

Racial Resentment, Hurricane Sandy, and the Spillover of Racial Attitudes into Evaluations of Government Organizations

Geoffrey Sheagley

University of Minnesota-Duluth

Philip Chen*

University of Calgary

Christina Farhart

University of Minnesota

This study explores the relationship between individuals' racial attitudes, exposure to information cuing them to think about President Obama, and evaluations of the government's response to Hurricane Sandy. Using a split ballot experiment embedded in a large internet panel fielded during the 2012 presidential election, we show that respondents' evaluations of President Obama's response to Hurricane Sandy were based on their racial attitudes. We next examined the possibility for racial attitudes to "spill over" into how people evaluate governmental institutions and organizations associated with President Obama. We found evidence that respondents who were cued to think about President Obama and were impacted by Hurricane Sandy were more likely to base their evaluations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's response to the disaster on their racial attitudes.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Philip Chen, Political Science, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada [e-mail:philip.chen@ucalgary.ca].

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In short, linking President Obama to Hurricane Sandy led people to ground their evaluations of an organization tasked with coordinating the response to Hurricane Sandy in their racial attitudes. Our research suggests that racial attitudes are important predictors of how individuals perceive President Obama's effectiveness as well as the efficacy of related government organizations.

On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy made landfall on the coast of southern New Jersey. The storm proceeded to wreak havoc along the Eastern Seaboard, causing over \$50 billion in damage and at least 147 deaths (Blake, Kimberlain, Berg, Cangialosi, & Beven II, 2013). Media accounts of responses to the storm by the federal government and President Obama were often favorable, with Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie serving as an especially notable admirer (Haberman, 2013). The public was also apparently satisfied with the response, as a poll from Quinnipiac University administered to New York voters from November 14–18 revealed that 84% of respondents thought President Obama did an “excellent” or “good” job responding to the storm (Carroll, 2012). There is even evidence that President Obama's vote share was higher in regions impacted by Hurricane Sandy than in comparable unaffected regions (Velez & Martin, 2013). These generally favorable assessments are startling in the current era of polarized political parties and elites (Hetherington, 2001; Layman & Carsey, 2002; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011).

Despite the apparent consensus that Hurricane Sandy was handled effectively, the Obama presidency demonstrates the political reality that apparent successes and positive political outcomes also serve to open new channels for negative evaluations. These new channels are evident in the burgeoning scholarship on “racial spillover”—the tendency for people to rely on their racial attitudes to form evaluations in ostensibly non-racialized policy domains when those domains become linked to President Obama (Tesler, 2012; Tesler & Sears, 2010). For example, President Obama's connection to health care reform led people to ground their preferences for health care in their racial attitudes (Tesler, 2012).

In this article we expand upon recent work on racial spillover to explore a new area: evaluations of government institutions and their response to natural disasters, like Hurricane Sandy. We expected that views of government organizations' handling of the hurricane, which are closely affiliated to President Obama's response to Hurricane Sandy, would be racialized. In the particular case of Hurricane Sandy, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was a likely target of racial spillover. Our expectations stemmed from FEMA's responsibility to coordinate local, state, and federal government responses to large-scale disasters, like Hurricane Sandy. FEMA is also directly accountable to the president, and the public views FEMA as having a great deal of responsibility for handling disaster response (Atkeson & Maestas, 2012; S. Schneider, 2008).

Hurricane Sandy provides a unique opportunity to study spillover in the area of government institutions because of the president's close association with coordinating disaster response. By virtue of being explicitly linked through the mass media with the hurricane and the government's response, it may be the case that people transferred their racial attitudes about President Obama to organizations responsible for the hurricane response, namely FEMA. We explored the racialization of the handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy using a panel survey fielded during the 2012 Presidential election. Key for our purposes was that the study included measures of racial attitudes, perceptions of President Obama's and FEMA's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy, and an experiment aimed at activating racial attitudes so that we could examine racial spillover. Our research provides evidence that evaluations of President Obama's response to Hurricane Sandy were affected by people's racial attitudes. Moreover, for individuals who resided in an area directly impacted by Hurricane Sandy, we found that a simple reminder of President Obama's connection to the recovery efforts was sufficient to lead their racial attitudes to spill over into their evaluations of FEMA's handling of the storm.

Findings from this research speak to a number of normative concerns about political decision making, political trust, and public policy. First, the source(s) of evaluations of specific government institutions, like FEMA, provide insight into people's trust in government. Trust in government is linked to specific behaviors, like federal tax compliance (Scholz & Lubell, 1998) and general satisfaction with the federal government (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995). If people assess government's response to a disaster like Hurricane Sandy based not on objective handling of the crisis but on less relevant criteria, like their racial attitudes, this raises questions about both the levels and sources of trust. Second, public policy makers should consider the potential unintended benefits and consequences of high-profile association with specific policies. African American officials, in particular, might be especially interested in our results, as our research demonstrates that, depending on an individual's racial attitudes, spillover can work to both raise and decrease support.

Finally, our work diverges from past research on disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina. Our research focuses on disaster response evaluations headed by an African American president with racially heterogeneous victims, as opposed to the perceptions of a predominantly Black victim population and a White president with Hurricane Katrina. Although research on Hurricane Katrina revealed the importance of a victim's race (Cutter et al., 2006), results from our research speak to the importance of the policy maker's race on evaluations. Given the variety of natural disasters possible in the United States—across both racial and geographic boundaries - our results speak to natural disaster situations under African American leadership rather than disaster situations where there is a disparate racial impact.

Racial Attitudes, Evaluations, and Spillover

Public opinion scholars often find that people rely on their racial attitudes to form evaluations of many attitude objects, including political actors (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino, 1999; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002) and policies (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; White, 2007). These associations can be chronic, such that people automatically link their racial attitudes to public policies (Gilens, 1999). They can also be situational, where exposure to information, such as a subtle verbal or visual cue, causes people to connect their racial attitudes to their preferences (Domke, 2001; Mendelberg, 1997; Winter, 2008). Although these conclusions are heavily rooted in experimental findings, some of this work also makes use of novel quasi-experiments to show that these subtle processes operate outside of the lab and amid the cacophony of real-world competing information (e.g., Mendelberg, 2001).

A key theme that emerges from research in this area is that racial attitudes are often connected to policies which are tied to race in subtle, often implicit, ways. Gilens' (1999) work on racial attitudes and welfare preferences is an excellent example. Although welfare serves African Americans, the Department of Health and Human Services reports that fewer than 40% of welfare recipients are African American (Health and Human Services, 2012). Yet, this policy area has largely become racialized, Gilens argues, through a consistent portrayal of African Americans as disproportionate recipients of welfare benefits by the media and politicians. The result is that many Americans' opinions about welfare are rooted in resentment felt towards African Americans (see also, Winter, 2008).

Recently, scholars have shown that the election of Barack Obama to the presidency has led to the association between racial attitudes and a host of previously nonracial policy areas, such as health care reform (Tesler, 2012, 2015; Tesler & Sears, 2010). The "spillover" of race into these domains is predicated on two features of the contemporary political environment. The first is the salience of President Obama's race, which links general racial attitudes to attitudes about President Obama. The second is the link between the president and a policy area. In the presence of both factors, people evaluate policies using the same set of criteria they use to judge President Obama. The racialization of health care reform, for example, did not occur merely because Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election. Rather, once President Obama explicitly connected himself to health care, people started to think about health care reform through a racial lens (Tesler, 2012).

When the necessary circumstances exist, we expect a parallel process to take place when people evaluate government institutions and agencies. We do not expect that every government institution is evaluated through the lens of racial attitudes. Rather, it should be the case that racial attitudes are brought to bear

on government institutions when those attitudes are salient and when they are connected to a particular element of government through a linking event, like when President Obama championed health care reform. The close association between President Obama and FEMA (S. Schneider, 2008) is the first step for spillover to occur. The second necessary step is the occurrence of a linking event. We argue that Hurricane Sandy served as the linking event that led people close to the hurricane to root their evaluations of FEMA in their racial attitudes.

Hurricane Sandy, Emotions, and Linking Information

Our general contention is that racial attitudes should be brought to bear on evaluations of FEMA, but that this spillover will be conditioned not only by the activation of an individual's racial attitudes, but also by that individual's connection to Hurricane Sandy. Following other scholars who studied the impact of Hurricane Sandy (Velez & Martin, 2013), we argue that geographic proximity to the storm affected how people viewed President Obama and thus served as a linking event in this context. We expected that Hurricane Sandy served as a linking event because experiencing a natural disaster affects people's motivation to consume information and the content of the information they choose to consume.

Disasters motivate people to consume information so that they can better make sense of the disaster (Atkeson & Maestas, 2012). Further, the more directly a person is affected by a disaster, the stronger they feel this motivation (Arceneaux & Stein, 2006). Our contention is consistent with findings in other work showing that when negative and unexpected events occur, people feel anxiety and loss of control, which motivates them to restore order. For example, during both the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, people who lived close to the disaster sites were more likely to believe conspiracy theories about the disasters, placing blame on officials and government actors (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Disasters and related events, in short, result in people engaging in processes to make sense of what took place.

The next question is whether or not the motivation to make sense of the disaster leads people to rely on a different set of considerations than those unaffected by the storm. Both Malhotra and Kuo (2008, 2009) and Atkeson and Maestas (2012) suggest this should be the case. Malhotra and Kuo (2009) find that individuals who experienced a strong emotional reaction to Hurricane Katrina were more likely to rely on heuristic cues, such as party identification, when assigning blame to political leaders. These works imply that the need to assign blame for the disaster does not necessarily result in people making better judgments, as party cues are consistently shown to lead voters astray when making decisions (Rahn, 1993; Dancy & Sheagley, 2013). Although victims of natural disasters may be motivated to accurately assign blame, they still fall victim to the need for

cognitive consistency and parsimony, relying on heuristics and other readily available information to evaluate leaders.

Existing research is silent on what the content of these considerations should be in the case of evaluations related to Hurricane Sandy. In the case of this event, the motivation people feel to provide structure to their understanding of the disaster and to assess the response to the natural disaster could lead them to assign blame for perceived inefficiencies in disaster responses. These attributions of blame, should be based on readily available information and heuristics (Malhotra & Kuo, 2008, 2009) and be directed toward actors perceived as responsible for disaster response (S. Schneider, 2008). The close association between President Obama and disaster response, the salience of President Obama's race, and the strong evidence that his race activates individuals' racial attitudes, leads us to expect that people will assess the disaster response based heavily on their racial attitudes.

Our focus on racial spillover related to Hurricane Sandy moves research on natural disasters, in particular on Hurricane Katrina, in a different direction. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, scholars focused on questions related to race and class. This focus makes sense as the affected Gulf Coast residents were largely poor and non-White, producing a particularly vulnerable population of victims (Cutter et al., 2006). Scholars focused on racial portrayals in the media (Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006), group loyalty as a predictor of charitable giving (Fong & Luttmer, 2009), the effects of racial identity and apathy on views of Hurricane Katrina victims (Forman & Lewis, 2006; Huddy & Feldman, 2006), and whether the race of victims led to diminished bureaucratic services from the Bush Administration (Stivers, 2007). This research exposed important racial biases in public opinion, media coverage, and public administration when disaster victims are (or are portrayed as) predominantly lower class or non-White and the dominant political structure (i.e., the Bush Administration) is perceived as predominantly White.

Hurricane Sandy offers a different circumstance and framework in which to study the impact of race on public opinion. Although New York and New Jersey have roughly the same White population as Louisiana (57–58%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 Current Population Survey), the geography of New Orleans created a particularly disparate impact of the storm on residents of the largely African-American Lower Ninth Ward. The geography of the northeast, on the other hand, led Hurricane Sandy to have a less racially acute impact on residents across the region. The more racially diffused impact of the storm coupled with the salience of President Obama's race and close association with the storm, resulted, we contend, in race being cued not as an attribute of victims of the disaster but rather as a presidential attribute. In short, the logical connection between in-group loyalty or out-group hostility and support for Katrina victims breaks down with the less racially homogenous victims of Hurricane Sandy. A new racial cue, however, emerges in the form of the nation's first African-American president.

Ultimately our claims about racial spillover are similar to those of Tesler and Sears (2010): the key to racial spillover rests in the accessibility of both the racial attitudes and the connection to the attitude being expressed, i.e., evaluations of policies or, in the case of our research, government agencies. In most cases, accessibility is a function of attitude strength or level of political awareness (Zaller, 1992). However, under extreme conditions, such as directly experiencing a natural disaster, the connection becomes clear and accessible for a broad swath of people (Atkeson & Maestas, 2012). Zaller (1992) poses a hypothetical: “suppose that survey respondents could be induced temporarily to increase their normal level of engagement with an issue just at the moment of responding to a question about it. What would be the effect of such heightened engagement or ‘extra thought’?” (p. 86).

Where we advance research on racial spillover is by demonstrating that this accessibility can come from contextual events like a natural disaster. Thus, the combination of salient racial attitudes associated with President Obama and the experience of Hurricane Sandy creating a “temporary increase” in cognitive engagement strengthens the links between attitudes about President Obama and the federal disaster response. In essence, the strong emotional reactions that result from natural disasters (as work such as Freedy, Shaw, Jarrell, and Masters (1992) and Sneath, Lacey, and Kennett-Hensel (2008) shows) serve to heighten engagement and alter the decision-making processes of voters. These emotions can be directly induced from the disaster or indirectly aroused by the media (Kim & Cameron, 2011), but the causal pathway remains the same. Emotional arousal produces increased engagement, which in turn leads to a desire for structure and heuristic based processing to quickly arrive at that position. Key in this dynamic is that emotions and racial attitudes are not synonymous constructs. Rather, emotions moderate reliance on racial attitudes. Absent intense emotional arousal, citizens are not cognitively engaged or in need of structure, so they rely on these attitudes to a lesser degree than those who are emotionally and cognitively engaged.

Prior work demonstrates the importance of cognitive engagement for activating emotional responses. White, Philpot, Wylie, and McGowen (2007) demonstrate that African Americans were significantly more likely to experience emotions like anger and depression in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Furthermore, these emotions were not abstract or spontaneous. Instead, they arose from their particular situations, anger arising from perceived discrimination by the federal government and depression stemming from frustration with President Bush’s complacency. Similarly, Harris-Lacewell (2007) demonstrates that White and Black Americans experienced different levels of emotional distress following Hurricane Katrina, noting that prior racial attitudes influenced levels of emotional distress. In short, although our focus in the study of Hurricane Sandy is different from that of Hurricane Katrina, there is strong evidence that natural disasters result in

strong emotional reactions and can produce greater cognitive engagement with the specific disaster situation.

Research Overview and Hypotheses

This research builds on past work and addresses the racialization of evaluations of President Obama's and FEMA's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy. Using a unique survey with an embedded experiment, we induced some participants to think about President Obama. In doing so, we show that people evaluated President Obama's response to Hurricane Sandy based on their racial attitudes. We then show that this manipulation, in conjunction with geographic proximity to Hurricane Sandy, also led some respondents to use their racial attitudes to evaluate FEMA's response to the storm.

Drawing from previous research, our first hypothesis is that people evaluated President Obama's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy based on their racial attitudes. Specifically:

H1 (Racial attitude activation): Respondents relied on their racial attitudes when evaluating President Obama's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy. Specifically, those with favorable attitudes of African Americans held more favorable opinions of President Obama's response whereas those with negative attitudes held more negative opinions of President Obama's response.

Our second expectation is that racial attitudes activated by President Obama spilled over into evaluations FEMA's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy. However, spillover only occurred when two conditions were met. Specifically:

H2 (Racial spillover): Respondents relied on their racial attitudes to evaluate FEMA's handling of Hurricane Sandy when they were directly affected by Hurricane Sandy and when their racial attitudes were cued by President Obama. Thus, for those affected and cued, those with favorable attitudes of African Americans held more favorable opinions of FEMA's response whereas those with more negative attitudes held more negative opinions about FEMA's response. However, respondents whose attitudes were not cued by President Obama, as well as those who were not affected by Hurricane Sandy, did not rely on their racial attitudes when evaluating FEMA's response.

The logic for H1 flows from work showing that people's racial attitudes are chronically tied to President Obama. The logic for H2 follows from the work on racial spillover, which identifies two necessary conditions for spillover to occur. The first is the activation of racial attitudes. For our research, we expect that this is accomplished by the mere presence of President Obama. The second condition for racial spillover to take place is a linking event, a moment which connects President Obama (the initial target of racial attitudes) with the non-racialized domain.

In this case, we identify Hurricane Sandy as the linking event. Individuals affected by the storm will be motivated to make sense of the disaster and more cognitively engaged with the decision. Those unaffected by the storm will not have the same motivation to make sense of the disaster. Thus, we do not expect spillover among these individuals. When both conditions are met, people will connect their racial attitudes (which are linked to the president) with relevant non-racial evaluations, e.g., evaluations of government institutions or agencies like of FEMA.

Unlike a highly visible policy proposal like health care reform, however, the president is not automatically associated with disaster recovery. This is where media framing and, in the case of our experiment, subtle cues embedded in survey questions, are necessary to facilitate these linking events. By cueing people to think about President Obama, Hurricane Sandy serves as the linking event, whereas cues about the federal government fail to provide this link.

This distinction is vital because it identifies the complexity of the methodological approach necessary for us to effectively test for spillover. According to our theory, Hurricane Sandy alters the set of cognitively accessible considerations. However, just because these considerations are accessible does not mean they will be sampled without a racial cue responsible for linking them to the relevant attitude object. Thus, neither a subtle cue nor experiencing (or living in an area affected by) Hurricane Sandy alone should be sufficient to connect racial attitudes to evaluations of government institutions or agencies. Instead, being impacted by Hurricane Sandy was a necessary but insufficient condition for this connection. People, therefore, should only link their racial attitudes to evaluations of FEMA when they were directly impacted by Hurricane Sandy and they had their racial attitudes activated, such as by a cue.

Method

Participants

A total of 705 participants were recruited and paid \$3.50 for participation in a three-wave web-based panel survey administered during the 2012 Presidential election using Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (Chen et al., 2014). MTurk has gained popularity recently as a platform for subject recruitment for social experiments. Results from MTurk studies have been published in multiple journals (Fausey & Matlock, 2011; Huber, Hill, & Lenz, 2012; Lewis & Bates, 2011) and documented findings that were produced using nationally representative samples have been replicated using MTurk respondents (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Miller, Saunders, & Farhart, 2015). Fifty-eight percent of the final sample was female (42% identified as male) and the mean age was 36. Participants were generally well-educated (90% attended some college and 55% had at least a two- or four-year degree) and the median household income range was \$40,000 to

\$49,999 a year. In the full sample, 84% of respondents reported their race as White, whereas 16% reported a race other than White. Of those who reported a race other than White, 5.4% identified as Asian, 6.5% as Black, 0.6% as Native American, 2.6% specified a different race, and 1.1% did not answer the question. Participants were much more likely to self-identify as Democrats (56% Democrats, 12% Independents, 32% Republicans) and liberal (52% liberal, 19% moderate, 29% conservative). Although this and other MTurk samples are not nationally representative, the demographic distribution of these samples more closely mirrors the U.S. population than do typical convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012).

The first two waves of the survey were conducted prior to the 2012 election whereas the third wave occurred post-election, in mid-November, 2012. Attrition was high from the first to second wave (38%), whereas attrition from the second to third wave was relatively low (6%). Our experiment was administered during the third wave. However, we rely on numerous demographic variables that were asked on the first wave of the study, including age, education, race, party identification, ideology, and income. A total of 991 respondents completed waves 1 and 3. We restrict our sample to White respondents only, resulting in a final sample size of 705.

Procedure

To test for racial spillover in the domain of crisis management perceptions—either of an actor or of an institution (or agency)—we combine two unique features of our survey. First, we use a split-ballot survey experiment administered during wave 3. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two (Cue type: President Obama, federal government) conditions. The President Obama cue condition asked respondents “How well do you think President Obama has handled the response to Hurricane Sandy?” whereas respondents in the federal government condition were asked, “How well do you think the Federal Government has handled the response to Hurricane Sandy?” Responses on these questions ranged from “1” indicating the named party handled the response “*very well*” to “4” indicating the named party handled the response “*not well at all*.” The intent of the manipulation was twofold. We first wanted to assess whether people drew on different attitudes when assessing President Obama’s vs. the federal government’s handling of Hurricane Sandy. Our expectation was that the former would activate racial attitudes whereas the latter would not (H1).

Our second goal was to test whether participants exposed to the President Obama cue were more likely to rely on their racial attitudes when forming impressions of how well the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) handled the response to Hurricane Sandy. To test for evidence of this reliance, or spillover, we utilized a second unique feature of study: information about the geographic

residence of our respondents. We leveraged geographic information collected in wave 1 to categorize individuals by the degree to which their zip code was impacted by the Hurricane Sandy. This allowed us to assess whether the degree to which a respondent was affected by Hurricane Sandy conditioned the impact of the President Obama cue in leading to spillover of a respondent's racial attitudes into their evaluations of FEMA's response to Hurricane Sandy (H2).

Measures

Responses to Hurricane Sandy. Each respondent offered two assessments of responses to Hurricane Sandy. First, as noted above, depending on which treatment they received for the split ballot experiment, respondents either evaluated how well President Obama or the federal government handled the response to Hurricane Sandy. Next, all respondents were asked, "How well do you think FEMA has handled the response to Hurricane Sandy?" Responses were measured using a Likert scale in which respondents could evaluate the disaster response as being handled. The four-point Likert scale was originally coded 1 "Very Well"; 2 "Somewhat Well"; 3 "Not Very Well"; and 4 "Not Well at All." For all of our analyses we reverse code these variables so that higher values correspond to more favorable assessments of disaster response.

Hurricane Sandy impact. We studied how geographic proximity to the storm affected racial spillover (H2) by making use of two pieces of data. The first was a question administered at wave 1 of our survey which asked participants to report the zip code of their residence. This piece of information allowed us to identify if the participant resided in an area of the country affected by the storm. Note, existing research finds that MTurk worker self-reports of geographic residence are highly accurate (Daly & Natarajan, 2015). The second source we utilized was publicly available data from FEMA and ArcGIS that tabulates county-level estimates of damage from Hurricane Sandy. The damage estimates were based largely on the estimated impact of the storm surge, which, according to FEMA, was responsible for much of the storm's impact. Table 1 contains a summary of the impact estimates offered by FEMA, whereas Figure 1 is a map of the estimated impact areas.¹

We merged the Hurricane Sandy impact data with the zip codes offered by our respondents to create a variable that captured the degree to which a respondent's geographic area was impacted by the storm. Respondents who reported a zip code that existed in multiple counties were coded as residing in the county that encompassed the geographic center of their zip code. 501 (71%) respondents were

¹ The summary of the data are available here: <http://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=307dd522499d4a44a33d7296a5da5ea0>

Table 1. FEMA Impact Categories

Impact category	Measure of impact
Very High	Storm surge affected > 10,000 people
High	500–10,000 affected by surge, or modeled wind damage > \$100 million, or more than 8'' precipitation
Moderate	100–500 affected by surge, or modeled wind damage \$10–100 million, or 4–8'' precipitation
Low	No surge impacts, or modeled wind damage <\$10 million, or <4'' precipitation.

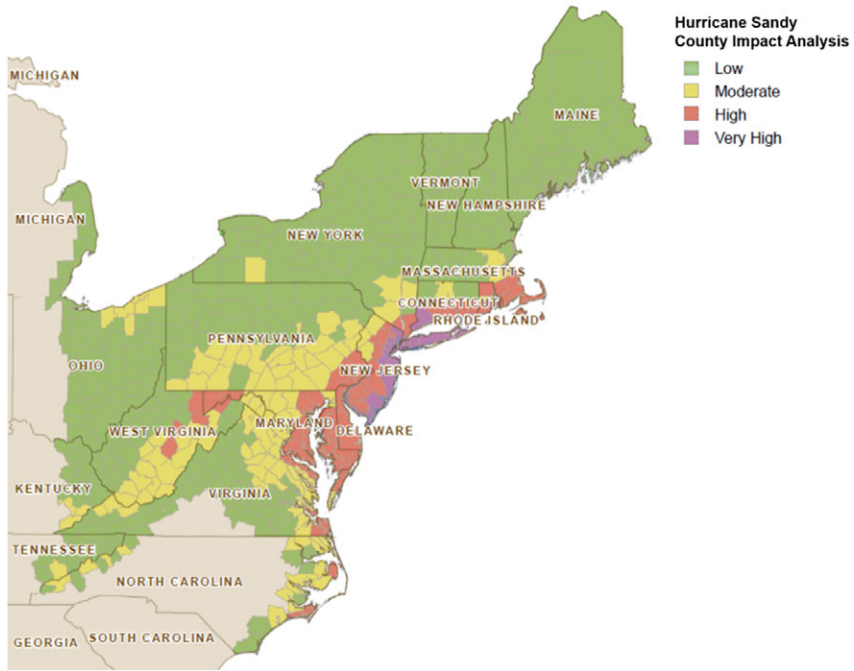


Fig. 1. Map of Hurricane Sandy impact zones. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

not at all impacted, 87 (12%) were categorized as having low impact, 61 (9%) as having moderate impact, 35 (5%) as having high impact, and 20 (3%) as having very high impact.

Racial attitudes. We rely on the concept of racial resentment to measure respondents’ racial attitudes. Racial resentment captures racial animosity driven by whether an individual believes that African Americans are underserving and

violate traditional American values. We measure these attitudes with the racial resentment scale commonly contained on the American National Elections Studies (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). These questions are also used by many scholars who study racial spillover (e.g., Tesler, 2012, 2015; Tesler & Sears, 2010). Admittedly, scholars have questioned whether these measures accurately capture only racial attitudes or tap both racial animosity and individualism for some people (Feldman & Huddy, 2005). While recognizing these objections, we believe that there is general agreement on the need for federal intervention in disasters. Therefore, we suspect that individualism is less likely to impact evaluations of FEMA's handling of the disaster than other political evaluations that have been examined in the past.

Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the following four statements: "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites," "Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same," "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class," and "Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve." We recoded the component measures of racial resentment so that higher values corresponded to greater racial resentment and combined them to form the scale running from 0 "low racial resentment" to 1 "high racial resentment" (mean = 0.61; $SD = 0.21$). The racial resentment scale is also highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.84$). Importantly, although work shows that racial resentment is stable, the fact that these measures were captured during the first panel wave, before Hurricane Sandy, allows us to rule out the possibility that Hurricane Sandy influenced respondents' racial attitudes, which would confound our results.²

Recently, Hassell and Visalvanich (2015) found that racial resentment exerts similar influences on political behavior among MTurk workers as would be expected among the general population. In our sample, we find that the distribution of racial resentment, while not identical to distributions from nationally representative surveys, is roughly normally distributed. A plot of this distribution is displayed in Figure 2. Racial resentment is typically negatively skewed in nationally representative samples, like the ANES. Thus, our MTurk sample is more racially liberal than the general population. However, there is also a great deal of variation across levels of racial resentment in our sample.

Control measures. In line with prior studies of racial resentment, all of our models include controls for age, education, income, sex, party identification, and ideology (Feldman & Huddy, 2005; Tesler & Sears, 2010). Age is coded in years whereas income and education are categorical variables, with higher

² Relying on the racial resentment items administered during wave 3 does not substantively change our results.

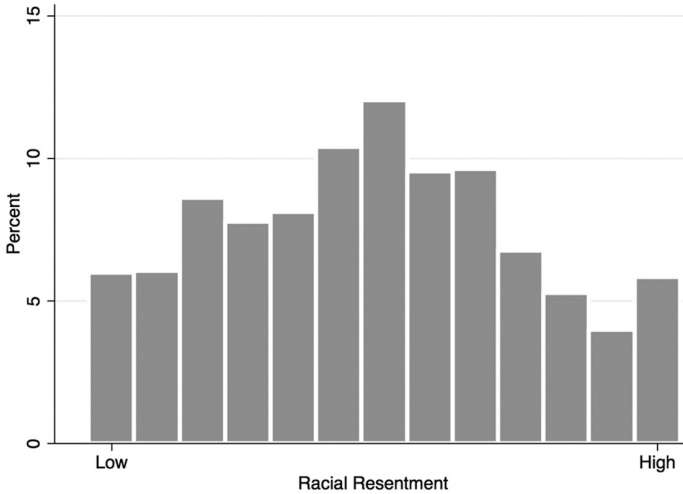


Fig. 2. Distribution of racial resentment in MTurk sample.

values corresponding to more income and education, respectively. Sex is a binary indicator, with women coded as one and men as zero. The party and ideology variables are both seven-point scales. Party ranges from 1 “*Very Strong Democrat*” to 7 “*Very Strong Republican*.” Ideology ranges from 1 “*Extremely Liberal*” to 7 “*Extremely Conservative*.” Each variable is scaled to run from 0 to 1. These variables were measured on wave 1 of our survey.

Results

Analysis 1—Priming Racial Resentment

Our first analysis is a test of H1, where we expect that respondents should have relied more heavily on their racial attitudes when evaluating President Obama’s handling of Hurricane Sandy than when evaluating the federal government’s disaster response. For this analysis, we rely solely on our split-ballot experiment in which half of respondents are asked about President Obama’s handling of the disaster whereas the other half are asked about the federal government’s handling. Our dependent variable is the four-level Likert scale which measured perceptions of President Obama’s/the federal government’s handling of the disaster. As a reminder, higher values of this variable correspond to more favorable assessments of disaster response.

Our primary independent variable is a respondent’s level of racial resentment, which is coded so that higher values capture more racially conservative attitudes.

Table 2. Regression Results Predicting Evaluations of Federal Government/President Obama's Handling of Hurricane Sandy

	(1)	(2)
Racial resentment	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.05)
Federal Govt condition	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.03)
Sandy impact intensity	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Racial resentment × Federal Govt condition		0.12** (0.06)
Age	-0.10** (0.05)	-0.10** (0.05)
Education	0.003 (0.05)	0.004 (0.05)
Income	0.09** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)
Gender (male)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Party ID	-0.32*** (0.04)	-0.32*** (0.04)
Ideology	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.11** (0.05)
Constant	1.01*** (0.04)	1.04*** (0.04)
<i>N</i>	705	705
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.335	0.337

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, all tests are two-sided.

Key to testing H1, we expect the effect of racial resentment to be a stronger predictor of President Obama's response to the disaster than the federal government's response. In other words, we expect the effect of racial resentment on the dependent variable to be moderated by treatment assignment. We test this by estimating an OLS regression³ with two key independent variables: a respondent's racial resentment and a binary indicator for whether they were in the President Obama cue condition (coded 0) or the federal government cue condition (coded 1). We then interact our indicator of treatment assignment with the racial resentment variable to determine if there is a differential effect of resentment by treatment assignment. All models control for the previously discussed covariates. We also control for the impact of Hurricane Sandy, although for this analysis we do not expect a main or moderating effect of this variable on our outcome or other predictors. Table 2 displays the results from two models, the first of which includes all of our primary

³ We are sensitive to concerns over our choice of OLS regression with a four-category dependent variable. This decision was made due to the complexity of interpreting and evaluating coefficients and predicted values from the interactions that are necessary to test H1 and H2. A replication of our key results using ordered logistic regressions is available in the supplemental appendix.

covariates and the second which estimates the interaction between treatment and racial resentment.

The results in Table 2 contain strong support for our expectation that the effect of racial resentment will be conditioned by treatment assignment. Examining Model 2 reveals evidence of a significant interaction between treatment assignment and racial resentment. Because our expectation is that the effect of racial resentment will be greater for people exposed to the President Obama Cue, we conduct a one-sided *t*-test of the interaction. The result reveals statistically significant evidence of moderation ($p = .025$, note that if we use a more conservative two-sided test then our *p*-value is .05). The interaction reveals that the effect of racial resentment is $-.19$ [95% CI, -0.29 to -0.09] in the President Obama cue condition and $-.07$ [95% CI, -0.17 to 0.03] in the federal government condition. Substantively, the effect of racial resentment is negative. The more resentful have more negative evaluations of the disaster response. This effect, however, is almost three times stronger in the President Obama cue condition than in the federal government condition. We find no evidence that the effect of racial resentment in the federal government condition is different from zero ($p = .16$, two-sided) whereas there is evidence of a significant effect in the Obama condition ($p = .0001$, two-sided).

These results indicate that respondents cued to think about President Obama relied more heavily on racial resentment to form evaluations than did those asked about the federal government's handling of the crisis. This finding is important for two reasons. The first is that it was an open question as to whether or not racial resentment would be brought to bear at all in evaluations about how any entity handled the response to Hurricane Sandy. This is especially true given the general consensus that the response was handled in an effective fashion. In other words, by no means was it guaranteed that cueing respondents to evaluate President Obama's handling of Hurricane Sandy would result in them relying on racial resentment in their evaluations. Second, testing H2—that racial resentment activated by President Obama will “spillover” into evaluations of FEMA—requires that our experimental manipulation actually activates racial resentment. It is clear from this analysis that our manipulation does have this effect.

Analysis 2—Racial Spillover and Hurricane Sandy

Our second analysis is a test of H2. Specifically, we expect that exposure to the President Obama cue will activate a respondent's racial resentment and that these attitudes will spill over into a respondent's evaluations of FEMA's response to Hurricane Sandy. We also expect that this relationship will be observed only for respondents who were impacted by Hurricane Sandy, which we argue serves as a linking event between President Obama and the non-racial target FEMA. Evaluations of FEMA's response to Hurricane Sandy will be racialized, but only

for respondents who were cued to think about President Obama and who were in regions impacted by the storm.

The dependent variable for this analysis is the four-level Likert scale which measured perceptions of FEMA's handling of the response to Hurricane Sandy. The primary independent variable is again racial resentment, the effect of which we expect to vary based on exposure to the President Obama cue condition and the impact of Hurricane Sandy. We specified a model to examine if the effect of racial resentment varied across these conditions. Specifically, we used OLS to estimate a model predicting evaluations of FEMA's handling of the Hurricane Sandy response, with higher values corresponding to more positive evaluations of FEMA. We then included an indicator variable for condition assignment (1 for *federal government condition*, 0 for *President Obama condition*) and interacted this with our measure of racial resentment and the five-level Hurricane Sandy impact measure, which runs from 0 (*no impact*) to 4 (*highest impact*). We also include control variables detailed earlier. The most important feature of this model is that it allows for a differential effect of racial resentment by treatment assignment and hurricane impact. This allows us to test whether the effect of our treatment on racial resentment varied depending on the impact of Hurricane Sandy in their area of residence.

Table 3 displays the results from the fully specified model (Model 3), and a series of lower-order model specifications. Before interpreting the results from Model 3, we outline the key conclusions evident in Models 1 and 2. Model 1 estimates the direct effects of racial resentment, treatment assignment, and geographic proximity to Hurricane Sandy on evaluations of FEMA. Model 1 indicates that there is a strong direct effect of racial resentment, with those higher in racial resentment having more negative evaluations of FEMA. The indicator for treatment assignment is statistically insignificant ($p = .27$), indicating that there is no evidence of a direct effect of our treatment on evaluations of FEMA. Finally, the coefficient on the Hurricane Sandy variable indicates that respondents who were impacted by the storm were significantly more negative in their evaluations of FEMA. Model 2 adds an interaction between racial resentment and treatment assignment. The interaction is insignificant ($p = .52$), indicating that there is no evidence of an interaction between treatment assignment and racial resentment when examining the full sample.

Our key expectation is that cuing people to think about President Obama leads racial attitudes to "spillover" into evaluations of FEMA, but that this effect should be conditioned by the degree to which someone was impacted by Hurricane Sandy. We assess if the effect of racial resentment on evaluations of FEMA varied by treatment assignment and exposure to Hurricane Sandy by constructing a three-way interaction between racial resentment, treatment assignment, and geographic proximity to Hurricane Sandy. Model 3 reveals that this interaction is statistically significant, however the exact nature of the interaction is difficult to interpret.

Table 3. Regression Results Predicting Evaluations of FEMA's Handling of Hurricane Sandy

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Racial resentment	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.11** (0.05)	-0.07 (0.06)
Federal Govt condition	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)
Sandy impact intensity	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.03)
Racial resentment × Federal Govt condition		-0.04 (0.06)	-0.12 (0.07)
Racial resentment × Sandy impact intensity			-0.06 (0.04)
Sandy impact intensity × Federal Govt condition			-0.06* (0.03)
Racial resentment × Impact × condition			0.13** (0.06)
Age	-0.09** (0.05)	-0.09** (0.05)	-0.09** (0.05)
Education	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)
Income	0.10** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)
Gender (male)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Party ID	-0.16*** (0.05)	-0.16*** (0.05)	-0.16*** (0.05)
Ideology	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)
Constant	0.86*** (0.04)	0.85*** (0.04)	0.83*** (0.04)
<i>N</i>	704	704	704
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.152	0.152	0.153

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

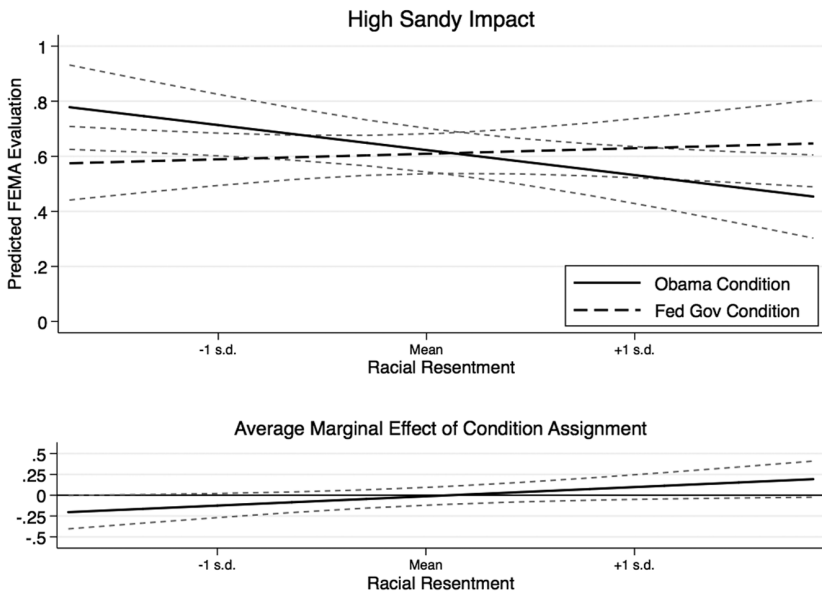
To illustrate the substantive effect, Table 4 displays the effect of racial resentment on evaluations of FEMA broken out by Hurricane Sandy impact (none vs. highest) and the experimental condition.

Table 4 demonstrates that the strongest effect of racial resentment is for people who were highly impacted by the storm and who were cued to think about President Obama (coef. = $-.32$, $p = .04$, two-sided). Substantively, the effect of racial resentment for those impacted by the storm and who received the Obama cue is roughly four times larger than the effect of racial resentment for those who were impacted by the storm and who received the federal government cue. An interesting pattern also emerges for those who were not impacted by the storm, namely that racial resentment is a relatively strong predictor in the federal government condition but not in the President Obama condition, however the difference between the effects is insignificant. To better illustrate the range of

Table 4. Effects of Racial Resentment on FEMA Evaluations

Federal Govt cue	0.07
High impact	[-0.23,0.37]
Federal Govt cue	-0.19
No impact	[-0.30,-0.08]
Obama cue	-0.32
High impact	[-0.63,-0.01]
Obama cue	-0.07
No impact	[-0.18,0.04]
<i>N</i>	704

95% CIs in brackets.



Note: Dashed gray lines represent 90% confidence intervals.
*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Fig. 3. Predicted FEMA evaluations across racial resentment by experimental condition: high sandy impact.

these effects, Figure 3 displays the predicted values of FEMA evaluation across levels of racial resentment in the two conditions.

The top panel of Figure 3 demonstrates that the predicted evaluation of FEMA varies heavily based on if someone received the Obama cue vs. the federal government cue when highly impacted by Hurricane Sandy. For those impacted by the storm and who received the Obama cue, higher levels of racial resentment translate to depressed approval of FEMA’s handling of the disaster. However, for

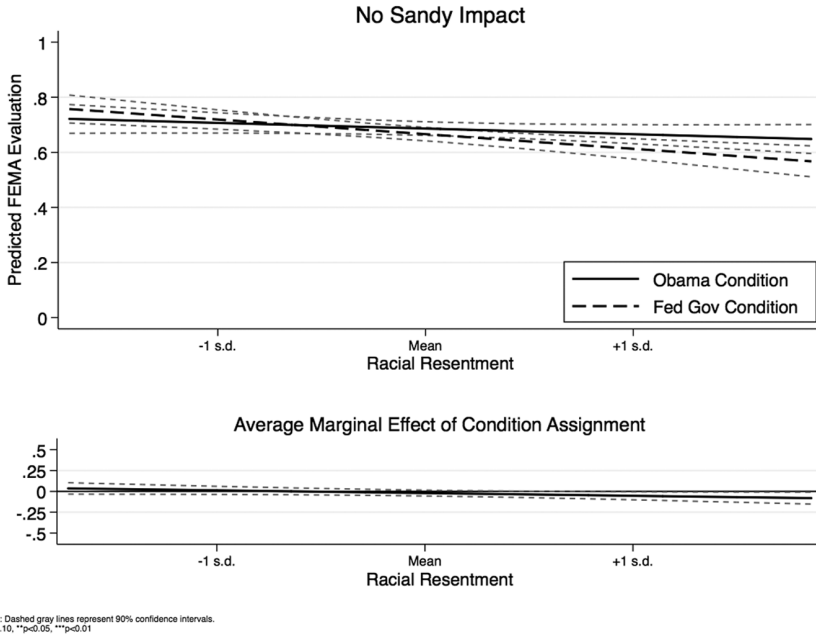


Fig. 4. Predicted FEMA evaluations across racial resentment by experimental condition: no sandy impact.

those who received the federal government cue, FEMA evaluations were unaffected by levels of racial resentment. The bottom panel in Figure 3 shows how the effect of condition assignment changes based on racial resentment, essentially revealing the difference in the effect of treatment across resentment. A significant treatment effect occurs wherever the line falls significantly above or below the zero line. Thus, for individuals at the low end of racial resentment, receiving the Obama cue (versus the federal government cue) made them significantly more supportive of FEMA. This finding falls in line with Tesler and Sears (2010) argument about the “two sides of racialization” which argued that Obama not only suffered from negative evaluations from those high in racial resentment, but that he also benefitted from the support of those low in resentment. These results demonstrate, compared to the Federal Government baseline, that those who were low in resentment and who were reminded of Obama’s connection to the hurricane were significantly more supportive of FEMA’s response.

Contrasting these results with those shown in Figure 4 illustrates the conditioning effect of Hurricane Sandy. As the top panel in Figure 4 shows, there is no difference in the effect of racial resentment on evaluations of FEMA by treatment for those who were not geographically impacted by Sandy. Finally, comparing

the bottom panels of Figures 3 and 4 illustrates that the differences in the effects of treatment for those impacted by Sandy and those not impacted by Sandy are themselves different from one another. For instance, the bottom panel in Figure 3 shows a significant treatment effect of those low in racial resentment, whereas the bottom panel of Figure 4 exhibits a substantively smaller effect in the opposite direction of what would be expected, with those high in racial resentment exhibiting slightly more positive evaluations of FEMA in the Obama condition than in the Federal Government condition. Although this effect is statistically significant, its magnitude is noticeably smaller than the effect for those highly impacted by the storm.

In all, we find strong evidence for our argument that racial resentment can spillover into evaluations of government institutions, and that this effect is conditioned by people's experiences. In this case, it is only those people who were in regions directly impacted by the storm who saw their resentment spillover into an ostensibly non-racial area.⁴

Discussion

A significant body of research demonstrates that subtle racial cues can lead people to rely on their racial attitudes when forming candidate evaluations (Mendelberg, 2001) and views on key political issues (Tesler & Sears, 2010; Tesler, 2012; 2015). Our research extends this work in a few key ways. First, we provide compelling evidence that racial attitudes spill over not only to candidate evaluations and policy opinions, but also to people's evaluations of government institutions, like FEMA. This is a key finding because people's support for government programs hinges on their evaluations of how well government responds to crises and important events (Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). If people can be led to root evaluations of political institutions in their racial attitudes, this raises serious questions about the source of people's beliefs about the legitimacy of American democratic institutions.

We demonstrate a unique confluence of events that produce a connection between racial animosity and institutional evaluations. Voters who experience crystallizing, linking events are reminded of racial considerations and, given this cue, their political evaluations are correlated with their racial attitudes. In the case of Hurricane Sandy, they rely on racial attitudes when evaluating President Obama and FEMA. By combining a subtle experimental manipulation with the occurrence

⁴ As a robustness check, we replicated our analyses with a different dependent variable asking about President Obama's handling of the crisis in Benghazi, Libya. No significant effects of Hurricane Sandy were found, demonstrating that the effects are specific to the linking event and not a general activation of racial resentment. Full discussion and results of this analysis can be found in the supplemental appendix.

of Hurricane Sandy, we leverage the internal validity advantages of experimental designs with the external validity of a substantive real-world event.

Our findings underscore the importance of considering all sources of institutional attitudes when studying evaluations of government organizations. In theory, these should emerge from an individual's experience and knowledge of the performance of that agency. Thus, after FEMA addresses a natural disaster, those who felt this response was proper and adequate should have more favorable evaluations of FEMA and vice-versa. This direct connection undergirds the link between people and their government, and indirectly strengthens ties between the performance of the federal government and the votes individuals cast. One could even argue that satisfaction with government agencies under the purview of the president should increase the likelihood that somebody supports the president.

Our study reaches a different conclusion, one that raises questions about the connection between agency performance and evaluations. Under certain conditions, people rely on their racial attitudes and not on substantive experiences with the agency. Disaster victims who hold positive racial attitudes, when reminded of President Obama's connection to FEMA, link their evaluations of FEMA not to their own experience with recovery efforts but rather on their continued preference for the nation's first African-American president. Conversely, those who hold negative racial attitudes extend their dissatisfaction with the president to their agency evaluations. Institutional evaluations lose the connection between performance and evaluation and instead take on a racialized, symbolic quality.

This is not to say that our study is without drawbacks. Our sample is not a nationally representative probability sample. However, like other MTurk samples, it mirrors the U.S. population to a much greater degree than other convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). Further, the use of an MTurk panel allowed us to quickly field a study in response to a political event, a prospect that is difficult when using other forms of sampling. Another shortcoming is the relatively small number of people whom we are able to categorize as being affected by Hurricane Sandy. Ideally, we would have surveyed a larger number of participants who were impacted by Hurricane Sandy; however, our results are robust even with the small number of people in the impact zone.

A common narrative surrounding Hurricane Sandy was that it solidified Barack Obama's lead over his rival, Mitt Romney, and helped to shepherd him into the White House for a second term (although some scholars have challenged the true electoral impact of Hurricane Sandy, see Pew Research Center, 2012; Velez & Martin, 2013). Regardless, the President was lauded for successfully managing the federal government's response to the crisis, with two-thirds of Romney's supporters giving the President favorable ratings (Cohen, Craighill, & Clement, 2012). Despite this, our research demonstrates that the salience of President Obama's connection to Sandy had unintended consequences. By linking the President to Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, those most impacted by Hurricane Sandy were

susceptible to racial cues that led them to ground their institutional evaluations in racial resentment.

Our results suggest that scholars would be wise to consider the subtle ways in which racial attitudes can be connected to general political evaluations. Although there is no theoretical reason FEMA evaluations should be based on racial attitudes, individual experiences and subtle political cues combine to tie institutional evaluations to racial attitudes. President Obama often presents an explicit racial cue for people, and this influences policies that are intricately tied to his political identity, such as health care reform. As the study of racial spillover moves forward, researchers must not forget the indirect ways in which racial attitudes influence political attitudes. This research demonstrates one instance where the environment strongly (but inadvertently) connected racial attitudes to government evaluations. Although more research is necessary to examine racial spillover into evaluations of government institutions and agencies, our findings and existing work in this area lead us to expect that this is highly unlikely to be an isolated effect.

Although scholars would be wise to consider the broader reach of racial attitudes, policy makers, especially African-American officials, should heed these findings as well. Although President Obama is in some sense a unique case given his status as the first African American president, other politicians can racialize issues when their racial identity is highly salient. Although perhaps not as common for bureaucrats and other officials, instances where a politician is both strongly associated with a policy and their race is highly salient are likely scenarios for racial spillover. Future research should examine the potential for racial spillover in alternate arenas, such as issues of state and local government for Black governors and mayors, especially in cases where race is highly salient (e.g. the first Black executive in the city's or state's history). In addition, scholars should continue to investigate the role of emotions in racial spillover, including the use of self-reported measures of emotions or physiological measures that measure emotional arousal.

Indeed, spillover effects need not be confined purely to federal officials. To the extent that voters feel a closer connection with state and local officials, spillover could just as easily happen for policies at these levels. Although theoretically possible, several factors may work against widespread racial spillover at the local level, including more racially homogeneous populations and stronger local identities which may trump racial identities. Nonetheless, the potential exists for racial spillover to operate across multiple levels of our political system.

In the alternative (and currently more likely) scenario of a White president or official, our expectations and understanding diverges from these results. For the time being and the foreseeable future, White Americans will remain the plurality of the population (and the majority in the short run). Additionally, the concept of a "politician" is culturally understood in America as a White man (Lawless & Fox, 2010; M. C. Schneider & Bos, 2014). Thus, racial or ethnic identity fails to

define White male presidents in the same way as it defines Barack Obama. For example, President George W. Bush's racial identity was likely inconsequential for individuals evaluating the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. In fact, Forgette et al. (2008) find the independent effect of race on government satisfaction post-Hurricane Katrina are strongly diminished when partisan framing is strong. All of this suggests that, for politicians with a widely understood and salient identity, there is a strong potential for spillover effects, whereas for those without defining identity characteristics, the potential is greatly reduced.

To the extent that negative attitudes are associated with any salient identity (race, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.), policy makers must consider the unintended consequences of their association with policies and government programs. As diversity increases among elected officials, the potential for identity spillover into evaluations of programmatic decisions increases. President Obama represents an extreme case in both identity salience and policy association (by nature of being the chief executive), but he is by no means the only case of spillover. As we continue to explore the power of racial spillover, elected officials, bureaucrats, and scholars must consider and examine the complex interactions between political situations, policy decisions, and identity if we are to fully comprehend contemporary public opinion.

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Supplementary Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web-site:

Table A1: Ordered Logit Results Predicting Evaluations of FEMA's Handling of Hurricane Sandy

Table A2: Regression Results Predicting Evaluations of President Obama's Handling of Benghazi

Table A3: Marginal Effects of Racial Resentment on Benghazi Evaluations

GEOFFREY SHEAGLEY is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. His research examines partisanship, political polarization, and voter decision-making.

PHILIP CHEN is an Eyes High postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Political Science at the University of Calgary. His research examines gender and racial identities, personality traits, and political communication.

CHRISTINA FARHART is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research examines political disaffection and civic engagement, as well as consequential political attitudes and beliefs.