistent with their above hypothesis. To further investigate the function of skin color and identity, then, I seek to qualify the Skin Color Paradox using Arab Americans’ ambiguous racial identity. The next chapter outlines my theory in-depth.

¹ Some scholars *support* the relationship between skin color and one’s political affiliation (Piston & Strother, 2015; Hutchings et al., 2015).

CHAPTER 3: THEORY

In the previous chapter, I reviewed previous literature on skin color and its effect on social, economic, and political outcomes. In this chapter, I will argue that when race is ambiguous, skin color acts a central heuristic for racial categorizations, which in turn shapes individuals' experiences with discrimination and consequently, their political attitudes.

4.1 WHAT MAKES ARAB IDENTITY AMBIGUOUS?

From what scholars have learned, Arab American identity is nothing less than perplexing (Naber, 2000; Abdulrahim et al, 2012; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Shouhayib, 2016). In effort to explain this puzzle, Nadine Naber (2000) offers four paradoxes: first, that Arab Americans are viewed as a monolith in North American culture, despite being wildly diverse in national origin, culture, and religious identity. Second, that Arab Americans are “simultaneously racialized” as white and non-white individuals (2000). Naber's third and fourth paradoxes explain the intersection of race and religion, as to understand Arab identity as solely racial or ethnic is to ignore the crucial added dimension of religious identity. I will expand on religion in future chapters; however, my thesis mainly explores the first two of Naber's paradoxes. In particular, I will dissect the role of phenotype – specifically skin color - as a marker of Arab American identity.

While legally classified as white, the construction of Arab identity suggests a conflicting non-white status. In the Western world, Orientalism has historically “othered” Arabs as the “enemy of the West:” being foreign, barbaric, and morally backwards (Said, 1978; Shouhayib, 2016). In Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), for example, the opening song describes Agrabah as a place “Where they cut off your ear / If they don't like your face / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home” (Clements, 1992). These anti-Arab sentiments worsened after the 9/11 attacks, when Arabs became the collective figureheads of international terrorism (Shouhayib, 2016). The construction of Arab Americans as non-white “others” conflicts with their legal status; a contradiction which has historically colored the development of Arab American identity. However, some scholars (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Espiritu, 1996) deny this contradiction, regarding Arabs as “honorary whites” or “white ethnics.” This perspective posits Arabs as racially white, yet simultaneously subject to ethnic-based discrimination. This status differs from a non-white status

in the “reduced severity of oppression [that] they experience” (Espiritu, 1996). For example, scholars Omi and Winant draw parallels between the experiences of Arab Americans and those of Jewish Americans, citing that “whites can at times be the victims of racism” (Omi & Winant, 1994). However, this perspective ignores the historically tumultuous relationship between Arab Americans and a legal white identity.

This tumultuous relationship manifests in the racial prerequisite cases of the 20th century, during which U.S. citizenship was limited to “free white” individuals. As consequence, the courts had to decide who was “white” on either biological/physical, ancestral/geographical, or socially-constructed grounds. In practice, these definitions varied wildly case by case and often contradicted one another. While Arabs were Caucasian from a scientific standpoint - and thus broadly “white” - the courts were forced to reconcile that fact with the “popular racial beliefs that held Syrians and Asian Indians to be non-Whites” (Haney-López, 1996). The failure of the courts to unanimously define race speaks to the greater issue of race itself. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which emboldens clear racial lines, there ultimately exists no “biological basis” for which racial categories are defined and created. In fact, upon closer examination, these categories reveal themselves to be “at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary” (Omi & Winant, 1994).

In support of this, the OMB notes that the “racial and ethnic categories set forth in the standard should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature” (OMB). Rather, racial definitions should be “generally understood” so that they “achieve broad public acceptance” (OMB). In this way, racial definitions are not about technicality, but rather conform to a wider public acceptance. This fact is consistent with Omi & Winant’s racial formation, which is defined as the “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi & Winant, 1997). This means that racial categories are socially constructed, so that they change to fit a certain social, historical, political, and/or cultural context.

4.2 IMPOSED RACE: SKIN COLOR AS A PHENOTYPICAL MARKER OF RACE

Referring to the racial prerequisite cases, the racial category “White” changed, quite literally, on a case-by-case basis. For *In re Najour*, for example, Syrians were white. For *Ex parte Shahid*, Syrians were not white. In both *In re Ahmed Hassan* (1942) and *Ex parte Mohriez* (1944), “Arabians” were ruled as not-white (Haney López, 1996). This historical back-and-forth among the courts proves the terrible ambiguity surrounding racial definitions. For example, in the 1913 *Ex parte Shahid* decision, the court echoed the point that the “statute as it stands is more uncertain, ambiguous, and difficult both of construction and application” (Haney López, 1996). In light of such ambiguity, then, skin color was used to determine who was and who was not eligible for citizenship. In his discussion of racial prerequisite cases, Ian Haney-López notes that “the court thought it necessary to describe the applicants’ complexions suggests that this factor contributed to the decisions to deny them naturalization” (Haney-López, 1996). Similarly, Gualtieri (2001) writes that the “ascription of darkness increased the chances of ineligibility, while that of lightness decreased them.” In this way, it was skin color that formed the racial identity of Arabs, perhaps more concretely than did actual legal race.

In fact, skin color is one of the easiest markers of racial identity. Van Den Berghe (1967) argues that phenotype is used “first and foremost” as a “[badge] of membership in social groups.” And thus, skin color becomes the primary indicator of one’s race; skin color being the phenotypical trait, and race being the social group to which that trait belongs. However, while skin color cannot code a specific race or ethnicity (such that medium skin cannot distinguish between a Latino or South Asian identity), it can at least distinguish between whether one is white or non-white. An individual with darker skin, for example, is far less likely to be identified as white than an individual with lighter skin, as light skin is more prototypical of the “white” racial schema. Prototypicality is significant as it increases the speed and ease at which racial categorization occurs, and also explains why individuals with the “essential features” of a category are more likely to be identified with that category over others.

Further, Espiritu (1996) notes that “ethnicity is not always voluntary but can be coercively imposed” onto certain groups or individuals. Imposed race, as Espiritu calls it, is race that is neither legal nor self-defined, but rather imposed by one group onto another. As Espiritu argues,

imposed race often operates on the basis of prototypicality (Espiritu, 1996). Yet racial categorization is not unique to race. Rather, the consequences of imposed race have the same social, economic, and political implications associated with these categories.

In one study, Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) interviewed Dominican immigrants living in the United States. One interviewee noted that Argentinian immigrants can “merge in this country, but look how [Dominicans] look, our skin is different, our color is different” (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral., 2000). By this, skin color is not only a marker of race, but also a marker of who and who does not receive race-based discrimination. More so in the context of American politics, skin color also becomes a marker of social belonging in the United States. As Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) argue, when people immigrate to the U.S., they enter a society in which “race is a central feature of daily life” and where they “suffer discrimination due to their skin color and ethnicity” (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Those with lighter-skin can pass as white and thus “merge” into U.S. culture. Yet when one’s “color is different,” they are perceived as less American, and thus more subject to racial/ethnic-based discrimination.

4.3 DISCRIMINATION-TO-POLITICS LINK

Furthermore, Lee (2008) outlines the identity-to-politics link, where “individuals who share a demographic label—e.g., African American, Latino, Asian American, Arab American—will also share common political goals and interests and act in concert to pursue them.” Via this mechanism, I argue that lighter-skinned Arabs - who pass as “white” - are less likely to identify with other Arab Americans whereas those with darker skin are more likely to experience discrimination, identify with their minority status, and thus follow the identity-to-politics framework.

I argue that when darker-skinned Arabs experience discrimination, they are more likely to have pro-minority, anti-discriminatory attitudes. I name this mechanism the discrimination-to-politics link. Certainly, discrimination against Arab Americans is a growing issue. For example, within the first few weeks following 9/11, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) received more than 700 reports of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim violence. The ADC also found a dramatic increase in racial profiling, as well as housing and employment discrimination on the

basis of anti-Arab or anti-Muslim sentiment (Thomas et al., 2008). This data is further supported by the Arab American Institute (AAI), which found that hate crimes against Arab Americans have increased since 9/11, particularly in correlation with other terrorist threats/attacks (AAI, 2018). In fact, the 1998–2000 Report on Hate Crimes and Discrimination Against Arab Americans (Ibish, 2003) suggests that “Arab Americans remain vulnerable to vicious attacks...motivated by anti-Arab prejudice” citing incidents of airport security profiling, immigration profiling, employment discrimination, and hate crimes.

In this section, I argued that darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to be identified as non-white, and thus more likely to face discrimination relative to their lighter-skinned counterparts. Beginning with Orientalist frameworks and finally manifesting post-9/11, darker skin is historically and inextricably tied to the demonization of Arabs. In Disney’s *Aladdin*, for example, the villains consistently had darker skin and more exaggerated facial features, whereas the heroes of the film, Aladdin and Jasmine, had fairer skin and more European features. Arabs with lighter skin are more easily seen as “American,” whereas darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to be seen as foreign, and in most cases, anti-American. Of course, Islamophobia adds to these experiences, a topic on which I will expand in future chapters. As it relates to discrimination, the social confusion of the “Arab” and “Muslim” archetypes create a unique, multifaceted experience for Arab Americans, regardless of their actual religious identity.

Here, race becomes not ancestry, but rather imposed on the basis of phenotype. It is via this mechanism that skin color is a more influential factor for Arabs’ political attitudes than it is for other, more clearly defined racial identities. For example, Arabs with lighter skin are more likely to pass as white and thus “merge” with the greater American society. However, Arabs with darker skin are more likely to be identified and treated as minorities. When darker-skinned Arabs face these kinds of discrimination, they will be more likely to know that discrimination exists, and thus favor policies that seek to reduce it.

CHAPTER 4: HYPOTHESIS

Based on this theory, I arrive at a central hypothesis. I hypothesize that lighter-skinned Arabs who more adequately fit the “white” racial schema will be more politically conservative, whereas those with darker skin will face more discrimination, have stronger feelings of linked fate, and thus have more liberal, pro-minority attitudes.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 DESCRIPTION OF DATASET

To test my hypothesis, I used the Detroit Arab American Survey (DAAS) dataset. The DAAS was conducted in 2003 via the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The DAAS sampled 1,016 adults (18 years or older) of Arab or Chaldean descent who resided in the Detroit Metropolitan Area from July to December 2003. The DAAS is one of the only datasets that exclusively samples Arab Americans and pulls data from Detroit, Michigan, one of the largest and fastest-growing Arab American populations in the country (AAI, 2018).

In my analysis, I look to see how skin color affects Arab Americans’ attitudes beyond the initial measurements of party affiliation and political ideology. I ask: how do Arab Americans engage with the political world? How do Arab Americans feel about issues pertaining to ethnic/racial minorities? Lastly, how do these attitudes differ on the basis of skin color?

5.2 VARIABLES

My independent variable is the skin color of the participant, measured by the interviewer on a 5-point scale with 1=Very Dark and 5=Very Light. For convenience, I re-coded this variable to range instead from 1 Very Light to 5 Very Dark². My main dependent variables range from participants’ direct political attitudes to their larger political affiliation. I divided these variables into five distinct categories: political affiliation, political attitudes, racial attitudes, perception of

² I have recoded all variables for convenience.

discrimination, and political participation. A more in-depth description of these variables follows:

POLITICAL AFFILIATION

The first dependent variable is political affiliation, which has been divided into two categories: political ideology and political party. The political ideology variable is operationalized by the survey question: “Thinking politically and socially, how would you describe your own general outlook--as being very conservative, moderately conservative, middle-of-the-road, moderately liberal or very liberal?” Their response was measured on a 5-point scale, with 1 being Very Conservative and 5 being Very Liberal. The party variable was measured on a 3-point scale, from Republican to Independent to Democrat.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

For the political attitudes category, I selected six questions from the Detroit Arab American Survey. Three questions asked about attitudes towards immigration, two asked about income inequality, and the last question asked about how proud the participants were to be American. I pulled these questions so that I could measure how Arab Americans felt about relevant political issues, as well as the United States more broadly.

Participants were asked how strongly they agreed with the following statements. First, “Immigrants are generally good for the U.S. economy. Participants were then asked how strongly they agreed with the statement “Immigrants make America more open to new ideas and cultures. Lastly, participants were asked how strongly they agreed that “Immigrants increase crime rates. Higher scores on these pro-immigrant scales indicated a more positive evaluation of immigrants. Consistent with my hypothesis, I expect darker-skinned Arab Americans to score higher on the pro-immigrant measures than lighter-skinned Arab Americans.

Next, “The United States is a land of equal opportunity. A higher score on this variable denotes a stronger awareness of unequal opportunity. In addition to this variable, I also pulled the statement: “Income differences in the United States are too large.” As with the previous question, I recoded this variable so that a higher score indicated a heightened awareness of income

inequality. For the last political attitudes variable, I analyzed participants' sense of pride. In the DAAS, participants were asked "how proud are you to be American? Would you say you are very proud, quite proud, not very proud, or not at all proud?" where a higher score on the measure denotes a stronger sense of American pride.

RACIAL ATTITUDES

The second dependent variable category measures Arab Americans' racial attitudes. In my theory, I contrasted Arabs' ambiguous racial identity with African Americans' strong, clearly-defined racial identity. The strength of Black Americans' racial identity fosters linked fate, and thus a narrow and cohesive set of group attitudes (Gay et al., 2016). However, when a group has a weak racial identity, I theorize that these attitudes will vary by the person's skin color as a vehicle of imposed race. Thus, for the racial attitude variable, I expect darker-skinned Arab Americans to express more linked fate and higher levels of trust towards other racial/ethnic groups than lighter-skinned Arab Americans.

The first racial attitudes variable is linked fate. Linked fate "represents a stage of identification that starts with a feeling of closeness to others who identify with the group label" and "reflect[s] a sense of belonging or conscious loyalty to the group in question" (Simien, 2005). To measure feelings of linked fate, I pulled the question from the 2003 DAAS: "I identify with other Arab Americans." By using this question, I measured how strongly participants identified with their ingroup (in this case, other Arab Americans).

The next series of questions measures how trusting participants are of other Arab Americans as well as other racial/ethnic groups. The DAAS 2003 asked its participants "(How about) Arab Americans? (Can you trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?)" This question measures how much Arab Americans trust (or not trust) members of their own group. Similar to the linked fate variable, this measure investigates how darker-skinned Arab Americans perceive their own racial/ethnic group differently than lighter-skinned Arab Americans. In addition, participants were asked this same question for other racial/ethnic groups. For example, "(How about) White people?" "(How about) African Americans or Blacks?" and "(How about) Hispanics or

Latinos?” All of the distrust variables were measured on a 4-point scale where a higher score indicates higher levels of distrust towards racial/ethnic groups.

PERCEPTION OF DISCRIMINATION

In addition to racial attitudes, I also tested for participants’ perception of discrimination, which consists of two main parts: perception and personal experience. First, I pulled this question from the 2003 DAAS: “Arab Americans are not respected by the broader American society.” Then, “Next, American news coverage of Arab/Chaldean Americans. (Do you think the coverage is biased in favor, balanced, or biased against?” Responses to this variable were measured on a 3-point scale with Biased In Favor=1 and Biased Against=3.

The second part of this category asked participants “In the last two years, have you personally, or anyone in your household, experienced the following due to your race, ethnicity, or religion?” The survey then listed multiple forms of discrimination. From those forms, I pulled three: “Verbal insults or abuse?” “Physical attack?” and “Loss of employment?” These different forms of discrimination cover the verbal, physical, and organizational aspects of ethnic/religion-based discrimination. I recoded the responses where No=0 and Yes=1.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The last dependent variable category is political participation. Participants were asked whether or not they were “currently registered to vote?” where 0=No and 1=Yes. I created a second dummy variable for the question “In the past 12 months, have you taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration about any social or political issue?” Finally, the last variable in this category measures membership to ethnic associations, including advocacy groups like ADC, the Yemeni Benevolent Association or the Chaldean Federation?” Responses were measured on a 3-point scale with Inactive Member=1 and Active Member=3. These variables gauge how politically involved participants are in the political system, either by basic voter registration or more involved forms of political activism. Consistent with my theory, I expect those with darker-skin to be more politically involved than their lighter-skinned counterparts.

5.3 CONTROL VARIABLES

I controlled for the participant's age, sex (coded as a dummy variable with male=0 and female=1), income, and education level. After running preliminary correlations, I found income and education to have particularly significant correlations with political ideology as well as party affiliation. Thus, by controlling for these variables, I optimize the internal validity of my results.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

6.1 POLITICAL AFFILIATION

Per my central hypothesis, I expect darker-skinned Arab Americans to identify as more liberal than their lighter-skinned counterparts. To test this, I ran two regressions using skin color as my independent variable and political affiliation as my dependent variable. In these tests, I also controlled for participants' age, sex, income, and education. The political affiliation variable was broken into two categories, political ideology (Very Conservative to Very Liberal) and party identification (Republican to Democrat). Based on these regressions, I found no significant relationship between skin color and either of the political affiliation categories (see Table 1).

These initial results are unexpected, as they do not support my central hypothesis. However, they are deeply fascinating. If my hypothesis were supported by these findings, then darker-skinned Arabs would be more likely to perceive discrimination relative to lighter-skinned Arab Americans, and would also have more pro-minority racial attitudes, such as stronger feelings of linked fate and trust for other racial/ethnic groups. However, I find that skin color is *not* correlated with political affiliation. If skin color has no effect on political *identity*, then will this effect be the same for political *attitudes*? Of course, political ideology or party identification may be too broad and not clearly tied to one's experience with skin color. Thus, we need to look at variables that are more closely linked to skin color, such as participants' political and racial attitudes. To investigate this further, I ran regressions for my three other dependent variable categories.

Table 1: Effect of Skin Color on Political Affiliation

	(1) Ideology	(2) PID
Darker Skin	0.0171 (0.38)	-0.00145 (-0.04)
Age	0.000473 (0.22)	0.00361* (1.96)
Female	-0.0427 (-0.61)	0.0555 (0.94)
Income	0.0508*** (3.34)	-0.0511*** (-3.99)
Education	0.0766*** (3.89)	-0.0276* (-1.66)
Constant	1.100 (0.26)	-4.682 (-1.30)
Observations	798	650
Adjusted R2	0.054	0.044

t statistics in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<.01

6.2 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Economic Conservatism: First, I tested for political attitudes. The political attitudes category consists of six sub-variables, including pro-immigrant attitudes (economic reasons, cultural reasons, and on the basis of crime). I also tested for whether participants saw the U.S as a land of equal opportunity, as well as their perception of the U.S. income gap. Lastly, I tested for how proud participants were to be American. While skin color had no effect on explicit political affiliation, measures of political attitudes – which are more clearly tied to skin color – may produce different results. Per my original hypothesis, I expected those with dark skin to be more pro-immigrant, more aware of the income gap, and less willing to say that America is a land of equal opportunity.

As seen in Table 4, I find that darker-skinned Arabs are in fact *less* likely to be pro-immigrant, specifically for reasons involving crime ($p = 0.03$) and the economy ($p = 0.11$). In particular, darker-skinned Arabs were around 0.5 points more anti-immigrant than were lighter-skinned Arabs on the 5-point pro-immigrant (crime) scale. While not exactly statistically significant, the data also suggests that darker-skinned Arab Americans are more likely to believe that the United States is a “land of equal opportunity,” and less likely to say that the income gap is too large. From these results, I find that darker-skinned Arab Americans are more conservative than lighter-skinned Arab Americans, particularly with regards to immigration and income inequality.

Table 2: Effect of Skin Color on Political Attitudes

	(1) Pro-Imm Econ	(2) Pro-Imm Cult	(3) Pro-Imm Cr	(4) Unequal Opp	(5) Income Gap	(6) Pride
Darker Skin	-0.0520 (-1.56)	-0.00806 (-0.26)	-0.0871** (-2.17)	-0.0583 (-1.53)	0.0794* (1.95)	0.0389 (1.34)
Age	-0.00242 (-1.49)	0.000960 (0.63)	-0.00305 (-1.56)	0.00263 (1.42)	0.00345* (1.74)	-0.00845*** (-6.04)
Female	-0.212*** (-4.00)	-0.113** (-2.29)	0.0449 (0.71)	0.115* (1.90)	-0.0489 (-0.76)	-0.0516 (-1.13)
Income	-0.0194* (-1.74)	0.00638 (0.61)	-0.0218 (-1.62)	-0.00640 (-0.50)	-0.0482*** (-3.54)	0.0145 (1.51)
Education	0.00443 (0.30)	0.0148 (1.08)	0.0142 (0.81)	0.00110 (0.07)	0.0257 (1.45)	-0.0112 (-0.89)
Constant	9.232*** (2.90)	2.366 (0.80)	9.964*** (2.59)	-3.309 (-0.91)	-2.457 (-0.63)	20.02*** (7.31)
Observations	835	835	830	837	837	810
Adjusted R2.	0.022	0.006	0.007	0.004	0.016	0.043

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

6.3 PERCEPTION OF DISCRIMINATION

Next, I looked at perceptions of discrimination. In Chapter 2, I hypothesized that darker-skinned Arab Americans would be more likely to experience discrimination than lighter-skinned Arab Americans, and thus have more liberal, pro-minority attitudes. To test this, I ran regressions

using perception of discrimination as my dependent variable, which was broken up into five sub-variables: perception of respect towards Arab Americans, perception of new media bias against Arab Americans, and experiences with three types of discrimination: verbal insults, physical attacks, and loss of employment.

For all five sub-variables, I again found no significant relationships with skin color. In other words, these results suggest that skin color has no significant effect on how Arab Americans perceive and experience racial/ethnic discrimination. To further investigate, I then looked at Arab Americans' racial attitudes. If darker-skinned Arabs do not perceive discrimination more than lighter-skinned Arabs, then how do they feel about other racial/ethnic groups?

Table 3: Effect of Skin Color on Perception of Discrimination

	(1) Not Respected	(2) Biased News	(3) Insults	(4) Attacks	(5) Loss Employment
Darker Skin	-0.0429 (-0.75)	0.0221 (0.95)	-0.000511 (0.03)	0.00277 (0.47)	0.00951 (1.14)
Age	0.00433 (1.59)	0.00148 (1.29)	0.00567*** (6.46)	0.000635** (2.22)	0.00143*** (-3.48)
Female	-0.108 (-1.23)	-0.00381 (-0.10)	0.0450 (1.58)	-0.0102 (-1.10)	0.00314 (0.24)
Income	0.0787*** (4.17)	0.0307*** (3.91)	0.00871 (1.44)	-0.000925 (-0.47)	-0.00674** (-2.40)
Education	0.0262 (1.07)	0.0428*** (4.17)	0.00230 (0.29)	-0.00108 (-0.42)	0.00545 (1.49)
Constant	-5.717 (-1.07)	-0.922 (-0.41)	-10.97*** (-6.39)	-1.205*** (-2.16)	-2.768*** (-3.45)
Observations	597	815	841	840	840
Adjusted R2	0.049	0.067	0.051	0.002	0.016

t statistics in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

6.4 RACIAL ATTITUDES

Racial/Ethnic Isolation: Then, I tested for five racial attitude variables: feelings of linked fate towards other Arab Americans, distrust towards other Arab Americans, distrust towards White Americans, distrust towards Black Americans, and distrust towards Latinos. Of these five regressions, I found one nearly significant and one significant relationship. First, darker-skinned Arabs were somewhat less likely to feel linked fate towards other Arab Americans than lighter-skinned Arabs. Though this finding wasn't exactly significant, it was almost significant ($p = 0.153$), suggesting there may be a relationship between linked fate and Arab Americans' skin color. Darker skin was also positively linked with distrust for Black Americans with a significance level of $p = 0.072$. This means that darker-skinned Arabs trust Black Americans 0.32 points less than do lighter-skinned Arabs on a 4-point scale.

While statistically insignificant, distrust for other racial/ethnic groups (like other Arab Americans, White Americans, and Latinos) had the same positive relationship with skin color. These results are especially fascinating as they imply that darker-skinned Arabs are distrustful of other racial groups, and even members of their own racial/ethnic category. This is what I call "racial isolation," or the tendency for darker-skinned Arabs to feel isolated from both in-group and out-group members.

Table 4: Effect of Skin Color on Racial Attitudes

	(1) Linked Fate	(2) Distrust Arabs	(3) Distrust Whites	(4) Distrust Blacks	(5) Distrust Latinos
Darker Skin	-0.0647 (-1.43)	0.0347 (1.06)	0.0411 (1.31)	0.0638* (1.80)	0.00435 (0.12)
Age	0.00146 (0.68)	0.00313* (1.95)	0.00481*** (3.14)	0.00681*** (3.93)	0.00681*** (3.79)
Sex	0.166** (2.42)	-0.0358 (-0.69)	0.0147 (0.30)	-0.00630 (-0.11)	0.00421 (0.07)
Income	0.0350** (2.35)	-0.0418*** (-3.73)	-0.0281*** (-2.64)	-0.0353*** (-2.91)	-0.0543*** (-4.28)
Education	0.0273 (1.42)	-0.0275* (-1.90)	-0.0296** (-2.15)	-0.0388* (-2.47)	-0.0321* (-1.96)

Constant	0.943 (0.19)	-3.768 (-1.19)	-7.103** (-2.37)	-10.72*** (-3.16)	-10.55*** (-3.00)
Observations	602	818	813	807	741
Adjusted R2	0.027	0.035	0.032	0.047	0.058

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

6.5 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political Disengagement: Finally, I tested for participants' political participation, using voter registration status, participation in protests, and membership to ethnic organizations as my sub-variables. Of these three variables, I find that two were statistically significant. First, darker skin is negatively correlated with voter registration, so that darker-skinned Arab Americans are less likely to be registered to vote than lighter-skinned Arab Americans ($p = 0.017$). I also found that darker-skinned Arabs are less likely to participate in a protest, march, or demonstration ($p = 0.059$). Political participation was not part of my original hypothesis. However, consistent with the logic of my theory, I expected darker-skinned Arab Americans to be more aware of discrimination and thus more proactive about reducing such discrimination through political involvement. Thus, I expected darker-skinned Arab Americans to be more politically engaged than their lighter-skinned peers. However, the opposite is the case.

Table 5: Effect of Skin Color on Political Participation

	(1) Registration	(2) Protests	(3) Ethnic Org
Darker Skin	-0.0459** (-2.40)	-0.0438* (-1.89)	0.0130 (0.46)
Age	-0.00684*** (-7.35)	-0.00640*** (-5.65)	0.00239* (1.72)
Female	0.0761** (2.51)	0.0931** (2.53)	-0.0137 (-0.30)
Income	0.0461*** (7.18)	0.0525*** (6.75)	-0.0545*** (-5.68)
Education	0.0485*** (5.80)	0.0419*** (4.14)	-0.0457*** (-3.66)

Constant	13.68*** (7.51)	12.81*** (5.78)	-1.720 (-0.63)

Observations	837	841	836
Adjusted R2	0.194	0.139	0.086

t statistics in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

In summary, these results above are unexpected, yet deeply fascinating. While I initially hypothesized that darker-skinned Arab Americans would be more conscious of discrimination, and thus more liberal in their attitudes, the opposite seems to be the case. Rather, members of the group are politically disengaged and isolated from other Arab Americans as well as other racial/ethnic groups. In the next chapter, I will introduce a new theory to explain these findings.

CHAPTER 7: THE MOST INVISIBLE OF THE MOST INVISIBLES

In the previous chapter, I found skin color to have different effects than what I initially hypothesized. While I expected darker-skinned Arab Americans to have more liberal, pro-minority attitudes, a series of regressions showed that they instead felt racial/ethnic isolation, economic conservatism, and political disengagement relative to their lighter-skinned peers. There are several possible explanations for this effect: one, that darker-skinned Arabs feel that they must reject other minorities in order to compensate for their own minority status. Alternatively, darker-skinned Arab Americans may feel a sense of competition with other minority groups, per the realistic group conflict theory (Sherif et al., 1961). In this section, I propose that in addition to the realistic group conflict theory, darker-skinned Arabs feel *isolated* from their own racial/ethnic group as well as the whole of American society, which in turn leads them to be socially and politically disengaged.

Arab Americans are named by Kadi (1991) as the “most invisible of the invisible.” Here, I argue that there exists a greater, most invisible of the most invisible. Darker-skinned Arab Americans have no real racial/ethnic designation, especially in legal terms. Unable to pass as “White,” Arab Americans become alienated from their own “white-passing,” lighter-skinned counterparts. However, with no secure racial/ethnic identity, they are simultaneously excluded from non-white

racial/ethnic minorities. In this way, darker-skinned Arabs teeter along these racial lines, stripped of a sense of belonging or community. In an opinion piece for *The Guardian*, Moustafa Bayoumi echoes this sentiment, writing “while it’s true that I’m not so dark that automated soap dispensers can’t see me, I’m also invisible in a more fundamental way in the United States” (Bayoumi, 2019).

Due to the overwhelming diversity of the Arab American category, lighter-skinned Arabs are able to “pass” as white and thus assimilate into U.S. culture, while darker-skinned Arabs are left as the undesirable, unassimilable, Arab “other.” To further exacerbate this effect, darker-skinned Arabs also have no true racial/ethnic group to identify with, and thus no true space for support or solidarity between members. Darker-skinned Arabs do not share the experiences of Black Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, or other racial/ethnic minorities, as they have no legally defined race. Yet they can also not relate to European white Americans, and with them, lighter-skinned Arabs who may “pass” and live as white. Thus, darker-skinned Arabs’ method of coping is to simply detach themselves from the social and political world.

In part, I agree with Sherif’s (1961) realistic group conflict theory, particularly in explaining darker-skinned Arab’s economic conservatism and racial isolation. This classical psychological theory proposes that prejudice is the byproduct of competition between groups for desired resources, such as economic opportunity or social status (Sherif et al., 1961). This explains why darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to be anti-immigrant than lighter-skinned Arabs, given the findings above. Scholarship on intergroup conflict (Esses et al., 1998; Zaraté et al., 2002) identify “perceived competition for resources” as a determinant of negative attitudes toward immigrants. Arabs with darker skin, who are more readily identified as non-white “others” will feel a greater sense of competition with racial/ethnic minorities. Since darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to be disadvantaged than their light-skinned (“white-passing”) peers, they consequently feel a greater need to compete for scarce social and economic resources³. This would consequently lead to more economic conservatism, anti-immigrant attitudes, and distrust for other racial/ethnic minorities.

³I acknowledge that the realistic group conflict theory may alternatively support white prejudice towards racial/ethnic minorities.

That being said, I argue that realistic group conflict theory only partially these findings. Rather, I maintain that darker-skinned Arabs' invisibility leads them to become socially and politically detached, especially in regard to their political disengagement. Without an accurate racial/ethnic designation on the U.S. Census, darker-skinned Arabs - who neither identify nor pass as white – feel ignored by the U.S. government, thus leading to their impaired political efficacy. This explains why darker-skinned Arabs would be significantly less likely to be registered to vote. As they feel unseen by the political system, they do not participate in the political system.

In summary, darker-skinned Arab Americans feel excluded by the U.S. government, other Arab Americans, and members of other racial/ethnic groups. As a result, darker-skinned Arabs lean into their feeling of exclusion via their economic conservatism, racial isolation, and political disengagement. To further investigate this relationship between skin color and political attitudes, I wanted to see how these effects would vary by different interaction variables. In this next section, I will present and discuss these findings.

CHAPTER 8: RESULTS & DISCUSSION CONTINUED

In addition to my regressions, I also looked to see whether the relationships between my independent variable (skin color) and given dependent variable vary by a third interaction variable. In this chapter, I will present and discuss these findings.

8.1 INTERACTION EFFECTS OF YEARS IN THE U.S.

Year of entry is an indicator of cultural assimilation. The longer Arab Americans live in the United States, the more acclimated they may be to American culture and in turn, the racial/ethnic hierarchy. This may cause those who have been in the U.S. for a longer time to experience more of the effects of skin color. As a consequence, we may see year of entry either alter or amplify the effects of skin color on political ideology, as well as my other dependent variables. Frank et al. (2010) note that racial boundaries form around those with darker skin as well as those with experience in the “U.S. racial stratification system.” After running interactions, I found no

significant effects for political affiliation (political ideology or party identification). However, I did find significant results for racial and political attitudes.

I also tested for the interaction effects of English proficiency and White self-identity, in addition to length of stay, though those variables showed no significant results. In my introduction, I discussed the ambiguity of Arab American racial identity, notably the contradiction between legal race and a race imposed by the other or the self. Thus, I am curious to see how race interacts with skin color in its effects on political ideology. Between skin color and race, which is a stronger predictor of my dependent variables? Would a lighter-skinned Arab who defined themselves as white have the same attitudes as a lighter-skinned Arab who defined themselves as non-white? In addition, English proficiency is a central marker of cultural assimilation. Poor English proficiency is a stigmatized condition which may add to the primary stigma of darker skin. In addition, when viewing English proficiency as a marker of cultural assimilation, those who speak English well may also be more acclimated to American culture, and thus more familiar with racial/ethnic discrimination in the United States. Thus, they may be more likely to express liberal, pro-minority attitudes relative to other Arabs.

8.2 RACIAL ATTITUDES

Linked Fate: First, data analysis shows a negative relationship between skin color and linked fate. However, this negative relationship may diminish over time, so that skin color has less of an effect on linked fate the longer that darker-skinned Arab Americans live in the U.S. That being said, this interaction is not statistically significant, with a significance level p of 0.183.

Regardless, this finding is notable as it may denote a diminishing of darker skin's relationship with linked fate, moderated by Arab American's length of stay in the United States.

Table 6: Interaction Effects of Skin Color and Years in U.S. on Racial Attitudes

	(1) Linked Fate	(2) Distrust Arabs.	(3) Distrust Whites	(4) Distrust Blacks	(5) Distrust Latinos
Darker Skin	-0.202** (-2.17)	-0.0942 (-1.40)	-0.0251 (-0.39)	0.0618 (0.85)	-0.0458 (-0.58)
Darker * Years.	0.00582 (1.33)	0.00411 (1.35)	0.00225 (0.78)	-0.00247 (-0.75)	0.000313 (0.09)

Years in the U.S.	-0.00695 (-0.62)	-0.0163** (-2.01)	0.000300 (0.04)	0.000663 (0.08)	-0.00836 (-0.91)
Age	0.00541 (1.49)	-0.000827 (-0.31)	0.00688*** (2.68)	0.00280 (0.95)	0.00287 (0.92)
Female	0.193** (2.39)	-0.0262 (-0.42)	0.0233 (0.40)	0.0259 (0.38)	0.0203 (0.28)
Income	0.0316* (1.75)	-0.0199 (-1.43)	-0.0273** (-2.08)	-0.0196 (-1.29)	-0.0375** (-2.30)
Education	0.0308 (1.41)	-0.0257 (-1.54)	-0.0361** (-2.30)	-0.0315* (-1.73)	-0.0266 (-1.37)
Constant	-6.570 (-0.92)	4.372 (0.82)	-11.05** (-2.18)	-2.821 (-0.49)	-2.614 (-0.42)

Observations	440	588	584	578	518
Adjusted R2	0.047	0.022	0.024	0.025	0.048

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

8.3 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Unequal Opportunity: To achieve a more rigorous analysis of the data, then, I also tested for year of entry's interaction with skin color on political attitudes. Darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to say that America is a land of equal opportunity relative to lighter-skinned Arabs ($p = 0.005$). However, this relationship fades away the longer that Arab Americans reside in the United States ($p = 0.009$). This means that the longer that darker-skinned Arab Americans live in the U.S., the less likely they are to say that America is a land of equal opportunity relative to lighter skinned Arab Americans. I attribute this to the fact that darker-skinned Arab Americans who have lived in the United States are more accustomed to American society, and with that, the realities of social, economic, and political inequality. Many Arab Americans have immigrated to the United States for their own "American Dream," and may consequently believe that the U.S. is a land of equal opportunity. However, once darker-skinned Arab Americans live in the United States, they may begin to disagree. An alternative explanation may be that Arab countries do not assign value to skin color in the same way as does the United States, so that darker-skinned

Arabs who immigrate to U.S. become more aware of skin color's importance, as well as its consequential social and economic disadvantages.

Table 7: Interaction Effects of Skin Color and Years in U.S. on Political Attitudes

	(1) Pro-Imm Econ	(2) Pro-Imm Cult	(3) Pro-Imm Crime	(4) Unequal Opp	(5) Income Gap	(6) Pride
Darker Skin	0.00870 (0.14)	0.0352 (0.56)	-0.0169 (-0.21)	-0.211*** (-2.82)	-0.141* (-1.76)	0.0956 (1.58)
Darker * Years.	-0.00101 (-0.35)	-0.0000632 (-0.02)	-0.00283 (-0.75)	0.00888*** (2.61)	0.00352 (0.96)	-0.00113 (-0.42)
Years in the U.S.	0.00164 (0.21)	0.00253 (0.33)	0.0127 (1.26)	-0.0203** (-2.23)	-0.0145 (-1.48)	0.00683 (0.95)
Age	-0.000769 (-0.30)	0.00364 (1.44)	0.00301 (0.91)	0.00352 (1.16)	-0.000406 (-0.12)	-0.00572** (-2.41)
Female	-0.177*** (-2.99)	-0.106* (-1.82)	-0.0397 (-0.52)	0.0765 (1.11)	-0.0694 (-0.93)	-0.0896 (-1.65)
Income	-0.00558 (-0.43)	0.0174 (1.36)	-0.0128 (-0.76)	-0.0154 (-1.01)	-0.0270 (-1.63)	0.00413 (0.34)
Education	0.0197 (1.25)	0.0163 (1.05)	-0.00336 (-0.17)	-0.0138 (-0.75)	0.0212 (1.07)	-0.00899 (-0.62)
Constant	5.827 (1.16)	-3.049 (-0.61)	-2.112 (-0.32)	-4.605 (-0.77)	5.319 (0.83)	14.48*** (3.10)
Observations	602	602	598	604	604	579
Adjusted R2	0.009	0.012	-0.003	0.012	0.010	0.039

t statistics in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

8.4 EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON (DIS)TRUST

As previously mentioned, we cannot fully understand Arab identity without considering the added dimension of religion. Thus, it is important to see how religion interacts with skin color not only in determining political ideology, but more specifically political attitudes and perceptions of discrimination. As darker-skinned Muslim Arab Americans are simultaneously darker-skinned and Muslim, they may have unique experiences/attitudes relative to other Arab

Americans. In the broader discussion of minority politics, it is imperative that we consider not only skin color as a racially-coded stigma, but other stigmas as well.

Religion is one important stigma, especially for Arab Americans. While “Syrian Christians” had “scored a crucial legal victory in favor of their whiteness,” Muslim Arabs had more trouble in acquiring naturalization. For example, in *In re Hassan* (1942), Muslim and Yemeni immigrant Ahmed Hassan was denied naturalization on the basis that “(Muslim) Arabs could not be expected to intermarry with ‘our population and be assimilated into our civilization’” (Gautieri, 2001). In the racial prerequisite cases, Arab applicants used their proximity to the Holy Land as their ticket to whiteness, and thus to American naturalization. This left Muslim Arabs, and especially Muslims with darker skin, to be demonized as the dangerous, unassimilable “other.” In fact, Judge Tuttle ruled that apart from their darker skin, Arabs are part of the “Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominately Christian peoples of Europe” (Gualtieri, 2001). In this way, skin color and religion play important, interconnected roles in shaping Arab identity.

All of that being said, I found no significant effects for any of the five dependent variable categories. Of the five racial attitudes variables, I found only one to be statistically significant. However, I did find religion itself to have significant effects on Arab Americans’ racial attitudes. For example, Muslim Arabs showed stronger feelings of distrust ($p = 0.021$) towards other Arabs relative to non-Muslim participants. In particular, Muslim Arab Americans scored around 0.4 points higher than non-Muslims on the 4-point scale measuring distrust for other Arabs. Muslims also held strong feelings of distrust towards Black Americans ($p = 0.086$) and Latinos ($p = 0.011$). For distrust towards Black Americans, Muslim Arabs scored approximately 0.32 points higher than non-Muslims, and for Latinos, nearly 0.5 points higher.

The results above indicate that Muslim Arabs are more distrustful of other Arab Americans, Black Americans, and Latinos relative to their non-Muslim counterparts. Similar to my theory on skin color isolation, Muslim Arabs may experience more discrimination than do non-Muslims, which in turn causes them to feel isolated from and threatened by different racial/ethnic minorities. This is supported by Hobbs and Lajevardi (2018), who find that Arab and Muslim

Americans “withdrew from public view” following Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric. Results from the study indicate that users with Arabic-sounding names shared their locations on Twitter 10 to 20% less often following “major campaign and election events.” Muslim respondents also reported “increased public space avoidance” (Hobbs & Lajevardi, 2018). While this may very well be the case, it is also important to note that religion had no significant effect on distrust towards White Americans, who are the main perpetrators of anti-Islam prejudice.

Alternatively, then, Muslim Arab Americans may feel a sense of competition with other minority groups per the realistic group conflict theory or may feel a need to compensate for their minority status by rejecting other groups (Sherif et al., 1961). Regardless of the cause of these effects, it is vital to consider the role of religion in shaping Arab American identity. In the next section, I will compare Muslim American and Arab American attitudes for a more rigorous analysis of this relationship.

Table 8: Interaction Effects of Skin Color and Religion on Racial Attitudes

	(1) Linked Fate	(2) Distrust Arabs	(3) Distrust Whites	(4) Distrust Blacks	(5) Distrust Latinos
Darker Skin	-0.0525 (-0.82)	0.0799* (1.79)	0.0627 (1.47)	0.115** (2.38)	0.0528 (1.08)
Darker * Musl	-0.0229 (-0.25)	-0.106 (-1.61)	-0.0526 (-0.84)	-0.114 (-1.60)	-0.122* (-1.65)
Muslim	0.0545 (0.23)	0.396** (2.31)	0.223 (1.36)	0.318* (1.72)	0.488** (2.54)
Age	0.00140 (0.62)	0.00192 (1.13)	0.00401** (2.47)	0.00660*** (3.61)	0.00512*** (2.71)
Female	0.163** (2.34)	-0.0253 (-0.48)	0.0245 (0.49)	-0.00524 (-0.09)	0.0212 (0.36)
Income	0.0348** (2.28)	-0.0351*** (-3.06)	-0.0233** (-2.13)	-0.0330*** (-2.65)	-0.0444*** (-3.42)
Education	0.0265 (1.37)	-0.0286** (-1.98)	-0.0299** (-2.18)	-0.0394** (-2.51)	-0.0342** (-2.10)
Constant	1.039 (0.24)	-1.594 (-0.48)	-5.652* (-1.79)	-10.47*** (-2.93)	-7.474** (-2.03)

Observations	601	817	812	806	740
Adjusted R2	0.023	0.042	0.034	0.048	0.069

t statistics in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

8.5 A COMPARISON: MUSLIM AND ARAB AMERICANS

Naber (2000) writes that the identities “Arab American” and “Muslim” are often conflated to the point that anti-Muslim sentiment becomes transferred to the broader experiences of Arab Americans. In particular, Naber’s third paradox explains that Arab Americans are racialized on the basis of a Muslim identity, rather than traditional methods of racial marking, such as phenotypical traits (Naber, 2000). While I certainly give more power to skin tone in my theory, I must acknowledge the role of religion in shaping the Arab American experience.

A lot of the discrimination against Arab Americans exists in the context of Islamophobia, regardless of whether or not the Arab is Muslim. American culture often perceives Arabs and Muslims as the same identity (Naber, 2000). After 9/11, for example, targets of Islamophobia were those who looked “Arab” or “brown,” though not all Arabs are Muslim, and of course not all Muslims are Arab. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, Muslim Americans are wildly diverse; about 41% of are considered “White,” 28% are Asian, 20% are Black, and 8% are Hispanic (Pew Research Center, 2017). Among these “White” respondents, it is unclear how many of those are specifically Arab. Therefore, it is both definitionally and statistically incorrect to generalize the attitudes of Muslim Americans to those of the entire Arab American population.

However, as mentioned, these two groups are undoubtedly interconnected, and thus, it is worth comparing the groups’ political attitudes. Both the Pew survey and the DAAS survey asked questions about discrimination, news coverage, and whether or not the respondent was proud to be American. First, 71% of U.S. Muslims recognized that there is “a lot of discrimination against Muslims” in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017). Comparing this with the DAAS 2003 Survey, only 40% said that Arab Americans are not respected by American society (Baker et al., 2006). In spite of this, 92% say they are proud to be American, whereas 94% are proud to be American (Pew Research Center, 2017). Both groups report high American pride. However,

the groups differ regarding their perception of discrimination. In addition to the general discrimination question, 60% of Muslim Americans see media coverage of Muslims as unfair (Pew Research Center, 2017). In contrast, only 38% of Arab Americans perceive the news as biased against Arab Americans (Baker et al., 2006).

In addition to these comparisons, about two-thirds of U.S. Muslims identify as (or lean towards) Democrats, whereas only 13% identify as Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2017). Comparing this to the DAAS, Arab Americans are more evenly split among the parties. Roughly a quarter of Arab Americans identify as Republican, 32% as Democrat, and 42.7% as Independents (Baker et al., 2006). Thus, Muslim Americans tend to prefer the Democratic Party, whereas Arab Americans identify across all party lines. That being said, the DAAS was conducted in 2003, a time when the parties were not as polarized as they were in 2017 when the Pew Survey was conducted. It may also be the case that in 2003, the Republican Party was not as likely to be seen as anti-Muslim compared to the Democratic party. However, Donald Trump's election in 2016 may have bolstered the association between the GOP and anti-Muslim sentiment. In fact, Lajevardi and Abrajano (2018) find that anti-Muslim sentiment is a "strong and significant predictor" of supporting Trump, even after controlling for a number of variables.

From these comparisons, we see that Arab Americans tend to perceive discrimination less than do Muslim Americans. These results are interesting since religion had no significant interaction effects on the skin color and political attitudes of Arabs. To explain this, I estimate that Muslims experience more discrimination, on average, than do Arab Americans. This may be due to the fact that many Arab Americans can "pass" as white, whereas Muslims are more easily identified as Muslim (by wearing a hijab, for example). In fact, Dana et al. (2018) reveal that veiled women report experiencing "both societal and institutional discrimination at much higher rates" than women who were not veiled, suggesting that the hijab is one of the most "obvious and dominant markers of 'otherness.'" In this way, Muslim identity is more easily marked, so that Muslim Americans are more likely to experience and perceive discrimination.

Robustness Check

I also recoded two more skin color variables: a dichotomized variable (Light/Dark) and a 3-category variable (Light/Medium/Dark). Findings were consistent across all iterations of the skin color variable.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

Limitations

The DAAS is notably outdated, which may mean that it is not particularly predictive of the patterns today. The DAAS was conducted in 2003, more than fifteen years prior to this paper's submission. Thus, the DAAS 2003 data comes from a different sociopolitical climate, particularly one less polarized. In addition, today's sociopolitical climate may harbor more anti-Muslim sentiment/discrimination relative to 2003. Republicans today may also be associated with more anti-Muslim policy positions. Thus, political affiliation on both party and ideological lines may have been less salient in 2003 than it is now in the late 2010s.

Another limitation of my study regards my control variables. In my regressions, I did not control for participants' age when immigrating to the United States, but rather their age at the time the survey was conducted. My main interaction variable was how many years participants lived in the United States and in those interaction tests, I controlled for the participants' current age. However, participants' current age may not have the same effects as their age when they immigrated to the United States. If participants were relatively young when they moved to the United States, they may possess an even greater understanding of United States culture, which could in turn influence the results of my analyses. Finally, I did not control for participants' country of origin, which may have produced undesirable confounds in my analyses. Different Arab countries may have different sociopolitical climates, which may in turn shape the differing values and/or political views of Arab Americans.

Lastly, it is important to question whether Arab Americans are – in fact – a “group,” and thus should be studied as a group. Perhaps the term “Arab American” applies to a population so diverse in national origin, religion, phenotype, and culture, that it fails to encompass one cohesive racial/ethnic identity. Perhaps Muslim Americans are a more fitting group to analyze,

as much of the discrimination against Arab Americans is ultimately tied to Islamophobia, regardless of whether or not the Arab American is Muslim. Because Arab Americans do not have their own legal racial/ethnic designation, it is difficult to confirm their legitimacy as their own racial/ethnic group, not simply an “honorary white” or “white ethnic,” as past scholars have named them. Of course, in this project, I argue that Arab Americans *are* a unique racial/ethnic group, deserving of their own piece of scholarship. However, it is also important to note the methodological implications of studying an ambiguous, conventionally under-studied “group.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While both light-skinned and dark-skinned Arab Americans are defined as White, the way in which American identity is perceived and constructed may complicate their lived experiences. I initially hypothesized that darker-skinned Arab Americans would be more likely to perceive discrimination, and thus favor more liberal, anti-discriminatory policies. However, my findings suggest the contrary. My data analysis suggests that darker-skinned Arabs are more likely to be economically conservative, racially isolated, and politically disengaged compared to those with lighter skin. These results are particularly frightening as they suggest a detachment of darker-skinned Arabs from their ingroup as well as the whole of American society. Darker-skinned Arab Americans feel like the “most invisible” of the most invisibles, and so isolate themselves as a means of coping. As there is no clear racial/ethnic designation for Arab Americans, their invisibility, and the deeper invisibility of Arabs with darker skin, remains pertinent and unaddressed.

This paper also sheds light on skin color as an important, consequential factor in racial/ethnic politics. In response to Hochschild & Weaver’s (2007) Skin Color Paradox, my results indicate a likely relationship between attitudes and skin color, albeit contrary to my initial hypothesis. Regardless, in this project, skin color has had profound contributions to understanding people’s experiences, perceptions, and interactions with racial and ethnicity.

Ultimately, there exists a gap in the literature regarding Arab American identity; attributed to their legal Whiteness, Arab Americans become erased from data, erased from literature, and thus erased from an ever-growing multicultural America. The racialization of Arab Americans is

described as a “layered process” in which “skin color, phenotype, ethnicity, national origin, and religion” define the group as a “different kind of brown: anti-American Muslim terrorists” (Zopf, 2017). My research on Arab identity is as inevitable as it is necessary. In light of a more polarized sociopolitical climate characterized by anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment, we see a greater need to understand Arab Americans as a unique racial/ethnic category.

Throughout American history, we have seen Arabs inhabit unique, multi-layered positions within the racial/ethnic hierarchy as racialized “others” and conversely, “honorary whites.” As a result, Arab Americans are important parts of the American racial/ethnic landscape, due to – as well as in spite of - their conflicting legal whiteness. Beyond the addition of a MENA category on the U.S. Census, it is essential that scholarship on Arab Americans is treated with the same regard as scholarship on White Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, or any other racial/ethnic group. In short, my project simply scratches the surface of Arab American research, though it has opened an otherwise unopened door. To fully understand Arab Americans as an “invisible” racial/ethnic group, further and more rigorous research must be conducted.

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