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## Explaining Public Opinion towards a Federal Educational Reform: The Impact of Accountability, Symbolism, Group Interest, and Authoritarianism on Support for the No Child Left Behind Law

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Explaining Public Opinion towards a Federal Educational Reform:  
The Impact of Accountability, Symbolism, Group Interest, and  
Authoritarianism on Support for the No Child Left Behind Law

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the  
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Jonathon Holland

Lexington, KY

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and Janet Stamatel, Professor of Sociology

Lexington, KY

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### EXPLAINING PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS A FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL REFORM: THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY, SYMBOLISM, GROUP INTEREST, AND AUTHORITARIANISM ON SUPPORT FOR THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND LAW

This study focuses on public opinion of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The act is a federal reform act, therefore politicians will pay attention to voters' opinions of the law when considering if they should pass future legislation like it. Data were collected from a sample population of United States citizens by the Princeton Survey Research Associates International. People's educational views, political views, group interests, and authoritarian views were all used to measure which groups have a positive attitude toward NCLB. Logistic regression was used to test several models to predict which groups have the strongest opinion of the law. The results indicate people's views toward standardized testing, Republicans, and parents are the groups most likely to have a positive view of the law, followed closely by people with authoritarian attitudes.

Keywords: Education, Symbolic politics, Self/Group Interest, Authoritarianism, No Child Left Behind

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In 2002 President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It was designed to close the achievement gap in test scores between American students and the students of other industrialized nations. The intent behind NCLB is to hold teachers and administrators accountable for students who are performing below the current academic standards (Meador 2010). The law is designed to encourage states to create goals for schools and thus improve education across the United States. The law also provides funding for programs that schools can apply for such as after school care, transportation, and programs to get parents involved in their children's schools. NCLB asserts more power over public education than any act in the history of the United States (McGuinn 2006). It holds schools accountable for the knowledge students are being taught and shuts schools down if the scores do not meet the standard set by the state, which no other federal act has done. Therefore, it is important to study because it has more potential to change the American educational system than any other federal education act to date.

Most of the research conducted about attitudes toward NCLB has focused on teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward the law (Landgraf 2007; Meador 2010; Peterson and West 2003). Teachers' and administrators' opinions are useful for measuring if the law is accomplishing its goal, but it is not a good indicator of how politicians will react to it. Since NCLB is an official law of the national



government, decisions regarding revisions or whether the act is amended lie with the federal government. Bearing this in mind, little research has been done on the general public's view of NCLB, which limits the predictive power of past research. Past research indicates that in 2004 and 2007 Americans were split on their attitudes toward the law; around 40% had positive attitudes and 40% had negative attitudes while the rest were undecided (McGuinn 2006, Landgraf 2007). These studies included little data on which demographics people belonged to and the demographic groups that like NCLB. They also did not run regression analyses coding for which groups had the strongest attitudes toward the law. Without this information it is difficult to determine how politicians will vote on future education legislation and what direction public education will go in the United States.

Considering that historically the federal government has never held such a large role in education, it is important to measure how American voters are reacting to this influence. If certain demographic groups with power react favorably toward the amount of influence NCLB gives the federal government then politicians are likely to increase their influence in education. However, if these groups do not like the influence the government has then the government will likely relinquish some of its power in education. The government could drift toward a largely private school system, as Republicans have been advocating (McGuinn 2006) or schools that specialize more since the educational system would not be standardized. Either way the public sides on the issue, it will affect the public school system as a whole.

This study explores which groups have the strongest attitudes toward NCLB. NCLB is a large act with many complexities, therefore public opinion on NCLB varies

based on (a) people's different views or theories of education (traditional vs. participatory education), (b) their party's position, (c) demographics, particularly parents of school age children, race, sex, age, and where they live, and (d) authoritarian versus tolerant attitudes. Therefore my research questions are:

**Research Question 1:** How does a person's educational values affect their attitude toward the No Child Left Behind Act?

**Research Question 2:** How does a person's political affiliation affect their attitude toward the No Child Left Behind Act?

**Research Question 3:** How does the social group people belong to affect their attitudes toward the No Child Left Behind Act?

**Research question:** How do people's authoritarian views affect their attitude toward the No Child Left Behind Act?

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review**

#### ***History of the No Child Left Behind Act***

Education in the United States started to become a national issue in the 1950s and has continued to be debated over through the No Child Left Behind Act. In the 1950s there was a focus on disparities in schools between white and black students, Northern and Southern schools, and urban and rural schools. In 1953 the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was created. Education was added because there was a growing movement in the United States that the federal government should help subsidize schools in order to aid the disparities previously mentioned (New York State Archives September 2, 2013). In 1954 five cases came together to form *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Supreme Court decided that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Many laws have preceded the case to ensure the rights of blacks and other minority groups, but the achievement gap still exists.

In the 1950s schools were getting larger and more people were graduating high school than any point previously in the United States (Tyack and Cuban 1995). This meant that schools needed more funding in order to educate the amount of young people that were going through the system. Educational conservatives and liberals debated whether the funding should come from the federal government or state and local governments. The crux of the arguments for both sides was characterized by “the three R’s... race, religion, and reds” (Rhodes 2012: 29). The

first R, race, referred to civil rights; those who were firm race advocates, on either side, did not support federal aid for education. Civil rights activists did not want federal aid to go toward segregated schools. Most southern states did not want to accept federal aid because it came with control; the federal government would be able to tell southern schools that they needed to desegregate. The second R, religion, referred to religious leaders that did not want federal aid for only public schools because it excluded parochial schools; this group was composed of mainly Catholics, who were advocates of Catholic schools receiving funding. “Reds” referred to the red scare and the fear of the federal government trying to control anything. This especially applied to schools and the fear that the government was trying to indoctrinate children through public schools (Rhodes 2012).

Since the 50s the government has become more involved with education. In order to counter the Soviet scare, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958 in response to the launch of Sputnik. The law provided money for loans, grants, and scholarships for people who wanted to go to college. It also provided funds for the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages in public elementary and secondary schools. These funds are designed to educate students to become worldwide leaders in the sciences and stay ahead of the Soviet Union.

During the early 1960s the federal government mostly focused on students getting a job after graduation. In 1963 the Vocational Education Act was enacted to provide funding for any vocational program less than a Bachelor’s degree (Eastern Kentucky University September 4, 2013). During this time in the history of the United States the country’s leaders recognized that technological and automation

processes were changing. This meant that some people would lose their jobs while new, more technical jobs would become available. Therefore, the government wanted education to be available for people who wanted to become skilled workers and take the jobs that would become available.

The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, which created laws prohibiting discrimination against racial, ethnic, national and religious minorities, and women in facilities that serve the general public (U.S. Department of Justice September 6, 2013). This includes discrimination against students and families who went to public schools. Along with the Civil Rights Act the president ordered for a report to be written addressing four issues: 1) the extent to which racial and ethnic groups are segregated from one another in public schools, 2) whether schools offer equal educational opportunities, 3) how much the students learn, measured by their scores on standardized tests, and 4) discern possible relationships between students' achievements and what type of school they attend. Therefore a report was published in 1966 that addressed these issues and was titled the Coleman Report. The researchers found that black students attend mostly black schools while whites attend mostly white schools. Even the majority of teachers in the black schools are black and the majority of the teachers in white schools are white. Although there were a few white teachers in black schools, it was extremely rare for a black teacher to teach in a white school. Blacks had fewer opportunities to take courses in physics, chemistry, and foreign languages. They also had fewer books in the libraries and less opportunity to be part of extracurricular activities. Whites were also learning more according to standardized tests, achieving scores far beyond

their black counterparts. The factors that affected black students' scores the most were the quality of the teachers, educational background of their parents, aspirations of the people around them, and the school they went to. This report showed that the United States had a long way to go before attaining equal rights for all races.

Despite the Civil Rights Act in 1965 Daniel Moynihan produced the Moynihan report detailing the history of blacks in the United States and how the nation needs to proceed in order to achieve its goal of equality for everyone (Black Past August 29, 2013). The report noted that unemployment for blacks was much higher than for whites and called for a change in the mentality of how America educated blacks. It stated that if blacks were better educated they would be able to secure better jobs for themselves and the economic position for the entire race would increase. However, even a decade after Brown vs. Board of Education only one ninth of black students attended a school with white children.

In 1965 President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was the most significant educational act to date in the history of the United States (Peterson and West 2003; McGuinn 2006; and Rhodes 2012). The act funded elementary and secondary schools for professional development, instructional materials, resources for educational programs, and parental involvement programs. The funding was given to each state depending on the population and number of schools in the state. Two percent of the money given to the states had to be used for school improvement. The act also bans a national curriculum although it establishes high standards and accountability for schools

throughout the nation. The law also emphasizes equality of education for all students, regardless of race, religion, or wealth and aimed to shorten the achievement gap by making education available and equal to every child in the United States (U.S. Department of Education February 17, 2013).

In 1968 the focus shifted to students who were not fluent in English with the Bilingual Education Act. The number of immigrants who spoke Spanish was rising and these students were falling behind in their studies because they could not understand classroom instruction. The Bilingual Education Act provided funds that were available to any school district that wanted to create programs for these students in order to help them speak English fluently (Orr, 2013). In order to measure the effectiveness of these laws The National Assessment of Educational Progress was passed which provided funds for periodic surveys in order to ascertain how much students were learning in school (New York State Education Department September 2, 2013).

At the beginning of the 1970s the federal government started the Experimental Schools Program, which gave funds to schools that wished to teach students using methods other than the traditional teaching methods. These programs had to provide several different measures of testing in order to decide if children were actually learning under their system. The National Institute of Education (NIE) was also created in order to regulate education in the United States, although it was absorbed into the Department of Education in 1985 (New York State Education Department September 2, 2013). Two years later President Nixon signed the Education Amendments of 1972, the most famous of which is Title IX. This

states that education should be available to everyone in the United States regardless of his or her sex (Tyack and Cuban 1995 and U.S. Department of Justice September 6, 2013). This law extends to all schools in the United States including elementary, secondary, colleges, and universities.

The laws passed in the mid 1970s focused on equality in schools. The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 states that schools cannot discriminate on the basis of color, race, gender, or nationality. This includes transferring a student to a different school in order to segregate them and not providing proper provisions for non-English speaking students (New York State Education Department September 2, 2013). The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 sought special provisions for handicapped children to help them thrive in the school system. It states that each handicapped child must be given an individualized education program and be educated in the least restrictive environment possible. Both of these laws seek equality in education, even if that means giving an advantage to those who start without one. In the late 1970s President Carter created the cabinet position of the Department of Education. The intent was to make the United States a global competitor in education.

In the 1980s people of the United States started focusing more on children and the schooling they were being provided (Howe & Strauss 2009, Rhodes 2012). In 1981 the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act was passed for two main purposes: 1) to streamline the funds of the previous laws into one block grant and, 2) define the powers of the Secretary of Education. Instead of several different laws that required schools to apply several different places, this law provided one block



grant to simplify the process. The law also defined the powers of the Secretary of Education, allowing him/her to perform fiscal accounting duties and prepare methods for making payments and to reasonably insure compliance with requirement guidelines. The law prohibits the Secretary of Education from issuing regulations of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating schools. They may suggest plans of action to communities or states, but they cannot order them to plan anything (Institute of Education Sciences August 26, 2013).

During this time groups such as civil rights groups and businesses started to refocus efforts into improving the educational system. The report *A Nation at Risk* was written in 1983 that states how schools in the United States are performing poorly. U.S. students have fallen behind their peers in other industrialized nations on standardized tests, the illiteracy rate among adults and school children was above ten percent, and was higher among minorities. Scores on standardized tests were dramatically lower than scores in the past, and comprehension had gone down in the sciences and mathematics. The report also stated that teachers' curriculums were unclear, homework for high school students had declined while their grades had increased; state standards were low; too few experienced teachers; and too many students were taking electives rather than core classes. However, suggestions for improving education in America were also provided in the report: require students who want to proceed to college to take four years of mathematics, English, history/U.S. government, and science and to take two years of a foreign language and business/economics. Additional suggestions were to make teachers' curriculums clearer; increase state standards; have experienced teachers and

scholars write textbooks; increase teacher's pay and decisions power; and make sure teachers are educated in their primary fields of teaching.

*A Nation at Risk* caused civil rights groups to focus on the fact that black students were falling behind their white counterparts every year (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983). This disparity came to be known as the "achievement gap," which is still a current issue that NCLB tries to address. Subsequently the report *Saving the African American Child* was produced in 1984 to suggest ways to close the achievement gap (National Alliance of Black School Educators, Inc. 1984). The report details how blacks need to be educated beyond what they are currently and that they need to be taught basic skills, such as science and mathematics (Institute of Education Sciences August 26, 2013). It also states that schools should be more sensitive to the black culture with their teaching methods and standardized tests, this will help black students to learn because it is teaching them in a way they are familiar. The report goes on to say that there have been a lot of plans regarding how to teach black students, but they have not been taught properly to begin with (Institute of Education Sciences August 26, 2013). This has led to a problem with fewer blacks than whites going to college and even fewer going on to graduate school. To compound the problem, along with desegregation of schools black teachers and administrators were let go from their positions and replaced with whites, making schools as an institution dominated by whites.

In 1988 the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments were passed to reauthorized ESEA as well as add a few adjustments. The major

revision was to make grants specifically for Native American children. Other things the law changed slightly from ESEA was the concentration on low-income families by giving to the counties directly and increasing federal support for science, mathematics, and foreign languages. There was also a state law passed in 1988 related to NCLB, the Minnesota School Choice Programs. The law allowed parents to transfer their children to a different school outside of the district if they wished and allowed charter schools to begin (Minnesota Department of Education September 6, 2013). Most Minnesota residents opposed the law, yet agreed that people should be able to choose which school their child goes to.

The Bush, Sr. administration held the National Education Goals Panel in 1989, which created goals for governors to accomplish by the year 2000: 1) create a more professional teaching force, 2) strengthen school leadership and management, 3) promote parent involvement and choice in education, 4) help at-risk children meet and increase education standards, 5) make better and more effective use of technology in education, 6) better use of resources invested in school facilities, and 7) strengthen the mission and effectiveness of colleges and universities. The panel also came up with other goals for the nation focusing on disadvantaged students, science and mathematics scores, literacy, and making American students competitive globally. The administration tried to pass this legislation through Congress in order to implement policies for optional standardized testing, and labeled it “America 2000.” However, ultimately the proposal was denied because of the efforts of civil rights groups, educational conservatives, and state leaders; while

all of these groups wanted education to improve, they wanted to keep it a state issue rather than involving the federal government (Rhodes 2012).

In 1990 the Bush administration passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which amended the Education for all Handicapped Children Act. The law provided additional measures so that all children with an identified disability receive special services that cater to their needs, ensures disabled children are prepared for employment and independent living, assesses the efforts of institutions that provide these services, and provides assistance to states, localities, and educational services that provide for disabled children (University of Washington August 19, 2013). At the end of the Bush, Sr. administration the federal government developed The Commission on Chapter 1, which focused on reforming the first chapter of ESEA in order to implement standards on schools that have a high percentage of minorities (Rhodes 2012). This act ultimately was the foundation for the principles of NCLB.

During the Clinton administration education became an important issue among voters (McGuinn 2006). This helped the administration to develop the Goals 2000 Act and Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) in 1994. Goals 2000 was written with the intent of improving education by the year 2000. The act gave more federal aid to schools than ESEA, which improved spending from \$400 million to \$9 billion (Rhodes 2006). The law also supplied funding for grants for organizations and states to develop standards for schools to adhere to, especially in science, history, geography, the arts, civics, foreign languages, and English (Ravitch 2000). IASA reauthorized ESEA with the intent of setting goals for schools in order to

improve them. Schools needed standards to adhere to so students would not be able to simply sit in a classroom for an allotted time and receive the same degree their peers did (Ravitch 2000). One of the main critiques regarding IASA was that the federal government was micromanaging schools. However, some states “were loath to oppose the IASA in a loud or vigorous way, because doing so would have suggested that state leaders supported a two tier system, in which poor and minority students were held to lower standards than their more advantaged peers” (Rhodes 2012: 117). This started the controversy concerning whether or not the government should implement standardized testing and whether testing worked, a discourse that continued through the passage of NCLB.

During the Clinton administration education kept gaining national attention as an important issue for people in America (McGuinn 2006). More people wanted the federal government to get involved in education. While they did not think that the federal government could change education, they did think it could be the catalyst that made change happen (Rhodes 2012). In the 2000 election when Bush, Jr. ran against Gore, education was the most important issue to Americans (McGuinn 2006). Therefore, Bush focused on making education, and consequently NCLB, his highest priority. The first draft he made for NCLB was constructed from the educational policies he had made in Texas while he was governor (Skrla and Scheurich 2004). The draft for NCLB was the first bill Bush sent to Congress as a new president (McGuinn 2006). While there was a lot of argument regarding whether NCLB should be passed (mainly from Republicans), it was ultimately passed by a bipartisan vote. NCLB focused a lot more on standardized testing in

order for schools to receive funding than its predecessors. This caused a lot of controversy among states deciding to participate because it was the largest push for federal participation in schools ever enacted in the United States (McGuinn 2006). Some states liked being able to show how good their educational systems were while other states passed laws against NCLB so that they did not have to participate. While this decision was within their rights, they did not receive any federal funding allocated by NCLB as a consequence even though NCLB gave states the power to create their own standards and system addressing the achievement gap.

NCLB has seven main practical goals: annual standardized testing, academic improvement, corrective action, report cards, teacher quality, transferability, and public charter schools (McGuinn 2006). Children in grades 3-8 must be tested annually in reading and math according to standards the state has mandated. States must also improve their scores on standardized testing each year until 2014, at which point all schools should be at 100% proficiency. If a school fails to make adequate progress on standardized tests for two years in a row they must provide an alternative school for children to attend. After three years of failing to improve they must provide supplemental education, including private tutoring for students. After four years of not improving the school is required to replace staff, which is known as reorganization. Finally, after five years of failure to improve the school is required to make structural changes, even up to and including reopening as a charter school. Each state must also give yearly reports to the federal government on how schools are performing in their state. NCLB also allocates funding for after school programs, transportation for schools, and programs that provide

opportunities for parents to get involved in the school system. Most studies have done research on people's attitudes toward one of these aspects of the law, not the law as a whole. The literature available focuses on parents' and teachers' attitudes or the public as a whole.

### ***Parents' and Teachers' Attitudes Toward the No Child Left Behind Act***

Parents of children in elementary and secondary education have an overall positive view of NCLB (Landgraf 2007). While parents had a positive view overall, Woodard (2009) studied parents who had gone through the process of transferring their child as a result of the law's transfer policy and analyzed their perceptions of the law. Overall parents were divided as far as their attitudes toward NCLB. The primary findings were that the children's experience was the biggest deciding factor. If the children were put into a school where they had a good experience, parents had a positive view of the law. However, if the children had a negative experience -even if they were placed in a better school and the process was fairly easy- then parents had a negative view of the act.

Teachers and school administrators have an overall negative view of NCLB (Landgraf 2007). While teachers and administrators like the fact that states make their own standards for schools rather than having overarching standards for the whole nation, they do not like standardized testing even when it comes with incentives (Peterson and West 2003). They also think that NCLB should undergo major changes before it will benefit school systems (Landgraf 2007). They agree that state leaders will focus on improving schools, but the federal government will not have enough time/resources to do so. While looking at teachers and

administrators attitudes toward NCLB, Meador (2010) found that whites support the law more than non-whites, females support it more than males, and teachers and administrators over the age of fifty have more positive attitudes regarding NCLB than their younger counterparts.

Among the national population Rhodes (2012) found that conservatives like the testing and the transfer parts of NCLB along with the fact that it allows states to implement their own standards. Liberals like the federal government's involvement and the fact that federal money is going toward education. McGuinn (2006) found that blacks viewed school systems poorly and therefore have a positive attitude toward the transfer program that NCLB provides. People from the suburbs viewed NCLB positively, although they were against standardized testing because it did not challenge gifted students enough (Peterson and West 2003). Fundamentalist Christians opposed the law because they were against federal involvement in education. In 2004 a national poll found that swing voters, people under the age of 30, and homemakers were more likely to vote for a president who focused on educational issues (McGuinn 2006).

### ***Public attitudes toward NCLB***

The literature on public opinion in general is equally as divided as parents' and teachers' opinions. According to a national poll done by the Educational Testing Service in 2004, Americans were split on their opinion toward NCLB. Thirty-nine percent viewed it favorably, 38% viewed it unfavorably, and 20% had no opinion (McGuinn 2006, Rhodes 2012). About half stated they would rather the government use the money to decrease class sizes. A separate national Gallup poll



done in 2004 indicated that people were becoming more knowledgeable about NCLB and consequently their opinions of it were not as favorable as in previous years. The number of people who favored the law decreased slightly from 2003 to 2004 (40% to 36%) while the number of people who opposed the law significantly increased (8% to 28%) (McGuinn 2006). The surveys also showed that people remain concerned about the education that children are getting in the U.S. and support the federal government's intervention in education. The public supports the general use of standards, standardized testing, and accountability in order to accomplish improvements in education, but these methods can be legislated in many different ways. Despite this general support, roughly half of the public do not like the "requirements and timetables" specified by NCLB (McGuinn 2006: 192).

In another national Educational Testing Service survey in 2007, Americans were split according to their attitudes on NCLB (Landgraf 2007). People are split in regards to whether the federal government should provide aid to public schools, especially struggling schools. Forty-nine percent of people think that the federal government should provide funding to public schools in general, while twenty-five percent think that the federal government should provide funding to struggling schools (Landgraf 2007). There are few people (19%) who think this funding should come with an accountability system. Most of the general public (59%) thinks the test standards should be nationalized instead of allowing each state to make their own standards. When probed further about this, people expressed a concern that states would make the tests too easy to make sure the state passed its own goals. However, about half of Americans also say their local school board is doing a

good job of governing the local school and are reluctant to allow the federal government to govern their schools (Jacobsen and Saultz 2012; Shapiro and Jacobs 2011). Most agree that states should have the most influence for improving schools and setting testing standards for them.

The studies pertaining to parents' and teachers' attitudes toward NCLB are trying to find if the law works. Teachers and parents are affected directly by the law and have the most insight about how it affects the children it claims to help. The studies about the general public's attitudes toward the law were preliminary findings based on surveys that were conducted to test who had positive attitudes toward NCLB. These studies did not use theories to predict who likes the law nor regression models to test which group had the strongest opinion. This study intends to fill that gap, predicting which groups will have a positive attitude toward NCLB and testing those theories with regression equations to find which groups have the strongest opinion toward the act.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

There are four theories that might help explain the public's attitudes toward this major educational change in federal laws: (1) shifts in basic educational philosophy among the general public; (2) symbolic politics that guide the public's overall opinions toward most areas of legislation, (3) group or self interest theories that affect ones demographic groups, and (4) authoritarianism theory, which are personal and child rearing practices that can be measured by attitudes toward religion and war.

#### **Educational theories**

People have very different approaches to education that are deeply rooted in their family and school backgrounds. Families create traditional or more progressive forms of socialization and control, and this affects basic attitudes toward learning. These attitudes are further shaped by the school experiences adults have, whether they have been positive, negative, or simply neutral. While these educational values and philosophies can be highly varied, they tend to fall into two areas that have competed for public attention over the last century. The first traditional model has deep roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is at the root of NCLB, whether acknowledged or not by advocates. The second progressive model started in the U.S. with John Dewey and can be exemplified by Montessori schools, but this approach has been criticized in the past 20 years and is largely not represented by NCLB. Below I discuss these two approaches and suggest hypotheses.

The traditional model is the model that NCLB adheres to; one of the leading theorists in this model of educational thought is John Herbart. He contends that adults should take a large role in students' education to teach them the material and make sure they are following instructions. According to Herbart children are unruly and will not desire to learn about school subjects unless a teacher is supervising them (Herbart 1901). While children have a natural curiosity about things around them they do not have the sense or desire to figure out the science behind it, the typical educational subjects such as reading, history, and math. Students must be taught these subjects by a teacher to provide them with the knowledge and desire to find out about the science behind their natural curiosities.

To teach students about educational subjects teachers must guide them constantly because according to Herbart, learning by observation and natural curiosity is a poor way to learn. Observations do not necessarily follow progressive steps from simple to complex, therefore teachers must teach the material in this manner for students to learn effectively. As Herbart states, "As a rule, we cannot take for granted that a boy has even the skill and patience required for reading; and if perfect facility has been attained, the reading is done too rapidly. There is too much hurry to get to the end, or too much delay over the wrong passages, so that connection is lost." (Herbart 1901: 107). In this sense students must be taught not only how to read, but the correct way to read, because some parts are more important than others. The most important thing for teachers to do in order to teach students educational subjects and what is important in these subjects is to provide a good example. The teacher will present the material to the class and then

later they are tested according to how well they memorized the lesson. If they have memorized everything the teacher intended, then the student is considered to have learned the material. If the student memorizes more about the lesson than intended then the student is considered to have mastered the material. However, often the students do not understand the material the first time it is given, therefore the teacher must provide repetition of the material either through the lesson or by individual studying in order to learn the material properly. According to this model how well students learn is entirely dependent on the example the teacher has provided.

This theory has evolved in many different ways since Herbart's first books, each theorist focuses on a different aspect of the traditionalist model. These theories mainly focus on memorization and the grades students earn. One theory that focuses more on grades and graduation rates is outcome-based education (Davis 2003, Schwartz and Kardos 2009). This theory focuses on how students perform in the classroom and whether or not they can utilize the skills they learn. The theory contends that students should learn through repetition in order to encode the information in students' short-term, and eventually long-term memory (Sternberg and Williams 2010). To ensure that the information is coded in students' short-term memory teachers use tests to ascertain how much knowledge the students are retaining. Final examinations and state tests are used to assess if the information has been coded in their long-term memory. The most effective measurement of long-term memory is still largely debated, although theorists largely agree that using standardized tests is the best approach; while standardized

testing has flaws, there are few cheaper and more efficient ways to measure a large number of students on a national level. This will also prepare students to graduate and enter the workforce, which is the ultimate goal for outcome-based learning. This theory has influenced NCLB the most, since the law focuses on standardized testing and how any student can learn the material presented with enough repetition.

Another way traditional theory has evolved is Bloom's "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives." His theory contends that educators should have clear standards about what they want students to learn and to convey those standards in a meaningful way, both for the sake of the students and the teachers (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). Objectives give teachers something to strive for, which motivates them to teach the lesson well, and helps them to understand what went wrong if students don't learn the intended material. They put these objectives into three categories: global, educational, and instructional. Global standards are abstract and designed to inspire educators, but are fairly impractical. These objectives are mainly used by governing bodies to give an ideal goal to strive for, such as "every student should be able to read by the age of 7". Educational goals are more substantial, although still long-term; for example a goal to achieve over a year or five years. Instructional goals are very specific and are typically made by instructors to help them teach a specific lesson or couple lessons. Each of these types of objectives is important for helping a school system thrive in the long term. Bloom's taxonomy helps educators to categorize what they want students to learn into cognitive processes and type of knowledge they need. Then suggests lessons to accomplish these goals by suggesting different types of lessons depending on what type of

knowledge they want the student to learn. After the educator is able to do this they can design a lesson and homework to achieve their goals. However, they must have standards from the beginning unless there will be no goal to achieve. This is the system used by NCLB, giving educators lofty goals in order to inspire them to educate America's students well. <sup>1</sup>

The progressive school of thought is headed by the theorist John Dewey, contending that schooling should enrich experiences and the imagination that the child innately has (Dewey 1963). He advocates that schools are supposed to use the natural experiences the child has to teach them about the world. As Dewey states, "social life demands teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates" (Dewey 1963: 6). In this capacity they will be able to apply their knowledge in practical scenarios, not just subjects such as math, science and literature. He contends that while lectures and books have their uses, they are overused in schools because children learn naturally through their social interactions with one another, which is how they should learn in a classroom as well. Therefore, one of the key aspects of education should be to provide an environment for children in which they want to learn. Once this environment is created then children will teach themselves with some help from their instructor. In this sense instructors respect the children's learning styles and learning capabilities, but also help them to learn materials that are useful to the society in which they live.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards (2006) gives a brief history of standards as they are used in standardized testing, which started in the US with Horace Mann in the 1800s and large-scale testing of millions of students in the 1920s. Since then large scale testing has pervaded the US education system through the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey. They and their Angoff Memorial Lecture Series provide legitimacy and research to back up testing as an efficient tool in education (Hartel 2013; Feuer 2011; Pelligrino 2004; Burton and Wang 2005). Stephen Raudenbush (2004) then links these ETS efforts to the NCLB through measuring school improvement.

Paulo Friere is a participatory theorist known for his theory regarding politics in education. He agrees with Dewey and contends that all knowledge occurs within the context of the society in which one lives and the history of that society (Freire 2004). His main contribution furthering educational theory was to teach children (especially minority children) their societal positions and the obstacles they will face as a consequence of that position. This goes beyond Dewey's theory in the sense that his goal was to free minority groups by teaching them to think critically about the system, which begins in the classroom. According to this model children will be ready and able to start participating in politics from an early age and benefit society through their participation.

These theories do not value the outcome of education as much as the traditional style but rather value the process of education. They focus on producing informed citizens that are life-long learners, able to teach themselves and others about the world. Therefore, testing would only be done in as much as it helps students learn, not to test students' knowledge. Getting a job at the end of a degree would also not be focused on as much, but rather to focus on what society needs from students.

These theories encompass the majority of people's thoughts regarding education. People either think that education should prepare children for jobs in business by teaching them discipline and how to memorize information or children should largely be left to their own devices because they have a natural desire to learn. Whether people think that children need discipline or to learn at their own



pace will affect the way they view NCLB because the act is largely set up according to the traditional model. These theories have led me to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1-1:** People who approve of testing and the implementation of sanctions on schools and teachers support the traditional or accountability philosophy of education, and hence, will think NCLB has made schools better.

**Hypothesis 1-2:** People who rate the economy/jobs as one of their top three considerations in choosing a presidential candidate will think NCLB has made schools better because the law focuses on people getting a job after they get their degree, which NCLB regards as the ultimate goal of education.

### **Symbolic Politics Theory**

In most cases the public is less interested in the specifics of various policies, especially if the laws do not directly impact them. They take their cues from their overall political attitudes and identifications. People do not have time or energy to go through every political policy in order to determine if it serves their interests (Downs 1957). Therefore, people use their ideology to determine if they like a law, which is largely based on symbols (Downs 1957). These ideas fall into two related camps in the United States: political ideology and party identification.

Political ideology is split into conservatives and liberals, conservatives are largely against government intervention while liberals are largely for government intervention. People with a conservative ideology do not like to change the system, but would rather maintain the status quo. NCLB supports the current education system and modifies it to include accountability measures. They also do not like national government intervention in most things but prefer to let local governments

handle most government decisions. NCLB allows the state and local governments to control the education system, the law only provides incentives for them to act. Therefore conservatives should like the act because the government is intervening with the intention to maintain the current system and maintain the current power structure with local governments and school boards. Conversely, liberals like to change the system in hopes of making it better and they like national government intervention. NCLB does not support either of these ideals. It advocates change for schools to implement, but still advocates for the same system that is currently in place. NCLB is also a federal act but does not intervene in education on a federal level; it only provides incentives for local governments to act. Therefore liberals will not like the act because it advocates maintaining the system that is already in place and gives power to state and local authorities.

In the 2000 election Bush used some Democratic ideas to form his education proposal, which would eventually become the No Child Left Behind Act (Peterson and West 2003). This is why both Republicans and Democrats voted for it, because it is a combination of both of their educational ideals (McGuinn 2006; Peterson and West 2003). He also added some Republican ideals, such as giving the states most of the power to influence their own schools. Therefore, NCLB has largely been regarded as a law driven by President Bush and the Republican Party and Republicans have largely been the population to have positive attitudes toward the law (McGuinn 2006; Peterson and West 2003; Rhodes 2012).

In the current political climate people seem to be less oriented toward labeling themselves Republicans and Democrats, instead choosing to classify

themselves as either conservatives or liberals (Ansolabehere et. al 2008). A respondent could identify as a conservative but not as a Republican because he/she thinks the Republican Party is not conservative enough. If the symbolic politics theory is true then Republicans and conservatives will have the same opinions toward NCLB; however Republicans should have a stronger opinion because the Republican Party created the law and they trust their party's stance more than conservatives who are not necessarily part of the party. However if the two groups have an equally positive attitude toward the law then their attitudes are not based on party affiliation.

**Hypothesis 2-1:** People who support the Republican Party will think NCLB has made schools better.

**Hypothesis 2-2:** People who express a conservative ideology will think NCLB has made schools better.

### **Group or Self Interest Theory**

People develop interests based on their class, race, gender and other social positions in society. Based on these group memberships they evaluate laws as either beneficial or not as well as weighing the costs that are associated with that benefit (Downs 1957). According to this theory, in order to form an opinion about an issue people must be directly affected by the outcome, otherwise they will not care (Lau et al., 1978). If people benefit from the outcome then they have a positive attitude toward the policy. If they are part of a group associated with the costs, then their attitude will be negative. Group memberships that are relevant to this theory are parental status, race, sex, age, and region the participants live.

Parents have a direct interest in their children's education and are directly affected by NCLB. One of the best ways to increase their child(ren)'s economic opportunities later in life is for them to attain a good education (Cuesta and Silverda 2009). Therefore, in the interest of their family parents are likely to have a positive attitude toward the federal act if they perceive that it has a positive outcome on their children's education. The literature suggests that parents focus more on their children's experience and the outcome of the educational opportunity it has provided rather than the overall impact it has on the educational system (Cuesta and Silverda 2009).

It is generally known throughout the U.S. population that one of the goals of NCLB is to make schools focus on minority populations in an effort to bring test grades up (Landgraf 2007). Therefore, minority populations should have a positive opinion regarding the act because it is intended to aid their education and bring up their test scores. Past literature has shown that blacks have positive attitudes toward the law, especially the vouchers it provides (McGuinn 2006). Landgraf (2007) showed that the younger population and males have a more positive attitude toward the act than the older and female population. While they did not ask further survey questions about why males and younger people like the law they hypothesized that younger people like NCLB because they looked at it as progressive. Males will like it, having a small and positive correlation coefficient of .05, because they are more likely to have more disciplinary values, which may be closer to authoritarianism and NCLB supports the disciplinary style of education. NCLB is also directed toward poor, urban schools, especially the voucher system

that allows students to transfer to schools within their district for free. The suburban population does not think that the law does enough to challenge gifted students. The rural population is not affected by the act as much by the transfer policy, because usually there are no other schools in the district for students to transfer to, although they are effected by the accountability standards provided by the states, which they are largely not meeting. (Peterson and West 2003).

**Hypothesis 3-1:** People who are parents with young children in school will think NCLB has made schools better since it is focused on making their children's education better.

**Hypothesis 3-2:** People who are black, male, younger and live in urban areas will think NCLB has made schools better while people who are white, female, older, and live in suburban or rural areas will think NCLB has made schools worse.

### **Authoritarian Theory**

For the authoritarian framework I use Altemeyer's theory of Right-Wing Authoritarianism. According to this theory authoritarians are characterized by their adherence to authority figures (Altemeyer 1981). Most of the time these figures are political authorities, although they respond to symbols of religious authority as well. They are highly in favor of strong military power in order to defend their country or what their country stands for (Duckitt 2010). The population is also much less likely to switch religions than non-authoritarians because they are likely to become indoctrinated into a religion at an early age (Duckitt 2010).

Altemeyer also found that authoritarians have the common characteristic of a general intolerance of anyone who differs from the status quo (Altemeyer 1981).

In later research it was found that this negative attitude extends especially to minority groups because they typically have a lifestyle that is different from or contrary to the status quo (Swami et al., 2012). They also favor security far above human rights, especially minority rights and will openly discriminate against minorities. They are against all liberal political stances that work to protect or include minority groups into the current system and decentralize the government.

Altemeyer characterizes authoritarians into three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism (Altemeyer 1981: 148). Authoritarian submission is characterized by a high degree of submission to legitimate authority figures in their society. This population tends to support a decision that a leader has made, even if they would consider that decision immoral if someone of a lesser status decided it. Authoritarian aggression is characterized by an aggressive attitude toward people that are deemed harmful by authority figures. The aggressive behavior can vary from discrimination against a certain group of people, such as blacks or gays, to physical aggression, such as beatings or even killing people of a certain minority group. Conventionalism is characterized by adherence to societal norms that are endorsed by society and the authorities governing it. These people will vigorously defend social norms and will not tolerate these norms being broken, especially by minority groups. These are not exclusive categories, a single person can adhere to more than one or even all three of these attitudinal systems.

Research has been done in regard to how education influences authoritarianism (Schuman et al., 1992, Klajman 1999, Simpson 1972, and Cribbs

and Austin 2011), however there has been little literature on how authoritarians view education (Giroux 2005). Authoritarians like educational policies that adhere to traditionalist religious policies, such as prayer in schools and teaching against gay marriage (Giroux 2005). For this reason the authoritarian population also has a general distrust for higher education because of the focus it places on expanding people's minds. They also dislike the progressive educational system and rather favor the traditional teaching model. The progressive model places emphasis on helping children discover things for themselves, in which case they may discover something contrary to what is traditionally taught. The traditional model has more of an emphasis on following authority and teaching students the right and wrong way to do things and even how to think, which adheres more to the authoritarian system (Giroux 2005).

NCLB supports the traditional style of learning which entails following teachers' authority. The law states that teachers should be qualified to teach the grade level they are hired at, although it leaves it up to each state to determine what qualified means. The state wants someone competent in order to lead students because they are the main authority figure in the classroom. This perpetuates the system by having the authority figure remain the teacher and increases the likelihood that the teacher will be able to control a classroom of students. The Act also has funding for after-school programs, which are intended to keep students in school where they are supervised and are likely to stay out of trouble. Both of these parts of the law are likely to increase authoritarians' attitudes toward NCLB because

it supports an authority figure for students as well as a disciplinarian for when they do something wrong.

**Hypothesis 4-1:** People who are authoritarians will think NCLB has made schools better because authoritarianism is correlated with submissiveness to authority, which the law supports.

**Hypothesis 4-2:** People who are tolerant and value liberal political stances tend to be against rigid applications of discipline and will think NCLB has made schools worse.



## **Chapter 4:**

### **Methods, Data, and Variables**

#### **Data and Variables**

The data used for this study come from an election survey conducted via telephone interviews by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from April 18-22, 2007, consisting of a nationwide sample of 1,508 adults. The sample is from the continental United States and was weighted in order to compensate for demographic factors. The survey used random digit dialing so everyone in the United States had an equal chance of being called, even those who do not have their telephone numbers listed in a phone book. If a person did not answer a call then the number was tried again up to ten times to attempt to contact the person. Taking contact rate, cooperation rate, and completion rate into consideration, the total response rate for the survey was 23 percent. The purpose of the survey was to find out people's attitudes toward the presidential nominees, the Virginia Tech shootings, the war in Iraq, NCLB, and attitudes toward terrorism and Muslims.

#### **Dependent variable**

The dependent variable for this study measures the respondents' attitudes toward NCLB. First the respondents were asked how much they have heard about NCLB, if they answered "Nothing" then they were not asked their opinions about the law, 190 cases were lost because of this response. If the respondent answered they had heard a little or a lot then they were asked, "Based on anything you may have seen or heard, do you think the No Child Left Behind Act has made schools in

America better, worse, or had no impact?" The responses were coded: 1 (Better) and 0 (Worse/No impact). Below all of the descriptive statistics for the variables are shown. Most of the variables are dummy variables, so only the percent coded as one, the minimum, and maximum are included; the mean and standard deviation are added for the continuous variables. A further description of the variables is included in Appendix 1.

### **Independent variables**

**Educational theory:** The independent variables intended to measure which educational theory the respondent adheres to measures their views on testing and jobs. The first question was screened using the same procedure as the dependent variable. The first question is worded, "Under the 'No Child Left Behind' Act, do you think there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, too little, or the right amount?" The responses are coded 1 (Right Amount) and 0 (Too much/Too little). It is coded as a dummy variable because the question is intended to find if people agree with the amount of testing NCLB advocates, both "too much" and "too little" indicate they do not agree with the amount of testing while "right amount" indicates that they do agree.

The next question is split into two different questions, both use the same screening process. The questions are screened by asking if the respondent is a Republican or a Democrat or leaning toward the Republican or Democratic Party, 294 cases were lost because of this response; they are asked, "In choosing between the candidates for the (Democratic/Republican) nomination in 2008, what one issue will be most important to you?" The respondents could pick up to three answers

and rank them. A dummy variable was created to capture whether respondents chose “economy/jobs” for any of the three responses. The responses are coded 1 (Economy/jobs) and 0 (All others).

**Symbolic Politics Theory:** The questions intended to measure the respondents’ symbolic politics were asked of all of the respondents that took the survey. The first question measures the respondents’ political party affiliation stating, “In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?” The respondents were given the choices: “Republican, Democrat, Independent, No preference, and Other party”. This variable was coded 1 (Republican) and 0 (All others), since I expect that Republicans will think NCLB has made schools better.

The second question is intended to measure the respondents’ political ideology, it states, “In general, would you describe your political views as...”. The responses were coded 1 (Very liberal), 2 (Liberal), 3 (Moderate), 4 (Conservative), and 5 (Very conservative) so it is a continuous variable ranging from very liberal to very conservative.

**Self/Group Interest Theory:** To measure the self/group-interest theory five questions were asked of all respondents. The first question measures if the respondent is the parent of a school-aged child or younger asking, “Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household?” The responses were coded as a dummy variable, 1 (Yes) and 0 (No). Yes was coded as the higher value, to indicate they are parents.

The second question measures race and asks, "What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other?" The responses were recoded into a dummy variable 1 (black) and 0 (white, Asian, and other).

The third question measures the sex of the respondent. The interviewer entered the sex of the individual. The responses were coded as a dummy variable, 1 (male) and 0 (female).

The fourth variable measures the respondents' age asking, "What is your age?" This is a continuous variable.

The fifth question measures the kind of community the respondent lives in urban, suburban, or rural. The respondents were asked "What is your zip code?" They were later classified according to which type of community they belong to. The answers are coded into three dummy variables in which each response (urban, suburban, and rural) will equal one and the other answers as zero. Suburban is the omitted category because the law affects them the least and puts the least strain on them, therefore the other two community types have more reason to think NCLB has changed their schools, either for the better or worse.

**Authoritarian Theory:** In order to measure if people are authoritarian four questions were analyzed. The first question asked, "Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?" The responses were coded as 1 (Right decision) and 0 (Wrong) decision so the higher value indicates an authoritarian response.

The second question intends to measure authoritarian views on religion was screened, the respondent had to answer that they were a Christian in one of three

questions. The question is worded, “Would you describe yourself as a ‘born again’ or evangelical Christian, or not?” The responses were coded as dummy variables 1 (Yes, would) and 0 (No, would not) the higher value is coded as the authoritarian response.

The third question asked “What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?” The responses were coded as a dummy variable: 1 (Protect the right of Americans to own guns) and 0 (Control gun ownership) so that the higher values indicates an authoritarian response.

The three questions above were added into an index of authoritarianism in order to create a single measure for authoritarianism ranging from 0 to 3. These three variables are each indicative of authoritarian views. The question asking if they are a born-again Christian is a measure of religiosity, which Altemeyer (1981) characterizes as one part of authoritarian views. The other two measures are political beliefs, indicating a high belief in military power and the right to protect themselves (gun rights), which Altemeyer (1981) also characterize as authoritarian. These three measures were added together to provide a scale of authoritarianism, which provides a more accurate view of authoritarianism since the authoritarian viewpoint is made of several different components and this scale comprises more than one.

The last question measured if the respondent is very liberal or not, it was not screened and is worded, “In general, would you describe your political views as...” The responses were coded as a dummy variable 1 (Very liberal) and 0 (Other). This

variable was not put into the scale because it measures a different type of authoritarianism, intolerance of minorities, rather than adherence to authority.

### **Control variables**

People's educational attainment is related to what they know about the education system as well as their views of how the system should be run (Duckitt et al. 2010). People with a high school education typically do not have as much knowledge about how standardized testing works as people with a college degree and especially graduate school (Duckitt et al. 2010). This knowledge could lead to how people view NCLB's use of standardized testing. It could also skew their perception of the law because its name implies that every child will receive a good education. Education also effects how people view the problems NCLB addresses, such as the problem of which school to send their child to or the transportation required to get there. People with a lower education typically think about these problems more than people with a higher education because it is more prevalent in their lives, therefore people with a high school education or below will have a positive view of the law.

People with a college degree are able to experience a system outside of high school. They have a more critical opinion toward NCLB and the impact it has on the education system. People with college experience or higher also would not typically have the same problems the act addresses, such as transportation issues, and therefore will view it as a waste of federal funds. Thus people with college experience or higher will not like the law since it does not address middle-class problems. The question to ascertain people's education is worded, "What is the last

grade or class that you completed in school?" The responses are coded into three dummy variables "High school graduate or below", "Some college to college degree", and "Post-graduate education". Post-graduate education is used as the omitted category because people with a high school degree should perceive education differently than people who have gone beyond high school, therefore people who have college experience should view the law the same as people with graduate experience.

People's income affects how they perceive education as well as how they view how NCLB benefits them (De Graaf et al. 1995). The law focuses on low-income families, especially those with incomes at \$40,000 or below since that is the poverty line. Therefore people who make \$40,000 or less should have a positive attitude toward NCLB because the law focuses on low-income people and the problems they have. People who make more than \$40,000 will have a negative attitude toward the law and think it is a waste of federal funds because the law does not address middle-class problems. The income question is worded, "Last year, that is in 2006, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?" The responses are coded into three dummy variables: "Less than \$40,000", "\$40,000 to \$100,000", and "\$100,000 or more". \$100,000 or more was used as the omitted category because the law focuses on people below the poverty line, which is around \$40,000 for most families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 12, 2013) therefore people who make more than \$40,000 should view the law the same. Both education and income will be used in all equations as control variables.

Table 2 shows the zero-order correlations for all of the variables in the analyses. Considering the correlations between these variables multicollinearity is not a problem. None of the variables have a correlation higher than .5 except the variables intended to measure the same things such as conservative and very liberal, urban and rural, the education variables, and the income variables. The zero-order correlations are given below, a more complete table is given in appendix II.

### **Analysis**

This study uses logistic regression: this type of regression is appropriate for dichotomous dependent variables because it uses logarithms to get dependent variable scores between 0 and 1. This gives the regression score a meaningful value since dummy variables are coded as 0 and 1. The value that the logistic regression produces is a z-value. The z-value can be calculated into a percent probability that a person will have an opinion toward the response coded as 1. The way the formula for calculating the percent chance is calculated makes it so that if the z-value is negative the percent chance will be less than 50% and if the z-value is positive it will be higher than 50%. The degree that the z-value differs from 0 determines the degree of the percent value. For this study the regression gives the researcher the percent chance that a person of a demographic group will think NCLB has made schools better.



**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Variable name	Frequency	% coded 1	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
NCLB has made schools better	1214	35%			0	1
Favor standardized testing	1144	29%			0	1
Jobs are Important	1214	17%			0	1
Republican	1195	26%			0	1
Conservative	1179		3.19	.93	1	5
Parent of child <18 in household	1213	31%			0	1
Race (black)	1199	9%			0	1
Sex (male)	1214	46%			0	1
Age	1191		51.99	16.62	18	95
Urban	1214	27%			0	1
Rural	1214	22%			0	1
Authoritarianism	1214		1.16	.98	0	3
Tolerant	1179	5%			0	1
H S Education	1210	31%			0	1
College Education	1210	52%			0	1
Low income	1076	26%			0	1
Middle income	1076	55%			0	1

**Table 2: Zero-order Correlations**

	NCLB	Standard Testing	Job	Republican	Conservative	Parent	Race (black)	Sex (male)	Age	Urban	Rural	Authoritarian	Tolerance	HS Edu	College Edu	Low Income	Mid Income
NCLB	1																
Standard Testing	.3478	1															
Job	-.0035	-.0661	1														
Republican	.1980	.1177	.0035	1													
Conservative	.2016	.1387	-.0428	.3741	1												
Parent	.1261	.0284	.0266	.0503	.0103	1											
Race (black)	.0363	-.0650	.0452	-.1180	-.0482	.0857	1										
Sex (male)	.0488	.0454	.0416	-.0003	.0395	-.0335	-.0070	1									
Age	-.0941	-.0164	-.0525	-.0218	.1167	-.4311	-.0721	-.0794	1								
Urban	-.0380	-.0411	-.0121	-.0418	-.0722	.0114	.1967	.0141	-.0432	1							
Rural	-.0041	.0092	.0020	-.0027	.0391	-.0291	-.0589	.0183	.0590	-.3301	1						
Authoritarian	.1897	.1729	.0139	.3779	.4091	.0112	-.0811	.1187	-.0243	-.1448	.1356	1					
Tolerance	-.0989	-.0849	.0198	-.1179	-.5175	-.0189	.0937	-.0194	-.0622	.0339	.0045	-.1560	1				
HS Edu	.0526	.0894	-.0112	-.0365	.0769	-.0451	.0817	.0072	.0628	-.0655	.0966	.0912	-.0083	1			
College Edu	.0376	.0169	.0235	.0247	-.0037	.0385	-.0582	-.0251	-.0746	.0103	-.0348	-.0081	-.0199	-.7201	1		
Low income	-.0229	.0289	-.0224	-.0846	-.0037	-.1343	.1112	-.0946	.1233	-.0330	.1164	-.0174	.0355	.3369	-.1517	1	
Mid income	.0359	-.0189	-.0049	.0260	.0092	.0422	-.0759	.0396	-.0675	-.0408	-.0025	.0274	-.0094	-.1644	.1172	-.6919	1

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Results**

This section reviews three parts of my analysis: (1) the logistic regression results for the models of each theory, (2) a combined model that puts most of the independent variables into the equation explaining attitudes toward NCLB, and (3) an exploration of the strongest variable (i.e. testing) in the large equation actually means because the variable by itself seems to be too closely connected to the meaning of NCLB (i.e., there may be tautological elements in explaining NCLB with testing since testing is so much a part of the law in and of itself). It ends with a consideration of the limitations of this analysis. I begin with the four models: education theory, symbolic politics theory, self or group interest theory, and authoritarian theory.

#### **Modeling Educational theory**

The following equation is constructed according to the educational theory. Positive views toward standardized testing and whether the respondent thinks politicians should focus on jobs/economy as one of their top three issues will be positive predictors with favorable attitudes toward NCLB. The law focuses on using standardized testing to make schools better, which will consequently help students find employment after receiving their diploma. People with low education and income will be positively correlated with their attitudes toward NCLB because the law focuses on people who have lower education and income. People in the middle

range of education and income will not like the law because it does not focus on improving their children's education.

$$\text{NCLB1} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Test\_std} + \beta_2 \text{job} + \beta_3 \text{educchs} - \beta_4 \text{educcol} + \beta_5 \text{incomelow} - \beta_6 \text{incomemid} + e$$

Table 3, model 1 shows that people who think NCLB use the right amount of standardized testing are 369.1% more likely to like the law than people who think it uses too much or too little, significant at the  $p < .001$  level. People who think jobs are important were not significant in the model, which means people are not associating jobs with NCLB. While standardized testing is part of the traditional model, it is only one variable out of the two that was significant. It is inconclusive if people are focusing on the educational theories they adhere to or they may simply be focusing on their views toward standardized testing when considering their attitudes toward the act. The only other significant variable in the model is high school education, which is significant at the  $p < .05$  level. People with a high school education or below are 78.6% more likely to state NCLB has made schools better, which is far below the magnitude of people who focus on standardized testing. None of the other controls were significant.

### **Modeling Symbolic Politics Theory**

The second equation is constructed according to the symbolic politics theory. The theory suggests that both Republicans and conservatives will have a positive attitude toward NCLB because a Republican president passed it. According to the symbolic politics theory people's attitudes toward laws correspond with the political party that supports/enacted it, not necessarily what the law says. I will control for education and income, which will remain the same as above.

$$\text{NCLB1} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Republican} + \beta_2 \text{conservative} + \beta_3 \text{educhs} - \beta_4 \text{educcol} + \beta_5 \text{incomelow} - \beta_6 \text{incomemid} + e$$

Table 3, model 2 strongly supports the symbolic politics theory, both Republicans and conservatives are likely to think NCLB has made schools better and both are significant at the  $p < .001$  level. People are looking to their political party for how to interpret the law because Republicans have a 104.2% chance of thinking the law makes schools better than while conservatives are lower (38.4%), which means it is not just the conservative idea that is appealing. These two political variables are significant despite strong control variables. People who have a high school education or below are 106.3% more likely to have a positive view of NCLB. College education has the opposite effect than predicted; people with college experience were 65.4% more likely to have a positive attitude toward the law rather than a negative attitude. People's income does not significantly affect their attitude toward NCLB so their economic position is insignificant compared to their political opinions and educational attainment.

### **Modeling Self Interest and Group Interest Theory**

The third set of equations is constructed according to the self and group interest theory. People who are parents with children in the home, blacks, males, and live in urban areas should have a positive attitude toward NCLB because the law is focused on parents and children who live in urban areas, especially minorities, such as blacks. Males will view the disciplinary measures of the law positively and have an overall positive view. People who are older and live in rural areas should have a negative attitude toward NCLB. The law focuses on younger individuals therefore older people may not be pleased that federal funds are not being directed

toward their age group. The law also focuses on urban areas. Some parts of the law do not even apply to people living in rural areas, so people living there will not be pleased that they are paying for educational benefits they cannot participate in. I will control for education and income, which will remain the same as above.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{NCLB1} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{parent1} + \beta_2 \text{black} + \beta_3 \text{male} - \beta_4 \text{age} + \beta_5 \text{urban} - \beta_6 \text{rural} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{educhs} - \beta_8 \text{educcol} + \beta_9 \text{incomelow} - \beta_{10} \text{incomemid} + e \end{aligned}$$

Table 3, model 3 does not support the self/group interest theory well. The only variables in the theory that are significant are males who are 32.6% more likely to think NCLB has made schools better than females. Parents with children in the house are more significant, at the  $p < .01$  level, and are 71.3% more likely to think NCLB has improved schools than parents without young children in the home or people who are not parents. While NCLB tries to get parents more involved in their child(ren)'s education, the main focus of the law is to help minorities receive a good education. The law could benefit parents, but it would depend on their situation because it does not benefit all parents. The law does not benefit males over females, but males have a more positive attitude toward the law, so they probably view the disciplinary measures the law advocates positively. Neither of the groups that the law claims to most benefit (urban residents and African-Americans) thinks that NCLB makes schools better. This means that people may be focusing on their specific family situations rather than their group membership. Being from an urban community, being black, and age are all macro factors that affect people rather than a micro structure such as their family.

### **Modeling Authoritarian theory**

The fourth group of equations is constructed according to the authoritarian theory. People who have authoritarian values will likely be in favor of NCLB since it promotes ridged school procedures and accountability systems. People who are very liberal will have a negative opinion of NCLB since that is a negative measure of authoritarianism and authoritarians will like NCLB. I will control for education and income, which will remain the same as above.

$$\text{NCLB1} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{authoritarian} - \beta_2 \text{very\_liberal} + \beta_3 \text{educhs} - \beta_4 \text{educcol} + \beta_5 \text{incomelow} - \beta_6 \text{incomemid} + e$$

Table 3, model 4 supports the authoritarian theory. Both measures of authoritarianism are significant although authoritarian values are more significant at the  $p < .001$  level while tolerance values are significant at the  $p < .05$  level. People with authoritarian values are 48% more likely to think NCLB has made schools better and people who are tolerant are 62% less likely. The education measures in the equation are also significant, people with a lower education are more likely to like the law than people with a higher education. Therefore, people's authoritarian values probably have a similar effect on people's views toward NCLB than their education.

### **Comparing Results and Doing a Combined Model**

Comparing results from each of the four models it can be deduced that the use of standardized testing in NCLB has a large impact on people's attitudes toward the law. However, it is questionable whether the theory in general is supported considering that only one variable is significant. Both variables in the symbolic politics theory are significant and people's political party affiliation is more significant than their political orientation, which supports the symbolic politics

theory because the party that the law is associated with has more of an impact than the principles the party is built on. The self/group interest theory was not well supported since only two variables were significant (parents and males) and neither were macro groups, therefore it does not indicate that people are motivated by their group orientation. The authoritarian theory is also supported since both of the variables used to test it are significant. The variables measuring people's educational attainment were significant in all four models, except table 3, model 1, therefore people's education has an impact on their attitudes toward NCLB, although it is overridden by their views toward standardized testing. College experience also had the opposite effect in each model than predicted; it has a positive influence on people's opinions rather than a negative influence. Income was not significant in any model; therefore people's economic position probably has no impact on their attitudes toward NCLB.

Since the results varied by model, I tested a combined model to see if the significant variables from equations 1 through 4 in table 3 would stand up to scrutiny.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{NCLB1} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Test\_std} + \beta_1 \text{job} + \beta_2 \text{Republican} + \beta_3 \text{conservative} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{parent} + \beta_5 \text{black} + \beta_6 \text{male} - \beta_7 \text{age} + \beta_8 \text{urban} - \beta_9 \text{rural} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{authoritarian} - \beta_{11} \text{tolerance} + \beta_{12} \text{educhs} + \beta_{13} \text{educcol} \\ & + \beta_{14} \text{incomelow} - \beta_{15} \text{incomemid} + e \end{aligned}$$

The combined results in Table 3, model 5 winnow down the significant variables to support only two of the four theories. It appears that the respondents' primary concern with the law is how they view standardized testing, as shown by its strong and positive significance at the  $p < .001$  level. This is understandable because if a



school performs poorly on standardized tests it could get shut down. Republicans and conservatives support this type of traditional business model. Parents also think the law has made schools better, although they may think so because they perceive aspects of the law other than standardized testing since they are around schools more. They could also like the fact that the law tries to get parents involved with their child(ren)'s education.

Likelihood-ratio tests were used to test whether table 3, model 5 is better than the previous four models in table 3. A likelihood-ratio test measures which equation explains more variation by expressing how many times the variables occur in one test as opposed to the other. The test produces a p-value that states the likelihood that model with more variables explains more variation than the other. In all of the likelihood-ratio tests model 5 explains significantly more variation than any other model in table 3. Therefore, multiple theories are needed to explain people's views toward NCLB, although the education theory explained the most variation of models 1 through 4. This means that people's view toward standardized testing in NCLB majorly affects their perception of the law since that was the only significant variable in the model except high school education.

### **The Causes of Standardized Testing and an Alternative NCLB Model**

The tests of these four hypotheses show that people's attitudes toward the NCLB law's use of standardized testing have the strongest impact on their attitude toward the law. Even when all of the other variables were included in the equation people's views of standardized testing in NCLB affected how they perceived the law. However, since the questions directed at people's attitudes toward NCLB were only

targeted on standardized testing in NCLB, we do not know what they thought of the other components of the law (e.g., more money spent and the use of charter schools). Since people's views of standardized testing in the law dominated their views about the law, it must be a large percentage of what they know about it. Since the questionnaire only asked people if they knew about NCLB and did not test that knowledge, the majority of the people in the questionnaire could have known about the parts of the law that dealt with standardized testing and know little about the rest of the law. However, this question alone does not support the education theory since people's view of the importance of jobs did not significantly correlate with their view of NCLB. This correlation shows that people are probably not thinking about the end result of NCLB, as the traditional education theory would suggest. More research needs to be done that includes more variables about people's education theory such as their views toward discipline, creativity, and the teacher's role in the classroom to determine if it affects their attitudes toward the law.

But the meaning of standardized testing is rather thin in terms of theory. People's attitudes toward standardized testing is the most highly correlated variable with people's attitudes toward NCLB, but it is difficult to interpret its meaning. Even though this was only one part of my original educational theory hypothesis, I will examine the roots of this variable in more detail in the following section. Thus, a second set of regressions was run using standardized testing as the dependent variable. This is done to measure if people's opinions toward NCLB might be tautological with their opinion toward standardized testing used in NCLB. The variables that had the highest correlation with people's attitudes toward

standardized testing in NCLB were Republican, conservative, and authoritarian. If people's attitudes toward NCLB are tautological with their attitudes toward standardized testing then those variables should be significant and positively correlated with attitudes toward standardized testing because those variables were positively correlated with attitudes toward NCLB.

$$\text{Standardized testing} = \alpha + \beta_1\text{Republican} + \beta_2\text{conservative} + \beta_3\text{authoritarian} + e$$

Next, the variables that had a moderate correlation with the standardized testing variable were added. All of them except the tolerance measure should be positively correlated toward standardized testing since they were positively correlated with attitudes toward NCLB.

$$\text{Standardized testing} = \alpha + \beta_1\text{job} + \beta_2\text{Republican} + \beta_3\text{conservative} + \beta_4\text{authoritarian} - \beta_5\text{tolerance} + \beta_6\text{eduhs} + \beta_7\text{incomelow} + e$$

Finally, all of the variables in the study were run except the variable measuring people's attitudes toward standardized testing using attitudes toward NCLB as the dependent variable. This was done to test if attitudes toward standardized testing are tautological with attitudes toward NCLB. If the results are the same in this equation as model 5 in table 3 then the explanations may be tautological; if the results are different then the explanation may not be tautological.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{NCLB1} = & \alpha + \beta_1\text{job} + \beta_2\text{Republican} + \beta_3\text{conservative} + \beta_4\text{parent} + \beta_5\text{black} \\ & + \beta_6\text{male} - \beta_7\text{age} + \beta_8\text{urban} - \beta_9\text{rural} + \beta_{10}\text{authoritarian} \\ & - \beta_{11}\text{tolerance} + \beta_{12}\text{educhs} + \beta_{13}\text{educcol} + \beta_{14}\text{incomelow} \\ & - \beta_{15}\text{incomemid} + e \end{aligned}$$

The new equations show the same general pattern as the equations with people's views toward NCLB, although with several variations. Table 4, model 1 tests for people's political stances and authoritarian views, people's authoritarian

views were more likely to predict attitudes toward standardized testing, being 33.2% more likely to have a positive attitude toward standardized testing. Conservatives were less likely (18.1%), but still significant, although Republicans were insignificant in the equation.

In table 4, model 2 four other variables were added and political variables ceased to remain significant. Authoritarian views were still significant and people's views toward jobs became significant for the first time and people with a high school degree or below were also significant. Therefore, people with authoritarian views have a positive view toward the use of standardized testing in NCLB, likely because they have a positive attitude toward rigid measures, like standards. People who want politicians to focus on jobs are also significant, which likely means they are in favor of measures which jobs can easily read and therefore hire people quickly and decisively based on those scores. The political variables, including the tolerance variable were not significant, which makes sense since standardized testing is not a political issue, but an educational one.

Table 4, model 3 essentially shows the same thing that table 3, model 5 shows although with added variables. The political variables and parents are still significant and people's views toward authoritarianism and educational attainment become significant. Since authoritarianism and education were significant in the first four models in table 3 that do not include people's views toward standardized testing, the correlation between the variables could have made authoritarian views and education insignificant. Since most of the same variables are significant in the comprehensive models testing all of the variables considered (model 5 in in table 3

and model 3 in table 4), there is a possibility that the use of standardized testing in explaining people's views toward the NCLB law are tautological. However, there is a political component that the tautology theory is missing, as demonstrated by table 4, models 1 and 2. Therefore, it is unlikely that the explanations are tautological, although attitudes toward standardized testing have a large role in people's views toward NCLB. While people may equate standardized testing with NCLB, more analysis needs to be done to fully explain the connection.

### **Discussion of the Causes of No Child Left Behind**

In the first set of regressions, I found that two major theories were quite strong even in the face of considerable control variables – the educational and symbolic politics theories. However, the meaning of the strongest variable representing the educational theory was questioned on the basis of its possible overlap with the dependent variable. So a second set of regressions was done that eliminated standardized tests. The results showed that authoritarianism then played a stronger role along with symbolic politics. I will review these two sets of results and compare them in the next few paragraphs.

First, standardized testing representing the educational theory was the strongest variable in all of the equations. In table 3, model 5 it is more than three times stronger (based on the comparison of the odds ratios) than either Republican or conservatism, and it is significant at  $p < .001$  compared to the other two variables being significant at  $p < .01$  and  $p < .05$  respectively. So clearly, standardized testing is the strongest explanatory factor in this analysis.

Second, the political variables definitely support the symbolic politics theory. Both Republicans and conservatives support the law by a significant margin. These groups probably do not have a positive attitude toward the law because it is conservative since Bush borrowed many of the ideas for the law from Democratic principles and to get it passed through congress he had to convince his Republican colleagues to support it because they considered it too Democratic (McGuinn 2006). Therefore, Republicans and conservatives probably like the law because it was written by a Republican/conservative president and passed by a congress that consisted of a majority of Republicans. To further support this point, table 3, models 2 and 5 show that Republicans are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the law than conservatives. This further supports the theory because it shows that people are relying more on their party affiliations rather than their political stances.

Neither the group/self interest or authoritarian theories were supported in the table 3, model 5. The only variable from either theory that was significant is if you are currently a parent. This variable alone does not argue for either theory, but primarily means that parents take an interest in their child(ren)'s education. Being a parent was significant despite the standardized testing variable being present in the equation, which could mean parents know about different aspects of the law beyond standardized testing because they spend more time around schools than the average citizen.

The results regarding the authoritarian theory were mixed. Table 3, model 4 shows that both measures of authoritarianism are significantly correlated with people's attitudes toward NCLB. However, in table 3, model 5, those results do not

stand up to the other variables. Therefore, it can be deduced that authoritarian attitudes affect people's attitudes toward NCLB, although those views are overridden by another variable or variables present in table 3, model 5.

These results stood up to a considerable number of control variables. While high school education was significant in the education model, it did not dull the impact of standardized testing (table 3, model 1). Further, both high school education and college education were significant in the symbolic politics and the other two models; the main variables in these models remained significant (table 3, models 2, 3 and 4). In the combined regression equation (table 3, model 5) education disappeared in significance.<sup>2</sup> The other major controls were low and medium income, and they never achieved significance or reduce the results of symbolic politics or standardized testing.

Although the first set of regression results supports the educational and symbolic politics theories, there were questions about standardized testing being too close to the dependent variable itself and thus possibly being tautological. If standardized testing is tautological then one should remove it from the equation. Therefore, I explored its determinants before running another model including all of the variables except people's views of standardized testing. The first two models in Table 4 show that people's view of jobs, conservative ideology, and authoritarianism

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<sup>2</sup> Although my theories did not target levels of education as an explanatory factor, there are some interesting aspects of educational levels in these equations. Both education variables were positive and significant in every model except the one that included standardized testing and then only the HS variable was significant. This in comparison to people with graduate education, which has a negative zero-order coefficient with NCLB. One might develop a hypothesis that gaining higher level degrees would decrease a person's chance of having a positive view of the law. But I did not find this hypothesis worth pursuing and these education variables disappear in the final results. My main use of education variables was for purposes of control.

have a strong impact on standardized testing, although conservative ideology drops from significance in the second model. People's view toward jobs was never significant in any of the models in table 3, although both conservative ideology and authoritarianism were.

The last equation in table 4 shows that when standardized testing is taken out of the equation measuring all of the variables including authoritarianism and respondent's educational attainment become significant again. Authoritarianism, which has the strongest connection to standardized testing of all the variables used in this analysis ( $r=.17$  at  $p<.001$ ), was significant in table 4, model 3 at the  $p<.05$  level. So if the problematic status of standardized testing is recognized, authoritarianism comes into play as a significant factor. This model shows how Republicans, conservative, and authoritarians hang together as a political group, as all three are significant in the model despite having a high correlation with the public's views toward NCLB. Also significant in the final equation were respondents being parents and both education variables. As a result, table 4, model 3 supports the symbolic politics theory with Republican and conservatism being significant and shows that authoritarianism may actually have a role in explaining the public's view toward NCLB.

Standardized testing is a major part of NCLB and its effectiveness has been debated over in educational theory. Supporters of standardized testing argue that among the methods developed to test student's knowledge, standardized testing is the cheapest and most meritocratic method to use. The scores for the standardized test can be put into a bell curve and if a student scores beyond a certain mark then



they are gifted but if they score below a certain point then they are falling behind and need extra help. This is a major advantage for both employers and schools. Employers can quickly look at the tests to ascertain which applicants are best based on their scores while schools can easily look at the scores and see areas the student struggles or excels and classify them accordingly. However, the support for standardized testing is not simply rational, as shown by the regressions such political terms as conservatism and authoritarianism are closely linked to standardized testing. As a result, I believe that authoritarianism doesn't really drop out of this analysis, but its effects are intertwined with the meaning of standardized testing. This additional analysis of the roots of ones' beliefs in standardized testing does more to contextualize the meaning of standardized testing and show that what may possibly be a tautology actually reflects the partial impact of authoritarianism and conservatism.

### **Limitations**

The first and primary limitation of the study is that the dependent variable does not measure people's attitudes toward NCLB, but rather if they think it has made schools better or worse. It can be inferred that people who think it has made schools better have a positive attitude toward the law, but further research is needed to determine people's views toward the law. A better measure of people's views toward NCLB would be a Likert scale measure asking how much they like the law and making "don't know enough" an option, but not a screening question. People who do not know about a law can still have an opinion and may see how a law affects something without actually knowing what the law does.

The only part of NCLB that the survey measured was the part dealing with standardized testing. None of the other parts of the law were measured, such as the funding the law gives to schools that create programs for parents of students or the part that allows students to transfer out of schools that are failing. This study would have a better indication of people's attitudes toward the law if it included questions about people's attitudes toward more aspects of NCLB.

Another limitation is the standardized testing variable only measures people's attitudes towards standardized testing in NCLB, not overall. While it tests people's attitudes toward a specific part of the law, it limits the generalizability of the study because it does not test people's attitudes toward standardized testing in general.

The jobs variable is also limited to people's attitudes of what political candidates should focus on in the 2008 presidential election. People were very concerned about the economy during that election, so the numbers were probably higher than they would have been a few years earlier. It also cannot be inferred that the people who responded that jobs are important think that getting a job is the main purpose of education; only that they think getting a job is important. A better measure would ask respondents what is the main purpose of education and to include getting a job after they graduate as an option.

The parent variable is also slightly problematic because it tests if the respondents had a child under 18 in the house in the year 2007. It does not measure if they are parents in general or have had children in school since NCLB was passed; both of these measures would affect a person's view toward the law. If

they are parents but divorced and living in a separate place then they would not have the child in their house, but may still be involved in their child(ren)'s education, which would affect their view toward NCLB. Also, if they had children in the school system after NCLB was passed but they graduated before the survey was administered then they would be able to see how the act affected their child's education. Both of these scenarios would not be measured in this study because of the way the survey measured if people are parents.

**Table 3: Logistic Regressions on Attitudes toward the No Child Left Behind Act** (Significance levels: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		
	Odds Ratio	Percent change	Odds Ratio	Percent change	Odds Ratio	Percent change	Odds Ratio	Percent Change	Odds Ratio	Percent Change	
Standardized Testing	4.69*** (.699)	369.1%							4.14*** (.657)	314.6%	
Job focus Orientation	1.20 (.238)	19.6%							1.12 (.233)	11.8%	
Republican			2.04*** (.325)	104.2%					1.74** (.325)	74.4%	
Conservative			1.38*** (.113)	38.4%					1.27* (.138)	27.3%	
Parents					1.71** (.270)	71.3%			1.59** (.279)	58.7%	
Race (black)					1.21 (.277)	20.7%			1.54 (.406)	54.1%	
Sex (male)					1.33* (.177)	32.6%			1.23 (.188)	22.6%	
Age					.10 (.005)	-0.4%			.99 (.174)	-13.4%	
Urban <sup>1</sup>					.77 (.125)	-22.9%			.90 (.165)	-9.8%	
Rural <sup>1</sup>					.87 (.146)	-13.3%			.91 (.174)	-8.8%	
Authoritarian								1.48*** (.103)	48.7%	1.10 (.099)	9.8%
Tolerance <sup>2</sup>								.38* (.160)	-61.9%	.61 (.321)	-39.0%
HS Education <sup>1</sup>	1.79* (.700)	78.6%	2.06** (.472)	106.3%	2.11** (.479)	111.3%	1.92** (.436)	92.1%	1.58 (.400)	57.8%	
College Education <sup>1</sup>	1.46 (.238)	45.7%	1.65* (.338)	65.4%	1.83** (.369)	82.6%	1.64* (.331)	63.6%	1.31 (.292)	31.2%	
Low income <sup>1</sup>	.77 (.164)	-23.3%	.87 (.179)	-12.9%	.99 (.206)	-0.8%	.84 (.169)	-16.1%	1.00 (.233)	0.4%	
Medium <sup>1</sup> Income	1.09 (.212)	9.3%	1.09 (.204)	9.2%	1.18 (.220)	18.4%	1.04 (.192)	4.1%	1.29 (.265)	29.0%	
	N= 1019 LL=-592.08 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (6)= 129.48		N=1046 LL=-638.54 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (6)= 74.75		N=1057 LL=-661.99 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (10)= 41.03		N=1055 LL= -651.61 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (6)= 61.33		N= 983 LL= -542.66 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (16)= 182.46		

\*Key on page 64

<sup>1</sup>Suburban, graduate education and high income are used as reference categories.

<sup>2</sup>For model 5 the regression was also run without the tolerance measure because of potential multicollinearity with the conservative measure, but the regression results did not change significantly.

LL=Log Likelihood

**Table 4: Explaining Standardized Testing and a New Final Regression** (Significance levels: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Standardized Testing		Standardized Testing		Revised NCLB Regression	
	Odds Ratio	Percent change	Odds Ratio	Percent change	Odds Ratio	Percent change
Job focus orientation			0.57** (.123)	-43.1%	0.93 (.182)	-6.4%
Republican	1.18 (.191)	18.4%	1.19 (.206)	19.4%	1.81** (.311)	81.1%
Conservative	1.18** (.096)	18.1%	1.17 (.116)	16.7%	1.24* (.124)	24.5%
Parents					1.51* (.250)	51.3%
Race (black)					1.43 (.351)	43.5%
Sex (male)					1.24 (.177)	24.3%
Age					0.99 (.005)	-0.6%
Urban <sup>1</sup>					0.86 (.147)	-13.5%
Rural <sup>1</sup>					0.86 (.152)	-14.5%
Authoritarian	1.33*** (.102)	33.2	1.32** (.109)	32.1%	1.23* (.102)	23.8%
Tolerance <sup>2</sup>			0.56 (.278)	-43.6%	.55 (.273)	-45.3%
HS Education <sup>1</sup>					1.85** (.439)	85.8%
College Education <sup>1</sup>					1.61* (.338)	60.7%
Low income <sup>1</sup>			1.02 (.157)	1.60%	1.05 (.228)	5.1%
Medium <sup>1</sup> Income					1.21 (.233)	20.9%
	N= 1161 LL=-679.14 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (3)= 40.7		N=1043 LL=-605.61 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (7)= 56.36		N=1057 LL=-661.99 LR chi <sup>2</sup> (10)= 41.03	

\*Key on page 66

<sup>1</sup>Suburban, graduate education and high income are used as reference categories.  
<sup>2</sup>For model 5 the regression was also run without

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of attitudes toward the laws that our government passes and attempts to implement are often complicated by the theories the originators think are reasonable explanations of the policies or programs. When they create survey research data sets those theories can be operationalized, and others may have to work with an often-awkward attempt to test other theories. This makes testing some of the alternative theories a bit difficult, and these choices provide a certain limitation on what can actually be done.

Initially in this analysis, standardized testing came out as the strongest variable in explaining NCLB, but this clearly left the researcher with an unsatisfactory explanation since people's attitudes toward standardized testing are not often contextualized within larger explanations of political laws. Therefore, I tested for the causes of people's views toward standardized testing in order to contextualize the results, although a more satisfactory result could be attained with a battery of variables that measure people's attitudes toward other aspects of NCLB. If attitudes toward the various facets of NCLB (not just the one aspect of standardized testing) had been measured, a more complex and informative analysis could have been done. Nonetheless, the analysis in this thesis, which has been somewhat exploratory since no other survey research explaining attitudes toward the law exist, does show that symbolic politics (slightly changed to include authoritarianism with Conservatives and Republican ideology) has a strong effect



on both attitudes toward NCLB, and also in explaining attitudes toward standardized testing.

Standardization is not an outlier concept in our society. Saying you believe in standardization does not mean that you believe in dictatorships and an Orwellian future for humanity. Standardization is rampant in the production of items as diverse as automobiles and yogurt. Standardization allows people to replace parts instead of buying a new product every time and to know how much of something they are receiving (such as a cup of sugar). On the other hand, few of us want every aspect of our life to be standardized; in certain parts of our lives we expect some intimate and personal attention. Education seems to fall in between these two extremes of standardized production and intimate experiences. Parents want to be able to transfer their child from one school to another if the family needs to move and trust that the child learned the same thing in the third grade in their old school as the children in their new school did and are prepared for the fourth grade no matter where they send their child. Conversely, they also want each teacher to personalize the lessons as much as possible in order to reach individual students in an effective manner. Parents may differ considerably on how much personalization they desire, but there is a fairly strong connection between family income and personalized treatment. As a result of this analysis, I open up an area of policy 'standardization' that has only begun to be explored in the policy-making and educational literature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Weber discusses rationality in terms of a bureaucracy. He states that processes will become standardized in order to make them more efficient and easier to compare. This process of rationalization, of which standardization is a part, pervades everything in society including

There is a political element to NCLB that the standardized testing theory fails to recognize. People's political stances shape the way they perceive laws regardless of what the law may address. This forms a dichotomy of people who have an opinion of what the law pertains to and people who side with their political party. This research shows this interaction of people's attitudes. One side shows there are people who care about the educational aspects of the law, such as people who care about standardized testing and parents. Standardized testing definitely supports the traditional education theory stating that children should memorize the information, which can be easily measured with standardized tests. Parents care about education because they want their children to get a good job later in their lives and education has a large role in getting people a good job. On the other side there are people who only care about their political stances, such as Republicans and conservatives. These people do not pay as much attention to individual laws, but rather know their party's general stances and trust the laws their party supports are in their best interest. The middle shows the interaction of the two sides, represented by authoritarianism, which is an inherently political concept because it means they obey authority figures, such as politicians. Yet the concept extends beyond politics in things like discipline, especially in the classroom. This interaction extends beyond NCLB to all federal education reform, therefore people's views toward federal education reform do not necessarily mean they think the law works, but may be loyalty to the party that passed the law.

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education. Therefore, education will become more standardized in terms of testing and teaching since this is the trend in society (Weber, 1977; Ritzer, 1996).

### **Future research**

This study measures people's attitudes toward NCLB, but there are several factors that can be researched more in depth to add to the literature. People's views toward standardized testing has a large impact on their views toward NCLB, so future research done on people's views toward standardized testing would be useful to determine their views toward NCLB in more detail. Part of the research should focus on the interaction between their views toward standardized testing and educational attainment. Respondents who had a high school degree or less were most likely to have a positive view of the law in each model except the models that include their view toward standardized testing. This could mean there is a relationship between education and people's attitude toward standardized testing regarding NCLB or their attitude toward standardized testing in general, but this study has no way of differentiating or ascertaining that relationship.

More research also needs to be done on people's attitudes toward the different aspects of NCLB. This study has explored reasons behind people's attitudes toward standardized testing in NCLB, but was not able to explore attitudes toward any other part of the law due to the study using secondary data analysis. Therefore, testing more parts of the law would provide a more complete picture of people's attitudes toward the law, specifically what they do and do not like about it.

This study measures how authoritarian attitudes affect people's attitude toward NCLB and there has been research done on how people with authoritarian attitudes view education in general, but very little research on how they view certain educational acts and which acts they view positively. This study has found

that people's authoritarian attitudes do affect how they view NCLB but those attitudes are not prevalent when coding for their attitudes toward standardized testing in NCLB and political affiliation. Therefore more research needs to be done on the impact authoritarian attitudes have on people's attitudes toward educational acts.

## Appendix I: Variable Descriptions for All Variables Used and for Four Models

### Dependent variable:

NCLB1: Based on anything you may have seen or heard, do you think that the No Child Left Behind Act has made schools in America better, worse, or had no impact?

- Frequency: 1214, no missing
- Mode: No impact/Worse (788)
- Recoded as an ordinal variable
  - No impact/Worse=0 (788)
  - Better=1 (426)

### Independent variables:

#### **Education Theory:**

Test\_std: Under the 'No Child Left Behind' Act, do you think there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, too little, or the right amount?

- Frequency: 1144, no missing
- Mode: Too much/too little (807)
- Recoded as a continuous variable
  - Too much/too little =0 (807)
  - Right amount=1 (337)

Job: In choosing between the candidates for nomination in 2008, what one issue will be most important to you? (Asking Democrats)

- Frequency: 1214
- Mode: Other (1041)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Other=0 (1041)
  - Economy/jobs (173)

#### **Symbolic Politics Theory:**

Republican: Political party affiliation

- Frequency: 1195
- Mode: Democrat/Independent (879)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Republican=1 (316)
  - Democrat/Independent=0 (879)

### Conservative: Political Ideology

- Frequency: 1179
- Mode: Moderate (527)
- Coded as an ordinal variable
  - Very conservative=5 (84)
  - Conservative=4 (342)
  - Moderate=3 (527)
  - Liberal=2 (173)
  - Very liberal=1 (53)

### Self/Group Interest Theory:

#### Parent1: Do you have anyone living in your house under the age of 18?

- Frequency: 1213
- Mode: No (841)
- Recoded as a dummy variable
  - Yes=1 (372)
  - No=0 (841)

#### Black

- Frequency: 1199
- Mode: Other (1088)
- Recoded as a dummy variable
  - Black=1 (111)
  - Other=0 (1088)

#### Male: Sex

- Frequency: 1214
- Mode: Female (650)
- Recoded as a dummy variable
  - Male=1 (564)
  - Female=0 (650)

#### Age

- Frequency: 1191
- Mode: 60 (36)
- Coded as an interval variable

#### Community type (Recoded so that each is a dummy variable)

- Urban
  - Frequency: 1214
  - Mode: Other (884)
    - Urban=1 (330)
    - Other=0 (884)

- Suburban
    - Frequency: 1214
    - Mode: Suburban (619)
      - Suburban=1 (619)
      - Other=0 (595)
- Rural
  - Frequency: 1214
  - Mode: Other (949)
    - Rural=1 (265)
    - Other=0 (949)

### **Authoritarian Theory:**

Authoritarian: An index of the variables military, born1, and gun.

- Frequency: 1214
- Mode: 1 (416)
  - 0 (366)
  - 1 (416)
  - 2 (300)
  - 3 (132)

Military: Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?

- Frequency: 1135
- Mode: Wrong decision (587)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Right decision=1 (548)
  - Wrong decision=0 (587)

Born1: Would you describe yourself as a “born again” or evangelical Christian, or not?

- Frequency: 985
- Mode: No (553)
- Recoded as a dummy variable
  - Yes, would=1 (432)
  - No, would not=0 (553)

Gun: What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

- Frequency: 1134
- Mode: Control gun ownership (702)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Protect the right of Americans to own guns=1 (432)
  - Control gun ownership=0 (702)

Very\_liberal: In general, would you describe your political views as...

- Frequency: 1179
- Mode: Other (1126)
- Recoded as a dummy variable
  - Very liberal=1 (53)
  - Other=0 (1126)

### **Control variables:**

Educhs: Education

- Frequency: 1210
- Mode: Higher than high school degree (838)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Higher than high school degree=0 (838)
  - High school degree or below=1 (372)

Educcol: Education

- Frequency: 1210
- Mode: College degree to above high school degree (631)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - High school degree or below/above a college degree=0 (579)
  - College degree to above a high school degree=1 (631)

Edugrad: Education

- Frequency: 1210
- Mode: College degree or below=0 (1003)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - College degree or below=0 (1003)
  - Post-graduate education=1 (207)

Incomelow: Income

- Frequency: 1076
- Mode: More than \$40,000 (797)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - More than \$30,000=0 (797)
  - Less than \$30,000=1 (279)



#### Incomemid: Income

- Frequency: 1076
- Mode: \$40,000 to under \$100,000 (588)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Under \$30,000 or above \$100,000 (488)
  - \$30,000 to under \$100,000 (588)

#### Incomehigh: Income

- Frequency: 1076
- Mode: Under \$100,000 (867)
- Coded as a dummy variable
  - Under \$100,000=0 (867)
  - \$100,000 or above=1 (209)

## Appendix II: Correlation Coefficients for All Variables Used and for Four Models

**Table AI: Correlation Coefficients for All the Variables Used in All the Models with zero-order correlations, significance and n's**

	NCLB	Test_std	Job	Republican	Conservative	Urban	Rural	Male	Parent	Age	Black	Authoritarian	Very_liberal	Educ_hs	Educ_col	Income_Low	Income_mid
NCLB	1 1214																
Test_std	.347 .000 1144	1 1209															
Job	-.003 .903 1214	-.066 .022 1209	1 1508														
Republican	.198 .000 1195	.118 .000 1189	.004 .892 1473	1 1473													
Conservative	.202 .000 1179	.139 .000 1174	-.043 .104 1445	.374 .000 1422	1 1445												
Urban	-.038 .186 1214	-.041 .153 1209	-.012 .637 1508	-.042 .109 1473	-.072 .006 1445	1 1508											
Rural	-.004 .195 1214	.009 .748 1209	.002 .939 1508	-.003 .917 1473	.039 .138 1445	-.330 .000 1508	1 1508										
Male	.049 .090 1214	.0454 .1148 1209	.042 .106 1508	.000 .990 1473	.040 .133 1445	.014 .583 1508	.018 .477 1508	1 1508									
Parent	.126 .000 1214	.028 .323 1208	.027 .303 1504	.050 .054 1472	.010 .695 1444	.011 .658 1504	-.029 .259 1504	-.034 .194 1504	1 1508								
Age	-.094 .001 1191	-.016 .573 1188	-.053 .044 1475	-.022 .408 1443	.117 .000 1418	-.043 .097 1475	.059 .024 1475	-.079 .002 1475	-.431 .000 1474	1 1475							
Black	.036 .209 1199	-.065 .025 1195	.045 .081 1489	-.118 .000 1458	-.048 .068 1432	.197 .000 1489	-.059 .023 1489	-.007 .786 1489	.086 .001 1487	-.072 .006 1461	1 1489						
Authoritarian	.190 .000 1214	.173 .000 1209	.014 .590 1508	.378 .000 1458	.409 .000 1445	-.145 .000 1508	.136 .000 1508	.119 .000 1508	.011 .663 1504	-.024 .350 1475	-.081 .002 1489	1 1508					

	NCLB	Test_std	Job	Republican	Conservative	Urban	Rural	Male	Parent	Age	Black	Authoritarian	Very_liberal	Educ_hs	Educ_col	Income_Low	Income_mid
Very_liberal	-.099 .001 1179	-.085 .004 1174	.020 .452 1445	-.118 .000 1422	-.518 .000 1445	.034 .197 1445	.005 .863 1445	-.019 .461 1445	-.019 .472 1444	-.062 .019 1418	.094 .000 1432	-.156 .000 1445	1  1445				
Educ_hs	.053 .067 1210	.089 .002 1206	-.011 .666 1499	-.037 .162 1467	.077 .003 1440	-.066 .011 1499	.097 .000 1499	.007 .780 1499	-.045 .081 1498	.063 .016 1471	.082 .002 1482	.091 .000 1499	-.008 .753 1440	1  1499			
Educ_col	.038 .192 1210	.017 .557 1206	.024 .363 1499	.025 .345 1467	-.004 .887 1440	.010 .689 1499	-.035 .178 1499	-.025 .332 1499	.039 .136 1498	-.075 .004 1471	-.058 .025 1482	-.008 .753 1499	-.020 .450 1440	-.720 .000 1499	1  1499		
Income_low	-.017 .587 1076	.059 .055 1072	-.035 .204 1313	-.067* .016 1294	.008 .784 1279	.006 .829 1313	.094 .001 1313	-.087 .002 1313	-.121 .000 1312	.124 .000 1301	.110 .000 1303	.004 .881 1313	.056* .045 1279	.357 .000 1309	-.187 .000 1309	1  1313	
In-come_mid	.028 .357 1076	-.042 .165 1072	.005 .861 1313	-.004 .897 1294	-.001 .960 1279	-.078 .005 1313	.027 .326 1313	.025 .375 1313	.020 .479 1312	-.058 .037 1301	-.066 .018 1303	.006 .819 1313	-.025 .375 1279	-.154 .000 1309	.135 .000 1309	-.674 .000 1313	1  1313

**Table A2: Educational Theory Correlation Matrix with zero-order correlations, significance, and n's**

	NCLB1	Test_std	Job	Educhs	Educcol	Incomelow	Incomemid
NCLB1	1 1214						
Test_std	0.3478*** 0.0000 1144	1 1209					
Job	-0.0035 0.9033 1214	-0.0661* 0.0215 1209	1 1508				
Educhs	0.0526 0.0673 1210	0.0894** 0.0019 1206	-0.0112 0.6662 1499	1 1499			
Educcol	0.0376 0.1915 1210	0.0169 0.5567 1206	0.0235 0.3625 1499	-0.7201*** 0.0000 1499	1 1499		
Incomelow	-0.0166 0.5874 1076	0.0587 0.0546 1072	-0.0350 0.2044 1313	0.3569*** 0.0000 1309	-0.1865*** 0.0000 1309	1 1313	
Incomemid	0.0281 0.3569 1076	-0.0424 0.1652 1072	0.0048 0.8613 1313	-0.1541*** 0.0000 1309	0.1354*** 0.0000 1309	-0.6737*** 0.0000 1313	1 1313

**Table A3: Symbolic Politics Correlation Matrix with zero-order correlations, significance, and n's**

	NCLB1	Republican	Conservative	Educhs	Educcol	Incomelow	Incomemid
NCLB1	1 1214						
Republican	0.1980*** 0.0000 1195	1 1473					
Conservative	0.2016*** 0.0000 1179	0.3741*** 0.0000 1422	1 1445				
Educhs	0.0526 0.0673 1210	-0.0365 0.1623 1467	0.0769* 0.0035 1440	1 1499			
Educcol	0.0376 0.1915 1210	0.0247 0.3454 1467	-0.0037 0.8872 1440	-0.7201*** 0.0000 1499	1 1499		
Incomelow	-0.0166 0.5874 1076	-0.0673* 0.0155 1294	0.0077 0.7837 1279	0.3569*** 0.0000 1309	-0.1865*** 0.0000 1309	1 1313	
Incomemid	0.0281 0.3569 1076	0.0036 0.8969 1294	-0.0014 0.9603 1279	-0.1541*** 0.0000 1309	0.1354*** 0.0000 1309	-0.6737*** 0.0000 1313	1 1313

**Table A4: Self/Group Interest Theory Correlation Matrix with zero-order correlations, significance, and n's**

	NCLB1	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Male	Parent1	Age1	Black	Educhs	Educcol	Incomelow	Incomemid
NCLB1	1 1214											
Urban	-0.038 0.186 1214	1 1508										
Suburban	0.037 0.194 1214	-0.629*** 0.000 1508	1 1508									
Rural	-0.004 0.886 1214	-0.330*** 0.000 1508	-0.526*** 0.000 1508	1 1508								
Male	0.049 0.090 1214	0.014 0.583 1508	-0.028 0.280 1508	0.018 0.477 1508	1 1508							
Parent1	0.126*** 0.000 1213	0.011 0.658 1504	0.014 0.595 1504	-0.029 0.259 1504	-0.034 0.194 1504	1 1504						
Age1	-0.094** 0.001 1191	-0.043 0.097 1475	-0.010 0.705 1475	0.059* 0.023 1475	-0.079** 0.002 1475	-0.431*** 0.000 1474	1 1475					
Black	0.036 0.209 1199	0.197*** 0.000 1489	-0.128*** 0.000 1489	-0.059* 0.023 1475	-0.007 0.786 1489	0.086*** 0.001 1487	-0.072** 0.006 1461	1 1489				
Educhs	0.053 0.067 1210	-0.066* 0.011 1499	-0.021 0.426 1499	0.097*** 0.000 1499	0.007 0.780 1499	-0.045 0.081 1498	0.063* 0.016 1471	0.082** 0.002 1482	1 1499			
Educcol	0.038 0.191 1210	0.010 0.689 1499	0.019 0.454 1499	-0.035 0.179 1499	-0.025 0.332 1499	0.039 0.136 1498	-0.075** 0.004 1471	-0.058* 0.025 1482	-0.720*** 0.000 1499	1 1499		
Income low	-0.017 0.587 1076	0.006 0.829 1313	-0.083** 0.003 1313	0.094*** 0.000 1313	-0.087** 0.002 1313	-0.121*** 0.000 1312	0.124*** 0.000 1301	0.110*** 0.000 1303	0.357*** 0.000 1309	-0.187*** 0.000 1309	1 1313	
Income mid	0.028 0.357 1076	-0.079** 0.005 1313	0.048 0.084 1313	0.027 0.326 1313	0.025 0.375 1313	0.020 0.479 1312	-0.0577* 0.0374 1301	-0.066* 0.018 1303	-0.154*** 0.000 1309	0.135*** 0.000 1309	-0.674*** 0.000 1313	1 1313

**Table A5: Authoritarian Theory Correlation Matrix with zero-order correlations, significance and n's**

	NCLB1	Authori- tarianism	Very_ liberal	Educhs	Educcol	Incomelow	Incomemid
NCLB1	1 1214						
Authori- Tarianism	0.190*** 0.000 1214	1 1508					
Very Liberal	-0.0989*** 0.002 1179	-0.1560*** 0.0000 1445	1 1445				
Educhs	0.0526 0.0673 1210	0.0912*** 0.0004 1499	-0.0083 0.7525 1440	1 1499			
Educcol	0.0376 0.1915 1210	-0.0081 0.7531 1499	-0.0199 0.4500 1440	-0.7201*** 0.0000 1499	1 1499		
Income Low	-0.0166 0.5874 1076	0.0041 0.8808 1313	0.0561* 0.0449 1279	0.3569*** 0.0000 1309	-0.1865*** 0.0000 1309	1 1313	
Income Mid	0.0281 0.3569 1076	0.006 0.819 1313	-0.0248 0.3750 1279	-0.1541*** 0.0000 1309	0.1354*** 0.0000 1309	-0.6737*** 0.0000 1313	1 1313

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