WORLDS APART

Blacks and Whites React to Hurricane Katrina[1]

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Abstract

Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster that destroyed New Orleans, a major U.S. city, and it is reasonable to expect all Americans to react with sympathy and support for the disaster's victims and efforts to restore the city. From another vantage point, however, Hurricane Katrina can be seen more narrowly, as a disaster that disproportionately afflicted the poor Black inhabitants of New Orleans. Past research demonstrates a large racial divide in the support of issues with clear racial overtones, and we examine the possibility of a racial divide in reactions to Katrina using data from a national telephone survey of White and Black Americans. We find large racial differences in sympathy for the hurricane's victims, the adequacy of the federal government's response, and support for proposed solutions to mend hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, verifying the racial nature of the disaster. Blacks viewed the hurricane victims more positively than did Whites, drew a sharper distinction between and felt more sympathy for those stranded than for those who evacuated New Orleans, and were substantially more supportive of government efforts to improve the situation of hurricane victims and rebuild New Orleans. This racial gap is as large as any observed in recent polls; persists even after controlling for education, income, and other possible racial differences; and documents more fully differences that were hinted at in public opinion polls reported at the time of the disaster. We spell out the implications of this divide for racial divisions within U.S. politics more generally.

Keywords: Racial Attitudes, Racial Differences, Public Opinion, Hurricane Katrina

INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster—exacerbated perhaps by human actions in connection with global warming, but a natural disaster nonetheless—that destroyed New Orleans, a major U.S. city. It can be considered one of the worst, if not the most devastating natural disaster ever to strike a U.S. city. On that score, it is reasonable to

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expect an outpouring of American sympathy for those affected by the disaster, and widespread support for government efforts to ameliorate their plight. The residents of New Orleans could hardly be blamed for the path of the hurricane, and it is easy for each one of us to imagine being subject to the caprices of nature in this or another guise, regardless of our own wealth or social position.

From another vantage point, however, Hurricane Katrina can be seen more narrowly, as a disaster that disproportionately afflicted the poor Black inhabitants of New Orleans. Such individuals were most likely to have been stranded in New Orleans after the hurricane, and their race and class was made abundantly clear in the intense media coverage of the disaster. In particular, coverage of the deteriorating situation in the Superdome and Convention Center in the days after the storm highlighted the preponderance of lower-income African Americans among hurricane victims. That the victims were predominantly Black raises a very central question about the extent to which public reactions to the disaster and the government's response were tinged by racial concerns.

There is some suggestive evidence from public opinion polls conducted in the wake of the Katrina disaster that the preponderance of poor Black victims may have fueled racially distinct reactions to the disaster. Polls demonstrate some consensus over the degree to which the government should be blamed for failed relief efforts. A majority of Americans rate government performance as fair or poor, maintaining that all levels of government responded too slowly to the disaster, and are to blame for what happened.[2] But a sizeable number of Americans also blamed the disaster victims. For example, in a *Time* magazine poll conducted in early September 2005, 57% of Americans placed some blame for the disaster on people living in the areas hit by the hurricane. Similar numbers were reported in a poll conducted a few days later by the *Associated Press*. Lukewarm support for the disaster victims is not what one would expect after a major national catastrophe and suggests that a racial flavor attends these reactions.

Polls conducted in the hurricane's aftermath go further to hint at the racial underpinnings of Americans' reactions to the disaster. In a *Newsweek* magazine poll, only 31% of White Americans, compared to fully 65% of Blacks, thought the government responded slowly because most of the affected people were African Americans. In an *AP* poll, 47% of Whites said it never crossed their mind that the government would have responded faster if the victims had not been mostly poor and Black. In another poll, conducted by CBS, 50% of Americans said that the race and class of people left behind in New Orleans was not a factor in the speed of the government's response. These polls provide clear evidence that Blacks and Whites differed in their belief that race played a role in determining government response to the hurricane.

Previous polls have focused on whether or not the victims' race affected the perceived speed and adequacy of government response, uncovering substantial racial differences. But these questions also referred explicitly to race and may have artificially increased observed differences between Blacks and Whites. We examine the extent to which race itself colored response to different facets of the disaster, including support for the victims and government action, drawing on findings from the American Racial Opinion Survey (AROS), a national telephone survey.

THE POLITICAL RACIAL DIVIDE

Possible differences between Blacks and Whites in reaction to Hurricane Katrina are consistent with a broader political reality: the tremendous political unity displayed by African Americans in an era in which there has been a marked decline in the political

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cohesion of many other groups based on religion, income, and ethnicity within American politics (Huddy 2003). While strong support for Democrats has declined among Catholics, members of the working class, and other groups, Blacks have retained strong loyalty to the Democratic party. And this loyalty goes hand in hand with widespread policy differences between Blacks and Whites, especially on racial issues. Blacks and Whites do not see eye-to-eye on a panoply of issues ranging from affirmative action and the existence of racial discrimination to the reasons for contemporary racial inequalities. These differences are not minor; they are huge, especially when compared to other group-based differences in U.S. public opinion (Jackman 1994; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Kinder and Winter, 2001; Schuman et al., 1997; Tate 1993; Sigelman and Welch, 1991; Tuch et al., 1997; Welch et al., 2001).

The largest political differences between Blacks and Whites emerge on racial policy issues. Among Blacks in the 1992 American National Election Studies (ANES), 76% supported setting aside college places for Black college students, compared to only 25% of Whites, a difference of 51 percentage points. And 89% of Blacks, but only 49% of Whites, favored government action to ensure equal employment opportunities in the same data set. Sigelman and Welch (1991) report similar racial differences in support of affirmative action in housing and education, and government assistance to Blacks. Racial differences even emerge in support of popular racial policies such as enterprise zones and merit-based college scholarships that are likely to appeal to the political beliefs of White conservatives (Bobo and Kluegel, 1993). In a related vein, Sigelman and Welch (1991) find major differences in the extent to which Whites and Blacks perceive racial discrimination within U.S. society. In their research, a majority of Blacks report having experienced discrimination in education, housing, employment, and wages, and they regard Blacks as much more likely to experience discrimination in terms of jobs, education, and housing in their local area than are Whites (see also Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005; Welch et al., 2001; Tate 1993).

Racial differences extend beyond racial policy issues to include differences in support of general social welfare policies, as demonstrated by Kinder and Winter (2001). For example, 50% of Whites, while 61% of Blacks, favored the government provision of health insurance in the 1992 ANES. There were even more pronounced racial differences in support of federal spending for the unemployed in the same study (support among 68% of Blacks, but only 35% of Whites). Tate (1993) also observed substantial racial differences in support of policies such as Medicare, school spending, and government-guaranteed jobs. Overall, racial differences tend to be confined to economic policy, social welfare, and explicit racial issues, with few or no racial differences emerging in support of issues such as abortion, immigration, or foreign policy (Tate 1993).

There are two key explanations for these observed differences in Blacks' and Whites' support of various government policies. The first focuses on differences in their political beliefs. As noted, on average, Blacks remain persistently loyal to the Democratic Party and are more liberal than Whites. Thus, some racial disagreements over policy could arise because Blacks hold different political beliefs from Whites and are more supportive of government involvement in social welfare policies very generally. Indeed, racial differences on social welfare matters (apparently unrelated to race) are reduced dramatically (by at least one-half) once differences in Black and White political beliefs concerning the size of government and equal opportunity are taken into account (Kinder and Winter, 2001). There are also obvious class differences between Blacks and Whites that fuel further political racial differences via differing class-based economic interests, although their impact is less marked than that of political beliefs (Kinder and Winter, 2001).

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The second major explanation for racial differences in policy views centers more squarely on group identity and interests that transcend differences in Blacks' and Whites' political beliefs or class-related interests (Bobo and Kluegel, 1993). Accumulated evidence points to this approach as the best explanation for racial differences in support of specifically racial policies. Kinder and Winter (2001) document that broad racial differences in support of government policies that affect African Americans persist even after controlling for an individual's political beliefs and social class (see also Tuch et al., 1997). The broad chasm between Blacks and Whites in their support of issues such as affirmative action, government assistance to Blacks, and integrated housing is not a function of Black liberalism or White conservatism, but rather an issue of differing racial-group membership.

The origins of racial policy differences in either political beliefs or group membership are very relevant to the analysis of public reactions to Hurricane Katrina. If racial differences emerge in support of government policies to deal with Hurricane Katrina, they could arise *either* because Blacks and Whites have different political beliefs, *or* because Blacks and Whites belong to different racial groups. Of these two explanations, the latter may be of greater political import. The Bush administration has attempted to capitalize on growing conservatism among middle-class African Americans (Tate 1993) to effect a modest increase in the number of Blacks who vote for Republican candidates. But events that polarize Blacks and Whites along group lines are likely to increase cynicism and alienate Black voters, fueling dissatisfaction with the administration. It is thus important to examine racial differences regarding the government's response to Katrina to determine whether such differences are driven by garden-variety political concerns that differ between Blacks and Whites, or stem more squarely from racial-group membership and explicitly racial considerations.

REACTIONS TO THE HURRICANE VICTIMS

In disentangling different possible reasons for a Black–White divide in reactions to Katrina, we focus additionally on reactions to the victims. As we noted at the outset, it is reasonable to expect generally broad support for the victims of a natural disaster. Natural disasters generally ignore political and socioeconomic distinctions, affecting a broad swath of people, and there is no particular *a priori* reason why Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, rich or poor should show greater or lesser support for hurricane victims. Thus, an observed gap in Blacks' and Whites' reaction to the victims lends tentative support to a racial-group membership account of racial differences. Greater Black than White sympathy for Katrina victims is consistent with a form of in-group bias, a preference for members of one's own group over others.

Our interest in racial differences thus extends beyond differences with regard to the government's response to the Katrina disaster, to include racial differences with regard to the hurricane's victims as well. This focus on the racial characteristics of Katrina's victims is consistent with varied research that demonstrates the centrality of beliefs about a government program's intended beneficiaries as a critical factor in driving program support. Americans who hold social welfare recipients responsible for their situation are less supportive of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Medicaid (Cook and Barrett, 1992). Americans who blame individuals for their own poverty are more opposed to social welfare policies targeted at the poor (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). And people who view the unemployed and AIDS patients as responsible for their circumstances are less likely to support public aid for such

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individuals (Skitka and Tetlock, 1993). In all of these instances, program support depends on *perceptions* of program beneficiaries which are often colored by group stereotypes, contributing to an acknowledged group-centric basis for much political reasoning (Nelson and Kinder, 1996).

We focus on two central questions in this study. First, are there deep racial differences in reactions to Hurricane Katrina, as hinted at in recent public opinion polls? And, second, to what extent are such differences largely a function of racial-group membership that is not readily explained away by other differences in Blacks' and Whites' social class, educational background, or political beliefs?

AMERICAN RACIAL OPINION SURVEY (AROS)

Sample

The data used in this paper are based on re-interviews with respondents who participated in the American Racial Opinion Survey (AROS). The survey is based on a three-wave Random-Digit-Dial (RDD) national sample conducted initially in late 2003 and early 2004. The telephone interviews in waves one and two were conducted by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research; the third telephone interview was conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bukuvalis (SRBI). The first wave of the interview was conducted with 1,583 individuals with a cooperation rate of 44%.[3] We then attempted re-interviews with all Whites in the study (N = 1,229) in early to mid-2004 (from February until June), and obtained completed interviews with 868 non-Hispanic, non-Asian Whites, for a re-interview rate of 71%. The second-wave interview focused exclusively on Whites, in order to obtain very detailed assessment of their racial attitudes. The third wave of interviews was conducted from late September until late November of 2005, with over 95% of all interviews conducted in October. Third-wave interviews were attempted with all Whites successfully re-interviewed in wave two (N = 868) and all Blacks (N = 165) interviewed in wave one. We obtained completed interviews with 507 Whites, for a re-interview rate of 58%, and 52 Blacks, yielding a 32% re-interview rate.[4] A new RDD sample of 215 Black respondents was interviewed in wave three to increase the sample of African Americans (COOP3 = 40%).[5] Interviews were approximately twenty minutes in length in each of the waves. Thus, in this study, a total of 507 Whites and 267 Blacks were interviewed concerning their views on Hurricane Katrina.

The Black and White respondents interviewed about Hurricane Katrina are roughly representative of the nation, although Whites are a little older and somewhat better educated than the nation as a whole. College had been completed by 43% of the White sample and 22% of the Black sample (panel and RDD combined). Respondents' average (mean) age was fifty-three for Whites and forty-four for Blacks. Among the White respondents, median household income was between $40,000 and $50,000, while for Blacks it was $30,000. Among Whites, 31% lived in the South, in contrast to 25% of Blacks. Finally, White respondents were evenly divided by partisanship, with 33% identifying with each party (Republican, Democratic, and Independent). Among the Black respondents, 58% identified themselves as Democrats and only 6% as Republicans.

Questionnaire

The third-wave questionnaire focused squarely on public reactions to Katrina, tapping three key areas: (1) attitudes towards the hurricane's victims, (2) support for

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government efforts to assist those affected by the hurricane and rebuild New Orleans and the other affected regions of the Gulf Coast, and (3) trust in government. In this paper, we rely largely on data from wave three interviews (from 2005) and focus on reactions to the hurricane victims and government policy and responsiveness. Demographics and some basic political beliefs were collected in wave one for panel respondents.

Analyses

In the following analyses, Black respondents from the panel and the RDD were combined after careful examination of potential differences between the two samples. Extensive analyses across all major demographic and political variables uncovered no significant differences between the two samples. We therefore combined them in order to obtain a reasonable sample size of African Americans for the following analyses. All multivariate analyses in which Blacks and Whites are combined include weights that reduce the numerical size of African Americans to their percentage in the wave one panel (10%). A series of demographic and political factors are included in multivariate analyses and were recoded to a 0–1 scale, except where noted otherwise. Multivariate analyses include the following set of demographic and political factors: respondent race; partisanship; liberal-conservative ideology; age (in decades); education (in years); household income above $70,000; household income below $30,000; income missing; gender; southern residence; living in a hurricane-prone area; and knowing someone who was affected by the hurricane.[6]

RESULTS

Reactions to Hurricane Victims

We believe that a critical component of public response to Katrina is how sympathetically the citizens of New Orleans, and especially those who remained in the city during the hurricane, were perceived. While the population of New Orleans is racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, a large proportion of those who did not leave the city before Katrina hit were poor Blacks. This was very clear from media coverage in the days immediately after the disaster. And both White and Black respondents in the sample were amply aware of this fact. Over 90% of Whites (94%) and more than three-quarters of all Blacks (81%) said that most of those who stayed behind in the city after the hurricane were poor; many fewer said they were middle class, and almost no one thought that they were wealthy. In contrast, large majorities of Whites (81%) and Blacks (68%) viewed most of those who evacuated before the storm as middle class, with a slightly higher percentage of Blacks (20%) than Whites (12%) viewing the evacuees as wealthy. These percentages are reported in Table 1. In both instances, Blacks exhibited a slight tendency to see New Orleans residents as more affluent than did Whites.

Previous research demonstrates that judgments of desert and sympathy play a significant role in the willingness to support policies to assist people in need. And the images of poor Blacks were juxtaposed with stories of looting, violence, and the breakdown of social order. While those who evacuated also faced economic and social hardships, the focus of media attention in the days after the storm and flooding was on those left behind. This raises the very real possibility that attitudes toward assistance for the victims and reconstruction efforts were disproportionately influenced by reactions to the sight of poor Black residents of the city. We thus asked

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Table 1. Perceived Social Class of Hurricane Katrina Victims by Type of Victim and Race of Respondent

	(1) LEFT BEHIND IN NEW ORLEANS		(2) EVACUEES	
	White Respondent	Black Respondent	White Respondent	Black Respondent
Poor	94.2%	80.5%	7.2%	12.2%
Middle Class	5.8	18.4	81.1	68.2
Wealthy	0.0	1.2	11.7	19.6
N	480	256	472	245

Note: Entries are percentages.

Question wording:
Would you say that most of the people who [(1) stayed behind/(2) left] New Orleans before the hurricane were poor, middle class, or wealthy?

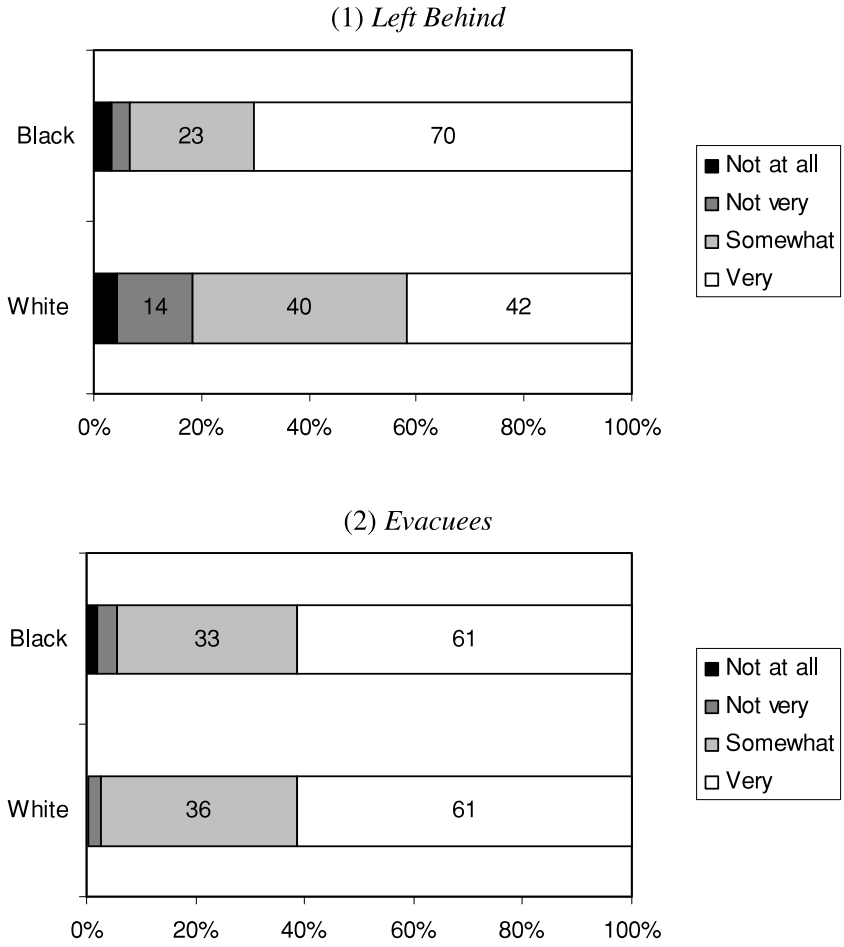
respondents how sympathetic they felt towards both those who were left behind and the evacuees.

Powerful racial differences emerged in sympathy felt towards those who were left behind in the city, as shown in Figure 1. Most Blacks (70%) felt very sympathetic towards these individuals, in contrast to only 42% of Whites. When those who felt somewhat and very sympathetic are combined, a majority of Blacks and Whites felt at least some sympathy for those left behind, but racial differences emerged even here. Almost all Blacks (93%) felt some sympathy, whereas sympathy was less unanimous among Whites (82%). There were no racial differences, however, in reactions to those who left New Orleans before the hurricane. A majority (61%) of both Blacks and Whites felt very sympathetic towards them, and an added 33–36% felt somewhat sympathetic.

When taken together, responses to evacuees and those left behind indicate a further intriguing racial difference. Whites expressed considerably stronger sympathy for evacuees than for those stranded in the city, whereas Blacks expressed somewhat stronger sympathy for those left behind than for evacuees. The difference among Whites is especially striking: 61% of Whites said they felt very sympathetic towards the evacuees, but only 42% felt the same way about those stranded in the city. In contrast, 70% of Blacks felt very sympathetic towards those left behind, and 61% felt very sympathetic towards evacuees, a more muted difference. This suggests a clear racial difference in reactions to the victims, and may reflect differences in the racial makeup of the two groups, with Whites constituting a greater percentage of evacuees. Further multivariate analyses (not shown here) indicate that this difference persists after controlling for respondents' political beliefs (partisanship and ideology), and social class (income and education).[7] Thus, racial-group membership had a profound impact on sympathy towards the hurricane victims, with Whites feeling less sympathetic towards the victims left behind in New Orleans than towards evacuees, and expressing less sympathy for such individuals than did Blacks. These findings provide very clear evidence of a racial divide over Katrina.

Blacks and Whites held differing views of the behavior of those left behind in New Orleans that may have further influenced their reactions to hurricane victims. Whites were evenly split on whether those who "entered stores and took things in the first few days after the hurricane" were "mostly in search of food, water, and

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Note: Entries are percentages.

Question wording:

(1) "As you may know, residents of New Orleans make up the majority of people affected by Hurricane Katrina. Some people left the city before the storm hit; others did not. How sympathetic do you feel towards the residents of New Orleans who were IN THE CITY after the hurricane?"

(2) "Not all of the residents of New Orleans were stranded in the city after the hurricane. How sympathetic do you feel towards the residents of New Orleans who DID evacuate the city (before Hurricane Katrina)?"

Fig. 1. Differences between Black and White Respondents in Sympathy for Those Left Behind in New Orleans versus Evacuees

clothing" (51%), or were "in search of appliances, electronics, and other expensive items" (49%). In contrast, Blacks overwhelmingly believed that city residents who entered stores were in search of essential items (79%), not luxury goods (21%), despite contrary media images. This racial difference persists in multivariate analyses with controls for a range of political and demographic factors.

In addition to the fact that Blacks felt more sympathy than did Whites for those left behind in New Orleans, they also believed that these individuals were more deserving of government and charitable assistance. Just under 50% of Whites believed

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Table 2. Hurricane Victims Deserve Assistance from Government and Charities by Type of Victim and Race of Respondent

	(1) LEFT BEHIND IN NEW ORLEANS		(2) EVACUEES	
	White Respondent	Black Respondent	White Respondent	Black Respondent
A Great Deal	49.6%	65.3%	42.0%	54.9%
Some	41.3	28.2	52.2	36.5
A Little	9.5	5.4	5.4	7.5
None	.6	1.2	.4	1.2
N	496	259	498	255

Note: Entries are percentages.

Question wording:
To what extent do the people who [(1) did not evacuate/(2) left] New Orleans before the hurricane deserve assistance from the federal government and private charities: a great deal, some, a little, or none?

that the victims deserved a great deal of assistance, compared to 65% of Blacks, a statistically significant difference. Interestingly, both Blacks and Whites believed that those left behind deserve more assistance than did evacuees, as seen in Table 2. While 42% of Whites believed evacuees deserved a great deal of assistance, 50% felt that way about those stranded in the city. Among Blacks, the difference is comparable, with 65% endorsing a great deal of assistance to those left behind compared to 55% supporting the same level of assistance for evacuees. Thus, despite Whites' greater sympathy for evacuees, they perceived those left behind in the city as deserving. Once again, all racial differences in the victims' perceived deservingness remain even after controlling for respondents' political beliefs, social class, and other demographic characteristics.

Overall, there are marked differences in Blacks' and Whites' reactions to the hurricane victims left behind in New Orleans. Americans accurately understood socioeconomic differences between those stranded and those who evacuated the city. And there was clear evidence of a racially based response to the victims. Blacks felt greater sympathy than did Whites for those left behind in the city, viewed their behavior more empathetically, and saw them as more deserving of assistance.

Adequacy of Government Assistance

Early poll questions revealed differences between Blacks and Whites in the extent to which they viewed the government's response to Katrina as racially motivated or affected. We thus turn next to consider public reactions to the government's efforts to deal with the disaster and its aftermath. For these analyses, we switch from a simple presentation of cross tabulations and percentages to multivariate analyses. This shift in analytic strategy and presentation is needed to ensure that any observed racial differences are not simply the consequence of broad demographic and political differences between Blacks and Whites that may color their typical response to government policy and action.

We first examine respondents' concerns about the adequacy of government assistance to hurricane victims, which is assessed by two questions. The first asks:

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"How concerned are you that the people affected by Hurricane Katrina will receive enough help to fully recover from the disaster?" The second asks whether the respondent is more worried "that the government will give too much money and assistance to those affected by Hurricane Katrina or that it will give too little money and assistance." In both cases, multivariate ordered probit analyses reveal a significant effect of race: Blacks are more concerned than Whites that hurricane victims will receive enough help to recover and that the government will give victims too little assistance. The findings for both probit regressions are presented in Table 3.

These racial effects emerge even after other demographic and political factors are taken into consideration. As can be seen in Table 3, both Republicans and conservatives are less concerned than Democrats and liberals, respectively, about victims receiving adequate government assistance, in addition to being more worried that victims will get too much government assistance. These effects are independent of racial differences in political class and outlook, suggesting that Blacks' greater concern for the hurricane victims does not simply derive from their typical support of government welfare policies.

There is a large gap in Blacks' and Whites' level of concern about the adequacy of the government's response. Based on the ordered probit analyses in Table 3, we calculated the predicted probability of different levels of concern among Black and White non-southern women who did not live in a hurricane-prone area, did not know someone who had been affected by the storm, and were of average age, level of education, and income.[8] One-third (33%) of Whites with these characteristics were predicted to feel very concerned that victims would receive enough government

Table 3. Determinants of Support for Government Assistance to Hurricane Victims: Ordered Probit Analyses

	(1) Concerned About Help		(2) Worried about Too Little Help	
	β	s.e.	B	s.e.
Black	**.84**	.12	**.60**	.24
Party (Republican)	**−.45**	.16	**−.91**	.25
Ideology (Conservative)	**−.50**	.18	**−.72**	.30
Age (10 years)	−.005	.006	−.022	.079
Education (years)	.010	.020	.03	.09
High Income	−.01	.13	**−.35**	.16
Low Income	**.28**	.13	.11	.23
Income missing	.28	.17	−.23	.22
Female	**.24**	.10	.27	.15
South	.21	.12	−.17	.15
Hurricane Area	.05	.11	.09	.14
Knew Someone	−.09	.12	−.19	.15
N	722		652	

Note: Entries in columns 1 and 3 are ordered probit coefficients; entries in columns 2 and 4 are standard errors. Coefficients in bold are more than twice the size of their standard errors.

Question wording:

(1) How concerned are you that the people affected by Hurricane Katrina will receive enough help to fully recover from the disaster: very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not at all concerned?

(2) Which worries you most: that the government will give too much money and assistance to those affected by Hurricane Katrina or that it will give too little money and assistance?

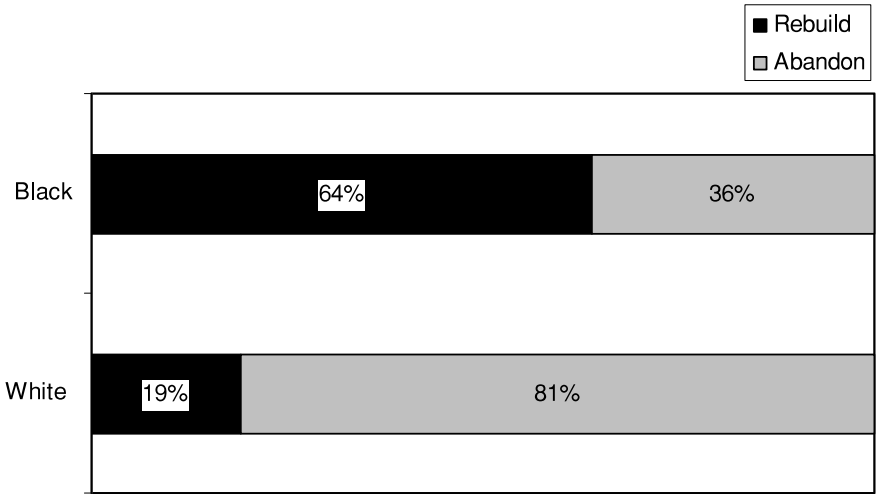
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assistance. This is much lower than the prediction for comparable Blacks, 66% of whom were predicted to feel very concerned about the adequacy of government assistance.

Other socioeconomic factors further shaped concerns about government assistance. Residents of low-income households were more concerned about the adequacy of government assistance than middle- and higher-income individuals, and residents of high-income households were more worried than others that the government would spend too much on the victims. In addition, women were more concerned about the adequacy of government assistance. But, once again, race effects remain even after controlling for income, gender, and other characteristics.

Blacks and Whites also held differing views on how New Orleans should be rebuilt. Respondents were asked whether the government should "rebuild all of New Orleans as it was before" or abandon "the most flood-prone areas." While 64% of Blacks supported rebuilding all of New Orleans, 81% of Whites supported abandoning flood-prone areas. These differences are depicted in Figure 2. To ensure that responses were not simply due to broad political beliefs, we once again ran multivariate probit analyses with the same set of demographic and political controls (not shown here). There were modest effects of partisanship and ideology in this analysis, indicating that Republicans and conservatives were more supportive of abandoning flood-prone areas. But these effects were dwarfed by the impact of respondent race, consistent with the findings charted in Figure 2.

When taken together, these finding suggests that Blacks not only felt greater sympathy than did Whites for the hurricane victims, especially those left behind in New Orleans, but they were also more concerned that the victims would not receive adequate assistance to help them to recover from the hurricane's devastating consequences. Blacks' greater concern about the ability of hurricane victims to



Question wording:
"Should the government rebuild all of New Orleans as it was before the Hurricane, or should the most flood-prone areas be abandoned?"

Fig. 2. Support for Rebuilding All of New Orleans versus Abandoning the Most Flood-Prone Areas (by Respondent Race)

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recover from the disaster may have also fueled their opposition to abandoning the lowest-lying areas of the city, the former home of many of the city's poorest Black residents.

Responsibility and Blame

Finally, we turn to the possible political consequences of the disaster and examine in greater detail how Blacks and Whites apportion blame for what happened in New Orleans. As noted above, the Republican party has made a concerted efforts to woo Black voters, raising pertinent questions about whether or not the Katrina disaster has damaged perceptions of the president and the administration among Blacks. Once again, we rely on multivariate analyses to examine racial differences. Any evidence that race shapes reactions to the administration or President Bush's handling of the disaster independently of respondents' political views provides potentially bad news for the Bush administration, hinting at broad race-based reactions to the administration.

Consider first the entities blamed by Blacks and Whites for the situation in New Orleans. Respondents were asked two questions. First: "Who do you think deserves the most blame for the fact that many New Orleans residents were trapped in the city after it flooded?" The second asked who was to blame for "the poor conditions that developed in the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center in the days after the flooding." Respondents were given the following options on both questions: "The Louisiana Governor, the New Orleans Mayor, the residents themselves, or the Bush Administration?" Responses are presented in Table 4 separately for Blacks and Whites.[9]

Both Blacks and Whites blamed a mixture of all four entities for the Katrina disaster, but the apportionment of blame differed significantly by race, as seen in Table 4. A majority (65%) of Whites blamed the city residents and the mayor for the residents' being trapped in the city, whereas fewer than 20% blamed the Bush administration. In contrast, roughly the same number of Blacks blamed

Table 4. Responsibility and Blame for the Katrina Disaster by Respondent Race

	(1) Why Residents Were Trapped		(2) Conditions after Flooding	
	White	Black	White	Black
Governor	15.1%	20.5%	25.3%	28.7%
Mayor	35.1	17.6	28.3	20.9
Residents	30.2	20.1	20.6	8.7
Bush Administration	17.3	39.8	23.5	38.3
Someone Else	2.4	2.1	2.2	3.5
N	457	239	446	230

Note: Entries are percentages.

Question wording:

(1) Who do you think deserves the most blame for the fact that many New Orleans residents were trapped in the city after it flooded?

(2) Who do you think deserves the most blame for the poor conditions that developed in the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center in the days after the flooding: The Louisiana governor, the New Orleans mayor, the residents themselves, or the Bush administration?

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the Bush administration (40%) as the mayor and local residents (38%). Similar racial differences emerge regarding who was blamed for local conditions at the Superdome and Convention Center. Many more Whites blamed either the city residents or the mayor (49%) than the Bush administration (24%), while more Blacks blamed the Bush administration (38%) than the mayor or the city residents (30%).

The fact that Whites are more likely than Blacks to blame the mayor and city residents for the Katrina debacle has obvious racial implications. As already noted, the city residents were predominantly Black, as was made clear by almost all news coverage of Katrina. Ray Nagin, the mayor of New Orleans, was a very visible presence in the media in the days after the hurricane, and he is also Black. And in both cases (regarding the residents' being trapped and the conditions at the Superdome and the Convention Center), Black respondents were much less likely to blame either city residents or the mayor than were Whites. These differences provide further evidence of the racially polarized nature of reactions to the disaster. The differences shown in Table 4 remained when we estimated a multinomial logit model that controlled for political and demographic variables.[10]

Data presented in Table 4 makes clear that Blacks are much more likely than are Whites to blame the Bush administration for the disaster that unfolded in New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Respondents were asked more specifically about the way in which President Bush initially responded to Katrina, and whether the steps he had taken to help hurricane victims were "mostly because he sincerely cares about the victims or mostly for political reasons?" Overall, Blacks were more critical of Bush's performance than were Whites, and Blacks were also more cynical about his motives. These racial differences emerged in multivariate ordered probit analyses with controls for respondents' political beliefs and demographic characteristics. Table 5 presents the results of both probit analyses.

Not surprisingly, partisanship has a substantial impact on perceptions of the president's performance and motives, with both Republicans and conservatives giving the president more positive ratings than Democrats or liberals, respectively. But race also plays a significant role in fueling negative assessments of the president independently of respondents' political views. When predicted probabilities were calculated for Black and White female Democrats who shared otherwise average characteristics (as described above), there was a sizeable racial difference in ratings of the president's perceived motives and his performance in handling Katrina. Among such female Democrats, 64% of Blacks were predicted to rate the president's handling of Katrina as poor, compared to 45% of Whites. In the same vein, 63% of these White female Democrats were predicted to view the president as acting to help Katrina victims for cynical political reasons, compared to 86% of comparable Black Democrats. Overall (in simple bivariate cross tabulations), Whites were divided about the president's motives, with 51% saying that he sincerely cared about the victims, compared to 48% who believed he acted for political motives. But cynicism was much more pronounced among Blacks, of whom 85% believed that he acted for purely political reasons.

Overall, Hurricane Katrina holds potentially negative connotations for the Bush administration's efforts to attract Black voters. Blacks were more likely than were Whites to blame the Bush administration for what happened in New Orleans. They were also much more likely to rate the president's performance poorly and to view his motives for action cynically. These racial differences emerge independently of Blacks' political beliefs and suggest a broad-based racial reaction to the events surrounding Katrina that may have long-lasting political ramifications for the Republican Party.

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Table 5. Evaluations of President Bush's Response to Katrina

	(1) Positive Bush Response		(2) Bush Insincere?	
	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
Black	**−.50**	.12	**.75**	.19
Party (Republican)	**1.31**	.18	**−1.75**	.24
Ideology (Conservative)	**.81**	.19	**−.92**	.36
Age (10 years)	−.001	.011	−.018	.029
Education (years)	**−.072**	.022	.032	.101
High Income	−.15	.13	.01	.07
Low Income	**−.35**	.13	.06	.28
Income missing	−.29	.17	−.07	.19
Female	−.14	.10	.12	.17
South	**.38**	.12	**−.33**	.16
Hurricane Area	−.12	.12	−.06	.15
Knew Someone	.21	.12	−.15	.15
N	715		702	

Note: Entries in columns 1 and 3 are ordered probit coefficients; entries in columns 2 and 4 are standard errors. Coefficients in bold are more than twice the size of their standard errors.

Question wording:
(1) How would you rate the way George W. Bush initially responded to Hurricane Katrina: excellent, good, fair, or poor?
(2) Thinking again about George W. Bush: Just your best guess, do you think George W. Bush has taken steps to help victims of Hurricane Katrina mostly because he sincerely cares about the victims or mostly for political reasons?

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Hurricane Katrina elicited the kind of polarized racial reaction typically reserved for racial issues such as affirmative action and housing integration. At odds with the broad-based support expected in response to a natural disaster, the hurricane produced a sharp line of racial demarcation more reminiscent of reactions to the O. J. Simpson trial than to the 2004 Asian tsunami or the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Blacks were much more sympathetic than were Whites towards those stranded in New Orleans, more concerned that these individuals would not receive adequate government assistance, more critical of the performance of the Bush administration, and more cynical about the president's motives. Consistent with other racial issues, these differences were not simply explained away as an outcome of Blacks' more liberal and pro-Democratic political leanings (Kinder and Winter, 2001). Racial differences persisted in our analyses, even after controlling for broad racial differences in socioeconomic status and political beliefs. Hurricane Katrina was clearly a racially polarizing event.

The racial nature of reactions to Katrina has important political implications. The Republican Party has made active efforts to recruit African American voters over the last several presidential elections. Moreover, there is some evidence that the strategy has been working, albeit slowly. Differences between Black and White voters were reduced slightly in 2004 from 2000 (Huddy et al., 2006). The Republican party's recruitment of Black supporters has been potentially nourished by growing support over the last decade or so for moderate and conservative political views among the Black middle class (Gay 2004; Tate 1993).

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But events such as Hurricane Katrina may turn back the clock on such efforts and shore up racial differences in broad political preferences. It has become accepted journalistic wisdom that the Republican Party's effort to attract Black voters was undermined by the way in which the administration handled the Katrina disaster. Our findings flesh out that conventional wisdom. Both Blacks and Whites were critical of the government's response to the disaster, with a majority rating the performance of the president, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Governor Blanco, and Mayor Nagin as fair or poor. But African Americans were especially critical of the president, even after adjusting for their more liberal beliefs and pro-Democratic political leanings. Furthermore, it is significant that these effects emerge, even holding constant Blacks' political views and socioeconomic status. Regardless of whether Black respondents were conservative or liberal, they were highly critical of the president and the Bush administration. This is not good news for the Republican Party.

Our findings indicate that racial differences could not be accounted for by differences in Blacks' and Whites' differing political views or socioeconomic status. Differences arise instead from simple racial-group membership. But these results are more descriptive than analytic, documenting broad racial differences in reaction to victims and support for solutions to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. It is therefore important that future research examine and test the theoretical explanations for this racial divide.

One intriguing theoretical possibility is that differences are most pronounced among Blacks and Whites who identify most strongly with their racial group. One of the enduring findings of research on groups is that subjective group loyalties (such as racial identity) have far greater political power than does objective group membership (simply being Black or White) in driving political preferences and behavior (Huddy 2003). We have not clearly identified the source of Black racial unity in reaction to Katrina. But such reactions would seem more likely to stem from a shared sense of identity than from shared economic interests, for positive reactions to the hurricane victims are just as common among high- and low-income Blacks. Evidence that subjective racial identities drive observed racial differences would be compatible with social identity theory, which stresses the need for group members to maintain positive regard (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Turner and colleagues have described this motive as a need among group members "to differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 42).

Blacks have an especially strong sense of racial identification in the United States. Tate (1993) used the 1984 and 1988 National Black Elections Studies to examine the political effects of subjective group identification among African Americans (see also Dawson (1994)). She found a strong sense of racial identity among American Blacks, with 56% feeling very close and 38% feeling fairly close to members of their race in 1984; in addition, 75% felt economically interdependent with other Blacks. Bobo and Johnson (2000) confirm that this pervasive sense of race-linked common fate among African Americans is stronger than that observed among Whites, Latinos, or Asians. This evidence raises interesting questions about a possible group-based asymmetry in response to Katrina. Whites clearly sympathize with Blacks affected by Hurricane Katrina, but this sympathy is likely to be weaker politically and less central than that among Blacks. In contrast, feelings of sympathy born from mutual racial identity among Blacks is likely to more powerfully motivate support for hurricane victims and lead to greater outrage at an ineffective government response to the disaster. Future research should examine closely the effects of racial identity and determine the extent to which it accounts for the Black-White

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divide regarding racial policy and racially tinged events such as the response to Katrina.

Future research should also investigate the extent to which a tepid White response to Katrina victims (especially those stranded in New Orleans) can be attributed to the existence of racism among a subset of Whites. There is clear evidence, for example, that Whites vary in their level of racism (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986). And varying White support for Katrina victims is consistent with the notion that some Whites reacted positively and some negatively to the situation in New Orleans. It will be important in future analyses to explore the extent to which there is variance among White reactions to Katrina victims and the government response that may stem from differences in racial beliefs.

Hurricane Katrina wrought untold damage in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Many months after the disaster areas of New Orleans remained ravaged and uninhabited, a large number of hurricane victims remained in temporary housing, many still struggled to get their lives back in order, and residents continued to wrangle with local and federal officials over which parts of the city should be rebuilt. But in addition to the grisly details of everyday life in New Orleans, Katrina reminded Americans of their racial differences. Blacks saw the situation as a racially charged disaster, watching as members of their race died in the streets of New Orleans, were stranded on city overpasses, or left to battle it out on their own in the city's Superdome and Convention Center. For Whites, the situation was less dire. They felt somewhat less empathy than did Blacks for hurricane victims, they saw the victims and the mayor as largely responsible for the situation, and they were willing to abandon low-lying areas of the city. The political fallout from Katrina is far from over, but it has made one thing glaringly obvious: Race is unlikely to disappear any time soon as a powerful source of division within U.S. society.

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NOTES

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2. The poll results discussed in this section are available at ⟨www.pollingreport.com⟩.
3. A maximum of fifteen call attempts were made at each number and an effort made to convert initial refusals; the denominator for cooperation rates includes all numbers at which an interviewer ever spoke to a live person in the household, even with language problems, illness, etc. See the website of the American Association for Public Opinion Research: ⟨www.aapor.org⟩.
4. The re-interview rate for Blacks is lower than for Whites in wave three for two reasons: a longer period of time had elapsed since the previous interview, and low-income households experience a higher rate of interrupted phone service and residential mobility.
5. To obtain the RDD Black sample, telephone exchanges were called in places where there were at least 6% Black residents. The cooperation rate includes success in both screening and completing longer interviews.
6. Living in a hurricane-prone area was assessed by the following question: "Do you live in an area that could be hit by a hurricane?" And knowing someone affected by the hurricane was assessed by the following question: "Do you have any close personal friends or relatives in New Orleans or the Gulf Coast area who were directly affected by the Hurricane or flooding?"
7. Analyses also included controls for age, gender, living in the South, living in a hurricane-prone area, and knowing someone who was affected by Katrina.
8. These characteristics were chosen here (and in subsequent calculations) to represent the average respondent, who differed primarily in terms of race.

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9. These response options were presented to respondents in random order.
10. Since multinomial logit results are lengthy and difficult to interpret, we present the simple frequencies, as they show virtually the same racial differences.

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