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Public opinion and the Katrina disaster: linking support for rebuilding and perceptions of flood victims in New Orleans

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PUBLIC OPINION AND THE KATRINA DISASTER:
LINKING SUPPORT FOR REBUILDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF FLOOD VICTIMS IN NEW
ORLEANS

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
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In

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by
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ABSTRACT

Public support for government assistance to the needy has long been the focus of scholarly attention. Some assert that the perceived race of recipients of such aid is the primary determinant influencing such support. Others cite that it is the degree of trust one has in government institutions while still others cite American notions of individualism and self-reliance versus collective responsibility. The present study analyzes public opinion regarding aid to the City of New Orleans and its inhabitants following Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding of the city. Several important findings emerge from this analysis. First, it cannot be demonstrated that levels of confidence in public institutions determine support for rebuilding New Orleans. Second, support for rebuilding New Orleans and perceptions of its residents seem to be primarily determined by respondents' views regarding the appropriate role of government in aiding the needy. The events following Hurricane Katrina were viewed in largely ideological terms based on one's predispositions. Third, the evidence suggests that racial perceptions appear to have a more subtle and nuanced effect in shaping the policy preferences of the very conservative than those of the very liberal.

OVERVIEW

The basic role of government is to collect taxes from citizens and redistribute resources to ensure the interests of the society under governance. Ultimately, democratic government is directed by the policy preferences of the majority of its citizens. As the public is "in the trenches" supporters of democratic governance contend that the masses are ideally equipped to determine society's best interests and how tax dollars should be redistributed. Through public debate, the greater good is determined and resources are allocated to assure that government satisfies its obligations to its constituents.

Yet the appropriate scope of government efforts to secure the greater good has emerged as the core theme in American politics. Some argue that government should take as little as possible from citizens in the way of taxes and limit its role to providing for national defense, infrastructure, and other basic needs. Others favor broadening government's role to include taking responsibility for the general welfare of its citizens. These differences form the foundation of the left-right continuum in American politics today.

There are instances in America's history when its citizens undergo setbacks due to no fault of their own. Such instances are tragic opportunities to explore the dynamics of the ongoing debate regarding the appropriate scope of government assistance. It is worth exploring what variables influence support for government aid to citizens who suffer from these events. The 2005 inundation of the City of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, the plight of its citizens, and the subsequent task of rebuilding this devastated city represents such an event in history. Yet surprisingly little research has been done that seeks to make generalizations of the public's interpretation of this tragedy and how policy preferences informed such interpretations. Many assumptions regarding how the public interpreted the Katrina disaster have been taken for granted. The politics of race, poverty and government inefficiency have been oft-cited to explain the disaster itself, while empirical evidence to support such interpretations has been scarce. This research will utilize public opinion data to explore interpretations of the Katrina event, support for rebuilding New Orleans and

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perceptions of its residents. This discussion will be directed by an analysis of three themes often cited in previous literature as determinants of public support for government spending to aid its citizens: 1) public confidence in government institutions, 2) the perceived race and/or deservedness of recipients of the government's aid, and 3) general support for the government's role in aiding those in need.

RACE AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT AID

Our goal is to assess levels of support for aid to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures. We will examine support for government aid as a dimension of general support for aiding those afflicted by the Katrina disaster. The issue of race and racial biases, both independently and how they relate to overall support for government aid, will be examined specifically as public support for government aid to New Orleans may contain a racial dimension. Many scholars have averred that support for government spending is influenced by the perceived race and or ethnicity of beneficiaries of such spending. This effect, which will be discussed in more detail below, assumes that the race or ethnicity of influences the perceptions of the "worthiness" of those receiving aid. Proponents of this view state that minorities, particularly black Americans, are less likely to be judged by the public-at-large as being "deserving" of receiving governmental resources.

The specific degree in which this affect actually influences public support for aid has been debated; some scholars assert that it is only a minor consideration while others state that it is the most important variable that determines levels of support for government aid. New Orleans' status as an African American-majority city was well-publicized in the days following the catastrophe. As such, this analysis hopes to enrich the discussion regarding the degree in which race influences public support for government spending. It is thus necessary to further explore the relationship between race and public support for government aid.

Race and Domestic Policy Preferences

Perhaps no issue is more important to gaining an understanding of American domestic politics than race and the history of race relations in the United States. From drug control policy to education, the issue of race is never far beneath the surface of every issue America has had to face. This has been the case since the country's founding and continues to be true today. Beginning with Truman's desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, the United States has witnessed drastic changes that have ultimately sought to correct the wrongs done to black Americans. During this time, the nation has seen a veritable revolution in the way in which

Americans view its minorities and their rights. On the surface, it appears that black Americans have won the war of public opinion. Gone are the days when policy makers such as Ross Barnett and George Wallace can publicly advocate inequitable policies and retain credibility. This has become true because most Americans of both major political parties have grown to deeply loathe racial demagoguery.

Yet as these changes occurred, millions of voters who supported racial inequity in government policy did not simply vanish. As their views became unpopular, politicians were challenged to gain their votes without openly engaging in race-baiting. Today, American politics has been characterized by policy-makers' desire to capture the wayward white voter in a post-civil rights era. Policy makers have had a role in generating stereotypes of black Americans that speak to white voters' views of how the government should act, particularly if its actions are seen to benefit black Americans. This effect, however, appears to be differential based on gender with white males seemingly less supportive of such government actions.

America has all but completely ended the *de jure* segregation of its past. In doing so, it has redefined the American value of egalitarianism to include people of all races and genders. Still, "…blacks today remain at a substantial disadvantage by most standard indicators. This gap between the races has in many respects not narrowed" (Sears, et al, 2000: 3). Although greater opportunities exist for black Americans, a substantial achievement gap exists between races. Some state that the cause of this achievement gap lies at the feet of black culture. Factors such as a lack of work ethic, self-segregation, violence in the black community, and the breakdown of African American families are therefore to blame. Others state that white racism still poses a formidable barrier in areas such as housing, education and employment, and these barriers make achievement very difficult (5-6). This leads one to believe that the war of public opinion is as of yet not won. If large segments of the population are making generalizations about other based on race, and if such generalizations contend that one race is intrinsically lazier or less capable than another, than clearly prejudice is still present no matter how rationally it is couched. Yet it would be foolish to assert that millions of citizens are simply

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lying when they state their belief that all individuals are created equal. Where then do present-day racial divisions lie and how did they take shape?

Race and Government Aid

It appears that these divisions may lie in Americans' fundamental views of how the government should act and what its appropriate role should be. "No one should be surprised that racial differences emerge on matters of policy that engage racial interests so directly. It is the magnitude of the difference that is surprising. The racial difference is a racial *divide*…" (Kinder and Sanders, 1996: 18). On matters of principle, white Americans of today appear to possess very egalitarian views. Still, many white Americans view racial problems as being in the past, while blacks do not see things similarly. Moreover, white support for policies that seek to eliminate disparities between the races has not increased much with time (92).

Kinder and Sanders contend that in a post-civil rights era, the image of black Americans has changed. Images of peaceful civil disobedience were supplanted by images of urban violence and poverty. This change in the black image began with the riots in northern ghettos across the nation. This change, and the ensuing fear, led white Americans to abandon their cities for the suburbs. As the image of black Americans changed, support for policies that would benefit them experienced a decrease as did an overall support for the welfare state. Some of this change can admittedly be attributed to whites observing real events and threats and attributing them to the black community as a whole. From the white business owner whose store is burned during a race riot, to the white homeowner held at gunpoint in her living room by criminals who happen to be black, some of this change in image was a consequence of real social problems that existed in a community that was long marginalized and denied equal opportunity. Still, individuals can typically (over time) discern between the behavior of a few thugs and the worthiness of an entire race. How were negative racial stereotypes allowed to persist over the past few decades?

Elite actors played a well-known role in exploiting the tumult of the decades past for electoral gain. Republicans attempting to make gains in the once solidly Democratic South

"realized that they could win the votes of white racists simply by being more racially conservative than the racially liberal Democratic Party. The growing complexity of racial issues compared to the clear moral high ground held by the Civil Rights Movement has made these tactics simpler and more acceptable. Racially liberal policies like busing and affirmative action attract opposition outside the South and from many who oppose discrimination, laud the Civil Rights Movement, and wish no return to the evils of segregation" (Lublin, 2004: 141). Fiscally conservative policy stances that opposed government aid appealed to fiscal conservatives outside of the South as well as southern white voters who had negative stereotypes of black Americans. In addition, the media itself participated in this "image-change". The legacy of racially-coded policy debate remains today. "Animosity toward blacks is expressed today less in the language of inherent, permanent biological difference, and more in the language of American individualism, which depicts blacks as unwilling to try and too willing to take what they have not earned" (124).

Feldman and Zaller (1992) contend that Americans support a government that maintains the basic functions of a welfare state but ideologically adheres to a laissez faire attitude of government and government spending (268). Moreover, many Americans are often conflicted and ambivalence is found more frequently among liberals, as U.S. political values are innately "inhospitable" to the ideals of a welfare state (293). Opponents of government aid to the needy are more likely to justify their preferences by appealing to these broad values of individualism or self-sufficiency. The view that black Americans are unwilling to work hard, labeled "racial resentment" by Kinder and Sanders, has become a potent force in race relations today (Kinder and Sanders, 1996: 125). Indeed, Jacoby (1994) contends that "most citizens seem to translate the phrase 'government spending' into government spending on programs that could benefit the poor, blacks, and other disadvantaged groups" (354). Biases present in public opinion have the potential to limit a democracy's ability to act according to the best interests of citizens. Therefore, the relationship between race and support or opposition for government spending is worth exploring in depth.

Gilens (1995) even goes so far as to assert that the *most important* source of opposition to welfare among whites nationwide is race. Belief that black poverty is a result of a lack of effort and that black Americans have been given sufficient resources from the Federal government to account for their past disadvantages are strong predictors of opposition to welfare policies (1010). Goren (2003) contends that white citizens often express support or opposition to government spending in terms of the "deserving poor" or the "undeserving poor". He contends that political knowledge *strengthens* the relationship between racial stereotypes and attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor (208-209). "Media discourse on the undeserving poor is dominated by negative images of blacks" (Goren, 2003: 215). The "politically sophisticated" encounter this common frame more frequently, as they display a greater reliance on information from the media to inform their political view. Thus, the media's portrayal of events becomes a critical piece to unlocking Americans' views on race.

Assessing the Role of Race in Support for Aid to New Orleans

Hurricane Katrina became an important event in the *racial* history of this country overnight. Still, is there evidence to support the contention that Americans' views of New Orleans as a majority African American city will inform their support for government aid to the region? Is New Orleans viewed by Americans as deserving or undeserving? Does race appear to have an influence on this perception? Do those who are likely to oppose government spending simply do so because they mistrust the capability of their government to distribute resources appropriately to those most in need of assistance (Eismeir 1982: 142)? To explore these questions requires an examination of how the media portrayed New Orleanians.

MEDIA FRAMING AND THE RACIALIZATION OF HURRICANE KATRINA

Informational Shortcuts

In a study of elections where voters were given only limited information about the candidates, McDermott (1998) asserts that voters accounted for this lack of information by making potential judgments according to political and social stereotypes (897-898). Candidate demographics such as race or gender provided voters with stereotypical information that assisted them in making their choice (912). Stereotypes are therefore used by individuals in forming policy preferences. In an environment where public opinion ideally shapes policy outcomes it is worth asking why this occurs and how the "average" person discerns what government policies she or he favors or opposes.

> "How ordinary people manage this is a deep puzzle, because one thing that public
> opinion researchers are in agreement on is that the average citizen tends to pay only
> occasional and then usually superficial attention to politics. Not surprisingly, he or she
> tends to know and understand relatively little about it. But if ordinary people know and
> understand so little about politics, how can it be possible that they frequently figure out
> what they are for and against politically?" (Sniderman, et.al., 1991: 14-15).

Even the most well-informed citizen cannot learn about every dimension of every issue before developing a policy preference. Citizens can often compensate for their political sophistication by utilizing *heuristics.* These "judgmental shortcuts" are ways in which individuals can organize and simplify political information. While utilizing such shortcuts requires relatively little information, they provide citizens with "dependable answers even to complex problems of choice" (19). People utilize their likes and dislikes about politically relevant groups (such as African Americans, liberals, or specific political figures) to make policy judgments in cases where only limited information is available. For example, although a citizen may not know the specifics about a particular policy, she " knows what she thinks about increasing government spending to assist blacks, about busing, about affirmative action" (21-22). Emotional reactions to these likes or dislikes assist citizens in forming their policy

preferences. Kuklinski and Quirk (2000) contend that heuristics tend to result in a rational outcome when the public is dealing with broader and longer-standing issues (182). This raises potential questions as to the rationality of the public's response to a sudden event such as Hurricane Katrina. Given the suddenness of the event, the potential exists for citizens to utilize crude stereotypical information to formulate their perceptions and policy preferences about complex issues.

Framing and the Mass Media

Since its genesis, the United States has only become geographically larger and more populous, its citizenry more diverse and its electorate more representative of this diversity. Its federal government, in contrast, has only become more centralized and its actions arguably more relevant in the lives of average Americans. These changes have presented a unique challenge to the American democratic system. Ideally, the American media serve as a solution to these challenges. Today, the press has the ability and resources to communicate to the American public at-large. While the media were once more loosely structured and locally specific, they have become more institutionalized and centralized while its scope has simultaneously broadened.

Citizens access the media as a resource in making political decisions (Just et. al., 1996: 89). Media coverage of campaigns, for example, provides a critical role in American democracy and is a powerful factor in how Americans choose their national leaders. Still, it is a challenge to effectively inform a nation of over 300 million people. For this reason the media must assist citizens in formulating heuristic judgments to economize information intake and communicate effectively. Events such as Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures are multidimensional and have several possible interpretations. The media must choose which narrative (or frame) to utilize in conveying news to the public. Such interpretations will likely influence how the public views the disaster and its victims and shape levels of support for aiding the region.

Interpreting the Katrina disaster was not only a matter of observing an objective reality and reporting it. This event could have been interpreted in a number of ways. For example, the media could have framed the Katrina disaster in terms of New Orleans' long-neglected flood protection infrastructure which crumbled below design specifications. After all, widely circulated images of suffering at the Superdome and Convention Center in New Orleans would not have occurred had the Federal government invested adequately in New Orleans' federal levee program. The problem definition of infrastructure failure was one of many potential frames that did *not* dominate the debate and interpretation of the event.

Media framing thus "selects some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993: 52). In *The Mass Media and the Dynamics of American Racial Attitudes*, Paul Kellstedt asserts that the media have certain "powers" which include agenda-setting power, the power to make certain considerations salient (priming), and the ability for the media to use events as tools for social learning. His work analyzed how often the media framed their coverage of black Americans in terms of egalitarian language, and how often the media framed its coverage emphasizing the need for one to succeed based on his or her own merits. Further, it analyzed the media's emphasis on poverty in the black community. "Racial policy preferences and welfare-state policy preferences were once unrelated at the aggregate level, but over a short period of time…they became virtually indistinguishable…*The mass media were a major force that led to this merger*" (127, emphasis added).

Framing Debates

The media have the potential to exert a tremendous influence over policy outcomes. The way in which the press frames issues effects voters' decisions and many others have made note of the potential for the media to actually shape voting behavior by highlighting, omitting, and/or reporting information in a certain way (Porto, 2007). Cook (1998) asserts that in America today, journalists are political actors. Because the news media are positioned between

the government and the public, they have become a key means in which government signals to the public and to itself internally. As such, the media are in fact a *political* institution.

Entman (1993) states that there is even an *intentionality* regarding the way in which the press frames and issue or set of issues, selecting certain aspects of reality and assigning such aspects salience over others (52). Some, such as Kuypers (2002) have proposed that framing is driven by an innate (left-leaning) political bias prevalent in today's media. "Because journalists hold similar values, they see events in a similar manner" (245). Yet Patterson (1994) asserts that the press framing of campaign coverage is perhaps less intentional or driven by specific partisan biases and more motivated by underlying schemata which are in turn based in the collective experience that American media shared during the 1960s (i.e. Watergate, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, etc). The media are ill-equipped, Patterson asserts, to fulfill an informational role, not because they intentionally frame issues a certain way, but because they are not structurally designed to frame them any differently. In *All the News That's Fit to Sell*, Hamilton (2004) has notes that newsworthiness has an economic component that cannot be overlooked. News agencies must produce stories that have the greatest potential to yield a profit for networks and news agencies.

American governance incorporates a constitutional system of checks and balances. In many ways, a spontaneous event such as the Katrina disaster serves as an opportunity for the media to provide a check on government officials. Thus the media's framing and coverage of that event allows them to fulfill a watchdog role. Yet there is no formalized check on the media itself and as such, questions have been raised about their ability to effectively and reliably fulfill their role as watchdog.

The Katrina Disaster and the Role of Events in News Coverage

Social problems "are often identified and defined against a backdrop of single, concrete events" (Lawrence, 2001: 92). Such events serve to focus the public's attention on certain issues, as differing perspectives compete in the public sphere to define and interpret such occurrences. An important distinction exists between "institutionally-driven" and "event-driven" problem

definitions (95). While institutionally-driven problem definition lies within the control of government officials (with the media simply reporting problems as defined by government officials), event-driven problem definition is outside the scope of such control. Following an event such as the Katrina disaster, the government became but one of many voices that seek to interpret the meaning of said event. Therefore, an "interpretive struggle" arises, and the media becomes the primary mediator of this struggle. Eventually, a particular definition (or set of definitions) of the problem linked to this accidental event will emerge from that struggle. (97-98).

Events that are likely to lead to intensive problem definition activity are usually large in scope and magnitude, shared similarities with other recent news events, contained dramatic narrative possibilities, are of interest to key demographic audiences and have the potential to illicit political conflict (99-100). Katrina was such an event. Problem definitions of these events are often illustrative of deeper concerns within a society. To some, the Katrina disaster was a federal infrastructure failure, yet to many, it brought up issues of race and longstanding divisions between the government and black America. Similar to Lawrence's interpretation of the Rodney King beating of the previous decade, images of black Americans trapped in New Orleans tapped into a "latent civil rights discourse" present in the collective memory of the nation (Lawrence, 2000: 156).

Accidental events occur that speak to "deep political and cultural concerns and often remain etched in the public's memory. These memorable 'news icons' shape many of the political debates of our time" (140). When such an event occurs, a struggle to define and interpret this event ensues. Journalists become the mediators in this struggle (173). In the context of Katrina, much of this struggle centered on aid to the poor and the ongoing legacy of discrimination and prejudice toward black Americans. The media's coverage of Katrina catastrophe highlighted the floundering government response, New Orleans' status as a black majority city, and its high levels of poverty, especially among those trapped in the city. Therefore, issues of race and urban poverty have emerged as a prime problem definition for the

Katrina disaster. The emergence of this interpretation highlights the fact that the role of government in aiding the poor, race, and confidence in government institutions is an underlying theme in American political culture.

In *The Black Image in the White Mind,* Entman and Rojecki contend that the media unwittingly participate in disseminating stereotypical images of African Americans and "possibly influence White's ways of thinking on racial matters" (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 3). The racial nature of the problem definition and debate surrounding the Katrina disaster combined with the potential for media stereotyping and added to the public's predisposition toward using stereotypical information as a judgmental shortcut create the possibility that public support for rebuilding New Orleans and assisting its residents might be influenced in part by variables linked to welfare spending issues of race and perceived "deservedness" of aid. The purpose herein is to further explore this possibility.

MEASURING DETERMINANTS OF PUBLIC POLICY PREFERENCES THROUGH THE KATRINA DISASTER

In the spirit of the studies cited above, this research hopes to describe determinants of public support for government aid. Herein, we begin with the contention that aid to New Orleans following the Katrina disaster has been framed in terms of race, poverty, individualism and social equity. I will attempt to identify variables linked to public perceptions of Katrina victims and support for rebuilding the City of New Orleans. I argue that these variables also influence support or opposition to government spending for the needy in general. The following fundamental questions will be examined further in this research:

1) Do opponents of government aid to the needy justify their preferences based on the values of individualism and self-sufficiency?

2) Are liberals more ambivalent to supporting the needy?

3) Is support related to confidence in government's capabilities?

4) Do racial biases appear to influence support for government spending?

5) Is race the most important source of opposition to government spending?

For this study, data were gathered from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's I-Poll online database. Responses were analyzed from two national surveys given via telephone in early September 8th- 11th 2005, just days following Hurricane Katrina's landfall. These two surveys were a CNN/USA Today sponsored Gallup Opinion Poll taken of 1,005 individuals and a survey sponsored by the PEW Research Center taken of 1, 523 individuals. In the Gallup Opinion Poll, 87.06% of respondents identified as White, 7.06% identified as Black or African American, 4.88% identified as Hispanic and 1% identified as Asian. In the PEW Research Center poll, 81.09% of respondents identified as White, 9.98% identified as Black, 1.25% identified as Asian and 5.98% identified as being of a mixed race or "other".

The analysis of data from this time period allows us to assess public response at a time when the devastation of New Orleans was salient, and respondents were likely to express their interpretations of an event as it was being reported to them. Using Intercooled STATA 9, cross tabulations and significance tests were performed of survey responses that addressed the issues

discussed above. The results are presented below. The category "don't know/refused" was omitted when conducting all chi square tests.

Since Hurricane Katrina has not, to date, been analyzed by public opinion scholars, this study provided an opportunity to begin a discussion of interpreting this event and the implications of such interpretations. Using the questions generated by the previous literature as guidance, this research aims to assess what empirically-supported generalizations can be made regarding the public's views of the Katrina disaster.

The first set of hypotheses utilizes support for rebuilding New Orleans as the dependent variable. The question of whether or not to rebuild the city is seen as a fundamental measure or whether or not a respondent is supportive of helping New Orleans. More generally, since government funds would be used to rebuild the city, this question is also utilized to measure levels of support for government spending.

HYPOTHESIS 1: Low levels of confidence in the federal government's capabilities should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans.

HYPOTHESIS 2: A belief that the poor "have it easy" should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans.

HYPOTHESIS 3: A belief that blacks who can't "get ahead" are responsible for their condition should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans. Conversely, a belief that racial discrimination is the primary reason for the plight of black Americans should be associated with increased support rebuilding New Orleans.

HYPOTHESIS 4: Liberal ideology should be associated with increased support for rebuilding New Orleans, while conservative ideology should be associated with decreased support.

The next four hypotheses seek to utilize the data to clarify respondents' views of race and poverty and to assess which views have a stronger effect on informing respondents' policy preferences.

HYPOTHESIS 5: Conservatives should be more likely to respond that blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their condition. If this relationship is strong, negative views of race may influence overall support for aid to New Orleans.

HYPOTHESIS 6: Belief that the federal government should not increase the amount of aid to poor people should be associated with a belief that individual residents trapped in the city or the mayor of New Orleans were responsible for New Orleans' plight.

HYPOTHESIS 7: Belief that the federal government's response was slow because trapped residents of New Orleans were poor should be associated with belief that the federal government's response was slow because residents were black.

HYPOTHESIS 8: Belief that the federal government's response was slow because residents were black should be associated with increased support for additional federal spending for poverty.

RESULTS

HYPOTHESIS 1: Low levels of confidence in the federal government's capabilities should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans.

TABLE 1:   Cross tabulation between views of government and support for rebuilding New Orleans

Rebuild NOLA?	*Government is wasteful/inefficient*	*Government does better than people give it credit for*	*Neither/both equally*	*Don't know/refused*	*Total*
Yes	50.59% (432)	51.95% (306)	47.62 (20)	50% (19)	51.02 (777)
Too risky	41.22% (352)	37.01% (218)	33.33 (14)	28.95% (11)	39.07% (595)
Don't know/ refused	8.2% (70)	11.02% (65)	19.05% (8)	21.05% (8)	9.91% (151)
Total	100% (854)	100% (589)	100% (42)	100% (38)	100% (1523)

Those who find that government is wasteful and inefficient still favored rebuilding the city, as do respondents who believe the government does "better than people give it credit for". After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 1.47 with a P value of .48 showing very little association between the two variables. Hypothesis 1 was therefore NOT SUPPORTED by the evidence.

HYPOTHESIS 2: A belief that the poor "have it easy" should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans.

TABLE 2: Cross tabulation between views of the poor and support for rebuilding New Orleans

Rebuild NOLA?	*The poor have it easy because they get undeserved government benefits*	*The poor have difficult lives because benefits are inadequate*	*Neither/both equally*	*Don't know/refused*	*Total*
Yes	44.52% (260)	56.9% (429)	49.22% (63)	43.86% (25)	51.02 (777)
Too risky	47.60% (278)	33.02% (249)	37.5% (48)	35.09% (20)	39.07% (595)
Don't know/refused	7.88% (46)	10.08% (76)	13.28 (17)	21.05% (12)	9.91% (151)
Total	100% (584)	100% (754)	100% (128)	100% (57)	100% (1523)

Respondents who aver that poor people have it "easy" are less likely to support rebuilding New Orleans, suggesting that hypothesis 2 can be SUPPORTED by the evidence. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 27.29 with a P value of 0.0, indicating significance at a .01 level.

HYPOTHESIS 3: A belief that blacks who can't "get ahead" are responsible for their condition should be associated with decreased support for rebuilding New Orleans. Conversely, a belief that racial discrimination is the primary reason for the plight of black Americans should be associated with increased support rebuilding New Orleans.

TABLE 3:   Cross tabulation between views on racial discrimination and support for
            rebuilding New Orleans

Rebuild NOLA?	Racial discrimination is the main reason why blacks can't get ahead	Blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their own condition	Neither/ both equally	Don't know/ refused	Total
Yes	61.13% (239)	47.89% (432)	45.52% (66)	47.06% (40)	51.02 (777)
Too risky	31.71% (124)	43.46% (392)	33.1% (48)	36.47% (31)	39.07% (595)
Don't know/refused	7.16% (28)	8.65% (78)	21.38% (31)	16.47% (14)	9.91% (151)
Total	100% (391)	100% (902)	100% (145)	100% (85)	100% (1523)

Those who cite racial discrimination as the main reason for black Americans' inability to "get ahead" support rebuilding New Orleans by large margins. Still, respondents who assert that black Americans who can't get ahead are responsible for their own condition *still favor rebuilding New Orleans*, albeit by a much smaller margin. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 18.53 with a P value of 0.0, indicating significance at a .01 level. The evidence suggests that Hypothesis 3 is SUPPORTED.

HYPOTHESIS 4: Liberal ideology should be associated with increased support for rebuilding New Orleans, while conservative ideology should be associated with decreased support.

TABLE 4:   Cross tabulation between ideology and support for rebuilding New Orleans

Rebuild NOLA?	Very conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very liberal	Don't know/ refused	Total
Yes	35.29% (36)	46.89% (234)	52.72% (310)	56.73% (118)	71.08% (59)	46.51% (20)	51.02% (777)
Too risky	55.88% (57)	41.68% (208)	37.41% (220)	36.54% (76)	21.69% (18)	37.21% (16)	39.07% (595)
Don't know/ refused	8.82% (9)	11.42% (57)	9.96% (58)	6.73% (14)	7.23% (6)	16.28% (7)	9.91% (151)
Total	100% (102)	100% (499)	100% (588)	100% (208)	100% (83)	100% (43)	100% (1523)

Respondents who identify as "very conservative" do not favor rebuilding New Orleans by a large margin while perhaps surprisingly, respondents who identify as "conservative" still favor rebuilding the city, albeit by a smaller margin (over 11% are not sure or refused to answer the question). Therefore, conservatives are less likely to support rebuilding the city. Moreover, the more liberal a respondent was, the more likely they were to support rebuilding New Orleans. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 29.28 with a P value of 0.0, indicating significance at a .01 level. These results lend SUPPORT to Hypothesis 4. HYPOTHESIS 5: Conservatives should be more likely to respond that blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their condition. If this relationship is strong, negative views of race may influence overall support for aid to New Orleans.

TABLE 5:   Cross tabulation between ideology and views on racial discrimination

Racial discrimi- nation:	Very conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very liberal	Don't know/ refused	Total
Is the main reason why blacks can't get ahead	15.69% (16)	15.23% (76)	28.23% (166)	41.35% (86)	51.81% (43)	9.3% (4)	25.67% (391)
Blacks are responsible for their own condition	73.53% (75)	69.94% (349)	56.97% (335)	43.27% (90)	36.14% (30)	53.49% (23)	59.23% (902)
Neither/both equally	6.86% (7)	9.22% (46)	10.03% (59)	7.69% (16)	9.64% (8)	20.93% (9)	9.52% (145)
Don't know/ refused	3.92% (4)	5.61% (28)	4.76% (28)	7.69% (16)	2.41% (2)	16.28% (7)	5.58% (85)
Total	100% (102)	100% (499)	100% (588)	100% (208)	100% (83)	100% (43)	100% (1523)

The table above shows that those who identify as "conservative" and "very conservative" are much more likely to agree with the statement that blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their own condition. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 98.5 with a P value of 0.0, indicating significance at a .01 level. As such, this hypothesis was SUPPORTED by the evidence. Yet perhaps surprisingly, those who identify as "liberal" were also more likely to agree with this statement, while only those who identify as "very liberal" were not. A link between liberalism and views on race seems more difficult to assume using this measure as it appears to influence only the "very liberal". Moreover, the

large majority of moderates find that blacks who can't get ahead are responsible for their own condition. This finding runs contrary to literature that asserts that respondent's racial views are the most important variable determining support for government spending.

HYPOTHESIS 6: Belief that the federal government should not increase the amount of aid to poor people should be associated with a belief that individual residents trapped in the city or the mayor of New Orleans were responsible for New Orleans' plight.

TABLE 6:   Cross tabulation between views of government spending to fight poverty and culpability

Who deserves blame for residents trapped in city?	Federal government spends too much to fight poverty	Federal government spends the right amount to fight poverty	Federal government spends too little to fight poverty	Total
The Bush Administration	4.28% (17)	15.11% (60)	80.6% (320)	100% (397)
Residents/Mayor of New Orleans	13.54% (71)	33.01% (173)	53.43% (280)	100% (524)
Total	9.55% (88)	25.29% (233)	65.14% (600)	100% (921)

*Table omits the categories "don't know/refused", and "no one is to blame" from cross-tabulation.

Those that stated that the federal government was to blame for the fact that residents were trapped in New Orleans were more likely to support increased spending to fight poverty. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 74.5 with a P value of 0.0, indicating that a significant relationship existed between respondent's support for government spending to fight poverty and who they blamed for the plight of trapped New Orleanians. Therefore, the evidence above lends SUPPORT for Hypothesis 6.

HYPOTHESIS 7: Belief that the federal government's response was slow because trapped residents of New Orleans were poor should be associated with belief that the federal government's response was slow because residents were black.

TABLE 7: Cross tabulation between slow response due to poverty and slow response due to race

Response was slow because residents were poor:	Response was slow because residents were Black	Response was not slow because residents were Black	Don't know	Refused	Total
Yes, was a reason	89.88% (151)	11.87% (97)	20% (2)	30% (3)	25.17% (253)
No, was not	9.52% (16)	87.27% (713)	30% (3)	20% (2)	73.03% (734)
Don't know	0.6% (1)	0.73% (6)	40% (4)	0% (0)	1.09% (11)
Refused	0% (0)	0.12% (1)	10% (1)	50% (5)	0.7 (7)
Total	100% (168)	100% (817)	100% (10)	100% (10)	100% (1105)

A minority of respondents *did* believe that the response was slow because of the racial and/or economic circumstances of those trapped in the city. Approximately 25% of respondents stated that the government's response was slow because residents were poor. Less than 17% of respondents thought that the government's response was slow because residents were black. This question is not a valid indicator of overall racial or economic liberalism or conservatism (one can be supportive of black Americans and/or aid to the poor and still not believe that the government's response was slow because residents were poor or black). After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 449.81 with a P value of 0.0,

indicating a very strong relationship between those that linked poverty to the response with those that linked it with race. A large number of respondents that agreed with one statement also agreed with the other. Hypothesis 7 is therefore SUPPORTED by the evidence.

HYPOTHESIS 8: Belief that the federal government's response was slow because residents were black should be associated with increased support for additional federal spending for poverty.

TABLE 8:   Cross tabulation between slow response due to race and views of government spending

Response was slow because residents were Black:	*Federal government spends too much to fight poverty*	*Federal government spends the right amount to fight poverty*	*Federal government spends too little to fight poverty*	*Total*
No, was not a reason	11.22% (89)	28.37% (225)	60.4% (479)	100% (793)
Yes, was a reason	1.2% (2)	8.43% (14)	90.36% (150)	100% (166)
Total	9.48% (91)	24.92% (239)	65.58% (629)	100% (959)

*Table omits the categories "don't know/refused", and "no one is to blame" from cross-tabulations.

Most respondents that believed that New Orleanians were denied help from the government because of their race were also economically liberal. After conducting a chi-square test, the Pearson chi-square equaled 55.19 with a P value of 0.0, indicating significance at a .01 level. Hypothesis 8 is therefore SUPPORTED based on the evidence. However, as we have seen above, those who are economically liberal do not necessarily believe that blacks cannot get ahead because of their race. This demonstrates that the linkage between race and the lack of response is among the most liberal of respondents. As such, those who link race and poverty together with the lack of response appear to be those that hold the most liberal views.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the analysis presented above, we can now make supportable generalizations regarding how Americans perceived the Katrina disaster, their level of support for aid to New Orleans and their perceptions of New Orleanians. Additionally, several findings emerge from a study of the public's reaction to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath that could expand our understanding of what determines Americans' support for or opposition to government spending to aid the needy.

First, overall confidence in the capabilities of government institutions did not appear to influence one's support for rebuilding New Orleans. As such, one might call to question the notion that those who do not support government spending do so because they distrust the government's ability to act efficiently. Secondly, a simple majority of Americans support rebuilding New Orleans, although this support is not overwhelming. Moreover, the majority of Americans are generally sympathetic to the plight of New Orleans residents who suffered as a result of the flood and are supportive of the government taking action to help those affected.

Respondents' predispositions regarding support for or opposition to government spending to help the poor and the needy also appeared to inform their degree of support for assisting victims of Hurricane Katrina and rebuild New Orleans. It appears that Hurricane Katrina, in the minds of many, was an issue that was interpreted from an ideological framework. The more ideological a respondent was, the more strongly they expressed certain preferences. The more conservative one was, for example, the less likely they were to support rebuilding New Orleans or hold positive views of residents themselves. Likewise, the more liberal a respondent was, the more supportive they were of rebuilding New Orleans, the more they linked the governments' response to race and class, and the more willing they were to subscribe to the narrative of Hurricane Katrina as being an issue of race and poverty.

Those who were very conservative may have linked poverty with race, and their support for government spending may or may not have been determined by racial biases. Then again, such views may be attributable to general feelings conservatives have about

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individualism and self-reliance. If viewed in concert with previous literature on race and opposition to government spending, these findings indicate that a linkage between conservative opposition to government spending and race exists. Additionally, a large number of those surveyed believed that black Americans who cannot get ahead today are responsible for their condition. Still, the many also favored rebuilding the city and assisting its residents. Although not the single most important determinant of support for government spending for Katrina victims, race had a more subtle and nuanced effect on policy preferences. Race was often discussed in the Katrina narrative, and respondents held strong views. Still, the effects of this variable were more nuanced than expected.

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