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Media Impact on Disaster Public Policy

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Abstract

Decades of research suggest the media play a secondary role in the development of public policy. This appears to be equally true in media coverage of disasters. While the media may heighten awareness of an issue, individual public opinion leaders, particularly the wealthy and influential, have greater impact on the formation of public policy.

In 2005, media accounts of hurricane Katrina "riveted, angered, and depressed" Americans. While the media images of devastated individuals and communities from Katrina may have helped bring about changes in disaster policy, they did not result in public policy to fight poverty and provide economic equality. Whereas significant changes occurred in the federal approach to handling disasters, no legislation followed to improve the condition of the poor. The National Strategy for Homeland Security, revised in 2007, changes the focus of the Department of Homeland Security to an all hazards approach to dealing with calamities, not just on terrorism. In major disasters, the media can play a significant role in combination with other factors to bring about change.

The study of the relationship between mass media and policy making is problematic. Researchers have not been able to clearly determine the impact of media on public policymaking. However, using content analysis and interviews, researchers are able to ascertain the influence of press coverage on a case-by-case basis.

The mass media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) consume so much of the public's attention, but yet they seem to play a minor role in the formation of public policy. A number of factors weaken the press' influence on the policy making process. A leading factor is what the media cover and how they determine what news is. Press bias may reinforce opinions rather than change minds. The media focus more on problems rather than offering solutions. While the media may play a greater role in bringing issues to the attention of the public and legislators, opinion leaders have greater influence on decision-making. Opinion leaders have been shown to have greater impact on how the public votes in elections and how elected officials vote on legislation. In the past 20 years the Internet has impacted how people communicate and how the mass media operate. Beginning in 2008, social media began to play a more important role in elections and political processes.

This paper examines mass media impact on disaster policy, particularly press coverage of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. One would expect that news coverage of disasters would have

similar impact on disaster policy as it does in most policy situations. However, as a result of Katrina, the direction of public policy changed significantly, particularly as it relates to how government handles major natural disasters. The more horrific the event, the more likely the media are able to affect public opinion. Public pressure leads to government action. While policy regarding disaster response and relief changed, other areas of public policy, such that affecting poverty and minorities, saw no alteration.

Mass Media Coverage of Public Policy Making

While social media and the Internet play an increasing role in people's communication, the mass media continue to permeate the lives of the average American, both as entertainment and information providers. However, because of the nature and amount of news to report, the media spend very little time covering legislative process and content. As a result, the media seem to play a lesser role in the formation of public policy.

Because the media give little attention to policy decisions, media impact on public policy is often uncertain. Most studies of mass media impact on the political system surround elections. Fewer studies examine media impact on the political decision-making process. Even fewer studies look at policy making at the state and local levels. Part of the reason is that the media give little coverage to these decisions. When issues are not prominent in news coverage, it is difficult to examine the effects of mass media in the policy process (Berger, 2001).

Impact of the media

While the mass media affect "the standards by which governments, policies and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63), they appear to have less influence on policymakers than other sources of information. Bessant (2003) reports reported that many political actors continue to see the press simply as one of the many interests that make up the policy community, with a role that is "merely as a conduit for information – to observe newsworthy events and report them" (p. 12). Also, Bardhan (2002) found the level of accountability in coverage may significantly impact policy agendas. When responsibility for an issue (for example, between federal and state governments) is not clear-cut and news stories are passive, even a high volume of coverage may not lead to any policy outcomes.

In a study of mass media impact on educational policy making, Fisher (1991) found the mass media play a lesser role in influencing the public policymaking than other actors. He found that opinion leaders exert more influence on lawmakers. The media had little impact on the policy decisions, other than to inform. This study seems to support Fico's (1984) conclusions that reporters are more influential in functions involving transmittal of information to the public and have less impact in functions involving personal and professional influence in the legislative setting. In addition, the study seems to bear out Lambeth's (1978) conclusions that the impact of the press on elected officials is low to moderate.

Most coverage of politics and policy-making occurs at the federal level. At the state and local levels, according to Graber (2006), "most of the local news avoids detailed discussion and in-depth analysis of localized public issues, leaving these issues bereft of essential

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coverage" (p. 298). Although the media may seem like an obvious vehicle for disseminating information, Jackson-Elmoore (2005) found they are less useful to state legislators. State legislators rated the media and Internet as less important than personal contacts as sources of information. "More targeted sources of information should be considered to influence legislative decision-making. The sources should be targeted to the audience" (p. 260).

The nature of news coverage

Among the factors that weaken the press' influence on the policy-making process is how the media determine what news is. The media favor political conflict and controversy over coverage of the more mundane policy process. Press coverage also is limited by time and resources. The media choose not to or are unable to cover all sides of an issue, selecting instead to use more traditional sources for news. This leads to imbalance in coverage and press bias. While bias may reinforce opinions, it does little to change minds.

News has two priorities: it must be current, and it must mean something to people. In deciding on news, the media focus on a number of factors, including (a) conflict and controversy;(b) timeliness, impact, proximity; (c) the prominence of people involved; (d) uniqueness and human interest; and (e) sound and visual impact (Potter, 2008). The goal of commercial media today is to make a profit and maximize company value. Social goals are secondary. The media ignore or provide minimal coverage of programs and information that support public interests because they do not attract large audiences and are often expensive to produce. Rather they focus on stories about conflict, accidents, deviance, and celebrities, often presenting them in a "sensational and salacious manner." When they cover public affairs, it is usually with "sound bites and polarized attacks on participants with other views" (Picard, 2008, p. 215).

Public policy coverage often comes from the same special interests and is packaged and reused again and again. When the media produce their own material, they often pick up on the same ideologies, thus limiting the perspectives and breadth of coverage (Picard, 2008). Fisher and Soemarsono (2008) found the media draw from traditional administrative sources (i.e., government officials or executives) as their primary sources. Non-traditional sources are not sought out, although their comments would provide balance and different perspectives to stories, and even add controversy. Time and lack of resources could be reasons for the failure to seek balance in news coverage.

Journalists exert influence on each other. Journalists often gain their knowledge of events and issues from other journalists through reading and listening to the media. Although journalists claim to be neutral observers, they frame stories through their viewpoints and those of their colleagues. For example, most journalists have accepted the notion of human-caused global warming or climate change. Other viewpoints are ignored and even ridiculed. Framing brings bias into reporting, which makes policymakers wary (Fisher, 2007; Rogers, 2003).

Functions of the media in the policy-making process

Media reports supply news and provide a public forum on an issue. Picard (2008, p. 212) identified a number of social functions of the media: providing a wide range of information, opinions, and perspectives on developments that affect the lives of citizens;

mobilizing members of the public to participate in and carry out their responsibilities in society; helping citizens identify with and participate in the lives of their community, their state, and the nation; serving the needs and representing the interests of widely differing social groups; and ensuring that government, economic, or social constraints do not narrow information and ideas. The media keep institutions in society competitive.

Through in-depth interviews with senior policymakers, Bardhan (2002) found that most politicians tend to accord high importance to media coverage of issues in the early stages of an issue or if it is a crisis or conflict situation. According to Bessant (2003), the media play a central role in the discovery of the problem and in contests over meanings and identities, both of which are activities critical to having an issue placed on the policy agenda. As Schindlymayr (2001) states, of the many societal factors, the media are arguably the most important, for they are "the conduit, the pipeline, the funnel regulating the flow of communication between the policymakers (and therefore the policy itself) and others in the political system who might seek any different policy" (p. 128).

Fisher (1991) found that the mass media function less in policy areas of greatest impact. The mass media function more in relaying information than in influencing the policy process. The media had little impact on the policy decisions, other than to inform. The media focus more on problems rather than offering solutions. For example, while most news and editorial items about education can be related to educational policy or policy-making, the number of items having an impact on policy decisions was few. The media played a persuasive role only 6 percent of the time and an informative role 94 percent of the time. Coverage is greater in the initial stages of the policy-making process (i.e., announcement stage) and less media interest exists as the policy-making process draws out. News publications seemed to perform a greater function in identifying and relaying stakeholder group proposals to the public than they did in articulating and identifying problems. Problem identification overall was not as important as might have been expected. While Almond and Powell (1978) emphasized a media role in articulation, Fisher's study seems to suggest a much greater role in policy aggregation.

Fisher and Soemarsono (2008) found that press impact is moderated by the nature and kinds of items published or broadcast. Because most items are informative rather than persuasive, the impact of the mass media is less than might be expected. Despite its lack of consistency, media coverage provides a record of the key events of the policy process.

On the other hand, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2007) described how the media have changed from covering the news to expressing opinions. Because of this change, news and information have become subservient to commentary and persuasion. Blair claims that the media confuse news and commentary, by blending the two so that the public does not know what is news and what is opinion. This bias is another factor that lessens media impact on policy makers.

Agenda setting, priming, and gatekeeping

Media coverage of politics shows a wide range of influences on what or how the public thinks about political issues. According to Fortunato (2000), the mass media have power to influence public opinion in two critical dimensions: (1) the power to potentially influence

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the public as studied in agenda-setting research, and (2) the power to perform a gatekeeping function through processes of selecting and framing issues that will be exposed to an audience. Johnson (2002) outlined three ways by which the media may influence public opinion. First, the media can directly influence public opinion, by communicating ideas or events that draw attention to a particular issue. Second, the media can openly express "what already seems to be public opinion." Finally, the media may mirror society, giving a sense of prevailing public opinion.

The agenda setting function occurs when the media give more coverage or more prominence to some problems, thus influencing the importance of these issues in the minds of the audience. The perceived salience of the issues then influences the public's evaluation of political actors, in a process called priming. In writing about the process, Entman (2003) describes how public opinion sometimes "cascades up" through the media to influence the policy elites. If the news creates impressions that an idea is held widely and intensely by large numbers of the public, it can affect leaders' decisions on an issue. Also, news coverage can produce "a ripple effect" on policy by shaping public expectations (Seib, 2000).

Political issues that are most salient or accessible in a person's memory will most strongly influence perceptions of political actors and public figures, writes Scheufele (2000). Priming, based on agenda setting, is a key process for decision-making and consensus building in local communities. This is particularly true where the number of media outlets is limited and the media play a key role in indirectly shaping public opinions for a wide variety of issues on a day-to-day basis (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002).

While early studies of agenda setting suggested a linear causal relation between media, public, and policy agendas, research over the last 30 years shows that the relationship is not that straightforward. According to Bardhan (2002), "media framing suggests that the media not only tell us what to think about but also how to think about it, and consequently what to think" (p. 230).

In Tsfati's (2003) discursive model of public opinion, the media facilitate the creation of communities through the advancement of a shared agenda. The news media bear the responsibility for providing public opinion with a variety of "important" issues, which are required for the creation of some minimal consensus regarding the problems of the day. This agreement about "what our problems are" (as opposed to a possible lack of agreement about the solutions for these problems) is necessary in order to sustain any discussion on topics that are collectively perceived as important.

While the news media serve as intermediaries for the thousands of politicians, policy researchers, and opinion makers who wish to transmit information to the public, they also act as gatekeepers as they select to transmit only a fraction of the millions of potential messages to an audience. The issues that get coverage represent only a fraction of the thousands of issues, in the form of bills, which are actually introduced, debated, and usually rejected by policymakers each year. Media messages play a role in the development of political attitudes by presenting political messages and dramatic portrayals involving political beliefs (Brossard & Shanahan, 2003).

How the media cover policy-making

Nisbet and Huge (2006) reviewed how attention cycles and frames influence a scientific debate. By controlling media attention and framing an issue in favorable terms, interest groups have a potential for influencing policy-making. News coverage follows the "issue-attention cycle" proposed by Downs (1972). He argued that policy areas move through a five-step process in which public interest or attention is piqued by a significant event, then gradually declines. An issue rests in a pre-problem stage until a traumatic event "catapults" it to the public attention. The rise in attention then leads to pressure on the political system to solve the problem. It remains in the policy domain even after the initial attention diminishes. As long as changes occur incrementally, little attention is paid to the issue, but, when something dramatic occurs, press coverage increases and public pressure is applied on policy makers. Over time, public policy concerns may shift elsewhere, and the original policy area is left somewhat changed but outside the public setting. The incremental changes often alter the policy in a substantial way and will most likely play a key role when faced with another significant event.

Public opinion and opinion leaders

While the media may play a greater role in bringing issues to the attention of the public and legislators, opinion leaders have greater influence on decision-making. Opinion leaders have been shown to have greater impact on how the public votes in elections and how elected officials vote on legislation.

With the use of the 1966 election study conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, Kingdon (1970) developed a typology of leadership, comparing the types of leaders and examining the proportion of leaders in various subpopulations. He also discussed their potential for affecting political outcomes. In general terms, the four types in the population tend to arrange in the same rank order with respect to a number of variables, with the activists highest, the talkers next, the passive leaders next, and the non-leaders lowest. Compared to the non-leaders, the leaders had attained higher levels of formal education. Nearly half of college-educated people reported some leadership role, compared to 16% of grade-school educated respondents. The leaders are somewhat more likely to be white than nonwhite, male than female. Leaders are not evenly distributed among occupations. However, very few differences existed among age groups.

Ryan and Gross (1943) described the adoption of products, processes, and also beliefs in terms of five categories of people: (1) innovators (2.5%), (2) early adopters (13.5%), (3) early majority (34%), (4) late majority (34%), and (5) laggards (16%). Rogers (2003) enlarged on these categories by defining their application, describing the notion of adoption as diffusion of innovation. When adoption is almost complete, a product, process, or idea is accepted by both the media and politicians.

According to Rogers (2003), media channels are usually the most effective way of making adopters aware of an issue. However, it is usually through interpersonal contact that people are persuaded. While mass media channels are relatively more important at the knowledge stage, interpersonal channels are more important at the persuasion stage in the

innovation-decision process. Similarly, the mass media are more important than interpersonal channels for earlier adopters than for later adopters.

Special interests

The role of the media in public policy is often determined by interest groups (Sato, 2003). The active involvement of interest groups in politicizing an issue affects the amount of mass media over time. In the early period of issue development, when no visible social interests surround an issue, media reports may appear to be independent criticism of governmental inaction. Picard (2008) indicated that when advocacy groups emerge, as the media focus on their activities, they amplify and convey their voices to the public and the policymakers. When these advocacy groups take on the role of watchdog, the media also functions in that way.

Politicians as actors

Brustein (1974) claims that politics makes actors of politicians. For example, to be credible, politicians have to appear sincere. Television encourages politicians to become actors. Television allows the audience to get to know the politician, but the politician is unable to reciprocate. The sense of familiarity may work against the politician. The audience's attention is directed toward the political actor and away from the political action.

In his study of state legislators, Cooper (2002) found that politicians often solicit media exposure and that soliciting media exposure is an effective way to put an issue on the legislative agenda, to convince other legislators to support policy proposals, and to stimulate discussion of policy alternatives. State legislators, like their congressional counterparts, often use media tactics in their law-making efforts.

Interest groups and the public outside of their constituency are also prime targets of legislative media tactics. However, Cooper (2002) indicated policy-oriented legislators do not use the media as often and do not see the media as particularly influential. Legislators concerned primarily with being elected often use reporters as a source for information, but they do not believe these reporters are influential in making policy.

The media cause politicians to be careful about how they vote and also on what they say about issues, writes Hahn (2003). On one hand, to be politically correct, politicians avoid "class warfare," but yet to get elected they have to boast about what they have done and will do for the middle class. An example of how television and Hollywood affect political issues is crime and punishment, according to Hahn (2003). The melodramatic portrayal of crime and Westerns on television has led people either to support capital crime or gun control. Statistics show that the amount of violent crime is lessening, but politicians dare not support a reasoned approach to crime control for fear of being labeled soft on crime. Politicians realize the stands they take on the campaign trail and in office may have later consequences. One effect of political decision-making is the impact on television ads, not the positive ones but the negative ones that can destroy a politician's career. According to former senate majority leader George J. Mitchell of Maine, politicians worry about "what kind of campaign commercial could be made from a particular vote as they stand in the well of the Senate and prepare to cast their yeas or nays" (Fried, 1997, p. 215).

Case Analysis

The following case study analysis provides a study of the problems related to reporting as well as some of the effects of press coverage of Hurricane Katrina on the policy-making process. Case studies can be defined as "a story of a problem," dealing with actual events, organizations, and decision makers (Hoag, Brickley, & Cawley, 2001, p. 50). Problem solving "can be measurably improved by the case study method" (p. 49). Quantitative research approaches have been unsuccessful in measuring mass media influence on public policymaking. The case study approach may have greater success in establishing a situation-by-situation analysis of how the mass media impacts the policymaking process.

Media coverage of Hurricane Katrina

In the early days following Katrina, the media reported a city overwhelmed by the devastation of nature, human misery, and crime. A multitude of reporters besieged the city. Each media report re-emphasized a city suffering from a catastrophe. These reports first demonstrated government incompetence and then later showed government response to the problems.

The report of atrocities in New Orleans shocked the nation and the world. Audiences heard and read about a city in anarchy and subhuman conditions in the Dome and Convention Center. However, many of the reports of violence were false and could not be verified. Reports were based on rumors several times removed from the source.

For example, on September 5, 2005, the Financial Times of London attributed the following report to unnamed refugees: "Girls and boys were raped in the dark and had their throats cut and bodies were stuffed in the kitchens while looters and madmen exchanged fire with weapons they had looted." The report claimed that "several hundred corpses are reported to have been gathered by locals in one school alone" in St. Bernard Parish, the badly-flooded community just east of the city. A similar report indicated that up to 300 bodies were piled in Marion Abramson High School in Eastern New Orleans. Reporters from the Times-Picayune canoed to the school, went inside, and found no bodies.

"Stone-age storytelling got amplified by space-age technology," according to Thevenot (2005). Rumors of bodies in the Dome were retold several times and finally reached the media. When "the media arrived, with satellite phones and modems, BlackBerrys, television trucks with the ability to broadcast worldwide and the technology to post on the Internet in an instant," most of them did not realize that "normal rules of sourcing no longer ensured accuracy." The stories went global as officials, hurricane victims, and rescue and security personnel confirmed nightmarish scenarios, sincerely believing what they were saying and wanting desperately to get the word out so that help would come. The media also believed the stories they were telling, repeating without verification the stories being told by the officials. When it was discovered that the stories were false, the media were criticized. However, it was the media who revealed the falsehood of the stories. The only way that the public knew about the bad reporting was that the journalists told them.

While media accounts of Hurricane Katrina "riveted, angered, and depressed" Americans, the images of devastated individuals and communities from Katrina did not result in public policy to fight poverty and economic inequality. Deborah Belle (2006) points to

research that suggests that social policy decisions in the U.S. favor the wealthy at the expense of the poor and middle class. The wealthy control the policy-making process. Those most likely to downplay the problems of economic and racial inequality are most likely to have political power. While the media may impact middle America, they seem to have little influence on the decision makers.

News coverage of Katrina may have, in fact, lessened people's support for public policy. In his comparison of "episodic" versus "thematic" news stories, Iyengar (1990) found that people viewing "thematic" news stories about poverty were likely to blame the condition on societal factors. On the other hand, when people view "episodic" news stories showing images of people in poverty, they tend to hold the poor responsible for their own poverty. In a six-year period, television showed twice as many "episodic" as "thematic" stories. This tendency to blame the poor for their poverty may have lessened the impact of news coverage of Katrina.

In Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster led to a human catastrophe. Most of the victims were black. Media coverage reported that the poor government response was because of incompetence. On the other hand, some media reports held that there was an element of racism. In a study (Kaiser, Eccleston, & Hagiwara, 2008) following Katrina, white and black students were shown videos supporting both points of view. When confronted with claims of racism, white students used "system justification" as a way of rationalizing the mistakes rather than blaming "in-group" racism.

Language is important in portraying how the media, and therefore the public, view victims of a disaster. Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, and Wang (2006) discuss the race factor in describing victims of Hurricane Katrina. The media use of the word "refugees" was seen as having overtones of racism. In an analysis of news stories, "refugee" was associated with "poor" or "black." The media used the word "refugee" for displaced survivors throughout the coverage of Katrina, but more frequently in the early period. Within a week of the hurricane, President Bush complained about use of the term, and many news organizations shifted to the more traditional "evacuees," "survivors," or "victims."

Another factor that may support the notion of racism in coverage is story angle. The media reported sniper shots, murders, and roving gangs committing rapes. At one point the media reported sniper fire preventing rescue efforts by a helicopter. When investigated further, there were no sniper shots, and the rescue efforts were not halted. One story reported forty dead bodies murdered at the Superdome. In fact, there were four dead bodies, and only was suspected of having been murdered. The number of rapes was also over-exaggerated. Only one rape was actually reported. While it is not possible to say that the misreporting was racist, it may be that race was a contributing factor, claimed Sommers et al (2006).

Following 9/11, the media seemed to have lost their direction. They seemed weak and impotent. And as Rieder (2005) wrote, "Much of the media seemed cowed, afraid to press too hard, as if questioning the Bush administration's pronouncements about terrorism was somehow unpatriotic." Then Hurricane Katrina brought disaster to the Gulf Coast. Suddenly, the media were rejuvenated and even virile in their condemnation of incompetent government bureaucrats. In Katrina, "the chasm between the platitudes of the clueless government spokesmen and the ugly reality of New Orleans—the devastation, the misery, the

Third World-style chaos—was overwhelming." While television's powerful images allowed the public to see the horrors of New Orleans, newspapers provided "incisive and comprehensive coverage" and local radio served as "a lifeline" for people in the devastated region.

National Disaster Policy

One of the immediate results of news coverage of Katrina was the firing of Michael Brown, the director of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in the midst of government response to the hurricane. While the reorganization of the leadership of FEMA was a direct outcome of news coverage, more long-term and significant changes occurred in the change of focus of the Department of Homeland Security. Following Katrina, Congressional Hearings applauded the unselfish service of over 60,000 volunteers. At the same time the federal government response was highly criticized (A Failure of Initiative, 2006).

Following 9/11, the National Strategy for Homeland Security (2002) focused on terrorism as the main concern of the new Department of Homeland Security. The strategic objectives of Homeland Security in order of priority were to (a) prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, (b) reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and (c) minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur.

As a result of Hurricane Katrina and the Congressional Hearings, Homeland Security changed its focus to consider other forms of disasters in addition to terrorism attacks (National Strategy for Homeland Security, 2007).

Finally, in 2010 in the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, new missions were established for Homeland Security that included an all-hazards approach to dealing with disasters. The missions were listed as (a) preventing terrorism and enhancing security, (b) securing and managing our borders, (c) enforcing and administering our immigration laws, (d) safeguarding and securing cyberspace, and (e) ensuring resilience to disasters. At the same time, Homeland Security has established measures to be more prepared for natural disasters. Among these preparations was a greater focus on training and preparation. This included expanding the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

NIMS is the first-ever standardized approach to incident management and response. Developed by the Department of Homeland Security and released in March 2004, it establishes a uniform set of processes and procedures that emergency responders at all levels of government will use to conduct response operations.

The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), established in 1996, was praised during the Congressional Hearing. When federal response failed during Katrina, the states and local communities using EMAC were able to provide desperately needed assistance. The EMAC mutual aid agreement and partnership between member states exists to deal with disasters from hurricanes to earthquakes, wildfires to toxic waste spills, and terrorist attacks. EMAC is the first national disaster–relief compact since the Civil Defense and Disaster Compact of 1950 to be ratified by Congress. Since its ratification and signing into law in 1996 (EMAC, 1996), 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have enacted legislation to become EMAC members.

Conclusions

While studies suggest that the media may generally have little impact on public policy, in the case of Katrina the media played a significant role in bringing about immediate and later change to the way the federal government responds to disasters. The media did not act alone in bringing about these changes, but rather in concert with pressure from the public, and local and state politicians.

Downs (1972) proposed an "issue-attention cycle," suggesting that a traumatic event is required to "catapult" an issue to the attention of the public and to policy makers. In this case, the horrendous effect of Katrina has kept natural disasters in the forefront of American consciousness. Hopefully, as a nation we will be better prepared if a tragedy of the magnitude of Katrina strikes again. Nevertheless, not all aspects of the tragedy have been dealt with, including the need for public policy to deal with poverty as it is impacted by disasters.

Generally, while the media bring public attention and the attention of politicians to an issue, they are unable to sustain the kind of coverage that is required to see public policy through. Thus, the media usually play a minor role in the adoption of public policy.

While it is difficult to separate out the role of any one party in the Katrina disaster, it is evident that the media played a significant part in bringing about change in how government handles disasters. They brought the issue to the attention of the public and to politicians who acted upon the information.

Over time the interest of the media in an issue wanes. Haiti's tragic earthquake and the aftermath is an example. The international communities reacted quickly to support the victims, brought on in large part by media coverage. However, little has changed for the victims in Haiti. Many remain homeless. Media attention has faded ("Haiti's Neglected Crisis," 2011).

To truly have impact on public policy, the media must provide consistent and continual coverage to follow-up on issues. The press must go beyond simply bringing issues to the public's attention and thoroughly examine the problems and suggest solutions. However, this will only happen if the public also shares an interest in finding solutions to the public-policy problems.

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