

Attributing Blame: The Public's Response to Hurricane Katrina

Neil Malhotra (corresponding author)
Department of Political Science
Stanford University
Encina Hall West, Room 100
Stanford, CA 94305-6044
(408) 772-7969
neilm@stanford.edu

Alexander G. Kuo
Department of Political Science
Stanford University
Encina Hall West, Room 100
Stanford, CA 94305-6044
(317) 370-4266
agkuo@stanford.edu

ABSTRACT

When government fails, whom do citizens blame? Do these assessments rely on biased or content-rich information? Despite the vast literatures on retrospective voting in political science and attribution in psychology, there exists little theory and evidence on how citizens apportion blame among public officials in the wake of government failure. We designed a survey experiment in which respondents ranked seven public officials in order of how much they should be blamed for the property damage and loss of life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We manipulated the information provided to respondents, with some receiving the officials' party affiliations, others receiving their job titles, and others receiving both cues. We find that party cues cause individuals to blame officials of the opposite party, but citizens make more principled judgments when provided with information about officials' responsibilities. These results have implications for our understanding of the impact of heuristics and information on retrospective evaluations of government performance.

The attribution of blame and responsibility is a cornerstone of democratic politics. The contemporary relevance of these issues recently surfaced in debates over whether the Clinton or Bush administration was most responsible for not capturing Osama bin Laden and making America vulnerable to the attacks on September 11th (Hernandez 2006). Similarly, attitudes on the government's duty to provide social services to the poor hinge on beliefs about whether the indigent are to blame for their own circumstances, or are instead victims of societal structures (Kluegel and Smith 1986). And the political fallout of the government's failure to effectively respond to Hurricane Katrina, which is the subject of this article, has primarily dealt with who was to blame for what went wrong—the president, his subordinates, or the state and local officials in Louisiana. The case of Katrina provides a critical example to explore the question of whom citizens blame when government fails to do its job properly. Do citizens blame political leaders with particular official roles and responsibilities, or do they rely on existing attachments and blame officials of the opposite party?

Despite the vast political science literature on retrospective voting (e.g. Ferejohn 1986; Fiorina 1981; Key 1966; Lewis-Beck 1988; Peffley 1984) and the immense psychological literature on attribution (e.g. Gilbert and Malone 1995; Jones and Harris 1967; Schlenker et al. 1994; Shaver 1985), social scientists still do not have a good sense of the determinants of blame in the political context, and how people use information to make such decisions.¹ This paper addresses this omission by testing a series of hypotheses on blame attribution and heuristics using an experiment embedded in a survey on citizen attitudes regarding the response to Hurricane Katrina, which affected several states along the Gulf Coast in August and September 2005. The poor response of federal, state, and local authorities to prepare for and respond to the disaster is a highly salient example of government failure at all levels. Our survey experiment

exposed individuals to differing amounts of information about the seven public officials most involved with the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina. We test the effects of two forms of information about public officials on blame attribution: political party affiliation and job titles (as well as their interaction). We hypothesize that party cues will cause people to blame members of their own party less than members of the opposition party in the wake of administrative failure. However, we also expect that information about the positions of the officials also affects blame, perhaps mitigating partisan bias and resulting in more principled and content-based decisions.

Few theories or empirical data account for what influences people to blame different members of the government when there is widespread failure, which is surprising since attribution is itself an important outcome. The process is a basic one by which individuals can make sense of the world, and it is necessary for the formation of normative judgments and causal beliefs (Shaver 1985). Attribution serves as a psychological “adhesive” that allows individuals to connect events to actors (Rudolph 2003a; Schlenker et al. 1994). Accordingly, understanding what drives variation in such judgments is important for studying the political attitudes and behaviors that necessarily follow, such as opinions on job performance or vote choice.

More substantively, proper blame (and credit) attribution is necessary for citizens in a democracy to hold elected leaders accountable—they must first form an opinion of who should be held responsible for mistakes (and successes) before forming retrospective performance evaluations or casting their ballots. Traditional theories of reward and punishment (e.g. Key 1966; Kramer 1971) presume that voters automatically link outcomes to incumbent politicians, but it is unclear what influences formation of those initial judgments. This process is particularly complex when many public officials at multiple levels of government have a role in consequential outcomes, as is often the case.

In sum, much of the research in the study of retrospective voting examines how the public electorally rewards or punishes the incumbent government in response to economic conditions, but does not consider the first step of how individuals decide whom to initially blame. But these are distinct processes that need to be unpacked. Outcomes do not automatically translate into electoral consequences—the disconnect may be due to the low salience of the outcome, or to citizens’ refusal to attribute responsibility for the event to specific actors, particularly when responsibilities are diffused and events are complicated. Further, it is important to understand whether these judgments regarding blame are biased or reasoned, since they mediate the relationship between events and electoral outcomes. Hence, a closer examination of the *intermediate* step of attribution is required.

This study offers several contributions that build on the existing literature on blame attribution in politics. First, Hurricane Katrina presents a unique opportunity to examine how people evaluate multiple officials at *different* levels of government dealing with the same event. Previous studies address citizen blame of only one political authority (e.g. Achen and Bartels 2002; Arcenaux 2003; Tyler 1982), or consider blame of multiple authorities at the same level of government in narrower policy domains (e.g. Abney and Hill 1966; Arcenaux and Stein 2006; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001; Nicholson et al. 2002). Second, this paper examines attribution of responsibility outside the domain of economic performance, which is the focus almost every other study on the subject (e.g. Hibbing and Alford 1981; Rudolph 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Stein 1990). A non-economic domain such as natural disaster management is especially important to analyze because, as compared to a long-term and complex phenomenon such as the performance of the economy, the event can be isolated temporally and government officials may have greater control over the situation. Third, the extant literature is largely comprised of observational

studies that have identified correlations between various predictors and attributional judgments (e.g. Rudolph 2003a, 2003b; Stein 1990). In this study, we conduct an experiment to isolate the causal effects of multiple, competing pieces of information in attitudes regarding blame. In doing so, we extend the study of partisan bias beyond candidate and policy choice to the domain of blame attribution. Fourth, previous experimental research (e.g. Rudolph 2006) has examined synthetic political actors using subjects of college undergraduates. Our results have enhanced external validity because Hurricane Katrina was an actual event involving real officials, and our subject population is comprised of a random sample of the American population.

The paper is organized as follows. The first and second sections discuss the experimental design and a series of hypotheses to be tested with the data. Sections three and four present the results and discuss their implications for understanding blame attribution and its effects on political behavior.

Experimental Design

To test hypotheses concerning blame attribution, we conducted a survey experiment dealing with seven political officials involved in the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina in the city of New Orleans. The events surrounding Hurricane Katrina provide an excellent example of a nationally significant administrative failure and negative outcome that allows one to arbitrate between competing theories of blame attribution. In the immediate wake of Katrina there was considerable discussion published in the mainstream press over who was responsible for both New Orleans' inadequate preparation for the hurricane and the failure to evacuate more citizens before the storm's landfall. Although politicians had no control over the storm itself, the failure to develop and mobilize infrastructure and to respond efficiently to the disaster likely led to unnecessary death and destruction. Local, state, and federal officials

publicly argued over matters such as the inadequate strength of the levees and confusion over evacuation procedures (Kirkpatrick and Shane 2005; Lipton et al. 2005). Americans across the country, not just those living in the Gulf Coast area, are likely to have been exposed to news coverage of the storm and images of the stranded victims. In an *Associated Press* poll of U.S. news editors and in the Pew Research Center U.S. News Interest Index, Hurricane Katrina was the top world story of 2005 and had two out of ten entries on the list of the most closely followed news stories from 1986 to the present (Kohut, Allen, and Scott 2005). It is possible to test for blame attribution towards all levels of government in the case of Katrina, which would have been less meaningful for previous natural disasters or administrative failures which were more localized (e.g. Abney and Hill 1966; Arceneaux and Stein 2006).

Because Hurricane Katrina is such a unique political event, one potential objection to our study may be that the causes of individual-level blame attribution studied here cannot be generalized. However, understanding blame attribution in the context of such a significant event is important because resulting citizen attitudes are likely to lead to long-lasting changes in political judgments in the domain of disaster management and may influence other policy areas as well. When individuals form political preferences and make actual voting decisions, they recall their attitudes regarding the most salient events. Hence, it is these watershed moments that are important to study. Second, the magnitude of the disaster makes understanding how citizens judged politicians and officials substantively important, independent of long-term consequences.

Conducting a survey experiment exploring people's opinions on the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina offers a remarkably clean test of the sources of blame attribution. The devastation of the storm and the ensuing local, state, and federal response are likely to be extremely prominent in individuals' minds, precluding the need for lengthy explanation. Also,

the variation in partisan affiliation of the various public authorities involved in responding to the hurricane can be exploited to determine under what conditions party identification and other competing factors affect whom citizens blame for the loss of life and property damage.² Finally, studying Katrina allows us to present respondents with actual events and people (as opposed to hypothetical candidates and policies), increasing the external validity of our findings.

The survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN) over the Internet in May 2006, using a nationally representative sample of 397 American adults. KN recruits panel members over the telephone via random digit dialing (RDD) and provides them with WebTV equipment in exchange for their participation in weekly surveys, which they complete online. We sampled all Americans from the KN panel, not simply those directly affected by Hurricane Katrina, because the entire nation formed judgments about the competence of the government officials involved. Several studies have documented the validity of Internet-based surveys, and in some instances, their superiority to telephone-based methods. Dennis and Li (2001) and Dennis et al. (2005) find that KN panels do not create specific “panel effects” which would bias survey responses, nor does panel attrition lead to selection bias. In a direct comparison between a telephone-based RDD survey and an Internet-administered survey conducted by KN, Chang and Krosnick (2002) find that differences between telephone and Internet samples in terms of distributions of variables or data quality were rarely large, and that reports of attitudes collected over the Internet had higher predictive validity than reports of attitudes collected over the telephone. Further details regarding the methodology of respondent recruitment and fielding practices are provided in Online Appendix A.

In this experiment, each respondent was asked to *rank* seven public officials in order of how much they should be blamed for the property damage and loss of life caused by Hurricane

Katrina in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. The public officials available for the respondents to rank were Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco (Democrat), Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Michael Brown (Republican), President George W. Bush (Republican), Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff (Republican), New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin (Democrat), Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu (Democrat), and Louisiana Senator David Vitter (Republican).

The respondents were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups, which differ along two dimensions with respect to the information contained in the response options: whether each public official in the ranking list is associated with his/her office title, and whether the official is given a party affiliation. These two dimensions constitute the four experimental groups (see Table 1). The control group only received the list of seven proper names without any additional information. Group 2, the “party cues” condition, received the list of proper names with each official’s partisan affiliation. Group 3, the “office cues” condition, received the list of proper names with each official’s job title. Group 4, the “both cues” condition, received the list of proper names with each official’s partisan affiliation *and* job title. For all respondents, the order of the names on each list of officials was randomized.³

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The main dependent variable is the blame ranking assigned to each public official by the respondent.⁴ Respondents were asked: “Who do you think should be blamed the most for the loss of life and property damage in New Orleans that was caused by Hurricane Katrina?” followed by the list of seven officials. As explained above, the survey response options vary with respect to whether information about party affiliation and/or job title is provided. After selecting an official, respondents were then asked: “Who do you think should be blamed the

second most for the loss of life and property damage in New Orleans that was caused by Hurricane Katrina?” A series of six questions was asked until respondents had ranked all seven officials.⁵ In the regression analyses that follow, rankings were coded to lie between 1 (least blame) and 7 (most blame). In this way, higher values of the dependent variable intuitively represent “more” blame.

Admittedly, the experiment cannot provide evidence on the impact of cues and attributions on retrospective voting. An explicit analysis of vote choice in the context of Hurricane Katrina is not possible because Bush is term-limited, Chertoff and Brown are not elected officials, and very few respondents were constituents of the Louisiana politicians. However, previous research has suggested that attributions affect evaluations of incumbent performance (e.g. Peffley 1984; Rudolph 2003b), and that overall and domain-specific performance ratings influence vote choice (e.g. Fiorina 1981; Hetherington 1996; Malhotra and Krosnick 2007). Hence, our findings are at least suggestive of the mediational relationship between information use, blame attribution, and retrospective voting.

Online Appendix B presents question wordings, response options, and coding procedures for all variables in the analyses. Unless otherwise noted, all variables are coded to lie between 0 and 1, so that variables measured on different scales have the same range. All moderating variables (e.g. personal importance, demographics) were asked prior to the ranking task, meaning that they were unaffected by the treatments.

Hypotheses

In this section, we present a series of hypotheses regarding two major questions concerning the causes of blame attribution.

Does Partisanship Bias Blame Attribution?

Party identification has been found to affect how citizens formulate attitudes and make political decisions. Individuals vote overwhelmingly for candidates of their own party (Campbell et al. 1960) and base their own issue positions on perceptions of their party's stands on those issues (Jacoby 1988; Layman and Carsey 2002). Many experimental studies have demonstrated that party identification provides a heuristic cue for individuals when evaluating political candidates and policy positions (Cohen 2003; Goren 2002; Kam 2005; Rahn 1993; Skitka and Robideau 1997). Such party cues also affect individual perceptions of the political world (Bartels 2002). Rudolph (2003a, 2003b, 2006) also finds that partisan biases affect responsibility attribution for economic performance. We expect to observe similar findings with respect to whom citizens blame for government failure at multiple levels. This may be the consequence of people gaining information about officials they did not previously have, or making information they already had more accessible and salient. Because party identification of officials should not reveal much substantive information regarding officials' capacities to respond to natural catastrophes, individual use of party cues in this policy context can be considered a biased heuristic.

Hypothesis 1: *Republicans/Democrats should be more likely to blame Democratic/Republican officials when provided with party cues.*

How Do Competing Pieces of Information Influence Blame?

Unlike party cues, the office cues provide information that is policy relevant and content-rich, since individuals may have prior beliefs about which offices and levels of government should be most responsible for preparing for and responding to disasters. Presumably, citizens associate different public offices with different responsibilities; some offices are more relevant than others depending on the nature of the administrative failure or problem. Even if people are

not this sophisticated, they may still follow the reasonable logic of punishing the “bosses,” or the people they view as being the managers of the disaster. Unlike party identification, office titles offer more specific and content-rich information to citizens with which to formulate principled attitudes.

In the case of electoral candidates and public policies (the foci of previous studies of party cues), party labels provide relevant information as to whether an individual should offer his or her support. With respect to blame attribution towards a highly significant disaster, this is not necessarily the case. And unlike a job title, an official’s party identification provides no relevant information regarding his or her *responsibilities*. Whereas party cues may bias blame attribution, office cues may assist citizens in making judgments regarding blame when they have incomplete information, or if such information is not prominent in their minds. Although we cannot predict with certainty which offices people will view as more blameworthy, we can use the “both cues” condition to assess whether people relied more on the office titles or the party labels to assign blame. Given the extensive empirical evidence showing the importance of party identification on political decision-making, the party cue should presumably dominate the office cue. However, due to the paucity of existing theory and evidence on this topic, we do not make firm predictions.

Hypothesis 2a: *When provided with both the party cue and office cue, the party cue should dominate.*

Hypothesis 2b: *When provided with both the party cue and office cue, the office cue should dominate.*

Hypothesis 2c: *When provided with both the party cue and office cue, then the effect of the combined cue should be a mixture of the effects of the individual cues.*

We evaluate Hypotheses 2a-2c by comparing the estimated treatment effect of the “both cues” condition to the separate “party cue” and “office cue” conditions. This can be done via visual inspection and formally. Informally, if the effect of the combined condition is similar to the party/office cue in isolation, then we conclude that party/office cues dominated. On the other hand, if the coefficient estimate for the “both cues” condition is between the estimates of the other two conditions, then we conclude that “mixing” occurred. The formal tests of the hypotheses are described in the next section.

Methods

In this section, we discuss the methods of analysis used to test the hypotheses described above using the experimental data. We first discuss the *rank-ordered logit* models used to test the hypotheses pooling across officials, allowing us to make general inferences. We then describe the *ordered logit* models used to examine the blame of individual officials.

Because the data we are analyzing were generated by asking respondents to rank a set of items, we employ the rank-ordered logit model, also known as the “exploded logit” model (Allison and Christakis 1994; Beggs, Cardell, and Hausman 1981; Chapman and Staelin 1982). Interested readers can consult the original articles for methodological details; we describe here the intuition behind the model as well as a basic formal presentation.

The rank-ordered logit model is a generalization of conditional/multinomial logit models, which are used to model discrete choices of individuals selecting among a group of unordered items. These models help explain how the characteristics of the *choosers* and the *items* affect the likelihood of the items being selected. The process of ranking is an aggregation of these individual choices. For instance, when individuals are ranking a set of seven items, their selection of the item to be ranked first is equivalent to selecting one item from the seven. Their

selection of the item to be ranked second is equivalent to selecting one item from the remaining six, and so on. Here the items are the individual political officials. Hence, ranked data can be statistically modeled by combining together a set of conditional logit models to create the rank-ordered logit model.⁶

Formally, we assume that the data are derived from a random utility model where BR_{ij} represents the latent blame respondent i has for official j (out of J officials). We observe Y_{ij} , which is the blame ranking respondent i assigns to official j .⁷ Although BR_{ij} is unobserved, we assume that respondent i ranks official j more blameworthy than official k if $BR_{ij} > BR_{ik}$. Each BR_{ij} is modeled as having a systematic component (μ_{ij}) and a random component (ε_{ij}):

$$BR_{ij} = \beta_1 R_j + \beta_2 (R_j \times I_i) + \beta_3 (R_j \times P_i) + \beta_4 (R_j \times I_i \times P_i) + \beta_5 (R_j \times O_i) + \beta_6 (R_j \times I_i \times O_i) + \beta_7 (R_j \times B_i) + \beta_8 (R_j \times I_i \times B_i) + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where R_j is a dummy variable representing whether the official j is a Republican, I_i is a dummy variable representing whether the individual respondent i is a Republican, P_i is the treatment dummy for the “party cue” condition, O_i is the treatment dummy for the “office cue” condition, B_i is the treatment dummy for “both cues” condition, and ε_i represents stochastic error that is distributed double-exponential.⁸ We pool officials into a single variable based on their party affiliations to leverage statistical power and make general inferences about cue effects.

However, as discussed below, we also evaluate substantively interesting results with respect to specific officials. The condition dummies are indexed by respondent because the treatment was administered at the individual level and does not vary by official. Conversely, R_j is indexed by official because their party affiliations are the same for each respondent. The model implies the likelihood, L_i , of a respondent ranking official k as more blameworthy than official j . Let $\delta_{ijk} = 1$ if $Y_{ik} \geq Y_{ij}$ and 0 if $Y_{ik} < Y_{ij}$. Then,

$$L_i = \prod_{j=1}^J \left[\frac{\exp(\mu_{ij})}{\sum_{k=1}^J \delta_{ijk} \exp(\mu_{ik})} \right]. \quad (2)$$

As shown in equation (2), the likelihood of the rank-ordered logit model is simply the product of the likelihoods of individual conditional logit models.

The substantive interpretation of the coefficients in equation (1) is as follows:

β_1 and $\beta_1 + \beta_2$ represent the likelihood of Democrats and Republicans, respectively, in the control group ranking a Republican official higher than a Democratic official in terms of blameworthiness. Accordingly, we expect β_1 to be positive and $\beta_1 + \beta_2$ to be negative because Republicans should blame officials of their own party less than Democratic officials.

β_3 and $\beta_3 + \beta_4$ represent the likelihood of Democrats and Republicans, respectively, in the “party cue” condition ranking a Republican official more as blameworthy than a Democratic official, as compared to the control group. According to Hypothesis 1, β_3 should be positive because Democrats’ blame for opposing partisans should be even greater for those exposed to the party cues. Conversely, we expect $\beta_3 + \beta_4$ to be negative for Republicans.

β_5 and $\beta_5 + \beta_6$ represent the likelihood of Democrats and Republicans, respectively, in the “office cue” condition ranking a Republican official higher than a Democratic official, as compared to the control group. We have no *a priori* expectations for the signs of these coefficients. However, as explained above, comparing the effect of receiving both cues (β_7 and $\beta_7 + \beta_8$) to each cue in isolation allows us to ascertain which piece of information dominated in the attribution process. In other words, to what extent does information about official responsibilities dilute partisan bias?

Formally, we compare the treatment effects of the office and party cues against the effect

of receiving both cues via Wald chi-square tests testing two null hypotheses regarding linear combinations of the coefficients from equation (1). For Democrats, the null hypotheses are:

$$H_0: \beta_7 - \beta_3 = 0 \quad (3)$$

$$H_0: \beta_7 - \beta_5 = 0 \quad (4)$$

For Republicans, the null hypotheses are:

$$H_0: (\beta_7 + \beta_8) - (\beta_3 + \beta_4) = 0 \quad (5)$$

$$H_0: (\beta_7 + \beta_8) - (\beta_5 + \beta_6) = 0 \quad (6)$$

By comparing the “both cues” group to the “party cues” group, equations (3) and (5) test whether the addition of the office cue to the party cue significantly affects blame attribution. If it does not, then we conclude that the party cue dominates. Similarly, equations (4) and (6) inform us of office cue domination. Hence, failing to reject (3)/(5) and rejecting (4)/(6) provides evidence for party cue domination, consistent with Hypothesis 2a. On the other hand, rejecting (3)/(5) and failing to reject (4)/(6) provides evidence for office cue domination, consistent with Hypothesis 2b. Rejecting *both* null hypotheses would offer support of a “mixing” effect, meaning neither condition dominates, consistent with Hypothesis 2c. Finally, if we fail to reject both null hypotheses (most likely due to wide confidence intervals around the point estimates of the coefficients), then the results are inconclusive and we cannot determine if there was cue domination or mixing.

We also estimated equation (1) including $R_j\mathbf{x}_i$, where \mathbf{x}_i is a vector of demographic controls (age, education, race, gender, region, and liberal-conservative ideology). As discussed below, the estimated treatment effects were nearly identical when controlling for demographics.

An advantage of the rank-ordered logit model is that it allows us to pool responses and make general inferences about the treatment effects. However, examining blame towards the

seven individual officials is also substantively interesting and allows us to pinpoint the sources of the general results. Accordingly, we estimated the following ordered logistic regression model for each official, indexed by each respondent, i :

$$\text{logit}(BR_{ij}) = \alpha_j + \beta_0 I_i + \beta_{p1} P_i + \beta_{o1} O_i + \beta_{b1} B_i + \beta_{p2}(I_i \times P_i) + \beta_{o2}(I_i \times O_i) + \beta_{b2}(I_i \times B_i) + \gamma \mathbf{x}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (7)$$

where BR_{ij} represents the blame ranking towards the official for ranks $j = 1, \dots, 7$, and the other variables are defined as above. For Democrats, the treatment effects of the party and office cues are simply the estimates of β_{p1} and β_{o1} , respectively. These are the coefficients associated with the condition dummies not interacted with the Republican dummy. For Republicans, the treatment effects for the two cues are estimated by the sum of the coefficients associated with the treatment conditions and the coefficients associated with the interaction terms: $\beta_{p1} + \beta_{p2}$ and $\beta_{o1} + \beta_{o2}$. As with the rank-ordered logit model, we can evaluate Hypotheses 2a-2c concerning cue domination using linear hypotheses tests. For Democrats, the null hypotheses are:

$$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{p1} = 0 \quad (8)$$

$$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{o1} = 0 \quad (9)$$

For Republicans, the null hypotheses are:

$$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{p1} + \beta_{p2}) = 0 \quad (10)$$

$$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{o1} + \beta_{o2}) = 0 \quad (11)$$

Results

Before testing the hypotheses, we checked to see if random assignment was successful. For all variables used in our analyses, there were no significant differences between treatment conditions, either in statistical or substantive terms. Randomization checks are provided in Online Appendix C.

How Did Individuals Distribute Blame After Hurricane Katrina?

Before discussing the treatment effects, we describe how citizens distributed blame among the seven officials following Hurricane Katrina, an important substantive question in its own right. Table 2 presents the average blame ranking of the seven officials for Democrats and Republicans in the control group, who did not receive any cue, as well as the marginal distributions of whom respondents blamed most and least. Unlike the regression analyses, for presentational purposes, we coded lower numbers in Table 2 to correspond to *higher* blameworthiness because a rank of “1” indicates that the respondent found the official to be most to blame. The most striking result is that partisanship substantially affected whom citizens blamed for the effects of Katrina. Republicans and Democrats observed the same events through different lenses, underscoring the importance of party attachments in explaining reactions to Hurricane Katrina. However, interesting deviations from this overall pattern did emerge.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Democrats attributed most blame to President Bush, with 65.5% of respondents saying he was “most to blame” for the loss of life and property damage in New Orleans. Moreover, the average blame ranking for Bush was 2.26, which is significantly higher than the second most blamed official, FEMA Director Brown, who received an average ranking of 3.42 ($p=.002$). Conversely, Democrats blamed Senator Landrieu and Governor Blanco, both Democrats, least among the seven officials. The Republican officials Brown and Secretary Chertoff are blamed highly by Democrats, whereas Senator Vitter is among the least-blamed officials, perhaps because of his legislative position or perhaps due to his low name recognition. Republicans, on the other hand, distributed their blame more evenly. Although they blamed Democratic Mayor Nagin most (35.1% thought he was “most to blame” and he received an average blame ranking of 2.87), a surprisingly large 21.6% of Republicans found President Bush most to blame. This

may help to explain the deterioration of Bush's approval rating among conservatives and moderates post-Katrina (Stolberg 2006).

Republicans may have also used Michael Brown as a scapegoat, with 16.2% believing that he was most to blame. This could be because they did not know Brown's party affiliation or because Bush sent a signal by firing him and providing Republicans with the easy target needed to shift blame away from the Administration. These results are consistent with McGraw's (1990, 1991) discussion of "excuse-giving" as a potential blame management strategy. But here, the incumbent administration apparently used the lower-level officials to blunt public blame. The data do not allow us to precisely test this hypothesis, but the high blame of Brown among co-partisans suggests that shifting blame to other officials could be a viable management strategy.

These findings also indicate that respondents had some prior information about the officials. There exist significant differences in blame between Republicans and Democrats for various officials (as well as for the average blame ranking of Republican officials) in the absence of party cues. Further, both senators escape blame among both groups of partisans, suggesting that respondents felt that legislators should not be held responsible for failures on the part of executive agencies. Hence, any treatment effects can be considered quite substantial considering that they contribute additional effects beyond respondents' initial blame attribution (as represented by the control group).

Does Partisanship Bias Blame Attribution?

We find that party cues significantly influence whom respondents blame for the damage and death caused by Hurricane Katrina, providing support for Hypothesis 1. Table 3 presents the coefficient estimates from equation (1), with and without demographic and political controls. As shown in the third through eighth rows of the table, the inclusion of control variables does not

significantly change the estimates of the treatment effects. For simplicity, we describe the results from the model which excludes controls, presented in the first column of Table 3.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

For Democrats, the effect of the party cue on blame is statistically significant ($\beta_3 = .56$, $p = .005$). When given information about party labels, Democrats were significantly more likely to blame Republican officials and significantly less likely to blame Democratic officials (as compared to the control group). Moreover, this result is substantively large (in terms of the odds) in addition to being statistically significant. Compared to the control group, receiving the party cue makes Democratic respondents 1.75 times more likely to blame Republican officials. Among Republicans, the party cue also significantly affects blame attribution ($\beta_3 + \beta_4 = -.39$, $p = .07$). Compared to the control group, receiving the party cue makes Republican respondents about 1.48 times *less* likely to blame Republican officials. Further, the size of the treatment effects were not significantly different for Democrats and Republicans ($|\beta_3| - |\beta_3 + \beta_4| = .17$, $p = .56$). People appear to use party affiliation as a heuristic in determining how to attribute blame to government officials, similar to the way they do when evaluating candidates and public policies.

We can also examine the results by individual official to assess which figures were driving the party cue effects described above. Table 4 presents ordered logistic regression predicting the blame ranking of each of the seven officials. When given information about party labels, Democrats were significantly more likely to blame Bush (a Republican) and significantly less likely to blame Landrieu (a Democrat). On the other hand, Republicans were significantly more likely to blame Landrieu and Nagin (both Democrats) and significantly less likely to blame Brown (a Republican).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

An examination of individual officials provides evidence that the party cues both provide individuals with new information and make existing information more salient and accessible. As seen in Table 2, the difference in the average blame ranking for Michael Brown between Republicans and Democrats in the control group is statistically insignificant, suggesting that respondents did not have strong prior information on Brown's party affiliation. However, as discussed above, receiving the party labels causes Republicans to blame Brown significantly less, suggesting that the cue provided information that respondents did not previously have. On the other hand, in the control group, Democrats blamed Bush significantly more than Republicans did. This is unsurprising since respondents likely knew that the president was a Republican. However, the fact that Democrats in the "party cue" condition blamed Bush more than those in the control group suggests that the cue made Bush's party label more salient and accessible since it probably did not provide any new information.

With respect to individual-level variation in the use of the party cues, we find that respondents for whom Hurricane Katrina was personally important were less likely to be affected by the party cues. We measured personal importance by asking respondents: "How personally important to you were the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina?" with response choices ranging from "extremely important" to "not important at all." Following previous research (e.g. Krosnick 1988, 1989), we considered respondents for whom Katrina was "extremely" or "very" important as being "high" in importance. We then estimated equation (1) separately for high and low importance respondents.⁹ Democrats and Republicans for whom the event was important exhibited statistically insignificant treatment effects ($\beta_3 = .29, p=.36$ for Democrats, $\beta_3 + \beta_4 = -.12, p=.71$ for Republicans). Conversely, respondents from whom the event was personally

unimportant blamed opposing partisans significantly more when exposed to the party labels ($\beta_3 = .74, p=.005$ for Democrats, $\beta_3 + \beta_4 = -.58, p=.04$ for Republicans). These treatment effects substantively correspond to a 2.10 times increase in blaming Republican officials for Democratic respondents, and a 1.79 times decrease for Republican respondents. These findings are consistent with Krosnick (1988, 1989), who found that personal importance causes preexisting information to be more salient and accessible, precluding the need for heuristics such as party affiliation.

How Do Competing Pieces of Information Influence Blame?

We now examine the consequences of exposure to the “both cues” condition as compared to the party and office cues in isolation in order to assess which piece of information dominated in blame attribution. We generally find that the office cues mitigated partisan rationalization induced by the party cues. As explained above, we evaluate the null hypotheses of the linear parameter combinations in equations (3)-(6) to assess cue domination. However, as shown in Table 3, among Republicans, the party and office cue effects were in the same direction (blaming Republican officials less) and of similar magnitude. Because the cues affected blame in the same direction, it is difficult to adjudicate which cue dominated. On the other hand, Democrats exhibited divergent reactions to the cues. Whereas they blamed Republican officials *more* after being exposed to their party labels ($\beta_3 = .56, p=.005$, 1.75 times increase in the odds), they blamed these officials *less* after learning of their titles ($\beta_5 = -.37, p=.04$, 1.45 times decrease in the odds). Hence, we are able to assess cue domination among Democrats using the “both cues” condition. However, as explained below, we can make inferences about Republican respondents by examining the results official by official.

Contrary to existing research on partisan bias, party cue domination was generally not

observed. The results of the linear hypotheses tests for the full sample are presented in the top panel of Table 5. Among Democratic respondents, we find evidence of mixing ($\beta_7 - \beta_3 = -.51$, $p=.02$ and $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = .43$, $p=.03$), consistent with Hypothesis 3c. In other words, *both* the party cue and the office cue significantly affected blame attribution compared to each competing cue in isolation. We observe similar results when examining the blame of individual officials (see the top panel of Table 6). Among Democratic respondents, we find office cue domination for three officials, party cue domination for two officials, and inconclusive results for two officials.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

For Republicans, even though the party and office cue effects were in the same *general* direction, we can examine individual officials to assess cue domination. As shown in Table 6, among Republicans, the office cue dominates in four instances, with inconclusive results for the remaining three officials. In no case did we observe party cue domination.

The cleanest tests to evaluate Hypotheses 3a-3c are the cases in which the effects of the party and office cues, in isolation, are in opposite directions. For Democrats and Republicans, we examine the regressions predicting blame of Bush and Brown, respectively. When presented the cues individually, Democrats blamed Bush more when presented with the party cue and less when presented with the office cue (see Table 4). On the other hand, Republicans blamed Brown less when presented with his party affiliation and more when presented with his official title. In both cases, we observed office cue domination (see the top panel of Table 6). In the “both cues” condition, Democrats blamed Bush less and Republicans blamed Brown more, suggesting a reliance on information regarding responsibilities, and a dilution of the effects of the party labels. Hence, in the cases in which treatment effects diverge, party cues do not overwhelm blame

attribution.

These effects are not simply isolated among the most educated respondents. The bottom two panels of Table 5 reproduce the linear hypotheses tests of the rank-ordered logit models for Democrats with a high school diploma or less and those with education beyond high school.¹⁰ Among highly educated respondents, we find evidence of office cue domination ($\beta_7 - \beta_3 = -.52$, $p=.06$ and $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = .11$, $p=.66$), consistent with Hypothesis 3b. Among those with lower levels of education, mixing occurred ($\beta_7 - \beta_3 = -.55$, $p=.10$ and $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = .82$, $p=.004$). Although respondents with more education were able to solely utilize the more policy-relevant piece of information, in neither subgroup was the party cue overwhelming. Further, when examining the officials individually for both groups of partisans, office cue domination was not solely observed among highly educated respondents (see the bottom two panels of Table 6).

These findings have important implications for our understanding of the resiliency of party cues, both in the context of blame attribution and broader political behavior. In the vast majority of our analyses of the “both cues” condition, the office cue either diluted or dominated the effect of the party cue. This suggests that citizens are not absolute party loyalists, blind to relevant information, consistent with recent research (Gerber and Green 1998; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Instead, respondents took into account the positions of the officials and used that information to form a reasoned opinion (or at least used it to reduce the bias of the party cue). Our findings point to the fragility of party cues and the ability of citizens to formulate more reasoned political attitudes with limited information. Even if these findings are the result of the citizens having strong priors about party affiliation and the office cues providing “new” information, it is still notable that individuals incorporated novel, relevant data into their decision-making.

Of course, the use of office cues may not be evidence of extremely high political sophistication. As mentioned above, people may simply want to hold the “bosses,” or the managers, accountable. Yet, we consider this reasoning normatively superior to partisan-based attribution, which is devoid of consideration of the responsibilities of various levels of government. In other words, although use of party and office cues may both be simplistic, use of the latter more closely approximates the democratic ideal of retrospective accountability.

Discussion

In this analysis, we sought to advance the literature on retrospection and blame attribution in the political context, as well as provide a substantive account of citizens’ responses in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We tested and confirmed a series of hypotheses, demonstrating that citizens of all levels of political sophistication utilize content-rich, relevant information to mitigate partisan bias in determining who is responsible when government actors fail to perform their duties competently. Further, we show that individual characteristics such as the personal importance of the issue make people less reliant on party labels to make informed decisions regarding blame. Our results give us reason to be cautiously optimistic about the capacity of citizens to make unbiased blame attributions, an important responsibility in democratic systems. Although citizens do not appear to be the objective processors of information envisioned by Kramer (1971), they are also not the myopic stooges characterized by Achen and Bartels (2002). In other words, we find that people do the best with the information they have.

We hope this paper lays a foundation for future studies of retrospective voting. Foremost, our results suggest that examining electoral accountability requires further theoretical consideration of attribution. As discussed above, there exist conditions under which certain types of information bias judgments of responsibility. Do these attitudes translate into biased

vote choices as well, or are electoral rewards and punishments properly delivered to incumbents? Does this depend on the complexity of the policy issues at hand, the salience of the events, and successful blame management strategies on the part of incumbent politicians? Future experimental and observational research can address these questions through a unified consideration of both the causes and consequences of attributions.

This project also demonstrates the value of expanding the study of retrospective voting beyond the well-trodden domain of economic evaluations of the president and Congress to non-economic events that permeate the national, state, and local levels. Economic conditions often result from the actions of innumerable actors over many points in time, and are therefore substantively different from salient episodes such as Hurricane Katrina, which are temporally self-contained and over which government may have greater control. Hence, studies of retrospection can benefit from studying *events* as well as *conditions*.

Similarly complex and influential events—such as the Iraq war and terrorist attacks such as those on September 11th—present fertile territories for further investigation. The question of how attributions in response to such events interact with or trump assessments of economic performance also provides a fruitful research agenda. Hence, we echo the conclusions of a recent article by Berry and Powell (2007), who examine how educational outcomes affect school board contests at the local level. Future research on retrospection would benefit greatly through the exploration of non-economic events and conditions, as well as a consideration of how citizens apportion responsibility at different levels in the American federal system.

With respect to blame attribution itself, our findings suggest possible extensions and additional tests to better understand the role of information cues and partisan bias, as well as other potential causes. First, future studies might better test whether party (and other) cues

provide new information or simply make existing information more salient and accessible, perhaps by measuring respondent priors and allowing enough time to pass before the administration of the treatment. Second, given that ballot designs in the real world resemble the experimental treatments administered here (i.e. they vary with respect to information provided about job titles and party affiliations), it is possible that design choice affects electoral decisions (see Ansolabehere et al. 2006).¹¹ Third, future studies might consider credit attribution and how it differs from blame. In the wake of positive outcomes, do citizens use party cues to credit co-partisans? Finally, new operationalizations of the dependent variable using open-ended survey questions that allow citizens to assign “credit” or “blame” or perhaps apportion percentage values of “total blame” may allow for more precise testing of the cognitive mechanisms at work.

One of the primary responsibilities of democratic citizens is to use the ballot box to hold public officials accountable for their mistakes. Although the bulk of the literature on retrospective voting has focused on electoral reward and punishment in response to the performance of the economy, there has been surprisingly little research on the crucial prior causal step of the attribution of blame among specific political officials. We have found interesting variation in who uses different types of information to attribute blame to political leaders, but generally find that Americans are well-equipped to handle the important task of appropriately holding incumbents responsible when they fail to do their jobs properly. Hopefully, the results of this study not only help us better understand the important case of Hurricane Katrina but also show that understanding the causes and consequences of whom citizens blame when government fails is an area worth further investigation.

Notes

The data collection was funded by Timeshare Experiments in the Social Sciences (TESS). We thank Diana Mutz of TESS and Poom Nukulij of Knowledge Networks for their time and assistance. We also acknowledge Paul Sniderman, Jon Krosnick, Alexander Tahk, Matt Levendusky, John Bullock, Morris Fiorina, Jed Stiglitz, and Daniel Schneider for valuable suggestions.

1. A rich psychological literature also examines causes of blame attribution, but few articles study the political context. The focus has been on cognitive mechanisms used in health, workplace, or domestic situations. For example, Kay et al. (2005) argue that “blaming the system” is one response to people’s perception of individual failure. Regarding salient policy failures such as disaster response, some argue that blame attribution occurs because of individual desires for belief in control and the possibility that future disasters can be averted (Bucher 1957; Wortman 1976).
2. Louisiana has one Democratic and one Republican senator, allowing us to control for public office and isolate the impact of party affiliation.
3. Previous research has found evidence that candidates listed higher on the ballot receive electoral benefit (Imai and Ho 2006; Miller and Krosnick 1998). To eliminate ballot order effects, we randomize the order of officials.
4. An alternative to asking respondents to rank order the seven officials would have been to ask them to rate the seven officials on a five-point scale of performance. Ranking questions are more time consuming but reduce the chance that respondents will “satisfice” by providing the same response for all officials. Hence, the ranking format allows for more differentiation in individual preferences (Alwin and Krosnick 1985). Moreover, unlike rating scales, a ranking task allowed us to examine the *interdependence* of citizen attitudes; a respondent could only increase an official’s blame ranking by decreasing another’s.
5. We dropped respondents who either completely skipped or did not complete the ranking task.

This accounted for only 9.1% of the sample. We estimated a logistic regression predicting completion with a set of demographic and political variables: party identification, ideology, region, education, age, gender, race, and marital status. None of the coefficients were individually or jointly statistically significant at the $p=.05$ level, providing reassurance that the respondents who did not complete the ranking task were not systematically different from those who did.

6. The rank-ordered logit model is especially appropriate for analyzing these data because the ranking task mirrors the behavioral assumptions underlying the model. As explained above, respondents first chose the most blameworthy official, and then sequentially selected officials they believed to be less and less blameworthy until the ranking task was completed.

7. As explained above, for the regression analyses, we coded blame to lie between 1 (least blame) to 7 (most blame). However, the rank-ordered logit model is not invariant to a reversal in the coding of the rankings. Consequently, we reestimated all models with a reversed coding of blame and the results were statistically and substantively similar to those reported in this paper.

8. We do not include the constituent terms I_i , P_i , O_i , and B_i , because they do not vary across choices within individuals.

9. Estimates from these equations (both including and excluding demographic controls) can be found in Online Appendix D. We present results from equations excluding demographic controls, although the results are statistically and substantively similar with the controls included.

10. Estimates from equation (1) by level of education (both including and excluding demographic controls) can be found in Online Appendix D. We present results from equations excluding demographic controls, although the results are statistically and substantively similar with the controls included.

11. Further, as citizens gain the ability to vote in elections over the Internet (as foreshadowed by recent initiatives by the European Union), the findings from Internet surveys, such as the one presented in this paper, will gain external validity.

References

- Abney, F. Glenn, and Larry B. Hill. 1966. "Natural Disasters as a Political Variable: The Effect of a Hurricane on an Urban Election." *American Political Science Review* 60(4): 974-981.
- Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2002. "Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to Drought, Flu, and Shark Attacks." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston.
- Allison, Paul D., and Nicholas A. Christakis. 1994. "Logit Models for Sets of Ranked Items." *Sociological Methodology* 24: 198-228.
- Alwin, Duane F., and Jon A. Krosnick. 1985. "The Measurement of Values in Surveys: A Comparison of Ratings and Rankings." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49(4): 535-552.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shigeo Hirano, James M. Snyder, and Michiko Ueda. 2006. "Party and Incumbency Cues in Voting: Are They Substitutes?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1(2): 119-137.
- Arceneaux, Kevin. 2003. "The Conditional Impact of Blame Attribution on the Relationship Between Economic Adversity and Turnout." *Political Research Quarterly* 56(1): 67-75.
- Arceneaux, Kevin, and Robert M. Stein. 2006. "Who Is Held Responsible When Disaster Strikes? The Attribution of Responsibility for a Natural Disaster in an Urban Election." *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 28(1): 43-53.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2002. "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions." *Political Behavior* 24(2): 117-150.
- Beggs, Steven, Scott Cardell, and Jerry Hausman. 1981. "Assessing the Potential Demand for Electric Cars." *Journal of Econometrics* 17(1): 1-19.
- Berry, Christopher R., and William Howell. 2007. "Accountability and Local Elections:

Malhotra and Kuo

Rethinking Retrospective Voting." *The Journal of Politics* 69(3): 844-858.

Bucher, Rue. 1957. "Blame and Hostility in Disaster." *American Journal of Sociology* 62(5): 467-475.

Campbell, Angus, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.

Chang LinChiat, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2002. "Comparing Self-Administered Computer Surveys and Auditory Interviews: An Experiment." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, St. Petersburg, FL.

Chapman, Randall G., and Richard Staelin. 1982. "Exploiting Rank Ordered Choice Set Data Within the Stochastic Utility Model." *Journal of Marketing Research* 19(3): 288-301.

Cohen, Geoffrey L. 2003. "Party over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85(5): 807-822.

Dennis, J. Michael, Cindy Chatt, Rick Li, Alicia Motta-Stanko, and Paul Pulliam. 2005. "Data Collection Mode Effects Controlling for Sample Origins in a Panel Survey: Telephone versus Internet." Typescript.

Dennis, J. Michael, and Rick Li. 2001. "Are Internet Panels Creating Professional Respondents? The Benefits of Online Panels Far Outweigh the Potential for Panel Effects." *Marketing Research Summer*: 34-38.

Ferejohn, John. 1986. "Incumbent Performance and Electoral Control." *Public Choice* 50(1): 5-25.

Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. 1998. "Rational Learning and Partisan Attitudes."

- American Journal of Political Science* 42(3): 794-818.
- Gilbert, Daniel T. and Patrick S. Malone. 1995. "The Correspondence Bias." *Psychological Bulletin* 117(1): 21-38.
- Goren, Paul. 2002. "Character Weakness, Partisan Bias, and Presidential Evaluation." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(3): 627-641.
- Green, Donald, Brad Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Haider-Markel, Donald P., and Mark R. Joslyn. 2001. "Gun Policy, Opinion, Tragedy, and Blame Attribution: The Conditional Influence of Issue Frames." *Journal of Politics* 63(2): 520-543.
- Hernandez, Raymond. 2006. "The 2006 Campaign: Candidates and Issues; With Administrations Bickering Over Terrorism, Senator Clinton Joins the Fray." *New York Times*, 27 September, sec. A.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 1996. "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(2): 372-395.
- Hibbing, John R., and John R. Alford. 1981. "The Electoral Impact of Economic Conditions: Who is Held Responsible?" *American Journal of Political Science* 25(3): 423-439.
- Imai, Kosuke, and Daniel E. Ho. 2006. "Randomization Inference with Natural Experiments: An Analysis of Ballot Effects in the 2003 California Recall Election." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 101(475): 888-900.
- Jacoby, William G. 1988. "The Impact of Party Identification on Issue Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 32(3): 643-661.
- Jones, Edward E., and Victor A. Harris. 1967. "The Attribution of Attitudes." *Journal of*

- Experimental Social Psychology* 3(1): 1-24.
- Kam, Cindy. 2005. "Who Toes the Party Line? Cues, Values, and Individual Differences."
Political Behavior 27(2): 163-182.
- Kay, Aaron C., John T. Jost, and Sean Young. 2005. "Victim Derogation and Victim Enhancement as Alternate Routes to System Justification." *Psychological Science* 16(3): 240-246.
- Key, V.O. 1966. *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, David D., and Scott Shane. 2005. "Ex-Fema Chief Tells of Frustration and Chaos."
New York Times, 15 September, sec. A.
- Cluegel, James R., and Eliot R. Smith. 1986. *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Kohut, Andrew, Jodie T. Allen, and Scott Keeter. 2005. "What Was-and Wasn't on the Public's Mind And How Opinions Changed During 2005." Pew Research Center. <http://people-press.org/commentary/display.php3?AnalysisID=125>.
- Kramer, Gerald H. 1971. "Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896-1964."
American Political Science Review 65(1): 131-143.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1988. "The Role of Attitude Importance in Social Evaluation: A Study of Policy Preferences, Presidential Candidate Evaluations, and Voting Behavior." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55(2): 196-210.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1989. "Attitude Importance and Attitude Accessibility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 15(3): 297-308.
- Layman, Geoffrey C., and Thomas M. Carsey. 2002. "Party Polarization and 'Conflict

- Extension' in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science*. 46(4): 786-802.
- Lewis-Beck, Michael. 1988. *Economics and Elections: The Major Western Democracies*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Lipton, Eric, Christopher Drew, Scott Shane, and David Rohde. 2005. "Breakdowns Marked Path from Hurricane to Anarchy." *New York Times*, 11 September, sec. A.
- Malhotra, Neil, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2007. "Retrospective and Prospective Performance Assessments during the 2004 Election Campaign: Tests of Mediation and News Media Priming." *Political Behavior* 29(2): 249-278.
- McGraw, Kathleen M. 1990. "Avoiding Blame: An Experimental Investigation of Political Excuses and Justifications." *British Journal of Political Science* 20(1): 119-131.
- McGraw, Kathleen M. 1991. "Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts." *American Political Science Review* 85(4): 1133-1157.
- Miller, Joanne M., and Jon A. Krosnick. 1998. "The Impact of Candidate Name Order on Election Outcomes." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62(3): 291-330.
- Nicholson, Stephen P., Gary M. Segura, and Nathan D. Woods. 2002. "Presidential Approval and the Mixed Blessing of Divided Government." *Journal of Politics* 64(3): 701-720.
- Peffley, Mark. 1984. "The Voter as Juror: Attributing Responsibility for Economic Conditions." *Political Behavior* 6(3): 275-294.
- Rahn, Wendy M. 1993. "The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing About Political Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(2): 472-496.
- Rudolph, Thomas J. 2003a. "Who's Responsible for the Economy? The Formation and Consequences of Responsibility Attributions." *American Journal of Political Science*

47(4): 698-713.

Rudolph, Thomas J. 2003b. "Institutional Context and the Assignment of Political Responsibility." *Journal of Politics* 65(1): 190-215.

Rudolph, Thomas J 2006. "Triangulating Political Responsibility: The Motivated Formation of Responsibility Judgments." *Political Psychology* 27(1): 99-122.

Schlenker, Barry R., Thomas W. Britt, John Pennington, Rodolfo Murphy, and Kevin Doherty. 1994. "The Triangle Model of Responsibility." *Psychological Review* 101(4): 632-52.

Shaver, Kelly. 1985. *The Attribution of Blame: Causality, Responsibility, and Blameworthiness*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Skitka, Linda J., and Renee L. Robideau. 1997. "Judging a Book by Its Cover: The Effects of Candidate Party Label and Issue Stands on Voting Behavior." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 27(11): 967-982.

Stein, Robert M. 1990. "Economic Voting for Governor and U.S. Senator: The Electoral Consequences of Federalism." *Journal of Politics* 52(1): 29-53.

Stolberg, Sheryl G. 2006. "A Year After Katrina Disaster, Bush Still Fights For 9/11 Image." *New York Times*, 28 August 28, sec. A.

Tyler, Tom R. 1982. "Personalization in Attributing Responsibility for National Problems in the President." *Political Behavior* 4(4): 379-399.

Wortman, Camille B. 1976. "Causal Attributions and Personal Control." In *New Directions in Attribution Research*, eds. John H. Harvey, William John Ickes, and Robert F. Kidd. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Table 1: Experimental Design

<p><u>Condition 1: Control</u></p> <p>No Public Office, No Party Name</p> <p>Ex: Kathleen Blanco</p>	<p><u>Condition 2: Party Cue</u></p> <p>Political Party Name</p> <p>Ex: Kathleen Blanco (Democrat)</p>
<p><u>Condition 3: Office Cue</u></p> <p>Public Office</p> <p>Ex: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco</p>	<p><u>Condition 4: Both Cues</u></p> <p>Public Office + Political Party Name</p> <p>Ex: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco (Democrat)</p>

Table 2: Distribution of Blame among Government Officials

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Difference</u>
<u>Average Blame Rank</u>			
Blanco	4.67	3.41	-1.27**
Brown	3.42	3.46	.04
Bush	2.26	4.41	2.15***
Chertoff	3.67	4.51	.84*
Landrieu	5.16	4.65	-.52
Nagin	4.24	2.87	-1.37**
Vitter	4.58	4.70	.12
Average Republican	3.48	4.27	-.79***
<u>Most to Blame</u>			
Blanco	1.8%	13.5%	11.7*
Brown	10.9	16.2	5.3
Bush	65.5	21.6	-43.8***
Chertoff	5.5	5.4	-.01
Landrieu	5.5	2.7	-2.8
Nagin	10.9	35.1	24.2**
Vitter	.0	5.4	5.4 ⁺
Republicans Combined	81.8	48.7	-33.2***
<u>Least to Blame</u>			
Blanco	18.2%	10.8%	-7.4
Brown	3.6	2.7	-.9
Bush	12.7	43.2	30.5***
Chertoff	5.5	13.5	8.0
Landrieu	29.1	10.8	-18.3*
Nagin	14.5	8.1	-6.4
Vitter	16.4	10.8	-5.6
Republicans Combined	38.2	70.3	32.1**
N	55	37	

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

Note: Only respondents from control group reported. Blame ranking ranges from 7 (least blame) to 1 (most blame). Difference-of-means tests reported for "average blame ranking"; difference-of-proportions tests reported for "most to blame" and "least to blame."

Table 3: Rank-Ordered Logit Models Predicting Blame of Government Officials

Rep. Official	.61 ^{***} (.13)	1.24 ^{***} (.22)
Rep. Official x Rep. Respondent	-.96 ^{***} (.20)	-.76 ^{***} (.21)
Rep. Official x Party Cue	.56 ^{**} (.20)	.57 ^{**} (.20)
Rep. Official x Rep. Respondent x Party Cue	-.96 ^{**} (.29)	-.91 ^{**} (.30)
Rep. Official x Office Cue	-.37 [*] (.18)	-.36 [*] (.18)
Rep. Official x Rep. Respondent x Office Cue	.16 (.28)	.21 (.29)
Rep. Official x Both Cues	.06 (.19)	.13 (.19)
Rep. Official x Rep. Respondent x Both Cues	-.41 (.29)	-.55 (.29)
Rep. Official x Age	—	-.21 (.22)
Rep. Official x Education	—	-.24 (.16)
Rep. Official x White	—	-.07 (.12)
Rep. Official x Male	—	.05 (.11)
Rep. Official x South	—	-.28 ^{**} (.11)
Rep. Official x Conservatism	—	-.75 ^{**} (.24)
Log Likelihood	-2808.84	-2798.10
LR $\chi^2(8)$, $\chi^2(14)$	179.44 ^{***}	200.91 ^{***}

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

Note: N=2,380 for all regressions.

Table 4: Ordered Logistic Regressions Predicting Blame Ranking for Individual Officials by Experimental Condition

	<u>Blanco</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Chertoff</u>	<u>Landrieu</u>	<u>Nagin</u>	<u>Vitter</u>
Republican	1.47** (.43)	-.08 (.40)	-1.52** (.45)	-.73+ (.40)	.47 (.40)	1.02* (.40)	-.42 (.41)
Office Cue	1.08** (.35)	1.35*** (.36)	-.69+ (.39)	-.58 (.36)	-.37 (.36)	.20 (.34)	-1.03** (.36)
Party Cue	-.50 (.35)	.43 (.35)	.92+ (.47)	.36 (.34)	-.92* (.38)	.04 (.34)	-.37 (.37)
Both Cues	.70+ (.37)	1.11** (.38)	-.22 (.42)	.38 (.38)	-1.30** (.40)	.01 (.36)	-.88* (.37)
Republican x Office Cue	-.13 (.57)	-1.11* (.56)	.18 (.59)	.24 (.55)	.27 (.54)	-.15 (.56)	1.32* (.55)
Republican x Party Cue	.01 (.57)	-1.44** (.55)	-1.12+ (.65)	.18 (.54)	1.65** (.57)	.82 (.56)	-.08 (.57)
Republican x Both Cues	.30 (.57)	-.25 (.56)	-.57 (.61)	-.86 (.56)	1.28* (.56)	.28 (.56)	.61 (.55)
Age	.37 (.43)	.38 (.43)	.08 (.46)	-.05 (.42)	-.26 (.44)	.08 (.43)	-1.05* (.43)
Education	.08 (.31)	.33 (.30)	-.19 (.34)	-.15 (.31)	-.21 (.31)	.33 (.31)	-.52+ (.31)
White	.08 (.23)	.36 (.22)	-.07 (.26)	-.04 (.23)	-.11 (.23)	.27 (.23)	-.46* (.23)
Male	.00 (.20)	.08 (.20)	.21 (.22)	.05 (.20)	.05 (.20)	-.20 (.20)	-.10 (.20)
South	.28 (.22)	-.47* (.22)	-.16 (.24)	-.27 (.21)	.08 (.22)	.67** (.22)	-.26 (.21)
Conservatism	.49 (.44)	.16 (.45)	-1.86*** (.51)	-.71 (.44)	1.15* (.46)	.95* (.46)	.78+ (.46)
τ_1	-1.28	-3.60	-3.27	-3.39	-.99	-.62	-3.07
τ_2	-.09	-1.67	-3.08	-2.03	.21	.04	-1.57
τ_3	.79	-.36	-2.76	-1.28	1.16	.71	-.76
τ_4	1.75	.35	-2.43	-.56	2.09	1.38	.22
τ_5	2.51	1.22	-1.91	.64	3.34	1.94	1.43
τ_6	4.29	2.78	-1.35	2.12	4.50	2.81	3.96
Wald $\chi^2(13)$	104.53***	60.01***	141.57***	45.52***	74.99***	80.99***	31.94**

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

Note: N=340 for all regressions.

Table 5: Testing the Domination of Party and Office Cues by Level of Education (Democrats)

<u>Full Sample (N=188):</u>	
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_3 = 0$	.02
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = 0$	.03
Cue Domination	Mixing
<u>High School Diploma or Less (N=106):</u>	
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_3 = 0$	.10
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = 0$	.004
Cue Domination	Mixing
<u>Education Beyond High School (N=82):</u>	
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_3 = 0$	.06
H ₀ : $\beta_7 - \beta_5 = 0$	.66
Cue Domination	Office

Note: P-values from two-sided hypothesis tests are presented in table.

Table 6: Testing the Domination of Party and Office Cues by Level of Education for Individual Officials**Full Sample:**

	<u>Blanco</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Chertoff</u>	<u>Landrieu</u>	<u>Nagin</u>	<u>Vitter</u>
<u>Democrats (N=188):</u>							
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{p1} = 0$	.002	.07	.02	.97	.35	.93	.20
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{o1} = 0$	.30	.53	.25	.02	.02	.60	.68
Cue Domination	Office	Office	Office	Party	Party	Inconc.	Inconc.

Republicans (N=152):

$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{p1} + \beta_{p2}) = 0$	<.001	<.001	.17	.01	.07	.19	.65
$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{o1} + \beta_{o2}) = 0$	.88	.16	.51	.71	.85	.60	.17
Cue Domination	Office	Office	Inconc.	Office	Office	Inconc.	Inconc.

High School Diploma or Less:

	<u>Blanco</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Chertoff</u>	<u>Landrieu</u>	<u>Nagin</u>	<u>Vitter</u>
<u>Democrats (N=82):</u>							
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{p1} = 0$	.02	.10	.04	.81	.74	.83	.32
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{o1} = 0$	.11	.30	.61	.01	.14	.22	.53
Cue Domination	Office	Office	Office	Party	Inconc.	Inconc.	Inconc.

Republicans (N=68):

$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{p1} + \beta_{p2}) = 0$	.17	<.001	.75	.03	.30	.40	.40
$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{o1} + \beta_{o2}) = 0$	.58	.04	.61	.17	.84	.77	.22
Cue Domination	Inconc.	Mixing	Inconc.	Office	Inconc.	Inconc.	Inconc.

Education Beyond High School:

	<u>Blanco</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Chertoff</u>	<u>Landrieu</u>	<u>Nagin</u>	<u>Vitter</u>
<u>Democrats (N=106):</u>							
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{p1} = 0$	.03	.55	.21	.84	.19	.86	.43
$H_0: \beta_{b1} - \beta_{o1} = 0$	.90	.10	.33	.25	.05	.57	.85
Cue Domination	Office	Party	Inconc.	Inconc.	Party	Inconc.	Inconc.

Republicans (N=84):

$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{p1} + \beta_{p2}) = 0$	<.001	.003	.02	.10	.13	.23	.13
$H_0: (\beta_{b1} + \beta_{b2}) - (\beta_{o1} + \beta_{o2}) = 0$	.37	.92	.19	.60	.64	.65	.50
Cue Domination	Office	Office	Office	Office	Inconc.	Inconc.	Inconc.

Note: P-values from two-sided hypothesis tests are presented in table.