

RACE, SOPHISTICATION, AND WHITE OPINION ON GOVERNMENT SPENDING

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The conventional wisdom in public opinion research suggests that the white public views government spending as a single race-coded issue. This article develops an alternative theory that rests on two propositions. First, the white public sees government spending not as a single issue, but rather, as two distinct issues: spending on the deserving poor and spending on the undeserving poor. Second, political sophistication strengthens the impact racial stereotypes have on attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor, and it does not affect the relationship between stereotypes and attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor. These hypotheses are tested using data from the 1996 and 1992 NES surveys. The empirical results provide strong support for both propositions.

Key words: government spending; deserving poor; undeserving poor; political sophistication; racial stereotypes.

Should the U.S. government expand or contract the welfare state? Few questions have generated as much conflict among partisan and ideological elites over the past several decades. In light of this, scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to understanding the nature and origins of public opinion on government spending. This body of work suggests that, for most people, the issue revolves around the simple question of whether the federal government should spend more or less on programs to help the poor and the needy (Jacoby, 1994, 2000), that whites who evaluate blacks negatively are more opposed to spending than those who evaluate blacks positively (Gilens, 1995, 1996a, 1999; Jacoby, 1994, 2000; Kinder and Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder and Sanders, 1996), and that political sophistication does not condition the impact racial beliefs have on spending attitudes. In short, the consensus view holds that the public sees government spending as a single race-coded issue.

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This article develops and tests an alternative theory of how whites think and reason about government spending. First, I argue that a clear distinction exists in American political culture between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, and hence, between the perceived legitimacy of the claims each group has for government assistance (Cook and Barrett, 1992; Gilens, 1999; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Patterson, 1994). I posit that the mass public reacts by conceptualizing government spending not as a single issue but as two separate issues: spending on the deserving poor and spending on the undeserving poor. This distinction matters politically because the issues are not likely to be contaminated by racial beliefs to the same degree for everyone. Second, I argue that the politically sophisticated react differently than the unsophisticated to how news organizations portray these groups in stories on poverty. Media coverage of the undeserving poor is characterized by a common frame of reference—the image of lazy blacks (Gilens, 1999, 1996b). The constant repetition of this message ensures that the sophisticated become more accustomed to thinking about aid to the undeserving poor in terms of race, because they are more exposed to political news and more adept at incorporating what they have seen into their belief systems (Chong, 1996). Therefore, sophistication should strengthen the relationship between racial stereotypes and attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor. In contrast, media coverage of the deserving poor is not dominated by this racial frame of reference, so the information processing advantages conferred by sophistication should not affect how people think about spending on this group. Thus the sophisticated and unsophisticated will rely to an equally modest degree on stereotypes to deduce attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor.

These hypotheses are tested using data from the 1996 and 1992 National Election Study (NES) surveys. Two compelling findings emerge from this study. First, I demonstrate that whites' attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor are empirically distinct from their attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor. Second, I find that sophisticated whites alone ground attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor in racial stereotypes. In contrast, sophistication does not affect stereotype usage when whites evaluate programs that aid the deserving poor. Broadly speaking, these results suggest that sophisticated whites think about government spending on the undeserving poor in race-coded terms and that the unsophisticated do not.

CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

My discussion begins with the standard view of public opinion on government spending. Attitudes toward government spending can be defined as how positively or negatively people evaluate federal spending on programs that

provide material benefits to the poor, the needy, and other economically marginalized groups (Jacoby, 1994). How are these attitudes structured in memory? In one of the most comprehensive analyses of this topic, Jacoby uses cumulative scaling procedures to demonstrate that responses to the NES questions on federal spending on social welfare programs (i.e., welfare, food stamps, poor people, the homeless, etc.) can be arrayed along a common underlying continuum.¹ This finding suggests that attitudes toward government spending are structured coherently and unidimensionally in long-term memory.

What factors affect support for government spending? Standard political predispositions like ideology, party identification, and core values clearly matter (Jacoby, 1994), but perhaps the most important factor is racial considerations. Research shows that whites draw heavily on beliefs about blacks to guide their preferences on government assistance. In a particularly convincing demonstration of this fact, Gilens (1996a) utilizes a survey experiment, in which a welfare mother is described as black to one half of a sample of whites and as white to the other half, to demonstrate that perceptions of the black welfare mother exert a much stronger effect on attitudes toward government assistance than perceptions of the white welfare mother. Next, Kinder and his colleagues (Kinder and Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder and Sanders, 1996) and Gilens (1995) find that racial beliefs have strong effects on attitudes toward welfare spending and weak effects on attitudes toward spending on more sympathetic groups like the homeless and the elderly. Similarly, Jacoby (1994, 2000) finds that attitudes toward social spending broadly conceived are driven in part by symbolic racism. Finally, Feldman and Steenbergen (2001a, 2001b) show that racial prejudice predicts opposition to spending in general and to welfare spending in particular.

Overall, this line of research shows that the ostensibly race-neutral issue of government spending is seen as a matter of race. These works contribute to our understanding of public opinion on government spending, reaffirm the relevance of race in American politics, and help explain why politicians make implicit racial appeals to exploit white racial animosity for political gain. These accounts are logically plausible and empirically defensible as far as they go, but there are grounds to suspect that how whites think and reason about government spending is more subtle and complex than the standard perspective implies. I now build an alternative theory of opinion formation on government spending that centers on the nature of American political discourse on the poor and the role political sophistication plays in moderating how individuals react to it.

In American political culture, an important distinction exists between people who are entitled to government assistance and those who are not (Cook and Barrett, 1992; Gilens, 1999; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Patterson, 1994).

Specifically, the deserving poor have a valid claim for government assistance because they are seen as committed to working their way out of poverty, or as being prevented from doing so for reasons beyond their control. When poor people seek education or employment, or are unable to do so because of some disability, they have a moral right to receive help from the federal government. In contrast, the undeserving poor lack a legitimate basis for claiming federal assistance because they are blamed for their poverty and seen as favoring government handouts to working their way up. Able-bodied adults who fail to make an honest effort to help themselves do not deserve federal assistance. In light of the cultural distinction made between these two groups, it seems prudent to explore whether these ideas are reflected in how citizens' attitudes toward social spending are structured in long-term memory.²

Even if such a distinction exists, is it likely to be politically consequential? One affirmative answer lies in the possibility that political sophistication *strengthens* the impact that racial stereotypes have on attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor. Although it may seem counterintuitive that sophistication would promote reliance on racial stereotypes, Chong's work (1996) on common frames of reference provides a rationale for this expectation. A common frame of reference is a widely accepted interpretation of what an issue is most fundamentally about. A common frame signals which predisposition is most relevant for thinking about the issue, and, critically, the sophisticated are more likely to be susceptible to this influence than the unsophisticated. By definition, politically sophisticated individuals follow politics closely, possess large stores of factual and associational political knowledge in long-term memory, and process new information efficiently. The unsophisticated pay far less attention to public affairs, hold comparatively sparse stores of political knowledge, and do not process new political information efficiently (Converse, 1964; Luskin, 1987).

When an issue has a common frame of reference, public discourse on it consistently revolves around the same theme. The politically aware are exposed more frequently to public discourse and are more likely to retain the implications of what they encounter. Thus, for an issue with a common frame, the sophisticated should learn more readily than the unsophisticated what the issue is most fundamentally about. It follows that when formulating attitudes on the issue the sophisticated should rely more than the unsophisticated on the predisposition evoked most directly by the common frame. In contrast, when an issue lacks a common frame there is no dominant interpretation for the sophisticated to learn. The information processing advantages of sophistication lie dormant, so there is no reason to expect the sophisticated will attach greater weight to some considerations when deducing preferences.³

A valid test of these expectations requires identifying two distinct but nonetheless related issues, one of which possesses a common frame of reference

the other lacks. The government spending issues meet this condition, because public discourse on the undeserving poor is characterized by a common frame that is absent from discourse on the deserving poor. Specifically, Gilens' (1996b, 1999) analyses of weekly news magazine stories and television news broadcasts on poverty demonstrate that media discourse on the undeserving poor centers on the stereotypical image of lazy blacks. He finds "pictures of African Americans are disproportionately used to illustrate the most negative aspects of poverty and the least sympathetic subgroups of the poor" such as welfare recipients and the urban underclass (Gilens, 1999, p. 129). That is, public discourse on the undeserving poor is characterized by a common frame of reference that revolves around visual images of blacks. Therefore, politically sophisticated whites should rely more heavily than unsophisticated whites on racial stereotypes when evaluating government programs for the undeserving poor. Gilens' work also suggests that this racial frame does not permeate media discourse on the deserving poor. He finds that "black faces are unlikely to be found in media stories on the most sympathetic subgroups of the poor" (Gilens, 1999, p. 132).⁴ In light of this, there should be no propensity for the sophisticated to make greater use of racial stereotypes than the unsophisticated when rendering judgments about government aid to the deserving poor.⁵

Overall, my argument can be summarized as follows. First, I have posited that attitudes toward government assistance for the undeserving poor are distinct from attitudes toward aiding the deserving poor. Empirically, I predict that attitudes toward spending on these two groups will be bi-dimensional. Second, the politically aware are exposed more frequently to the racial frame of reference that dominates media coverage of the undeserving poor, and they are more skilled at incorporating the information they encounter into long-term memory. Empirically, I predict that political sophistication will strengthen the impact racial stereotypes have on attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor. Since the racial frame of reference does not saturate media coverage of the deserving poor, sophistication should not condition the relationship between stereotypes and attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor.⁶

THE STRUCTURE OF ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The hypotheses are tested using data from the 1996 and 1992 NES surveys. Given this article's focus on race-coded thinking among whites, nonwhite respondents are excluded from the samples. To measure attitudes toward government spending, I employ the standard NES budgetary items that ask whether federal spending should be increased, kept the same, or decreased on welfare, food stamps, poor people, and the homeless. In terms of face validity, the welfare and food stamp items clearly reflect attitudes toward

spending on the undeserving poor: in American political discourse welfare is synonymous with spending on this group. In contrast, the face validity of the poor and homeless items as indicators of attitudes toward helping the deserving poor appears less transparent. Nevertheless, some side evidence suggests these items fit the bill. If these items reflect attitudes toward sympathetic subgroups of the poor, then the public should favor spending much more on poor people and the homeless than on welfare and food stamps. This is precisely what survey marginals reveal (Gilens, 1999, p. 28; Rasinski, 1989, p. 391; Smith, 1987, p. 77).

The key question is whether attitudes toward government spending are bi-dimensional in a way that reflects the deserving versus undeserving distinction. This can be investigated using confirmatory factor analysis techniques. Four measurement models are estimated to determine which best reproduces the observed covariation among the spending items. Model 1 posits a single factor solution whereby all items load on the same dimension. In model 2, the welfare and food stamp items load on one factor, and the poor people and homeless items load on a second factor. For model 3, welfare and poor people load on one factor and food stamps and homeless load on the second. Lastly, in model 4 welfare and homeless load on one factor and food stamps and poor people on the other.⁷

My expectation is that the welfare and food stamp items tap one dimension of government spending attitudes and the poor people and homeless items tap another dimension. If this hypothesis is correct, model 2 should yield the best fit for the data. This can be determined as follows. The chi-square test is a test of the null hypothesis that the population covariation matrix for the observed variables equals the population covariance matrix implied by the model: $\Sigma = \Sigma(\theta)$. The closer the fit between Σ and $\Sigma(\theta)$, the smaller the chi-square, and the better the proposed model. A statistically insignificant chi-square indicates acceptable model fit, and thus, in contrast to the typical practice, an insignificant test result is desirable (Bollen, 1989).

Table 1a and 1b contain the factor loadings, the chi-squares, and the chi-square p values for the 1996 and 1992 measurement models, respectively. Given that the estimates from both years point to the same conclusion, I only discuss the 1996 results here. To begin with, the large and highly significant chi-square for model 1 ($\chi^2 = 314.469$, $p < .001$) indicates that a unidimensional solution does not adequately reproduce the data. Next, as expected, model 2 yields a statistically insignificant chi-square ($\chi^2 = 0.100$, $p = .75$), which shows that this model does an excellent job accounting for the observed covariation. And finally, the chi-squares for the third ($\chi^2 = 196.053$, $p < .001$) and fourth ($\chi^2 = 191.369$, $p < .001$) models indicate poor fit.

Overall, model 2 alone fits the data. These results demonstrate that responses to the welfare and food stamp items load on one dimension and that

TABLE 1a. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models of Attitudes Toward Government Spending, 1996

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	ξ_1	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2	
Factor Loadings								
Welfare	1.000	1.000		1.000		1.000		
Food Stamps	0.908	0.856			1.000		1.000	
Poor People	0.919		1.000	0.960				1.076
Homeless	0.731		0.734		0.860		.782	
Model Fit								
AGLS χ^2	314.469	0.100		196.053			191.369	
<i>p</i> value	<.001	.752		<.001			<.001	

TABLE 1b. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models of Attitudes Toward Government Spending, 1992

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	ξ_1	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2	ξ_1	ξ_2	
Factor Loadings								
Welfare	1.000	1.000		1.000		1.000		
Food Stamps	0.968	0.984			1.000		1.000	
Poor People	0.925		1.000	0.935				0.952
Homeless	0.760		0.784		0.807		0.798	
Model Fit								
AGLS χ^2	365.651	0.053		222.627			232.441	
<i>p</i> value	<.001	.817		<.001			<.001	

Notes: Samples limited to white respondents. Unstandardized factor loadings reported. Yuan-Bentler corrected AGLS chi-squares are reported. $N = 1401$ for 1996 and 1876 for 1992.

Source: 1996 and 1992 NES.

responses to the poor people and homeless items load on another. In other words, attitudes toward spending on the undeserving poor are empirically distinct from attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor.⁸ Hence, in contrast to the view that attitudes toward social spending derive from a single latent orientation, my results imply that citizens make a subtle and thoughtful distinction between welfare state programs.

MODELING ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The next step in the analysis is to determine whether sophistication enhances reliance on racial stereotypes only in the case of government spending on the undeserving poor. Two dependent variables are modeled. First, atti-

tudes toward spending on the undeserving poor are measured by combining responses to the welfare and food stamp items into a simple additive scale. Second, attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor are measured by summing responses to the poor people and homeless items. These are 5-point ordinal level variables, ranging from 0 to 4, and coded so higher scores reflect stronger opposition to spending.

Spending opinion is modeled as a function of economic self-interest, group evaluations, political predispositions, racial stereotypes, political sophistication, and a series of multiplicative terms.⁹ First, family income, divided into quartiles, is used as a proxy for economic self-interest. It should be positively related to spending opposition (Gilens, 1995). Second, feeling thermometer scores for poor people and people on welfare are coded so higher scores reflect warmer evaluations. Both should be negatively related to spending opposition (Nelson and Kinder, 1996). Third, Republican identification and ideological conservatism are associated with antispending sentiment (Jacoby, 1994). I tap these predispositions with the standard self-identification items, which are coded so higher values reflect more right-wing responses. Each variable should be associated with spending opposition. Fourth, two core values are included in the model. Limited government is measured with three items gauging support for a weak national government.¹⁰ Equal opportunity is measured with three items that ask about making sure everyone has the same chance to get ahead in life.¹¹ Both variables are coded so higher scores reflect more conservative positions, and hence, they should be positively related to spending opposition (Kinder and Sanders, 1996).

Racial stereotypes are measured as follows. Respondents rated whites and blacks on 7-point work ethic scales with endpoints labeled hardworking and lazy.¹² The white score was subtracted from the black score to create a new variable where higher values correspond to more negative judgments about blacks. The variable was then reset to a 0 to 12 scale. I utilize the white item to smoke out respondents who view blacks more pejoratively than their overt responses indicate. The more people endorse the view that blacks are lazier than whites, the greater the expected opposition to government spending on the undeserving poor and, to a lesser extent, the deserving poor.

Political sophistication is measured using factual political knowledge scales (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). The scales are created by adding the number of correct answers given to a series of factual political knowledge questions.¹³ This variable ranges from 0 to 8 in both years; higher scores reflect more sophistication. Finally, there are four multiplicative terms: ideology \times sophistication, limited government \times sophistication, equal opportunity \times sophistication, and racial stereotype \times sophistication.

The working hypotheses are as follows. First, sophistication should strengthen the relationship between racial stereotypes and attitudes toward

spending on the undeserving poor, so the stereotype \times sophistication term should have a positive and significant effect on the welfare/food stamps variable. Second, sophistication should not moderate policy reasoning for spending on the deserving poor. Statistically, the stereotype \times sophistication term should not exert a significant effect on the poor people/homeless variable. Finally, sophistication should not affect the use of the other predispositions (see note 3), so none of the remaining product terms should be significant.

Tables 2 and 3 contain ordered logistic regression estimates for the 1996 and 1992 models, respectively. Two sets of estimates are reported for each dependent variable. The full models include all multiplicative terms, while the trimmed models include the multiplicative terms that surpassed significance in the full models.¹⁴

The 1996 estimates in Table 2 reveal that sophistication enhances the impact stereotypes have on attitudes toward government spending on the undeserving poor. The stereotype \times sophistication coefficient is positive and significant as predicted, which indicates that politically aware whites rely more than unaware whites on beliefs about the work ethic of blacks to deduce spending opinions. In contrast, for spending on the deserving poor, there is no interaction between sophistication and stereotype usage. As expected, the stereotype \times sophistication variable is statistically insignificant, which suggests that when whites think about federal spending on sympathetic subgroups of the poor, sophistication neither promotes nor inhibits stereotype usage. Finally, the other multiplicative terms are statistically insignificant in the undeserving poor model, and two of the three are insignificant in the deserving poor model, which suggests that sophistication does not promote reliance on political predispositions. Thus, the stereotype \times sophistication effect cannot be attributed to a general propensity for sophistication to promote reliance on predispositions.

The 1992 estimates reported in Table 3 tell a similar story. Once again, sophisticated whites are more likely than unsophisticated whites to base attitudes toward government assistance on racial stereotypes when it helps the undeserving poor. First, in the welfare model, the stereotype \times sophistication variable is positive and significant, which indicates that the link between racial beliefs and spending opinion is stronger at higher levels of sophistication. Second, the stereotype \times sophistication term is statistically insignificant in the deserving poor model, which supports the inference that sophistication does not moderate the use of stereotypes when whites deduce attitudes toward spending on the sympathetic poor. Third, the politically informed do not make greater use of predispositions than the uninformed for either issue (excepting ideology in the welfare spending model), which means that the tendency for the sophisticated to rely more on stereotypes is not a function of a generic sophistication effect.

TABLE 2. Models of Attitudes Toward Government Spending on the Undeserving/Deserving Poor, 1996

	Undeserving Poor		Deserving Poor	
	Full Model	Trimmed Model	Full Model	Trimmed Model
Constant	5.599*** (.703)	4.946*** (.590)	1.168 (.736)	0.392 (.385)
Income	0.165*** (.050)	0.156*** (.050)	-0.076 (.047)	-0.081* (.047)
Feelings toward poor people	0.005* (.003)	0.006* (.003)	-0.022*** (.003)	-0.022*** (.003)
Feelings toward people on welfare	-0.040*** (.003)	-0.040*** (.003)	-0.010*** (.003)	-0.010*** (.002)
Party identification	0.062* (.032)	0.083** (.030)	0.104*** (.030)	0.113*** (.029)
Ideology	0.056 (.167)	0.267*** (.062)	-0.006 (.173)	0.161** (.056)
Limited government	0.218 (.145)	0.313*** (.048)	-0.094 (.141)	-0.105 (.134)
Equal opportunity	-0.006 (.062)	0.083*** (.021)	0.219*** (.054)	0.204*** (.017)
Racial stereotype	-0.180** (.076)	-0.193** (.074)	0.003 (.082)	0.091** (.032)
Political sophistication	-0.399*** (.119)	-0.300** (.106)	-0.068 (.123)	0.075* (.037)
Ideology × sophistication	0.041 (.031)		0.032 (.031)	
Limited government × sophistication	0.015 (.025)		0.068** (.024)	0.070** (.023)
Equal opportunity × sophistication	0.016 (.010)		-0.002 (.008)	
Racial stereotype × sophistication	0.044** (.015)	0.048*** (.015)	0.016 (.015)	
μ_1	1.137*** (.128)	1.137 *** (.127)	1.315*** (.073)	1.314*** (.072)
μ_2	3.159*** (.137)	3.156*** (.136)	3.033*** (.113)	3.029*** (.112)
μ_3	4.391*** (.144)	4.384*** (.143)	4.433*** (.163)	4.426*** (.163)
Model chi-square	383.911	379.480	413.082	411.698

Source: 1996 NES.

Notes: Ordered logistic regression estimates are reported. Higher scores on the dependent variable indicate stronger opposition to government spending. Standard errors are in parentheses. The trimmed models exclude the multiplicative terms that were insignificant in the full models. Samples limited to white respondents. To maintain strict comparability of samples all analyses are limited to the same set of respondents ($n = 1045$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 3. Models of Attitudes Toward Government Spending on the Undeserving/Deserving Poor, 1992

	Undeserving Poor		Deserving Poor	
	Full Model	Trimmed Model	Full Model	Trimmed Model
Constant	4.529*** (.453)	4.522*** (.448)	0.006 (.615)	0.203 (.354)
Income	0.141** (.045)	0.142*** (.045)	0.058 (.046)	0.060 (.046)
Feelings toward poor people	0.004 (.003)	0.004* (.002)	-0.020*** (.003)	-0.019*** (.003)
Feelings toward people on welfare	-0.047*** (.002)	-0.047*** (.002)	-0.013*** (.002)	-0.013*** (.002)
Party identification	0.020 (.025)	0.018 (.025)	0.167*** (.026)	0.175*** (.025)
Ideology	0.011 (.100)	0.020 (.099)	0.033 (.121)	0.193*** (.053)
Limited government	0.190*** (.055)	0.123*** (.022)	0.109* (.059)	0.146*** (.022)
Equal opportunity	0.042 (.043)	0.073*** (.018)	0.122** (.046)	0.156*** (.018)
Racial stereotype	-0.057 (.051)	-0.059 (.050)	0.053 (.072)	-0.028 (.030)
Political sophistication	-0.351*** (.092)	-0.357*** (.090)	0.191* (.115)	0.130*** (.024)
Ideology × sophistication	0.060** (.022)	0.057** (.021)	0.035 (.025)	
Limited government × sophistication	-0.014 (.010)		0.006 (.011)	
Equal opportunity × sophistication	0.006 (.008)		0.006 (.008)	
Racial stereotype × sophistication	0.038** (.012)	0.038*** (.012)	-0.019 (.014)	
μ_1	1.080*** (.081)	1.079*** (.081)	1.568*** (.071)	1.565*** (.071)
μ_2	3.133*** (.103)	3.130*** (.103)	3.515** (.133)	3.497*** (.131)
μ_3	4.258*** (.115)	4.254*** (.115)	4.651*** (.193)	4.621*** (.190)
Model chi-square	499.289	497.825	491.373	487.386

Source: 1992 NES.

Notes: Ordered logistic regression estimates are reported. Higher scores on the dependent variable indicate stronger opposition to government spending. Standard errors are in parentheses. The trimmed models exclude the multiplicative terms that were insignificant in the full models. Samples limited to white respondents. To maintain strict comparability of samples all analyses are limited to the same set of respondents ($n = 1374$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The ordered logit estimates demonstrate that sophistication promotes reliance on racial stereotypes when whites deduce their attitudes toward federal spending on the undeserving poor and has no effect when whites formulate attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor. To see if these statistically significant estimates translate into substantively meaningful results, I convert the coefficients from the trimmed models into predicted probabilities using the method of first differences (King, 1989). Table 4 contains the predicted probabilities that sophisticated and unsophisticated whites favor spending cuts on each issue given different values on the stereotype variable.¹⁵ The sophisticated and unsophisticated are set to one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. The stereotype values also correspond to one standard deviation above and below the mean. Each first difference reflects the difference in the probability of spending opposition comparing the “blacks work harder than whites” to the “blacks are lazier than whites” position on the stereotype variable, holding the other predictors at their means.

Table 4 reveals that the statistical relationships reported in Tables 2 and 3 are substantively significant. To begin with, the 1996 results indicate that the probability of opposing spending on the undeserving poor is .68 for sophisticates who believe blacks work harder than whites and .77 for sophisticates who believe blacks are lazier than whites, a difference of .09. Among the

TABLE 4. Effect of Racial Stereotype on Opposition to Government Spending on the Undeserving/Deserving Poor for Sophisticated and Unsophisticated Whites

	Undeserving Poor		Deserving Poor	
	Sophisticated	Unsophisticated	Sophisticated	Unsophisticated
1996				
Blacks work harder than whites	.68	.71	.14	.08
Blacks are lazier than whites	.77	.69	.18	.10
Difference	.09	-.02	.04	.02
1992				
Blacks work harder than whites	.38	.46	.06	.03
Blacks are lazier than whites	.52	.47	.05	.03
Difference	.14	.01	-.01	.00

Source: Trimmed Models Table 2–3.

Notes: Cells represent the sum of the predicted probabilities of a spending opposition response. Differences represent the predicted change in the probability of a spending opposition response when the racial stereotype variable moves from a nonstereotypical response (one standard deviation below the mean) to a stereotypical response (one standard deviation above the mean). Sophisticated/unsophisticated equal one standard deviation above/below the sophistication mean. Probabilities estimated with other variables assuming mean values. Samples limited to white respondents.

unsophisticated, movement from the hardworking to lazy position on the stereotype variable results in a trivial decline of .02 in the probability of spending opposition, from .71 to .69. Hence, the sophisticated depend on stereotypes and the unsophisticated do not. In contrast, for government spending on the deserving poor, the sophisticated are not more responsive to stereotypes. Movement from the work hard to the lazy position on the stereotype variable increases the probability of spending opposition by .04 for the sophisticated and .02 for the unsophisticated. In short, attitudes toward government spending depend on racial stereotypes only when the issue is defined in terms of welfare and only among the politically sophisticated.

The results from 1992 reaffirm these points. For the politically aware, movement from the racially sympathetic to the racially hostile position on the stereotype variable increases the probability of welfare spending opposition by .14—from .38 to .52. Among the politically unaware, there is no relationship between stereotypes and spending opposition, as racially sympathetic whites are as likely to oppose welfare spending (.46) as racially hostile whites (.47). Next, for the issue of spending on the deserving poor, there is no interaction between sophistication and stereotype usage. Among the sophisticated, the probability of spending opposition is about the same for those who reject and those who endorse the stereotype (.06 and .05, respectively). The same holds true for the unsophisticated; the probability of spending opposition equals .03 at both positions on the stereotype variable. Once again, it is apparent that attitudes toward social spending on the deserving poor are not race coded for anyone. To sum up, the 1992 results imply that sophistication promotes stereotypical thinking about government spending on the undeserving poor, and that it does not promote racialized thinking about the deserving poor.

Some final comments on the cross-year differences in welfare spending opposition are warranted. In 1996 it is clear that although sophistication promotes reliance on stereotypes, whites oppose spending on the undeserving poor regardless of how politically informed they are (i.e., the probability of spending opposition $>.50$ for all cells in the upper left quadrant in Table 4). This likely reflects the fact that welfare reform was a high priority for both the Republican Party and President Clinton in the mid-1990s and, therefore, received extensive coverage in the national media. Given the negative connotations associated with welfare, it is not surprising that antispending sentiments were prevalent in 1996. However, the issue was less salient in 1992, and hence, welfare opinion was less skewed in the antispending direction (compare the probabilities in the 1996 and 1992 left quadrants). It is here that the impact the common frame has on the policy reasoning of the sophisticated is most apparent. As sophisticated whites move from the blacks work harder to the blacks are lazier point on the stereotype variable, opinion shifts from rejection (.38) to acceptance (.52) of the conservative position on the

issue. In other words, the racial frame of reference that dominates public discourse on poverty is powerful enough to push sophisticated whites over the ideological dividing line on welfare spending.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This article has developed and tested a theory of how whites think and reason about government spending. First, I have argued that attitudes toward government spending on the undeserving poor are distinct from attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor, presumably because people pick up on the contrast made between these groups in political discourse. The confirmatory factor analysis results provide strong support for this hypothesis. Opinion reports on the welfare and food stamp items derive from one underlying orientation, and responses to the poor people and homeless items derive from a second orientation. Thus, the public thinks of government spending not as a single issue, but rather, as two separate (though related) issues.

Second, I have posited that political sophistication strengthens the relationship between racial stereotypes and attitudes toward government spending on the undeserving poor, and that it does not affect the impact stereotypes have on attitudes toward spending on the deserving poor. The statistical evidence is consistent with these expectations. The racial stereotype \times sophistication variable is positive, statistically significant, and substantively meaningful in the welfare/food stamps spending models, and it is statistically insignificant in the poor/homeless spending models. Put differently, when domestic spending targets the undeserving poor, sophisticated whites rely more heavily than unsophisticated whites on racial stereotypes to constrain spending opinions, presumably because they are more cognizant of the racial frame of reference that animates media discourse on the worst aspects of poverty. But when spending aids the deserving poor, sophisticated whites do not rely more than unsophisticated whites on stereotypes to render spending opinions. Given that media discourse on the deserving poor has not been racialized to the extent that discourse on the undeserving poor has, the lack of a sophistication effect makes sense. Finally, most of the remaining sophistication multiplicative terms are insignificant, which supports the inference that the observed stereotype \times sophistication effect cannot be attributed to a systematic propensity for sophistication to promote reliance on predispositions. Sophistication promotes the use of stereotypes and little else.

These findings contribute to our understanding of public opinion in several ways. First, they clarify how the public thinks about government spending. Some studies suggest that spending opinions derive from a single latent orientation toward social welfare (Jacoby, 1994, 2000), while others treat opinions on specific programs as if they derive from separate orientations (Kinder and

Sanders, 1996). Under the former interpretation, the public pays little heed to the beneficiaries of these programs; in the latter, the public makes numerous distinctions. My findings suggest that it makes little sense to speak of attitudes toward spending on the needy in general or on each and every subgroup in particular; instead, the public distinguishes between those who deserve help and those who do not.

Furthermore, this distinction matters politically. While most analyses of opinion on government assistance assume that everyone relies on racial beliefs to the same degree (Feldman and Steenbergen, 2001a, 2001b; Gilens, 1995, 1996a, 1999; Jacoby, 1994, 2000; Kinder and Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 1997, 2001), my results demonstrate that only sophisticated whites rely on stereotypes to guide their positions on government spending on the undeserving poor. Hence, politicians who play the “race card” to undermine support for welfare will not move white opinion en masse. Instead, implicit racial appeals work most effectively on politically and economically privileged whites. Given that these citizens are the most likely to participate in politics and the least likely to benefit from welfare, they surely exert disproportionate influence in pushing policymakers in an antiwelfare direction.

These findings also have implications for theories of political sophistication. The sophistication interaction model of policy reasoning holds that the ability to deduce policy preferences from general principles, such as ideology and core values, is a function of sophistication (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1987; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991; Zaller, 1992). However, these frameworks suggest that the ability to deduce welfare opinions from racial stereotypes is not a cognitively demanding task beyond the pale for most citizens. Stereotype activation occurs automatically in the presence of group-related stimuli (Devine, 1989), so cognitive processing demands that only the highly aware can surmount do not exist. Furthermore, government spending on welfare is an “easy” issue: it is symbolic, deals heavily with policy ends, and has been on the agenda for a very long time (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). Citizens hold genuine attitudes on the issue. Given the universal recognition of this stereotype and the ease with which it can be applied to welfare opinion, it may seem implausible that sophistication would promote its use. Nevertheless, this is precisely what the empirical results have shown (cf. Federico, 2002). How is this possible?

Following Chong (1996), I believe the answer centers on the power of a common frame of reference to shape how the sophisticated reason about certain issues. Media discourse on the undeserving poor is dominated by negative images of blacks. Which subset of the public encounters this common frame most frequently? The politically sophisticated. And which subset of the public is most skilled at retaining what they have been exposed to? The politically

sophisticated. The constant repetition of the same message, that the undeserving poor are overwhelmingly black, leads sophisticated whites to view federal antipoverty efforts on behalf of the undeserving poor in terms of race. More broadly, these results present a challenge to theories positing that factors internal to individual psyches largely drive policy reasoning. External factors, such as the nature of public discourse, must be considered as well. In short, characteristics of citizens and issues interact to shape mass policy reasoning (Sniderman, 2000; Zaller, 1992).

Finally, this research has implications for evaluating democratic citizenship. Sophisticated citizens are especially likely to approximate citizenship ideals. Sophistication promotes political interest and participation, support for democratic norms, political tolerance, and so on (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Nevertheless, it seems clear that sophistication can produce deleterious outcomes as well. While analysts take comfort in findings that sophistication promotes reliance on predispositions, such enthusiasm may be tempered when the predisposition involved can be used to justify animosity and discrimination toward traditionally disadvantaged groups. The fact that whites' attitudes toward government spending on the undeserving poor depend on negative stereotypes is unsettling enough (Gilens, 1999), but the finding that the most politically active rely most heavily on antiblack stereotypes is even more troubling.

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APPENDIX. Descriptive Statistics and Predicted Effects for the Independent Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Predicted Effect
1996 NES					
Income	2.65	1.07	1	4	+
Feelings toward poor people	68.53	17.19	0	100	-
Feelings toward people on welfare	48.92	18.92	0	100	-
Party identification	2.93	2.09	0	6	+
Ideology	1.28	0.91	0	2	+
Limited government	1.45	1.22	0	3	+
Equal opportunity	4.41	2.76	0	12	+
Racial stereotype	6.94	1.42	2	12	+
Political sophistication	5.31	1.93	0	8	NA
1992 NES					
Income	2.69	1.08	1	4	+
Feelings toward poor people	68.89	17.25	5	100	-

Feelings toward people on welfare	49.18	19.48	0	100	–
Party identification	2.92	2.00	0	6	+
Ideology	1.23	0.93	0	2	+
Limited government	2.23	2.28	0	6	+
Equal opportunity	3.10	2.56	0	12	+
Racial stereotype	7.11	1.47	0	12	+
Political sophistication	4.24	2.20	0	8	NA

Note: Samples limited to white respondents.

NOTES

1. Items that deal with other policy domains (i.e., crime, the environment, defense, etc.) do not form part of the cumulative scale, and hence, can be ignored.
2. This distinction has been noted before (Cook and Barrett, 1992; Gilens, 1999), but its potential influence on individual-level attitude structure has yet to be investigated.
3. One might posit that sophistication will, as a general rule, promote reliance on political predispositions (Zaller, 1992). This proposition does not appear to hold for public opinion on government spending (Feldman and Zaller, 1992; Goren, 2000).
4. Gilens' analyses end in 1992, which raises the question of whether these patterns persist thereafter. Clawson and Trice (2000) demonstrate that they do from 1993 to 1998.
5. More speculatively, it appears that public discussion on the deserving poor lacks any other common frame (Iyengar, 1990; Patterson, 1994).
6. Framing studies have proliferated over the past decade. Not surprisingly, conceptual definitions of framing vary widely (Druckman, 2001b; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997). In light of this, it is important to clarify how my study relates to the broader framing literature. Most framing studies focus on how alternative descriptions of a single issue condition the relationship between political predispositions and issue attitudes (Druckman, 2001a; Iyengar, 1990; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson and Kinder, 1996). In contrast, my study centers on how the presence or absence of a common frame of reference affects the relationship between a single predisposition and attitudes toward two distinct issues.
7. All models were estimated using the EQS program (version 5.7b). The observed variables are categorical rather than continuous; therefore, all estimates were generated from the polychoric correlation matrix using the category command.
8. The factor correlation is .61 in 1996 and .65 in 1992.
9. Descriptive statistics and predicted effects are in the appendix.
10. Question wording for these items is as follows: (1) One, the less government the better; or two, there are more things the government should be doing; (2) One, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or two, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved; and (3) One, the main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves; or two, government has become bigger because the problems we face today have become bigger. The range of this variable differs across the data sets because the 1996 NES did not include a volunteered midpoint option. Cronbach's α averages .75 across the surveys.
11. Question wording for these items is as follows: (1) Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed; (2) If people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems; and (3) One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance (five response

- options ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly). Cronbach's α averages .67 across the samples.
12. Question wording is as follows: "Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of the people in a group can be rated. In the first statement a score of 1 means that you think almost all of the people in that group tend to be 'hard-working.' A score of 7 means that you think most people in the group are 'lazy.' A score of 4 means that you think that most people in the group are not closer to one end or the other, and of course, you may choose any number in between. Where would you rate [blacks/whites] in general on this scale?"
 13. The 1996 items are the offices held by Al Gore, William Rehnquist, Boris Yeltsin, and Newt Gingrich; party control of the House and Senate; and the ideological placement of the two parties. The 1992 items are the offices held by Dan Quayle, William Rehnquist, Boris Yeltsin, and Tom Foley; which branch has the power to declare laws unconstitutional; who nominates federal judges; and party control of the House and Senate. The average Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$. Note finally that the correlation between the stereotype and sophistication variables is $-.03$ for 1996 and $-.13$ for 1992.
 14. The NES weighting variable is used in all of the statistical analyses. All models were estimated using the LIMDEP program (version 7.0). Due to space limitations I will not discuss control variable effects.
 15. Recall that the dependent variables range from 0 to 4: 0 and 1 values correspond to the increase spending categories, 2 corresponds to the neutral category, and 3 and 4 correspond to the decrease spending categories. The probabilities reported in Table 4 are the sum of the two decrease categories.

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