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Demographics and poverty spending attitudes in the Mississippi Poll: 2004-2014

By

William C. Jorgeson

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
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Demographics and poverty spending attitudes in the Mississippi Poll: 2004-2014

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The plight of the poor has played a role in America's politics for decades. In the 1930's, Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic Party vowed to fight the Great Depression, and by implementing countless anti-poverty initiatives and agencies it won enormous favor with the public and ushered in a period of Democratic dominance. In modern politics, narratives surrounding the poor and programs designed to help them are utilized by Republicans and Democrats to further their party's agenda. I examine the influence of various demographic factors on the attitudes of Mississippi residents towards spending by the government intended to alleviate poverty, using the Mississippi Poll's results from the years 2004-2014 as my dataset and using cross-tabulation analyses to draw conclusions. I find that gender and religiosity are relatively weak predictors of poverty spending attitudes, while income, education, and age are stronger predictors, and race and party identification are very strong predictors.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“But I conceive the first duty of government is to protect the economic welfare of all the people in all sections and in all groups.”—Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 14, 1938

Introduction

This paper studies public opinion on the issue of government poverty spending in the twenty-first century. While this paper begins its research in 2004, the government did not begin spending money on the poor in 2004, and the poor have been a part of society long before the government began to spend large sums of money on them. Therefore, it is useful to consider first a history of poverty, government poverty spending, and the public’s attitude toward that spending in the United States.

October 24, 1929 was a day that profoundly changed the course of not only the U.S. economy, but also the trajectory of its politics. Herbert Hoover defeated his opponent in the election of 1928, winning nearly 60% of the vote and carrying the whole country save only the South, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. While this surely seemed a great victory at the moment, the Republican Party may not have celebrated had they known it would put them in power when the Great Depression hit. The election of 1932 was almost a perfect reversal of the 1928 election, and led to more than a decade of dominance by the Democrats. In 1933, approximately 1 in 4 Americans were out of

work (Department of Labor). The plight of the poor was no longer a matter of charity, an issue that concerned only a relative few; almost literally overnight, it became a problem that confronted the majority of Americans in their daily lives. Even if they did not lose their own jobs, most citizens had close friends or family who did. The election of 1932 made the public's reaction clear. Government could not stand by and watch people suffer; it needed to step in and find a solution to help those who were struggling. The interplay between poverty and politics had changed permanently.

Once voted into power that was exactly what Franklin Roosevelt's Democrats set out to do. The president's New Deal introduced countless relief programs providing government-sponsored work and wages; one particularly important program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), is estimated to have provided more than 8 million jobs over the course of the Depression (Arnesen 2007). While the New Deal programs enjoyed great popular support, there were already voices who questioned the effectiveness of government-subsidized "busy work" and the quality of the laborers that it employed (Ginzberg 1943). The actual effectiveness of work-assistance programs in "solving" poverty is beyond the scope of this paper; rather, it is the *perception* that they are beneficial to society (or the perception that they are not) among the public that is of primary concern to this paper. In the same vein, it is not the truth of the various normative arguments made for or against poverty assistance that is most relevant here; what matters is simply the question of how well they are able to convince and sway the populace. This early criticism of the New Deal policies, while fairly impotent at the time, foreshadowed the conversations that were to come.

While the Great Depression is long gone, its legacy remains in the American political arena and likely will for the foreseeable future (if not permanently). After more than a half-century, the question of whether government should seek to actively help the poor remains relevant and hotly debated. As with most issues, the issue divides sharply along party lines. Republicans often feel that hard work is the American way, the only true path out of poverty—that a man down on his luck must pull himself up by his bootstraps. A Democratic narrative might emphasize the potential benefits of investment in human capital, arguing that if the poor have their basic needs met they will be more able to hold work and eventually better their situation. These conflicting viewpoints have played out on the national stage many times since the Great Depression, from Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society to the debate over welfare reform in the 1990s; even in the most recent presidential election year, warning calls about progress towards a “welfare society” continue to be fielded by the right side of the political playing field (Blake 2012). With the coming of the Great Recession in 2008, welfare politics may be more relevant to the public discourse in the past decade than they have been since the 1930s.

How does the electorate engage with the issue and with the narratives and policies put forth by the two parties? Do only the poor support government assistance policies? Or are there elements of more affluent citizens among the electorate who believe that the government should help the less fortunate? Do voters believe that poverty assistance programs come at the expense of the taxpaying middle class, or do they believe that poverty assistance programs ultimately bolster the middle class by helping people rise up to join its ranks? While such detailed inquiries fall outside the scope of this paper, they all branch off from the same essential question. How does the public feel about poverty

assistance by the government—specifically, are they for it, or are they against it?

Knowing this allows more detailed questions to be pursued and useful inferences to be drawn.

Trends in Voter Behavior

Voters' decision-making encompasses a great deal more than only their feelings about the poor and the government's role in helping the less fortunate. In the same vein, while both major parties have taken decisive stances on the issue at one time or another, it is only one of many issues which define their overall platforms. According to the "Michigan model" established in one of the first major studies of voter behavior, partisan identification is overwhelmingly the single most important factor in determining how a voter will cast his or her ballot. This party identification can be formed definitively by key life experiences or exposure to sufficiently convincing information, but more often than not it is merely "inherited" from the voter's parents, effectively setting the voter's beliefs in stone before they become active in the electorate (Campbell et al, 1960). While certainly a powerful indicator of voting preferences, party identification does not exclude the possibility of a voter's being influenced by his or her feelings on particular issues. Since identification with a certain party implies agreement with its policies and platform, it may be the case that a voter chooses to identify with a certain party based on a key issue (such as immigration in the case of a migrant to the U.S.—or poverty assistance in the case of the poor), as opposed to identifying with a party first and then later adopting its specific views on policy. If it is the case that party identification is the key factor in determining voter behavior, then the question of voter behavior becomes one of how to

predict party identification—one tool for doing so may be to look at a voter’s beliefs on specific issues (Converse 1964).

An important factor to consider when examining the electorate’s views on more specific issues is the narrative presented in the media and how this narrative affects potential voters. It is here that it is useful to begin sub-dividing voters into different groups according to their personal attributes. Scholars have held that some people are naturally more receptive to new political information while other may be hesitant to accept it, and that in a similar vein people are also more or less invested in following political news and researching political topics (Zaller 1992). The people who most vigorously indulge in and follow politics become the political “elites” of the population, those who are both most aware of what is happening in the nation’s political discourse and the most knowledgeable about the issues being discussed. While certainly average citizens can and do fall under this category, an example of such an “elite” might be Rachel Maddow or Rush Limbaugh, people who are deeply engaged in political discourse on a day-to-day basis. These individuals are considered to be ideologues or “opinion leaders,” stubbornly principled to the point that their views are more or less fixed and stand no reasonable chance of being swayed by conflicting information.

This trait makes them all the more useful as examples of elites, as scholars hold that political elites also generally have this disposition. Since they have invested so much time and energy—not just physically, but often also emotionally—into learning about political issues, the opinions they form and stances they take around these issues are unlikely to budge once they coalesce. If exposed to a countervailing narrative from the other side of the aisle, a political elite is more likely to dismiss it in favor of maintaining

the belief system that they adhere to. It is not hard to imagine that this might occur because elites are both much more likely to have encountered common counter-arguments to their viewpoint before (therefore entering any exchange with an already much-jaded view of the opposition) and much more likely to have a serviceable response ready when challenged. Ultimately, though, the reasons why this occurs are not as important as the mere fact that it does (Campbell et al, 1960).

This is important to bear in mind because it relates to the relative lack of stubbornness as one goes lower on the electorate ladder. While the elites on the highest rungs might form their political views and then hold them close to their heart for all eternity, they are a minority among the population. Most voters are neither so knowledgeable nor, perhaps more important, so hesitant to change their view. Voters closer to the colloquial “Joe Sixpack” do not follow news and politics so closely and thus are less likely to encounter new information; however, likely in part because they encounter new information infrequently, they are also more likely to be swayed by it (Zaller 1992). These less engaged voters, who comprise a much larger share of the population, may not feel a strong sense of loyalty to one party or the other and may instead make their decisions at the ballot-box (and indeed, the decision of whether to even bother going to the ballot-box) based on more heavily discussed “hot-button” topics as opposed to a rigid, pre-determined ideology. This concept can be seen in action in the aftermath of Great Depression; after all, if the population were all as stubborn as the elites, the massive shift in favor from the Republican Party over to the Democrats would never have occurred. The economic woes brought on by the Depression were no doubt a “hot-button” issue in the lives of Americans which held enough weight to get them to

change their voting behavior, whether that meant changing their vote from Republican to Democrat, or actually getting up and going to the polls to vote the Democrats in rather than simply staying home and listening to the radio. Accordingly, while party identification remains a strong indicator of voting preferences, scholars have found that it is not immutable and can change over time (Green, Palmquist & Schickler 2002).

The Role of Media

The primary avenue by which political information and “hot-button” issues reach the public, both political elites and otherwise, is through the news media: cable TV news stations, radio news programs, newspapers, and so forth and so on. Newer forms of Internet media such as Facebook, Twitter and various online news websites such as the Huffington Post are gaining prominence as sources of information for younger voters. Regardless of the specific medium used, all of them have one important trait in common: They cannot relay facts and information with perfect and unbiased clarity. Even if they attempt to do so, human error makes it impossible to achieve, and indeed many news outlets in the modern day barely even bother with a façade of objectivity. Stations and commentators such as Fox News and Rush Limbaugh deliver news and discourse with a decidedly conservative bent, consistently criticizing the actions and policies of Democrats while praising those of Republicans; equivalent news sources also exist on the liberal side of the spectrum (Graber 2010). No matter what source of news a voter interacts with, the information is conveyed through that particular source’s lens, altering the way it is perceived by the voter through the choice of words used to describe the

events in question, the omission of certain facts or the emphasis of others, and additional factors.

This is noteworthy since it means that the media have a role to play in shaping voter opinions and ultimately their behavior. While some scholars believe that the news media is largely irrelevant and has only a minimal effect on voters, others have found that it can make a measureable difference. This is shown through the concept of “information flows,” certain narratives or sets of facts which are emphasized by the news media to create an image with voters (Zaller 1992). Fox News and other staunchly conservative outlets would be described as providing a “conservative flow” of information and vice versa. Oftentimes, there are conflicting streams of information in the news media, in which case the overall effect of the news media becomes difficult to measure at best. However, at times the media may become more united in its narrative and present a fairly consistent image of a certain issue, in which case it begins to have a noticeable effect on voters because there is only one dominant “information flow” on the issue at hand.

The media’s narrative regarding the Vietnam War could be considered one example of this phenomenon, as the majority of media outlets began to uniformly portray the war in a negative light and so pushed public opinion (and in turn, public policy) towards ending the war. A more recent case can be observed in the case of the 2002 invasion of Iraq. By emphasizing a certain narrative above the alternatives—in this case, the idea that the dictator Saddam Hussein had access to weapons of mass destruction and was aiding terrorist organizations—and downplaying contradicting information, the media presented a consistent message to the public in favor of the invasion and public support for the war was consequently very high when it first began. The loss of support

for the Iraq war witnessed in the years to follow could be considered a regression to the mean, a return to the “normal” state of affairs in which there are conflicting streams of information presented in the media which keep the public divided along more traditionally partisan lines.

The media’s role in influencing the public is noteworthy because it demonstrates the malleability of voters when it comes to specific issues that are particularly relevant at a certain point in time. While many voters may have fairly well established party preferences which they rarely stray from, enough voters can be swayed to make a difference on specific issues. This can be seen most recently in the case of same-sex marriage, an issue that has made almost a complete turnaround in the span of just a decade or two. Less than twenty years after the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act, officially declaring marriage to be defined as between a man and a woman at the federal level, the country now considers same-sex marriage legal in over half of its states and may soon see it made legal in all of them. This sharp switch in policy has been accompanied by a sharp switch in public opinion on the matter; while a majority of Americans opposed legalizing same-sex marriage twenty years ago, today the majority agree that it should be made legal (Newport 2011). Clearly, enough independents and weak partisans on the Republican side were swayed to make a large difference in the nation’s overall sentiment on the issue. Therefore, merit remains in studying the opinions of voters on specific controversial topics as opposed to focusing on party identification. Voters may feel differently from the party they are loyal to on specific issues, they may not identify strongly with one party or the other while still holding strong opinions on specific issues, and perhaps most importantly, discourse on specific issues may lead to

change in the general stance of voters even among those staunchly loyal to one party or another. After all, at one time it was politically viable for members of the Democratic Party to argue against racial integration in society, whereas in the current day to support such a practice would be political suicide even for a Southern politician.

The topic of welfare policy is certainly not excluded from these influences. In the case of welfare, literature suggests that public opinion has shifted against poverty-assistance programs over a long period of time. Beginning in the 1960s, politicians increasingly described welfare recipients (and the public increasingly began to perceive them), women particularly, as “lazy, promiscuous, and inept.” The image formed of a single mother who had multiple children out of wedlock, lived comfortably on a government check, and was not even looking for a job. The animosity towards this perceived abuse of welfare programs grew over the following decades, culminating with the abolishment of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program in 1996—legislation that was signed by a Democratic president, no less, an indication of how strong political will on the issue had become (Lens 2002). In the past fifteen years, this trend may be reversing to some degree; 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney provoked an intense backlash from both media and the public when he made harsh comments about the “forty-seven percent of the country who pay no income taxes.” Despite the fact that the stereotypical “welfare queens” would clearly be included in that demographic, Romney stated that the remarks “did real damage to my campaign,” helping his opponent’s campaign to portray him as “an out-of-touch rich guy” (Davidson 2012, Cillizza 2013). Time will tell whether or not there has been another significant shift in public opinion on the poverty issue, however, as these events are still quite recent.

Voter Preferences and Poverty Spending

Given the literature regarding general voter behavior and opinion formation, how does the specific issue of poverty assistance interact with this knowledge? It is useful to begin by furthering the distinctions discussed above between “political elites” and the larger, less-active portion of the electorate. In addition to classifying citizens as elites with regards to their political knowledge in general, scholars have further identified that certain citizens can be considered “issue voters,” voters who may not be as vigorously invested in the whole spectrum of politics as the “elite” voter described above, but who are nonetheless heavily invested in and highly knowledgeable regarding specific issues which are of importance to them (Carmines & Stimson 1980). “Issue voters” may thus be seen as a step between an ideological “elite” and the less active and uninformed “Joe Sixpack,” as they are found to be more educated and politically motivated than most other voters. Continuing with the Great Depression as a useful example of these dynamics, the Democratic power shift that took place could be seen as an event that motivated a large number of “issue voters” on the subject of the economy’s abysmal state.

Issue voters can be further divided into “easy” and “hard” issue voters. “Hard-issue” voters are defined as voters who form their opinions through some degree of conscious calculation, who engage in some amount of critical thinking in order to come to their conclusions. Once the conclusions are formed, the voter then attempts to identify and vote for the candidate whose policy preferences most closely match his own. “Easy-issue” voters, meanwhile, are defined as voters on an issue that has become “so ingrained over time that it structures voters’ ‘gut responses’ to candidates and political parties”

(Carmines & Stimson 1980, p. 78). Since a “gut response” does not require active consideration on the part of the voter—he or she votes in a certain way because he or she knows that those around her have overwhelmingly expressed that preference for as long as he or she can remember, without necessarily understanding why—this type of issue voter is considered to expend less effort in making his or her decision. The distinction between these two types of issue voters is important because scholars have found that there is little difference between easy-issue voters and the rest of the voting public, save perhaps that they act on a gut response to a single issue as opposed to gut feelings about a political party as a whole. Hard-issue voters however are those who, as described above, tend to be measurably more educated about and more invested in political issues, especially the particular issue that they take interest in. This follows logically from the fact that hard-issue voters are characterized as those who attempt to think critically about the issues they are voting on.

Addressing the question of the poverty issue specifically, the Michigan model provides evidence that economic status is one predictor of voting behavior in its treatment of social class. While there can be short-term fluctuations which are difficult to predict and account for, in general it finds that individuals perceived as higher class tend to vote conservatively while those of a lower status favor the Democratic party more. For example, with the large swing towards poverty and the accompanying shifts in public sentiment, the Great Depression could be seen as a particularly large and long-lasting fluctuation. This model can also be seen in action in the voting history of the southern states; traditionally the poorest in the nation, they could be counted on to vote Democratic in presidential elections for decades before transitioning over to solid

Republican control in more recent elections. Whether this is a temporary fluctuation or a permanent paradigm shift remains to be seen, however. In addition to this effect on party identification and consistent with the idea that people may vote in their own economic self-interest, it is found that people are more likely to support poverty assistance from the government specifically if they are living in an area with a higher unemployment rate. In this case, the specific anti-poverty measure put forth was “governmental guarantees of full employment,” but it is not hard to imagine that people expressing support for such a measure would also endorse other traditional “welfare” programs such as SNAP and TANF (Campbell 1960). Also relevant is the durability of these preferences; even as many as seven years later, in counties where unemployment had been high people still showed an increased support for governmental guarantees of employment. This is consistent with the findings of scholars that voter preferences, while malleable to a degree, are slow to change and long lasting once fully formed (Green, Palmquist & Schickler 2002).

In addition to the self-interest component of a voter’s opinions on social welfare, research has also found that there is a strong abstract ideology component in how voters approach these issues. A 1992 study on the subject found that over half of respondents appealed to abstract concepts such as “individualism, humanitarianism or limited government” when discussing their views on government-sponsored poverty assistance. Thus there is evidence that voter opinions on the issue are influenced by a mix of both concrete life experiences and the effect of abstract ideological arguments. Perhaps unsurprisingly, voter sentiments invoking individualism and limited government were found to be exceedingly prominent, such that one-third of respondents classified as

“social liberals” still made some mention of “taxes & budget” in their answers despite being in favor of poverty assistance programs (Feldman & Zaller 1992). This preference among voters might be traced all the way back to the founding principles of the nation; after all, one of the foremost goals in the design of the U.S. Constitution was to limit the powers of government. Additionally, the image of a strong, hard-working American earning his fortune by the sweat of his brow is deeply entrenched in the American political psyche and its influence is not easily pushed aside. This classic American image may be one of the roots of the common sentiment that a man must “pull himself up by his bootstraps” rather than relying on outside help from the government to make ends meet.

The prevalence of such ideas implies that a position favorable towards social welfare programs is ultimately the more difficult to sustain and justify among voters. Indeed, the study posits that social liberals experience more “conflict” when discussing welfare policy due to the need to “reconcile” their policy preferences with the traditional American ideals outlined above (Feldman & Zaller 1992). This is unsurprising given the emphasis of the Republican Party on limited government and fiscal responsibility; obviously Republicans feel that their conservative narratives on these issues will play well with voters, and that is borne out by the evidence. The high instance of appeals to abstract ideologies when interviewing respondents also suggest that the poverty issue may be a “hard” issue which accordingly attracts “hard-issue” voters, those who are more invested and more knowledgeable than the electorate at large. Clearly, if the question of poverty assistance elicited mere “gut reactions” from voters, one would expect a much more conspicuous absence of such well-formed ideological responses. This is important to note as it suggests that voters thinking more about the poverty-assistance issue may be

accordingly more educated and have more well-formed thoughts regarding political ideologies on the whole.

Given that economic class and personal economic experiences help predict a voter's choice of party, and that these experiences remain relevant to the voter for years at a time, it is clear that the question of government poverty assistance can have a profound effect on voter behavior. While the available literature tells us much about the history of public opinion regarding welfare programs and spending for the poor, there is not so much research regarding contemporary opinions on the issue. As I touched on above, there is reason to believe that public opinion may be shifting once again in favor of government poverty-assistance programs compared to previous decades. The largest such shift in history occurred as a result of the Great Depression; considering that the largest economic crisis since that time has occurred within the past ten years, it is reasonable to suspect that a similar change may have taken place. Given that my data measures responses on the poverty issue in the past ten years only, with over half of those years being 2008 (the beginning of the financial crisis) and onward, I hope to contribute to the knowledge base regarding contemporary opinions on poverty spending.

Additionally, much of what we know about public opinion is measured at a national level; an aggregation of the country's population as a whole. Since my data is drawn from Mississippi specifically, I hope to highlight any regional differences that may exist between the state and the nation at large.

CHAPTER II

HYPOTHESES

“If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”—John F. Kennedy, Jan. 20, 1961

Hypothesis 1 – Gender Variable

Women are more likely than men to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs.

In my first hypothesis I predict that women will prove to be more favorable towards poverty spending than men. I base this prediction on the propensity of women to vote Democratic more often than men, a trend that has been found to exist at nearly all age ranges (Newport 2009). If women identify with and vote as Democrats, it follows that they will more likely agree with Democratic policy positions which tend to encourage either spending more money on poverty-assistance programs than is currently spent, or at the least not cutting funding to such programs. On the other hand, women may not necessarily identify with the Democratic Party because of the poverty issue. It is possible that they vote Democratic due to their stances on other issues—abortion rights and other topics considered to be “women’s issues.” For instance, the National Federation of Democratic Women prominently displays a link labeled “Save the Violence Against Women Act” on its homepage (National Federation of Democratic Women). If

women who vote Democratic are issue voters more so than strong overall partisans, they may therefore be more ambivalent on the poverty issue than one would expect based purely on the party they choose to vote for.

Literature has found that the “gender gap,” as this propensity of women to vote more Democratic may be termed, is not actually a propensity of women to vote for Democratic so much as a propensity for *men* to vote more *Republican*. It has been found that the gender gap is in fact a result of the changing political attitudes of men over time, who have shifted more to the right than women have. More interesting, this literature also finds that the gender gap may have formed primarily due to differences in attitudes towards welfare spending specifically between men and women. This finding is of particular interest to this paper as it suggests that not only are women more likely to support poverty spending, as this paper predicts, but that this gap in attitude between the sexes is so strong that in fact men are more likely to vote Republican solely on the basis of poverty spending attitudes (Kaufman & Petrocik 1999). Earlier literature also supports the idea that welfare spending is a primary driver of the “gender gap” in voting patterns and issue attitudes between men and women, finding that this effect was clearly observed during Ronald Reagan’s presidency (Gilens 1988).

Hypothesis 2 – Race Variable

Blacks are more likely than whites to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs.

Hypothesis 2 states that African-American voters are more likely to support poverty spending than Caucasians. This is likely to be true as a result of the

overwhelming degree to which African-Americans identify as and vote for Democrats in the current political environment. While African-Americans have not always identified strongly with the Democratic Party, it is undeniable that they do so now and have for some time. For instance, both John Kerry and Barack Obama, the two most recent Democratic Presidential nominees, took over eighty-five percent of the African-American vote (Abramowitz, 2011). In 2006's midterm elections, over seventy percent of non-white voters voted for the Democratic candidate in House races (CNN Exit Polls 2006). Given the previous findings regarding voting behavior of African-Americans in presidential elections, the percentage among African-Americans specifically (as opposed to non-whites generally) may be well above that. This is not a contemporary phenomenon, either. While African-Americans were solidly Republican voters over a century ago, showing a strong preference for the "party of Lincoln," as long ago as 1936 a large shift in African-Americans towards the Democratic Party can be observed (Daniel 2012). This initial shift during the Great Depression was a result of the perception that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs had improved their economic fortunes, and later in the twentieth century this preference for the Democratic Party among African-Americans would be strengthened even further by the actions of President John F. Kennedy during the Civil Rights Movement.

With such a huge margin of partisan identification it seems quite plain which way Hypothesis 2 will go. However, even if the hypothesis is not likely to bring new knowledge to the table in the sense of whether the relationship is in the direction predicted or not, it may still be useful to measure the magnitude of said relationship. For instance, if sixty percent of African-Americans express a desire for more poverty

spending as opposed to say, eighty to ninety percent, this represents a substantial gap in aggregate policy preferences for the group despite both cases being predicted by Hypothesis 2. Analysis of the race variable can also provide information about whether African-Americans' feelings on the poverty issue specifically are as strong as their identification with the Democratic Party in general, and whether or not the population of African-Americans local to Mississippi differs in any meaningful way from the national population.

Hypothesis 3 – Age Variable

Younger people are more likely than older people to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs.

In Hypothesis 3 I predict that young people are more likely to support poverty spending. I base this hypothesis on the increased identification of older voters as conservatives and subsequently Republicans, along with the large number of younger voters attracted by the Democratic Party in recent elections, particularly 2008. In 2008 it was estimated that voters under thirty provided millions of votes to Barack Obama and contributed substantially to his victory (Abramowitz 2011). Of course, the votes of young people in 2008 will not necessarily be representative of their feelings on the poverty issue today, but it does provide the foundation for my hypothesis. In conjunction with the above, older voters are measurably more likely to vote Republican (CNN Exit Polls 2006).

This is an easily observed trend throughout Mississippi's history. A primary driver of changing political attitudes over time is generational replacement. Among

white Mississippians, younger generations of voters are consistently more tolerant and socially liberal than their older counterparts. Research has found that in the 1980s eighty percent of white Mississippians under age 30 supported school integration while this figure was under fifty percent for those over sixty (Krane & Shaffer 1992). While a preference for the rights of racial minorities does not necessarily also indicate an increased tolerance for government welfare spending, both political attitudes are divided sharply among party lines, with Republicans typically being less tolerant in both of these areas and Democrats generally being more tolerant. As a result it is logical to expect that older voters would also be more likely to oppose increases in government poverty spending, or even prefer that it be cut back from current levels.

Hypothesis 4 – Religiosity Variable

Those who identify as less religious are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more religious.

My fourth hypothesis states that those who are less religious are more likely to support poverty spending than those who are more religious. In this case, religiosity is measured by frequency of church attendance. Highly religious groups tend to support conservative viewpoints, so I predict that those who are not particularly religious by comparison will be more sympathetic to the liberal viewpoint on this issue. Since 1980, the highly religious among America's Christian communities have shifted towards the Republican Party; many political commentators of the time felt that the "evangelical right" played an important role in the election of Ronald Reagan (Johnson & Tamney

1982). Research suggests that the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* may have had a hand in causing this shift, as people typically classified as "highly religious" (defined as attending church weekly or near weekly) have been found to mostly oppose the legality of abortion while those who only attend church monthly or less are mostly unopposed (Pew Research Center). Therefore, despite their increased identification with the Republican Party, it is not necessarily the case that highly religious people will oppose poverty spending to the same degree as Republican politicians; it is possible that the highly religious are issue voters who are more invested in social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, I predict that they will be more opposed to poverty spending as well.

Hypothesis 5 – Education Variable

Those with a higher level of educational attainment are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a lower level of educational attainment.

Hypothesis 5 predicts a greater degree of support for poverty spending among more educated voters. I base this hypothesis on an increased propensity for highly educated individuals to identify as liberal. Professors and other academic staff at universities overwhelmingly self-identify as liberal (Rothman, Lichter & Nevitte 2005). An immediate flaw in this line of reasoning is the fact that not all those with college degrees or more go on to work in academia, however, polling has also shown that in 2012 Obama led over Romney among voters holding a college degree while the reverse was true among the non-college educated (Marist College Institute 2012). Still, a preference

for the presidential candidate of one party does not indicate absolute support of the party's broad platform. It must be considered that higher levels of education are also correlated with higher levels of income, which are in turn associated with more conservative political leanings and a preference for the Republican Party (Erikson & Tedin 2007). This apparent contradiction provides evidence for the possibility that many highly-educated voters may disagree with the Democratic platform on certain issues even if they express support for the party in presidential elections.

Hypothesis 6 – Income Variable

Those with a low income are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a higher income.

Hypothesis 6 is fairly straightforward. It predicts that poorer and less financially secure individuals will vote in their own economic self-interest. Low income individuals are logically more inclined to be enrolled in government assistance programs, and once enrolled in such programs they have a very concrete incentive to wish that the programs stay around. The literature on the subject supports this simple line of reasoning regarding the voting preferences of individuals based on income. It has been found that when measuring the effects of social “stratification” on political attitudes, a higher income leads an individual to possess a more conservative attitude towards economic issues (Knoke 1979). This is not surprising as higher income individuals are both less likely to benefit from government programs currently, and also have less reason to believe that

they will have need of them in the future due to their increased personal wealth compared to others.

However, as explained above under Hypothesis 5, there is a potential conflict between this hypothesis and Hypothesis 5; there is evidence that highly educated individuals are more likely to support the Democratic Party, and there is also evidence that low income individuals are more likely to vote Democratic (Brooker & Schaefer 2006). The problem is that education and income are positively correlated (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). If a higher income individual is less likely to vote Democratic than a lower income one, one would expect that more highly educated individuals are less likely to vote Democratic as a result. However, this is not necessarily the case. This leaves a conundrum to be played out in the data below, which give an answer to how these conflicting influences play out in Mississippi with regards to poverty spending attitudes.

Hypothesis 7 – Party Identification Variable

Those who identify as more Democratic are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more Republican.

Of all seven, Hypothesis 7 is the simplest and the one which needs the least explanation or elaboration. The Republican Party tends to oppose government-sponsored welfare and insist that any benefits provided be tied to work (Republican Party Platform). As a result, any individuals identifying as Republican but expressing support for more government poverty spending face a direct contradiction in their expressed political views. While it is certainly not impossible for someone to identify as a Republican in

general while not supporting the party's stance on government welfare specifically, there is obvious reason to believe that such a case will be the exception rather than the rule. As with Hypothesis 2, despite the direction of the relationship being nearly a foregone conclusion, it remains useful to measure the magnitude of the relationship. If Democrats are fairly united in wanting more poverty spending while Republicans are not united in cutting it (or vice versa), this still provides useful information about the overall trend of political attitudes amongst the public.

CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

“Even with the tax relief we’ve put in place, a family with two kids that earns the minimum wage still lives below the poverty line. That’s wrong.”—Barack Obama, Feb. 12, 2013

Dataset

In order to test my hypotheses regarding attitudes toward poverty spending in Mississippi, I rely on data from the Mississippi Poll conducted by Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center. The Mississippi Poll has been conducted on a biennial basis since 1981; in each poll, approximately 600 adults are contacted and asked a series of questions about political issues. This makes the Mississippi Poll the oldest and most comprehensive source of public opinion data for the state of Mississippi. I have chosen for my analysis the years 2004 through 2014, the most recent poll, in order to best represent contemporary political attitudes in the state. The total number of respondents for the six polls conducted during this decade combined is 3018. Respondents may refuse to answer a question or choose to respond with “don’t know”; these responses were not considered valid and were excluded from the analysis, and as a result, the total N size for each variable differs from one to the next and is likely to be slightly less than 3018 as well.

A total of eight variables from the Mississippi Poll are used in conducting the analysis. For each variable, the corresponding question was asked in all six years of the poll under consideration, so the total sample size is consistent across all variables. The relevant variables and information regarding how they were coded are described below. Coding information for race and gender is not provided on the basis that it is self-evident.

Dependent Variable

“Now I'm going to ask you about some issues facing state and local government in Mississippi. As you know, most of the money government spends comes from the taxes you and others pay. For each of the following, please tell me whether you think state and local government in Mississippi should be spending more, less, or about the same as now. How about programs for the poor?”

The respondent's answer to this question is used as the dependent variable. Three answer choices were given: Less, Same and More.

Independent Variables

Seven independent variables were measured in the analysis: Gender, race, age, religiosity, education, income, and party identification. Some variables had more than five response categories and as such were recoded into five groups in order to facilitate the use of multivariate tables, as well as for the sake of reducing the size of the resulting tables. The age variable was recoded into five categories consisting of: 18-29, 30-41, 42-53, 54-65, 66+. Religiosity is measured as frequency of church attendance, divided into five categories: Weekly, Near Weekly, Monthly or More, Yearly or More, and Never. Educational attainment was measured in the following five categories: Some

High School (no high school diploma), High School Graduate (high school diploma or GED), Some College (attended college but did not complete a degree), College Graduate (completed an undergraduate degree), and Post-Graduate Work (including all respondents who had entered graduate programs). The family income variable had seven categories organized in intervals of \$10,000 measuring per-year earnings; beginning with “< \$10,000,” proceeding to “\$10,000 - \$20,000”, and so forth until the highest category of “> \$70,000.” The middle six response categories in the family income variable were collapsed into three intermediate categories measured in intervals of \$20,000 instead of \$10,000. The party identification variable and its sub-questions resulted in the following seven response categories: Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent Democrat, Pure Independent, Independent Republican, Weak Republican, and Strong Republican. For both parties, the “weak” and “independent” response categories were combined into a single “weak” category to reduce the original seven categories to five.

Methodology

With the data arranged as outlined above, I used IBM SPSS Statistics software to produce cross-tabulations of the dependent variable and the relevant independent variable for each of my seven hypotheses. I rely on the t-value of the chi-square association test to determine both the existence of a relationship between the two variables and the relative strength of said relationship; observation of the cell percent values reveals the direction of the relationship in the event that one exists, as well as providing a useful secondary measure of association. All cells in all cross-tabulations have expected counts well above five, ensuring that the chi-square test of association is valid. I also include

Goodman and Kruskal's gamma as another measure of association; while the chi-square test of association is the primary indicator of a relationship between the variables, the gamma value can supplement this test by providing a separate value for analysis when two independent variables both produce extremely small (less than .001) t-test values. It also provides another way to measure the direction of a statistical relationship between two variables.

In the following analysis, by far the most powerful and reliable variable is the race variable. As will be shown in the data relating to the relevant hypothesis, nearly eighty-five percent of black respondents believed that the state government should spend "more" on poverty-assistance programs. While this does not entirely invalidate the results of the cross-tabulations formed from the other dependent variables, it does mean that it is useful to also run cross-tabulations for the other six hypotheses which control for the race variable. Without controlling for this variable, the results in all other cross-tabulations will be skewed heavily towards the "More" answer. Cross-tabulations excluding black respondents have therefore been included in the analysis for the six hypotheses not relating to race. While cross-tabulations excluding white respondents could be used to determine the effect of other demographic factors within the black population in Mississippi, the fact remains that the white population displays a substantially greater degree of variety in its responses and is therefore more receptive to the influence of the non-racial demographic factors. A follow-up comparing whether factors such as age, income, etc., affect the responses of the black respondents in the same way that they affect the white respondents may be an avenue for future research.

Results

Hypothesis 1 states that women will have a more favorable disposition towards poverty-spending programs than men. Oddly, there is support for the hypothesis in the data, but only in the cross-tabulation where black respondents were included along with white ones. As shown in Table 1, a higher percentage of women than men chose both the “More” and “Same” responses while a higher percentage of men chose the “Less” response. However, in the cross-tabulation controlling for the race variable in Table 2, a higher percentage of women responded with “More” but a higher percentage of men responded with “Same,” producing an inconsistent result. This inconsistency is reflected in the measures of association; in Table 1 the chi-square statistic, while still relatively high, is measurably lower than that of Table 2, which is sufficiently large to conclude that there is no appreciable relationship between the two variables whatsoever. Unfortunately, given that the test statistic is still over .05 for Table 1, the odds that the results are not significant are unacceptably high. The gamma values are also quite low, sitting below 0.1. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 must be rejected in favor of the null hypothesis.

Table 1 Gender and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Gender		N Size
	Men	Women	
Less	14.6%	12.9%	(396)
Same	29.1%	25.5%	(785)
More	56.4%	61.6%	(1709)
Gamma	.092		
X^2	< .05		

Table 2 Gender and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Gender		N Size
	Men	Women	
Less	20.9%	19.0%	(357)
Same	35.7%	34.4%	(627)
More	43.4%	46.6%	(806)
Gamma	.054		
X^2	> .1		

Hypothesis 2 states that blacks are more likely than whites to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs. The results as shown in Table 3 are not surprising and need little explanation. The voting preferences of the African-American community are well-known and their preferences toward government poverty spending fall in line accordingly. As already mentioned above, the race variable is easily the most significant single demographic factor observed here. No other independent variable produces such a high gamma value. Indeed no other variable comes even close save only party identification. In short, the findings are consistent with what we already know about African-American political behavior, and the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of Hypothesis 2.

Table 3 Race and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Race		N Size
	White	Black	
Less	19.9%	2.7%	(383)
Same	35.0%	13.5%	(759)
More	45.1%	83.8%	(1626)
Gamma	.711		
X^2	< .001		

Younger people are more likely than older people to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs. That is the basis of Hypothesis 3. In Table 4 the cell percentages do not show a consistent pattern for the first two responses, “Less” and “Same.” However, a very consistent pattern emerges in the percentages for “More,” starting with a majority of respondents answering with “More” in the first age range but less than fifty percent by the time the table reaches the oldest age group, a decline of twenty percentage points. This provides evidence in favor of my hypothesis that younger people will be more amenable to poverty-spending, which is further supported by a chi-square significance value below .001. Interestingly, the effect of age on the dependent variable becomes less clear when African-American respondents are excluded from the cross-tabulation. In Table 5 none of the age groups display a consistent pattern; even in the “More” category, cell percentages go up between the first two age groups but down between age ranges two and three. Comparing the overall response patterns of each age range to the others reveals no obvious pattern, either, as the second and third age ranges gave answers that were slightly more favorable to poverty spending than the youngest age range, but the youngest range still displayed more support for poverty spending than the oldest age group. This is accompanied by a low gamma value of -0.76, suggesting that the relationship between age and poverty-spending preferences among white respondents is weak in the event that such a relationship exists. Oddly, the chi-square significance value for Table 4 is also below .001, indicating that some relationship between the two variables likely exists. However, the exact nature of the relationship is left quite unclear by the data. In spite of this

ambiguity when controlling for the race variable, the cross-tabulation for the general population provides sufficient evidence to accept Hypothesis 3.

Table 4 Age and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Age Range	30-41	42-53	54-65	>65	N Size
	18-29					
Less	12.1%	11.9%	14.3%	15.4%	14.6%	(387)
Same	23.0%	18.7%	27.0%	30.5%	40.7%	(779)
More	64.9%	69.4%	58.7%	54.1%	44.7%	(1685)
Gamma	-.170					
X²	< .001					

Table 5 Age and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Age Range	30-41	42-53	54-65	>65	N Size
	18-29					
Less	21.7%	20.7%	16.9%	21.8%	17.6%	(349)
Same	29.9%	28.1%	33.7%	37.1%	46.0%	(625)
More	48.4%	51.2%	49.4%	41.0%	36.4%	(802)
Gamma	-.076					
X²	< .001					

Hypothesis 4 poses that those who identify as less religious are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more religious. In Table 6, no obvious trend emerges in any of the 3 response categories. In each category, all five of the corresponding cell percentages are within ten percentage points of each other, indicating a relative lack of variation as the table moves from higher church attendance to lower. Additionally, “flip-flopping” is seen for all three response categories, with the cell percentages neither going up nor going down consistently from the left side of the table

to the right. Despite the chi-square significance value indicating the existence of a relationship between the two variables, the gamma value is less than .1 suggesting that whatever relationship exists is not very strong. Similar results appear in Table 7. Aside from an obvious general shift towards the “Less” and “Same” responses as a result of excluding African-American respondents, there is not a clear and obvious pattern. Table 7 does, however, have more variance between its cell percentages than Table 6; not all cell percentages fall within ten percent of each other in each row, as was the case in Table 6. This is accompanied by a slightly higher gamma value, supporting the notion that the relationship between the two variables is stronger in Table 7 than it is in Table 6.

Table 6 Church Attendance and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Church Attendance Weekly	Near Weekly	Monthly or More	Yearly or More	Never	N Size
Less	13.5%	15.8%	9.0%	15.4%	17.1%	(391)
Same	29.6%	29.9%	26.9%	23.4%	21.3%	(783)
More	56.9%	54.3%	64.1%	61.2%	61.6%	(1687)
Gamma	.048					
X²	< .001					

Table 7 Church Attendance and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Church Attendance Weekly	Near Weekly	Monthly or More	Yearly or More	Never	N Size
Less	19.5%	22.7%	15.1%	21.7%	20.7%	(355)
Same	39.2%	39.2%	36.6%	28.6%	22.6%	(626)
More	41.3%	38.0%	48.3%	49.7%	56.7%	(800)
Gamma	.085					
X²	< .001					

Further evidence for a clear relationship is seen in the “More” response row. While the percentage decreases from the “Weekly” to the “Near Weekly” category, it then increases substantially over the following three categories. Given that the “Weekly” and “Near Weekly” categories are arguably the most similar out of the five church-attendance categories, their difference measured in days rather than months or years, one could argue this as clear indication that those who rarely attend church are more likely to answer with “More” than those who frequently attend. As with Table 6, the chi-square significance value indicates the existence of some relationship between the variables, so the evidence in Table 7 provides support for Hypothesis 4 overall. The data provides mixed evidence, but the hypothesis is most clearly supported for white respondents.

Hypothesis 5 states that those with a higher level of education are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a lower level of education. Table 8 displays a strong relationship compared to many of the tables examined above. The cell percentage for “Same” increases while the percentages for “More” decrease in all five cells as one moves from less-educated to more-educated, indicating a shift away from preference for “More” government spending as level of education increases. In addition, the cell percentage for “Less” increases as one moves from left to right in all but one case; moving from “College Graduate” to “Post-Graduate Work,” it actually decreases. However, it decreases by less than a full percentage point, and the combined percentage of respondents falling under both the “Less” and “Same” responses is still higher for “Post-Graduate Work” than it is for “College Graduate.” Hence, overall the trend remains very apparent. The gamma value is consistent with these findings, reaching

nearly .3. In Table 9 nearly the exact same pattern can be seen. The cell percentages in the “Same” row no longer increase with absolute consistency from left to right, instead decreasing in one case (“Some College” → “College Graduate). However, other than this the exact same pattern from Table 8 is observed in the cell percentages. Furthermore, the total decrease in the percentage of respondents for the “More” category is even more pronounced in Table 9. While the percentage of “More” respondents decreased by thirty percentage points moving from “Some High School” to “Post-Graduate Work” in Table 8, in Table 9 it decreases by approximately thirty-eight percentage points. In Table 9, less than half as many respondents with “Post-Graduate Work” provided the “More” answer compared to respondents with “Some High School.”

Table 8 Education and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Educational Attainment Some High School	High School Grad	Some College	College Grad	Post-Grad Work	N Size
Less	7.0%	13.3%	15.5%	20.1%	19.2%	(394)
Same	19.2%	23.8%	32.3%	34.9%	37.0%	(784)
More	73.8%	62.9%	52.1%	45.0%	43.8%	(1698)
Gamma	-.273					
X²	< .001					

Table 9 Education and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Educational Attainment Some High School	High School Grad	Some College	College Grad	Post-Grad Work	N Size
Less	10.2%	20.6%	21.7%	25.3%	23.9%	(357)
Same	20.1%	33.0%	42.2%	39.6%	44.0%	(627)
More	69.7%	46.4%	36.0%	35.1%	32.1%	(807)
Gamma	-.266					
X²	< .001					

This indicates a strong trend in the same vein as the one observed in Table 8; indeed, the gamma values for the two tables are nearly identical. These results are fascinating because they suggest that even when controlling for the variable of race, the effect of educational attainment on poverty-spending attitudes remains consistent. Does this mean that higher educational attainment leads to a less favorable view towards government poverty spending among African-American respondents at the same rate as it does among Caucasian respondents? This is one question that could be addressed in future research. Among the general population, however, the results presented above are rather clear. Hypothesis 5 is rejected, as the exact opposite of the hypothesis was found in the data.

The basis of Hypothesis 6 is that those with a low income are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a higher income. Tables 10 and 11 also display a clear trend of decreasing support for state poverty spending as one moves from less to more affluent, left to right on the tables. This is to be expected given the known correlation between level of education and income and given the results already observed in Tables 8 and 9. Many of the higher-income respondents answering with “Less” or “Same” in these tables are likely the same people answering with “Less” or “Same” in the higher-education categories of the previous two tables. Of note is the fact that income may be an even stronger predictor of poverty-spending attitudes than education, however. In both Tables 10 and 11, the most affluent group (those making more than \$70,000 per year in family income) provided a lower percentage of “More” responses than the most highly-educated group in Tables 8 and 9 (“Post-Grad Work”). However, this does not hold true

across all corresponding response categories; for example, there were also more “Less” responses in the least affluent category than they were in the least educated response category. The primary evidence in favor of a stronger relationship between income and poverty-spending attitudes than education is the gamma values, which are higher for both Tables 10 and 11 than they were for Tables 8 and 9.

Table 10 Family Income and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Family Income	\$10,000- \$30,000	\$30,000- \$50,000	\$50,000- \$70,000	> \$70,000	N Size
Less	9.9%	8.7%	13.2%	16.8%	25.4%	(326)
Same	15.3%	22.6%	23.6%	36.2%	39.9%	(616)
More	74.8%	68.7%	63.2%	47.0%	34.6%	(1323)
Gamma	-.352					
X²	< .001					

Table 11 Family Income and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Family Income	\$10,000- \$30,000	\$30,000- \$50,000	\$50,000- \$70,000	> \$70,000	N Size
Less	17.9%	13.8%	18.6%	20.8%	28.6%	(300)
Same	16.3%	29.1%	30.9%	42.0%	42.6%	(503)
More	65.9%	57.1%	50.4%	37.2%	28.8%	(665)
Gamma	-.287					
X²	< .001					

Also of note is the fact that, even after controlling for the race variable, over half of respondents responded with “More” all the way up to the \$30,000-\$50,000 family income range (admittedly, by less half a percent in that category). This suggests that despite Mississippi’s status as a red state and the well-known fact that the Republican Party relies more heavily upon whites for its voter base than does the Democratic Party,

less wealthy Caucasians may still be disinclined to vote against their own financial well-being. If Republicans were to hold control of the state, one would expect that they garner a majority of the white vote since nearly all of the black vote goes to the Democrats. Yet, these results suggest that Republicans should not be getting the majority of votes from less affluent Caucasians; indeed, the total N count for “More” responses is only slightly less than the combined count of “Less” and “Same” responses, and larger than either one individually. One would logically expect that a person who favors increased state spending on poverty-assistance programs would not vote Republican as this is in opposition to fundamental values of the Republican Party currently. Therefore, one of two things may be true: Either these less affluent Caucasians are voting Republican despite their poverty-spending attitudes, or they simply do not vote in sufficient numbers to make their influence felt in political outcomes. This is a possible avenue for future research regarding voter behavior in Mississippi.

Overall, the data provide clear evidence of a relationship between the two variables in the direction predicted, with chi-square significance values below .001 and substantial gamma values in the predicted direction. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is accepted.

Hypothesis 7 states that those who identify as more Democratic are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more Republican. As expected, party identification shows a very strong trend of more to less support for poverty spending as one moves from more Democratic to more Republican with the highest gamma values out of any of the tables save only Table 2. Notably, the gamma value for Table 12 is significantly higher than that for Table 13, suggesting that party identification might play

an even stronger role among African-Americans in predicting poverty-spending values than it does among Caucasians. Another important feature of the tables is the fact that Republicans seem much more divided on the issue than Democrats. While “Strong Democrats,” those most likely to be strong partisans and/or political elites, overwhelmingly responded with “More,” “Strong Republicans” did not provide any cell percentages over fifty percent. A possible remedy would be to combine the “Less” and “Same” categories, as the combined “Strong Republican” responses in both of those combined are similar to the percentage of “Strong Democrats” responding with “More.” Hence, Republicans are about as likely to prefer spending the same or less on poverty-assistance spending programs as Democrats are to prefer spending more; this paints a picture more consistent with the two parties’ opposing ideologies. Regardless, it is clear that a strong relationship exists in the predicted direction given the relatively large gamma values and consistently small chi-square significance values. Hypothesis 7 is accepted.

Table 12 Party ID and Poverty Spending Preferences

Poverty Spending Preference	Party Identification	Weak Democrat	Independent	Weak Republican	Strong Republican	N Size
Less	Strong Democrat	3.1%	5.0%	9.1%	23.2%	25.1% (376)
Same		11.0%	21.0%	20.9%	38.3%	42.4% (758)
More		85.9%	73.9%	70.1%	38.5%	32.4% (1604)
Gamma		-.542				
X²		< .001				

Table 13 Party ID and Poverty Spending Preferences-White Respondents

Poverty Spending Preference	Party Identification	Weak Democrat	Independent	Weak Republican	Strong Republican	N Size
Less	4.8%	9.4%	11.6%	25.2%	26.8%	(346)
Same	19.2%	26.1%	20.9%	39.4%	44.7%	(607)
More	76.0%	64.5%	67.4%	35.3%	28.5%	(760)
Gamma	-0.395					
X^2	< .001					

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

“Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.”—Abraham Lincoln, Mar. 21, 1864

Summary of Results

Hypothesis 1: Women are more likely than men to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs. This hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Blacks are more likely than whites to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs. Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Younger people are more likely than older people to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs. The third hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Those who identify as less religious are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more religious. Hypothesis 4 is accepted for whites.

Hypothesis 5: Those with a higher level of education are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a lower level of education. This hypothesis was rejected, as the opposite was found to be true.

Hypothesis 6: Those with a low income are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those with a higher income. Hypothesis 6 was accepted.

Hypothesis 7: Those who identify as more Democratic are more likely to believe that the government should spend the same amount or more on poverty assistance programs compared to those who identify as more Republican. This hypothesis was accepted.

Conclusions

The results above indicate the primary findings of this paper. These hypotheses were analyzed within the scope of Mississippi Poll respondents from the ten years spanning from 2004-2014. As such, the primary goal of this paper was to analyze the influence of demographic factors on public opinion with regards to government poverty spending within Mississippi specifically. While there is much literature about public opinion on a national scale, there is relatively little which compares public opinion composition in individual states and certainly there is little which analyzes the state of Mississippi specifically. Furthermore, there is very little research or literature pertaining to contemporary, twenty-first century public opinion specifically. Public opinion does not shift easily or rapidly, but over the course of years it does shift; with the nation now

being a decade and a half into the new millennium, it is entirely reasonable to believe that previous conclusions drawn about public opinion before the year 2000 may no longer be true, or may have shifted in the conditions under which they hold true. The data and results contained in this paper are a step towards filling in that gap in the knowledge and providing detailed research on contemporary public opinion in Mississippi—and possibly, by extension, the Deep South in general, though further research would clearly be needed in order to confirm that the findings of this paper can be extrapolated to other states in the Deep South such as Alabama, Louisiana or Georgia.

This paper found that the two most important variables influencing public opinion towards government poverty assistance spending continue to be race and political affiliation/party identification. We know that these factors, at least, have not ceased to be significant since the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, comparison to previous data may reveal if there has been any shifts in one direction or another—if either of these factors are more or less influential now than they were in previous decades. For example, if seventy percent of those who identify as strong Democrats support more government poverty spending in the last ten years, while the figure was eighty or ninety percent for the decade preceding that, this reveals a trend towards more moderate views on government poverty spending within Mississippi's Democratic voters, even though the same general conclusion can be drawn in both cases (namely, that identification as a strong Democrat is an extremely powerful indicator of a person's likely attitude towards increases in government poverty spending).

Other variables found to hold undeniable significance include age, education and income. While the literature about public opinion at large may suggest that there are

conflicting forces in the interaction between education and income in determining political attitudes, in the state of Mississippi specifically this is clearly not the case. Both education and income were found to have a significant effect on poverty spending attitudes in the direction consistent with the positive relationship between the education and income variables themselves (i.e. the fact that a more highly educated person is also likely to earn a higher income). In Mississippi specifically, therefore, there is no contradiction between these two variables, at least with regards to poverty spending attitudes (though as this paper demonstrates, poverty spending attitudes are strongly correlated with party identification as well). Poorer and less educated individuals are more likely to favor more government poverty assistance spending while more affluent and highly educated individuals are more likely to favor the same amount of government poverty spending as exists currently or less. Further research could be conducted to determine possible causes for this outcome; for instance, it may be the case that academics in Mississippi are not nearly as likely to identify as liberal as are their colleagues in the nation in general. It may also be the case that education and income are not as strongly correlated in Mississippi as they are in the general population, or that the correlation between education and income has simply become less significant in the last decade. However, such questions are outside the scope of this paper. A clear trend can also be seen in the age variable; as the age of the respondent increases, the propensity to answer with a preference for more government poverty spending decreases. This is consistent with the finding that, in general, the conservative voter base tends to be older than the liberal voter base.

The least significant variables examined in this paper were gender and religiosity. Gender appeared to display no significant effect whatsoever on poverty spending attitudes. While the data does indicate the existence of some relationship, there is a substantial possibility that such a pattern emerged merely by random chance given that it is only very slightly different from a completely random distribution. It seems safest to conclude that gender should be disregarded as an indicator of poverty spending attitudes in Mississippi. The religiosity variable, measured by frequency of church attendance, was measurably more significant than the gender variable. However, its relationship with the dependent variable remains markedly less clear than that of the other five independent variables.

While these results do not paint a comprehensive picture of public opinion towards welfare spending in the state, they still have important implications for policy-makers who wish to remain in office. It is clear that those who support poverty spending programs in the state tend to be younger, less educated, less affluent, and less white. Meanwhile, those who oppose poverty spending tend to be older, more highly educated, wealthier, and more white. Politicians must consider which of these two demographic groups to appease in both their rhetoric and in their actual policy-making decisions. Logically, legislators should seek to curry favor with the group of voters that has a higher turnout rate between the two, as this will do more to bolster their odds of re-election. Under a delegate model of representation, it could also be said that the legislators are literally doing their job by matching their policy preferences to those of the voters who turn out in the greatest numbers on election day.

In Mississippi, this dynamic plays out quite clearly with the state's dominant Republican party seeking to please the group of voters who oppose poverty spending programs by the government. Given the demographic characteristics laid out above, it is not hard to imagine that the older, wealthier, more conservative voters who oppose poverty spending also vote in higher numbers during state elections. The Republican politicians in Mississippi have opposed expansion of Medicaid in the state under the Affordable Care Act, an action which directly declines a huge amount of federal money intended to assist those living in poverty. While this is certainly not the only example of state Republicans matching their agenda with a position that is hostile to government poverty spending, it is perhaps the largest and most significant such gesture in recent years. It is likely not an accident that the state's legislators have chosen this side; as described above, they have acted in accordance with the strategy of appeasing the group of voters that is most important to securing their positions in office. Hence, it is important for politicians to pay attention to public opinion research.

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