Social Integration and Political Ideologies of the Homeless

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between expressed preferences and claimed ideological identity among the homeless population, and the resulting impact on social service preferences. In doing so, we take a bottom-up perspective toward social service demand. What exactly is it that the homeless population wants, and is it related to their political views? Drawing on data obtained through 283 in-depth interviews with embedded surveys, we explore the political opinions of homeless persons. The data were collected in 14 locations across the Unites States. Our findings indicate that for the homeless, opinions regarding policy issues are not related to political ideology, as they are in the general public. Homeless persons' attitudes toward policy issues diverge in ways that are the result of the physical experience of street life. Once this divergence is accounted for, homeless persons' differing preferences for social service provision is predictable in an ideologically consistent way.

Keywords: Ideology; Homelessness; Opinion; Attitudes; Service Preference; Social Integration.

Introduction

Our study focuses on the most vulnerable end-users of public services—the homeless.[2] Too little attention has been paid to the political attitudes of the homeless and those in severe poverty. One cannot presume that mere need will cause individuals to seek out government or private assistance. We find that the needs and desires of the homeless are heavily based on social experiences and interactions on the streets, which may differ tremendously from the housed population.

For most Americans, political ideology provides an organizational guide for policy positions (see Lane, 1962; Van Dyke, 1995). The liberal-conservative spectrum provides a shorthand summary of opinions for many Americans (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964). Research has demonstrated a pattern of support for welfare and other social assistance programs that is closely tied to American's political ideology and partisanship (see Erickson & Tedin, 2007; Schneider & Jacoby, 2005). The electoral ramifications are obvious, with ideology highly correlated to party identification (tau-b = .542, $p < .001$; source: American National Election Study, 2008). But trends among the American mass public may or may not tell us much about the political perceptions of the homeless. For the homeless, we find no such correlation (tau-b = .056, n.s.).

This indicates that something different explains the political ideas of the homeless. It further identifies the homeless population as atypical and poorly explained by existing theory, and as such, in need of a micro-level understanding of not only their choices regarding preferred use of social services but the reasoning behind those choices. To that end, a bottom-up perspective

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[2] For definitional purposes, we use the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's criteria of homelessness (see Appendix A).

of the policy desires of the homeless population calls for an increased understanding of the social lives of the homeless and how these relate to public policy. The question of who seeks out services and why may be best understood through an analysis of homeless persons' attitudes toward specific government policies. In this study, we analyze the opinions of the homeless and explore areas of divergence from commonly held ideological consistency. Our attempt to explain this divergence with measures of physical, social and psychological integration meets with some limited success. But taken together, ideological divergence and integration help to explain the social service preferences of the homeless population.

Theoretical Orientation, Concepts, and Hypotheses

Our search to explain why and how homeless persons differ from the general public in terms of ideology starts with a few clues. The literature is replete with examples of how marginalized social sub-groups manifest opinions and behaviors that deviate from mainstream proclivities. For example, Cohen & Dawson (1993) demonstrate how residence in the economically devastated neighborhoods of Detroit led to significant deviation from the mainstream electorate in terms of political efficacy and opinions regarding the influence of different social groups. Specific research on the political activities of the homeless demonstrates how strong social ties and mutual bonds are built among the homeless, resulting in "disalienation" (Wagner & Cohen 1991, p. 555). These ties arise from and reinforce political organizing and social protest (Bradshaw & Linneker, 2001; Wagner & Cohen, 1991).

Research on other marginalized groups shows further evidence that group identity can lead to non-mainstream opinions. For example, resistance to cochlear implants in the deaf community can be explained by the threat that such implants pose to "deaf culture" (Jankowski, 1997; Lane, 1992; Niparko, 2000). Additionally, reluctance among disability activists to answer that they would want to take a "magic pill" to cure their disabilities is explained by their levels of positive affirmation of their identities as members of the disabled community (Hahn & Belt, 2004).

We can build an explanatory theory by combining these results with an individual-based mapping of the roles derived from participation in a homeless community. Snow & Anderson (1987) assert that the homeless make up a "superfluous" population, lacking roles that are "defined in terms of positive social utility" (p. 1339). In contrast, research by Rowe & Wolch (1991) demonstrates the building of communal ties among homeless women due to a sense of mutual vulnerability. Our interview results show that many of those who lack shelter do have roles in their community, such as caregiver, errand-runner, and even "mayor". These roles are critical to identity formation and help to deflect stigma attached to the often negatively viewed identity of "homeless." The homeless engage in "identity work", however, generating identities that give them self-worth and dignity. This identity work, combined with "identity talk" (which Snow and Anderson explain as consisting of distancing, embracement and fictive storytelling) helps to reinforce social and psychological bonds not only to other homeless persons, but to society at large.

Embracing personal identity by expressing allegiance to a group (or distance from one) is a powerful factor in informing political attitudes (see Masuoka, 2008; Sears, Hensler & Speer, 1979; Walsh, 2012). Our sample of homeless persons reflected this tendency. For example, one woman we interviewed self-identified strongly as a lesbian and, when asked about her intended vote in the 2008 presidential election, refused to refer to then Senator Clinton by her married name, preferring to refer to her simply as "Rodham". The same holds true, inversely, for "distancing" behavior, which allows an individual to disavow attachment to a negatively viewed personal identity concept (see Ezzell, 2009; Kaufman, 2003).

In order to discuss the nature of this identity construction (and so its potential effects on political attitudes), we separate identity construction into three dimensions of integration: physical, social, and psychological. These dimensions have been well-established in the literature on marginalized groups, particularly with respect to those with mental illness (see Aubrey & Myner, 1996; Segal, Baumohl & Moyles, 1980; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983; Wong & Solomon, 2002). Physical integration measures the degree of physical presence of a devalued person in ordinary settings,

activities, and contexts where non-devalued people are also present (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983, p. 18). Social integration involves the degree of social interactions within the devalued group versus the larger non-devalued group (Storey, 1993; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983; Wong & Solomon, 2002). Finally, psychological integration refers to the extent to which an individual perceives membership in a devalued sub-group versus the broader society (Aubrey & Myner, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Wong & Solomon, 2002).

As noted above, political ideology (as commonly construed) provides consistency in opinion holding across a broad range of issues. This precept was originally held as tenuous, (Axelrod, 1967; Converse, 1964; Lane, 1962) but evidence to its validity has strengthened over time (see Bishop, 1976; Holm & Robinson, 1978; Wyckoff, 1980). Some would even argue that ideology often imposes a rigidity of opinion, particularly for the extreme left and right wings (Adorno et al., 1950; Kohn, 1972; Tetlock, 1988). So, what types of homeless people would be more likely to embrace standard notions of political ideology? Our discussion leads to two competing hypotheses.

First, physical, social and psychological integration within the homeless community could simply mean that homeless people are more likely to mimic the housed population. In this sense, integration carries with it commonly held notions of normalcy. Thus, *greater integration* should result in greater ideological consistency between professed ideology and issue positions (less divergence).

On the other hand, the stress and uncertainties of street life may result in a desire for clarity of thought, especially for the least integrated. Greenberg & Jonas (2003) note that models of ideology presuppose that "advocacy of political conservatism is in large part a consequence of epistemic, existential and ideological needs stemming from the desire to reduce uncertainties and fears" (p. 376). Left-wing ideologies may provide similar comfort (see Kohn, 1972). Given the typically high degree of uncertainty and fear in the lives of the homeless, it is reasonable to posit that the attitudes of those *less integrated* might be driven to either ideological polar extremes, resulting in greater ideological consistency (less divergence).

Finally, we hypothesize that homeless persons' preferences for services provided by government agencies versus religious groups cannot be explained by ideology in a way consistent with common ideological proclivities. While it would be simple to surmise that homeless conservatives would prefer services provided by religious groups and liberals from government agencies, other factors should be important. The physical, social, and psychological experiences of living among others on the street should also influence service preference.

Data and Method

Our study draws on data we obtained through 283 in-depth interviews collected in 14 locations (including urban and suburban areas in California, Hawaiʻi, Nevada and Louisiana) between May of 2006 and June of 2008.[3] The interview protocol included an embedded survey questionnaire. Recruitment of homeless persons for interviews can be a challenging undertaking. Oftentimes, the homeless are interviewed at places where social services are provided (see Fisher et al., 1994; Hoyt, Whitbeck & Yoder, 1999; Schutt, Meschede & Rierdan, 1994). But since we were asking, among other things, questions related to attitudes regarding service providers, this technique could have biased our results. Instead, we used the technique of snowball sampling (obtaining referrals from the first subjects interviewed) in order to build our sample. While not a randomized sampling procedure, snowball sampling was the only way to recruit interviewees for our study, especially due to difficulties in locating and building rapport with potential interviewees (see Booth, 2006; Cress & Snow, 2000; Russell, 1998; Welch, 1975). Some interviewees were later excluded from analysis because our research team believed that the individual did not meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's criteria for homelessness (see Appendix A).

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[3] The fielding of this study was completed prior to the onset of the economic collapse and subsequent Great Recession. Presumably, the individuals interviewed in our study could be considered more a part of the chronic homeless problem than those who became homeless as a result of the recession.

Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner in order to maximize the validity and reliability of our measures. The homeless are not often spoken to with kindness, and are rarely asked their opinions, so gaining their trust was a challenge. Indicating respect towards each potential interviewee, and that, to us, no one was just "another street person," was paramount. We (the interview team) learned to rely on strong eye contact, maintain awareness of our body language, and exude a friendly smile. This allowed us to break the ice and more easily initiate conversation.

Interview responses were recorded using questionnaire sheets, and when permission was granted, audio voice recorders were employed (see Appendix B for the interview protocol with embedded survey questionnaire). The survey questionnaire was used as a starting point for dialogue. Although many questions were designed to elicit responses of agreement, don't know/neutral, and disagree (categorized as "A-N-D" in the questionnaire), our interview team took handwritten notes to record the full response an interviewee gave to any question. Following the survey questionnaire, we elicited richer data through in-depth interviewing. Interviewees gave prior consent, were insured of their anonymity and were guaranteed that no identifiable information would be turned over to government officials. Small incentives were provided to interviewees, but most said that they were happy to talk to us regardless of the incentive. While homeless persons are frequently surveyed regarding issues of mental health, drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and general health, few researchers question them as to their thoughts and opinions on political issues. As we were interviewing, many lined up to speak with us, often without knowing that we were offering an incentive.

Our survey items included multiple open and closed-ended measures of attitudes toward government (mostly drawn from the American National Election Studies) as well as levels of integration in the social world surrounding the interviewee. In order to measure physical and social integration, we created indexes. To construct the physical integration index, the following data points were considered: length of time spent as homeless, whether or not the interviewee has ever had interaction with social assistance programs, and whether or not the interviewee stated that s/he had made friends with anyone at these programs. Since some in our sample had been homeless for less than a month, and some much longer, length of time spent as homeless was coded as number of days. With a few long-time homeless persons skewing the distribution, a correction was made using a natural logarithm, and the variable was inverted and compressed to a range of zero to one. Use of social services and friends made there were coded as dummy variables (1=yes, 0=no). The three items were summed and then compressed to a range of zero to one. Higher values indicated greater physical integration with the housed population—less time spent homeless, and more interaction with social service employees. Lower values indicated greater physical integration into the homeless community. For the index, the mean was 0.430 and the standard deviation was 0.264.

Our social integration index consisted of seven items. We asked interviewees if they were doing anything to help other homeless persons, and if so, what specifically they were doing. Their responses were coded as providing three different types of assistance: material, psychological, or organizational. Interviewees' responses to the question "what is your principal source of news or information" also helped to establish level of social integration. Five categories for information source type were created: newspaper, internet, radio, television, and other people. Several interviewees indicated sharing copies of newspapers, so those who indicated newspapers as their principal source of news received enhanced scores for social integration. Those who indicated that other people were their primary source of information also received increased social integration scores. Those who responded that the internet, or television or radio was their principal source of information, however, received diminished physical integration scores. The reason for this is the solitary nature of interaction with any of these media. Those who relied on the internet talked about accessing it from public libraries, implying a solitary activity. Similarly, although those who gave television or radio as their principal source of information sometimes spoke of viewing or listening in a public space, none described this as a shared experience. The elements of the index were each compressed to a range of 0-1 and summed, and the resulting index was compressed again to a 0-1 range and inverted so that higher scores reflected greater social integration with the housed community as

opposed to the homeless community (which were indicated by lower scores). The mean for the physical integration index was 0.455 and the standard deviation was 0.124.

Our survey contained a simple and straightforward measure for psychological integration: "Do you consider yourself homeless?" While we considered all of the members of our sample homeless (and as noted earlier, we took steps to ensure they were), some did not perceive themselves as such, indicating unwillingness to admit to the fact psychologically. Those who refused to admit to being homeless—12 percent—were construed to be more psychologically integrated with the housed population rather than the homeless population.[4] A value of one was assigned if the interviewee denied being homeless, others received a value of zero for psychological integration.

Measuring ideology and whether individuals conceive of political issues in an ideologically consistent way has been the subject of much scholarly debate (for an overview, see Wyckoff, 1987). Issues of conceptual measurements and their underlying assumptions have drawn intense critique (see Bennett, 1977). Two approaches to account for the relationship between ideological consistency and other variables have been tried: the first is to control for other variables (such as education and voter information) by breaking these variables into separate groups and to evaluate ideological consistency correlations among these groups (see Bishop, 1976; Bowles & Richardson, 1969). The second method is the reverse, to break out the sample by level of attitude consistency, and then to evaluate correlations of other variables based on these levels (see Barton & Parsons, 1977; Wyckoff, 1980). Given our small sample size, breaking our sample in to smaller subgroups was unfeasible, so we instead controlled for factors by employing multivariate methods on our full data set.

In order to test the possible effects of physical, social, and psychological integration on ideological consistency, we constructed an index which measured divergence between stated ideology and stated position on individual issues. This method is similar to the Barton-Parsons attitude consistency method used by Wyckoff (1987, 1980), but uses professed ideology as a benchmark for divergence.[5] Additionally, instead of the unidimensional model of ideology, with its well-known limitations (see Bennett, 1977; Wyckoff, 1980), we parsed ideology into two dimensions: economic and social. We did this in order to capture non-traditional ideologies, such as statism and libertarianism, which might be prevalent among the homeless population.

Each survey question that measured an opinion on a given policy issue was first broken down according to whether they reflected statements about economic liberty or social liberty. Then, with respect to stated ideology, responses of agreement, disagreement, and neutrality for each issue were assigned divergence scores. Thus an interviewee who gave a stated ideology of strongly conservative but expressed support for government assistance for the poor received a high divergence score for that data point (1.0). A respondent who gave a similar response, but identified as a not strong conservative received a weaker divergence score for that item (0.5). Respondents whose ideology was less strong received weaker scores. Eleven data points were used to construct the overall score for divergence from stated ideology regarding social liberty. The social ideological divergence index was compressed to a range of zero to one and yielded a mean of .301 with a standard deviation of .211, with higher values indicating greater divergence from professed ideology. Eighteen data points were used to construct the overall score for divergence from stated ideology on issues of economic liberty. The economic ideological divergence index was similarly compressed, and yielded a mean of .323 and a

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[4] Unfortunately, it was impossible to validate our measures against other data as no such data on homeless persons has been previously collected. Items for the three integration matrixes were drawn from descriptions and items provided in prior literature (see Wong & Solomon, 2002), so face validity can be inferred. Although the sample size was insufficient to produce reliable estimates for factor analysis, correlational analysis was possible. Small and insignificant correlations among the three indexes underscore these indexes' discriminant validity. Pearson's r correlations are as follows: Physical integration by Social integration r = -.008, n.s.; Physical Integration by Psychological Integration r = -.058, n.s.; Social integration by Psychological Integration r = .005, n.s.

[5] Our method also improves on the Barton-Parsons method's significant problems regarding missing data (see Wyckoff, 1980). We attempted the Barton-Parsons method, but were left with a tremendous amount of missing data. Models estimated using the Barton-Parsons method achieved similar parameters but reduced significance because of larger standard errors due to the small amount of usable data.

standard deviation of .240, again with higher values indicating greater divergence (see Appendix D for items and Appendix E for Ideological Divergence Algorithm).

Data Analysis and Results

The demographic characteristics of our sample were largely similar to results found in other studies of homelessness conducted over a similar time period (see Burt et al., 1999; Lee, Tyler & Wright, 2010). In our sample, 69.4 percent of respondents were male. Roughly half or our sample identified as white, a quarter black, and a number of other ethnicities comprised the remainder (although interviewees were permitted to identify with more than one ethnicity). The median age of our interviewees was 46. Descriptive statistics regarding the interviewees in our sample are available in Table 1.

Table 1: *Sample Descriptives*

Item	Percent	n
Sex		
Male	69.4	201
Female	30.6	80
*Ethnicity**		
White	47.7	132
Black	25.1	70
Latino	8.2	23
Native American	12.2	34
Chinese	1.4	4
Japanese	.7	2
Filipino	2.9	8
Other Asian	1.8	5
Hawaiian	16.1	45
Other Pacific Islander	5.4	15
Middle Eastern	.4	1
Other	3.8	7
Age		
Median	46.0	
*Ideology***		
Mean	3.9	
*Party Identification****		
Mean	4.9	

* Note: Ethnicities do not sum to 100% due to several multiple responses
** Note: Ideology range = 1 (Strong Conservative) to 7 (Strong Liberal)
** Note: Party ID range = 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat)

As noted above, the stated ideology of the homeless is not always consistent with the position statements they make about individual issues. For example, an individual may identify as strongly liberal, but express an equally strong opposition to gay marriage, which is generally considered a socially conservative position. Table 2 reports the top-line results of our issue position questions. When asked to agree or disagree with statements of opinion, the preponderance of responses confounded general assumptions about the homeless population. In particular, when queried with the position "all drugs should be legalized", almost three quarters (73.9%) said they disagreed. While not a direct indication of the interviewees' own habits, these results would seem to fly in the face of a characterization of the homeless as chronic drug users. Those who stated that they did not think all drugs should be legalized were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "only marijuana should be legalized", and over half (55.1%) of respondents agreed with this statement. In several interview locations, visual and/or olfactory evidence of marijuana use was evident, while evidence of intravenous drug use, such as track marks on interviewees or discarded paraphernalia, was lacking.

Table 2. *Opinion Item Responses*

Item	Agree	Neutral*	Disagree	n
Social Issues				
Gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry	49.5	10.2	40.3	283
All drugs should be legal	19.4	6.7	73.9	283
Just marijuana should be legal	55.1	5.3	39.6	207
The police have too much authority	70.0	7.9	22.1	240
There should be no death penalty	28.8	11.7	59.6	240
You should be allowed to say what you want in public even if it offends some people	55.4	9.6	35.0	240
The government should be allowed to censor speech and the press	25.4	5.3	69.3	283
People should be required to carry a national identification card	54.1	4.9	41.0	283
The government should be allowed to listen in on telephone calls	15.4	3.8	80.8	240
There should be a stricter dress code in public places	30.8	6.2	62.9	240
Protecting the country from terrorism is more important than a person's right to privacy	44.2	15.4	40.4	240
Economic Issues				
There should be a limit on the amount of welfare that a person can receive	57.4	8.9	33.7	282
People should retire on their own savings, not on Social Security or a pension	19.4	8.8	71.7	283
Government welfare should be replaced with private charity	19.4	10.2	70.3	283
Churches and charitable orgs should provide more services for the homeless	66.1	8.1	25.8	283
Churches and other charitable organizations should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems	48.2	10.6	41.1	282
An employer should not have to pay extra to employees for working overtime	8.3	2.5	89.2	240
Should be a limit on how much a person can collect from a company in a lawsuit	35.1	10.5	54.4	239
The government should give financial support to large corporations	31.8	11.7	56.5	283
The government should require businesses to provide health care for employees	88.3	5.0	6.7	282
The government should provide more services for the homeless	87.6	6.4	6.0	283
The government should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems	65.4	7.1	27.6	283
The government should provide an insurance plan to cover the medical and hospital expenses for everyone	77.4	4.9	17.7	283
The government should see to it that every person has a job and standard of living	56.9	8.5	34.6	283
The gov. should do whatever is necessary so all people have equal opportunity	83.0	6.4	10.6	282
People who make more money should pay a higher percentage in taxes	56.1	5.4	38.5	239
There should be a higher minimum wage	87.1	4.6	8.3	240
There should be stiffer penalties on companies that pollute the environment	92.1	3.3	4.6	240
The government should provide all qualified people with a free college education	70.7	5.4	23.8	239

*Note: Includes "Don't Know" responses.

Regarding the relationship between the state and the individual, an interesting pattern became apparent. In response to four separate statements pertaining to government control of personal

behavior (regarding limits on verbal speech, written speech, government access to private phone calls and public dress codes), interviewees showed a marked preference for less government control. Curiously, however, over half (54.1%) of interviewees agreed with the statement that "people should be required to carry a national ID card". A preference for less interaction with the apparatus of the state and the result for the ID card question are intuitively inconsistent. As such, it could be taken as a sign of ideological inconsistency amongst the homeless. However, when re-framed as a preference for less state limitation of personal capabilities, these preferences are ideologically consistent. This possibility became apparent to us after some interviewees stated (without any kind of prompting or further questioning) that they wanted a national ID because they were denied access to social services (and thus experienced reduced capabilities) due to lost identification documents from states other than their current residence. Simply put, the exigencies of life on the street explain this otherwise ideologically inconsistent attitude.

We observed that the homeless have differentiated views on interactions between individuals and the state versus individuals and the private sector. While almost three quintiles (57.4%) of interviewees agreed with the statement, "there should be a limit on the amount of welfare a person can receive", almost the same percentage (54.4) disagreed with the statement "there should be a limit on the amount a person can collect from a company in a lawsuit". Additionally, a marked discrepancy was evident between support for church-based addiction treatment services and government-based addiction treatment services. In our sample, 48.1 percent of interviewees agreed with the statement "churches and other charitable organizations should take responsibility for treatment of people with substance abuse problems", while 41.1 percent disagreed. In replying to the statement "the government should take responsibility for treatment of people with substance abuse problems", however, a much more marked preference was apparent, with 65.4 percent of interviewees agreeing, and only 27.6 percent disagreeing.

Table 3 reports our predictions of social and economic ideological divergence. We find limited support for the first set of hypotheses—that life on the street influences ideological divergence. Specifically, we found that greater physical integration into the homeless community (as opposed to the broader housed community, which is reflected by higher values) led to a greater degree of economic ideological divergence. In other words, those more physically integrated into the homeless community based their economic attitudes on considerations not explained by common precepts of ideology.

Table 3: *Predicting Homeless Individuals' Ideological Divergence*

Variables	Social Divergence	Economic Divergence
Physical Integration	.017	-.091*
	(.038)	(.046)
Social Integration	-.012	.015
	(.076)	(.092)
Psychological Integration	.028	-.037
	(.025)	(.031)
Social Ideological Divergence		.672***
		(.061)
Economic Ideological Divergence	.455***	
	(.041)	
N	282	282
R^2	.308	.318

OLS Regression Estimates, SE in parentheses.
Note: * sig. at $p < .05$ level, *** sig. at $p < .001$ level.
Higher values = greater issue attitude divergence from professed ideology.

The same pattern manifests itself when predicting homeless persons' social service preference (government versus religious). In line with our final hypothesis, we find that ideological divergence helps to explain these preferences. Table 4 reports two models predicting service preference. The first model, which does not account for ideological divergence, shows that service preference is predicted by social integration and psychological integration. Those homeless persons more socially and psychologically integrated into the housed community preferred government services, but no influence was accounted for by ideology. The second model, which accounts for ideological divergence, better explains service preference. In this model, greater economic ideological divergence leads to preference for government services. But importantly, controlling for this divergence unmasks the impact of ideology, which influences service preference as predicted. Conservatives were more likely to favor services provided by religious groups and liberals were more likely to favor services provided by government agencies. Lastly, greater integration with the housed community along all three dimensions—physical, social, and psychological—led to stronger preference for services from government agencies as opposed to religious organizations. Conversely, greater physical, social, and psychological integration with the homeless community led to a stronger preference for services provided by religious groups.

Table 4: *Predicting Homeless Individuals' Service Preference*

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Physical Integration	-0.697	-1.123†
	(.571)	(.631)
Social Integration	-3.966**	-3.971**
	(1.291)	(1.427)
Psychological Integration	-2.246†	-2.764*
	(1.278)	(1.392)
Ideology	.508	1.399*
	(.404)	(.611)
Social Ideological Divergence		1.569
		(1.134)
Economic Ideological Divergence		-2.366†
		(1.279)
N	294	260
Nagelkerke R^2	.104	.140
-2 Log Likelihood	322.048	273.248
Sig.	.004	.007

Ordinal Regression Estimates, SE in parentheses.
Note: † sig. at *p* <.10, * sig. at. *p* < .05 level, ** sig. at *p* < .01 level.
Higher values = preference for religious over government social services.

Conclusion

Our study demonstrates four findings about the opinions of the homeless. First, the homeless have strong opinions on a number of policy issues. Secondly, the positions the homeless have on these policy issues diverge from common conceptions of ideological consistency. Third, these divergences are, to some degree, explainable by homeless persons' experiences, specifically their day-to-day needs and capabilities. Lastly, when these ideological divergences are taken into account, the policy preferences of the homeless are consistent in a meaningful way.

We found that the homeless are quite opinionated on many political issues, often in ways we did not expect. We found very few homeless people who took neutral positions or told us that they did not have an opinion on an issue—the most was 11.7 percent on the issues of the death penalty and subsidies for business. This rate compares remarkably well to national polling results of the housed population, which generally show non-response rates to be higher (see

Mondak & Davis, 2001). The homeless have thought through many political issues and have strong opinions about them, even though those issues may not affect them personally. We note that neither policy regarding the death penalty nor business subsidies has an apparent implication for daily capabilities of the homeless at large.

Our findings that the homeless sometimes mimic and other times deviate from the opinions of the housed population is borne out in other research on poverty and marginalized groups. In their study of individuals receiving public assistance, Saundra Schneider & William Jacoby (2003) found welfare recipients to differ from the rest of the population on issues related to their direct economic concerns, such as government spending, guaranteed jobs and a standard of living. However, welfare recipients did not deviate from the rest of the population on issues that were not materially related to poverty, such as opinions on the size of government, equal opportunity, and trust in government (Schneider & Jacoby, 2003). Similarly, Jo Anne Schneider found that attitudes about welfare and proposed policy reforms reflected differences based on individuals' access to government programs (Schneider 2000). In their study of poverty in Detroit, Michigan, Cohen & Dawson (1993) found that poverty significantly influenced attitudes on personal and group political efficacy, but did not influence other attitudes and opinions. Again, the finding, like ours, is explained by the physical experience (in this case isolation and dependency) of the individual.

Our second finding was very little correlation between professed political ideology and issue positions among the homeless. In fact, we found no correlation between party identification and ideology—usually a sure-fire finding in our polarized political climate. In our study, many interviewees told us that they were conservative Democrats. These were not the conservative Democrats of the 1960's US South, but rather, they were Democratic partisans who harkened back to the social programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. This divergence from general ideological consistency was curious, and warranted further examination.

Combining what we learned about life on the street with research explaining counterintuitive public attitudes within social subcultures (such as resistance to cochlear implants and the magic disability-curing pill), we developed and tested a theory to predict ideological divergence. Our theory stipulated that differing levels of physical, social and psychological integration would explain adherence to or deviance from stereotypical ideological consistency. We found some limited support for the hypothesis that greater physical integration among the homeless community led to greater ideological divergence on economic issues.

Finally, we found that when these divergences are stripped away, the homeless population's ideological precepts accurately predict policy preferences in an expected way. Homeless persons' political views differ from standard left-right ideology, and some of this has to do with the physical existence of life on the street. Physical, social, and psychological integration with other homeless individuals also influences policy response. Individuals with greater integration into the homeless community preferred services provided by religious groups. This is largely due to the geographical existence of homeless concentrations. Religious social service providers often "set up shop" in these areas, creating "service hubs" (see Dear, Wolch & Wilton, 1994), whereas government offices are geographically scattered. Individuals who are integrated into the homeless community then have more frequent and more positive interactions with these religious groups, thereby preferring their services. By contrast, homeless persons more integrated into the housed community avoid the stigma of these places. In sum, the realities of living on the street give rise to concurrent issue positions that may seem antithetical to the housed population. This finding casts doubt on claims that a "culture of dependency" is wholly responsible for deviations in the attitudes and opinions of an "underclass" (see Auletta, 1983; Friedman, 1962; Lewis, 1961; Murray, 1984).

While our data are somewhat limited in number and geographical scope, our findings have ramifications for social welfare policy. The homeless should not be thought of as living without opinions and preferences of their own. A "we know better" top-down approach from government and faith-based providers misses the fact that the homeless prefer certain services to others based on reasons that the housed population may not fully understand. Further, preferences among the homeless population vary significantly. Because of this, no "one-size fits all" solution can be effective.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: Definition of Homeless

The United States Code contains the official federal definition of homeless. In Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter I, homeless is defined as:

§11302. General definition of homeless individual
(a) In general
For purposes of this chapter, the term "homeless" or "homeless individual or homeless person" includes—
1. an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is —
    A. a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
    B. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
    C. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

(b) Income eligibility
1. **In general**
   A homeless individual shall be eligible for assistance under any program provided by this chapter, only if the individual complies with the income eligibility requirements otherwise applicable to such program.
2. **Exception**
   Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a homeless individual shall be eligible for assistance under title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 [29 U.S.C. 2801 et seq.].

(c) Exclusion
For purposes of this chapter, the term "homeless" or "homeless individual" does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of the Congress or a State law.

Source: HUD, see http://www.hud.gov/homeless/definition.cfm

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Items

The questions that I'm going to ask you have to do with your opinions about certain governmental and political issues. First, I need to ask you some background information, and then we'll get to the political questions. The whole thing should take about 15 minutes.

Note sex: _____
What year were you born? _____
Where were you born? _____
Did you grow up there? _____
        [if no] Where did you grow up? _____
Do you consider yourself homeless? _____
        [if yes] How long have you been homeless? _____
How long have you been living this area? _____
How far did you get in school? _____
        [if < HS] Did you get a GED? _____
Where were you last in school? _____
Did you receive any occupational training? _____
        [if yes] What kind? _____
Do you currently have a job? _____
When you work, what do you usually do? _____

What do you consider yourself in terms of White, Black, Latino, Asian, or other group? _____
What is your religion? _____
Have you ever been married? _____
Do you have any kids? _____
Have you ever been in the military? _____
        [if yes] Which service?_____
        Are you a veteran? _____
        Did you see combat? _____
Do you get any money or other assistance from the government? _____
        What kind? _____
Do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? _____
        [if Major Party] Are you a strong or not strong Dem/Rep? _____
        [if Independent] Do you consider yourself closer to the Dems/Reps? _____

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Items (Cont'd)

Do you consider yourself liberal or conservative, or somewhere in between? _____
        [Filter, if lib/con] Would you say that you are a strong or not strong lib/con? ___
        [Filter: if neither] Do you lean toward the conservative or the liberal side or neither? __
        [if homeless] Has being homeless affected your political views? _____
        [if yes] How so? _____
Do you remember the last time you voted in an election? _____
        [if yes] When? _____
        [if yes] Do you remember any particular candidates, or ballot measures that you
supported or opposed? _____
Do you think religion should have a place in government? _____
        [if yes] How so? _____
Does government have a responsibility to deal with homelessness and poverty among its citizens? _
Are disabled people more deserving of government assistance than others? _____
What about military veterans, are they more deserving than others? _____
Do you think the government is meeting its responsibility to the homeless? _____
        [if no] Is it doing too much or too little? _____
What things could it be doing better? _____
If you couldn't provide for yourself, would you prefer to receive services such as food, housing, and health care from the government, or from a religious organization? _____
Why is that? _____
Have you ever received such services? _____
        [if yes] Where? _____
How often? _____
What did you think of the people that worked there? _____
Have you made friends with anyone there? _____

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Items (Cont'd)

Are you personally doing anything to help homeless people? _____
        [if yes] What kinds of things? _____

There are a number of programs out there that offer money, food, housing, or health care. All these programs have rules you are required to follow to receive the benefit. Discuss what you think about these rules: what rules would you follow to receive a service, and what rules wouldn't you be willing to follow?
_____
_____
Where do you get your news from? _____

How many days per week do you use this source? _____

Do you plan to vote in the coming presidential election? _____

    [if yes] Will you vote for John McCain, the Republican nominee, or one of the Democratic Nominees, Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, or someone else? _____

    [if Obama] If the choice was between Hillary Clinton and John McCain, who would you choose? _____

    [if Clinton] If the choice was between Barack Obama and John McCain, who would you choose? _____

I'm going to read some statements that describe the political beliefs some people have. Tell me whether you agree, disagree, or have no opinion about each of them.

A N D   There should be a military draft.

A N D   Gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry.

A N D   The government should be allowed to censor [stop] speech and the press.

A N D   All drugs should be legalized.

A N D   Just marijuana should be legalized.

A N D   People should be required to carry a national identification card.

A N D   There should be a limit on the amount of welfare that a person can receive from gov't.

A N D   The government should give financial support to large corporations.

A N D   There are some things about America today that make me feel *ashamed* of America

        [filter] What sorts of things make you feel ashamed? _____

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Items (Cont'd)

A N D   There are some things about America today that make me feel *angry* about America.

        [filter] What sorts of things make you feel angry? _____

A N D   People should retire on their own savings, not on Social Security or a pension.

A N D   The government should require businesses to provide health care for employees.

A N D   Government welfare should be replaced with private charity.

A N D   Joblessness in America is the result of too much immigration.

A N D   Racism in society prevents minorities from being successful.

A N D   *The government* should provide more services for homeless.

A N D   *Churches and other charitable organizations* should provide more services for homeless people.

A N D   *The government* should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems.

A N D   *Churches and other charitable organizations* should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems.

A N D   *The government* should provide an insurance plan to cover the medical and hospital expenses for everyone.

    What makes you feel this way? _____

A N D   *The government* should see to it that every person has a job and standard of living.

    What makes you feel this way? _____

A N D   The government should do whatever is necessary so that all people have equal opportunity in life.

A N D   The police have too much authority.

A N D   There should be no death penalty.

A N D   The government should be allowed to listen in on telephone calls.

A N D   Crime would be reduced if more police were hired.

A N D   Crime would be reduced if wealth were more evenly distributed among all

	people.
A N D	People who make more money should pay a higher percentage in taxes.
A N D	There should be a stricter dress code in public places.
A N D	You should be able to say what you want in public even if it offends some people.
A N D	Protecting the country from terrorism is more important than a person's right to privacy.

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Items (Cont'd)

A N D	There should be a higher minimum wage.
A N D	Women should have equal rights as men.
A N D	There should be stiffer penalties on companies that pollute the environment.
A N D	An employer should not have to pay extra to employees for working overtime.
A N D	There should be a limit on how much money a person can collect from a company in a lawsuit.
A N D	The government should provide all qualified people with a free college education.

Please answer Yes, No, or Don't Know to the following:
Either because of something he has said or something he has done, has the current President Bush ever made your feel…

Y N DK	Afraid
Y N DK	Hopeful
Y N DK	Angry
Y N DK	Proud
Y N DK	Enthusiastic
Y N DK	Worried

Appendix C: Indicators of Physical and Psychological Social Integration

(lower values indicate greater integration with homeless as opposed to housed population)

Physical Integration
    How long have you been homeless [lower numbers]
    Have you ever received (gov't or faith-based aid services)? [no]
    Have you made friends with anyone who worked there? [no]

Social Integration
    Are you personally doing anything to help homeless people?
        Materially [no]
        Psychologically [no]
        Organizationally [no]
    Where do you get your news from?
        Newspaper [no]
        TV [yes]
        Internet [yes]
        Radio [yes]
        People [no]

Psychological Integration
    Do you consider yourself homeless? [no]

Appendix D: Indicators of Support for Social and Economic Liberty

Social Liberty

Gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry. [Agree]

The government should be allowed to censor [stop] speech and the press. [Disagree]

All drugs should be legalized. [Agree]

Just marijuana should be legalized. [Agree]

People should be required to carry a national identification card. [Disagree]

The police have too much authority. [Agree]

There should be no death penalty. [Agree]

The government should be allowed to listen in on telephone calls. [Disagree]

There should be a stricter dress code in public places. [Disagree]

You should be able to say what you want in public even if it offends some people. [Agree]

Protecting the country from terrorism is more important than a person's right to privacy. [Disagree]

Economic Liberty

There should be a limit on the amount of welfare that a person can receive from gov't. [Agree]

The government should give financial support to large corporations. [Disagree]

People should retire on their own savings, not on Social Security or a pension. [Agree]

The government should require businesses to provide health care for employees. [Disagree]

Government welfare should be replaced with private charity. [Agree]

The government should provide more services for homeless. [Disagree]

Churches and other charitable organizations should provide more services for homeless people. [Agree]

The government should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems. [Disagree]

Churches and other charitable organizations should take responsibility for treatment for people with substance abuse problems. [Agree]

The government should provide an insurance plan to cover the medical and hospital expenses for everyone. [Disagree]

The government should see to it that every person has a job and standard of living. [Disagree]

The government should do whatever is necessary so that all people have equal opportunity in life. [Disagree]

People who make more money should pay a higher percentage in taxes. [Disagree]

There should be a higher minimum wage. [Disagree]

There should be stiffer penalties on companies that pollute the environment.[Disagree]

An employer should not have to pay extra to employees for working overtime. [Agree]

There should be a limit on how much money a person can collect from a company in a lawsuit. [Agree]

The government should provide all qualified people with a free college education. [Disagree]

Appendix E. Ideological Divergence Algorithm

Conservative opinion = pro economic liberty, anti social liberty
Liberal opinion = anti economic liberty, pro social liberty

If (ideology = strong liberal) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 1.000
If (ideology = strong liberal) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.500
If (ideology = strong liberal) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = not strong liberal) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 0.667
If (ideology = not strong liberal) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.333
If (ideology = not strong liberal) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = moderate leaning liberal) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 0.333
If (ideology = moderate leaning liberal) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.167
If (ideology = moderate leaning liberal) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = pure moderate) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = moderate leaning conservative) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 0.333
If (ideology = moderate leaning conservative) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.167
If (ideology = moderate leaning conservative) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = not strong conservative) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 0.667
If (ideology = not strong conservative) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.333
If (ideology = not strong conservative) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 0.000

If (ideology = strong conservative) and (opinion = liberal) then divergence score = 1.000
If (ideology = strong conservative) and (opinion = neutral/DK) then divergence score = 0.500
If (ideology = strong conservative) and (opinion = conservative) then divergence score = 0.000