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# Crisis, Charisma and Consequences: Evidence from the 2004 US Presidential Election

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# Crisis, Charisma, and Consequences: Evidence from the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election

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*We investigate how conditions of crisis affect perceptions of charisma and how these, in turn, affect blame attribution and self-sacrificial behavior. Our data are from a 2004 experimental study that preceded the U.S. presidential election, in which we manipulated concerns of a terrorist attack. The results show that those in the Crisis condition rated Bush higher on perceptions of charisma compared to those in the Good Times condition. The Crisis condition also directly and indirectly, via perceptions of charisma, affected whether Bush was blamed for failures in Iraq and our subjects' willingness to sacrifice their personal resources for his candidacy.*

Terrorist attacks, health scares, and economic recessions make us vividly aware of citizens' vulnerability to crises. Under conditions in which crises loom or have been realized, citizens' perceptions of leaders often shift, affecting their attitudes and their behaviors. Our paper focuses on one particular factor, albeit a controversial one, that we believe is influenced by crises: charismatic leadership. Deep national crises often coincide with the rise of highly charismatic leaders, such as Juan Perón and Adolf Hitler. Yet even in less extreme conditions, we assert that political leaders can come to be seen as more charismatic; and, these increased perceptions of charisma carry important political consequences.

Our argument is based in extant scholarship, which suggests that perceptions of charisma can be magnified by contextual circumstances and that these heightened perceptions can provide likely leaders with special purchase (e.g., Madsen and Snow 1991; Weber 1922, 1947). We focus on three particular questions: Do crises affect citizens' perceptions of the charisma of political leaders? Do charismatic politicians better avert blame? And, finally, do such

politicians evoke greater levels of self-sacrificial behavior?

Generally speaking, political scientists have been hesitant to pursue, and a few have even argued against, the study of charisma (e.g., Spinrad 1991). Some of this disinclination may stem from the seemingly elusive nature of charisma. Reactions to the term are often akin to Justice Potter Stewart's famous statement on obscene material, which suggested that it is hard to define but "I know it when I see it."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, not only do members of the press and campaign operatives extol the importance of charisma, but many scholars outside the purview of political science have embraced charisma and transformed it into a theoretically grounded, empirically valid, and measurable concept. Moreover, several researchers have offered persuasive accounts of the role charisma plays in the success of certain political leaders (e.g., Davies 1954; Friedrich 1961; Madsen and Snow 1991; Willner 1984) and in voting behavior (Pillai and Williams 1998; Pillai et al. 2003; but see McCann 1997). Our project expands and extends this research by using an experimental setting to investigate the intersection of crisis, charisma, and consequences.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184 (1964).

## A Theory of Crisis, Charisma, and Consequences

Frequent references to the term “charisma” in the popular press suggest that the public possesses some general sense of what it is and that it is important.<sup>2</sup> But, what is charisma exactly, when is it important, and what consequences does it have for political behavior? In this section we argue, first, that conditions of crisis heighten perceptions of a leader’s charisma. Second, these factors (crises and charisma) lead individuals to overlook poor performance by that leader and to express a willingness to engage in self-sacrificial behavior on his or her behalf. Before developing this two-part argument, we first provide a working definition of charisma.

### Charisma

Beginning with Weber’s (1922, 1947) classic work, scholars have theorized about charismatic leadership from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Two basic understandings of charisma stand out in current academic and popular texts. The first stems from Weber’s definition of charisma as “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities” (quoted in Eisenstadt 1968, xviii). In this conception, leaders are, or are not, inherently charismatic. If we look at charisma in this way, it is an elusive or at least ambiguous concept. How can we determine whether a leader is “superhuman”?<sup>3</sup>

We adhere to a second, more concrete definition of charisma characterized by three principal features. First, charisma is a continuous latent construct derived from a bundle of specific traits and, as such, something that one can possess to greater or lesser degrees. Conceptualizations and operationalizations of charisma that follow this format are nearly ubiquitous in the study of organizational leadership and have been increasingly adopted by studies of charisma in the political realm (e.g., Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai 2005;

Emrich et al. 2001; Pillai and Williams 1998; Pillai et al. 2003; Shamir 1994).<sup>4</sup> Among scholars working in this tradition, a great deal of agreement exists with respect to the core elements of the bundle of traits that make a leader more charismatic; specifically, greater levels of charisma are associated with being more confident, caring, enthusiastic, goal-oriented, optimistic, and inspiring (e.g., Behling and McFillen 1996; Bryman 1992; Conger and Kanungo 1988; House and Howell 1992; Madsen and Snow 1991).

Second, charisma is not simply an inherent personality trait. While individuals may innately possess (or fail to possess) certain traits associated with charisma, the degree to which they are ultimately perceived as charismatic can be influenced by contextual circumstances. In short, charisma is intrinsically linked to follower perceptions (Conger, Kanungo, and Menon 2000) and, as such, is malleable. One context in which followers may come to perceive leaders as more charismatic is during times of crisis.<sup>5</sup>

Third, charisma is associated with a particular type of leadership and is not simply another term for general leadership. Scholars (e.g., Avolio, Waldman, and Einstein 1988; Bass 1985; Hunt, Boal, and Dodge 1999) identify several different types of leadership, including transformational, active transactional, passive transactional, and laissez-faire, which are based on different leader-follower relationships. For example, a passive transactional leader only interferes with the status quo when a problem arises (Avolio, Waldman, and Einstein 1988). Charismatic attributes are at the heart of the transformational leader, who, by means of these qualities, elicits trust and loyalty from followers (Bass 1985; Pillai and Williams 1998). For our purposes, the key point is that these various leadership types have been shown to evoke *distinct* behavioral responses on the part of followers (e.g., Avolio, Waldman, and Einstein 1988; Awamleh and Gardner 1999; Bass and Avolio 1994; Conger, Kanungo, and Menon 2000; Hunt, Boal, and Dodge 1999).

### Crisis

The first part of our two-part argument is that conditions of crisis affect the extent to which a particular

<sup>2</sup>In a search of the *New York Times* online archive from January 1, 1981, to December 31, 2005, the phrase “charismatic leader” yields 330 results. For the purposes of comparison, “strong leader,” “moral leader,” and “intelligent leader,” respectively, generate 513, 77, and 11 hits.

<sup>3</sup>The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary offers a similar definition of charisma: “a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure (as a political figure).” Available at <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/charisma>.

<sup>4</sup>They are also found in the popular press; a search of the *New York Times* archive from January 1, 1981, to December 31, 2005, revealed a total of 88 hits for the phrase “more charismatic” and 31 hits for the phrase “less charismatic.”

<sup>5</sup>Studies have also demonstrated that perceptions of charisma can be influenced by personal efforts to adopt more charismatic characteristics (e.g., Cohen 1992) and by the nature of the leader’s performance in office (e.g., Shamir and Howell 1999).

leader is perceived to be charismatic; more specifically, crises magnify perceptions of charisma. Crisis situations evoke feelings of distress, anxiety, and hopelessness, which draw citizens to leaders who promise to deliver better times (Hunt, Boal, and Dodge 1999; Shamir and Howell 1999; but see Pillai and Meindl 1998). Charismatic leaders surface in times of crisis because they are seen as saviors and are perceived to have a unique ability to improve a critical situation.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the intersection of a crisis and certain leadership traits can result in a “charismatic bond,” where individuals project charisma onto a leader whom they believe is capable of restoring feelings of efficacy undermined by the crisis (Madsen and Snow 1991).<sup>7</sup>

Empirical works support this theoretical perspective. The rise of populist, charismatic political leaders often coincides with conditions of crisis (Willner 1984). For example, the phenomena of *Fujimorismo* in Peru and *Chavismo* in Venezuela point to a willingness among people in crisis situations to focus on and support charismatic personalities (see Roberts 1995; Weyland 2003). Charismatic bonding also appears in an experimental study of the 2003 California Recall election, in which Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai (2005) find that the state economic crisis led citizens to rate challengers to Gray Davis as more charismatic.

## Consequences

Extant works suggest that elevated perceptions of a leader’s charisma have evaluative and behavioral effects (Conger and Kanungo 1987, 1988). The second part of our argument is concerned with two effects: willingness to overlook poor performance and to self-sacrifice.

First, charismatic leaders should be more likely than noncharismatic leaders to weather periods of poor performance or at least avert blame for poor output in times of crisis. In short, the confidence-inspiring rhetoric of the charismatic leader and a desire to sustain his or her savior-like image encourages individuals to resist blaming that leader for bad

<sup>6</sup>Weber (1922, 1947) was perhaps the first to assert this. His argument is linked to institutional context: inherently charismatic leaders appear in revolutionary times, when traditional institutions have been undermined and are in flux. Our conception of charisma is not dependent on institutional context, but could be conditioned by it.

<sup>7</sup>In a related but different vein, scholars of terror management theory posit that in times of crisis people experience heightened fears of death, which cause them to turn to charismatic leaders who appear capable of providing protection (for a discussion see Landau et al. 2004).

policy outcomes (for a discussion and examples in the realm of organizational theory, see Awamleh and Gardner 1999). The cases of Perón in Argentina and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Bangladesh are empirical instances where charismatic political leaders managed, at least initially, to deflect blame despite poor output (see Madsen and Snow 1991 and Khan 1976, respectively).

Second, followers of charismatic leaders should be more inclined to engage in self-sacrificial behavior. The phenomenon of self-sacrificial behavior oriented toward a charismatic leader and/or that leader’s cause most likely stems from feelings of oneness with the leader and/or norms of reciprocity triggered by the leader’s inspirational actions (Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl 2004; Choi and Mai-Dalton 1998; Cialdini et al. 1997; House, Spangler, and Woycke 1991; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1996; Shamir et al. 1998). Research, primarily in the field of business organization, supports the assertion that charismatic leaders are particularly adept at causing followers “to perform above and beyond the call of duty” and “make significant personal sacrifices” (House, Spangler, and Woycke 1991, 364).

While the literature suggests the existence of these relationships among crises, charisma, and consequences, most studies in this area typically rely on qualitative evidence, lie outside the confines of political science, and/or do not specifically compare crisis to noncrisis contexts. In order to test these ideas systematically within a political context, we implemented an experimental study just prior to the 2004 U.S. presidential election.

## The 2004 Presidential Election as a Test Case, and Case-Specific Hypotheses

Our experiment took advantage of the fact that the 2004 presidential election was a context in which perceptions of crisis were both plausible and real. The fact that the United States was operating under the threat of crisis was identified often by the media and by politicians. Numerous news reports suggested Al Qaeda was planning an attack on the United States in the period before or near election time.<sup>8</sup> Vice President

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, the numerous references to terrorists’ plots to influence the 2004 Presidential election archived at the *New York Times* and CNN.com.

Cheney also issued frequent warnings about terrorists similar to this one given at a town hall meeting in Minnesota:

“. . . they’re doing everything they can to find ways to strike us. . . . And you can imagine what would happen if we had an al Qaeda cell loose in the middle of one of our own cities with a nuclear weapon. The devastation that that would bring down on hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of Americans, obviously is something that you don’t want to think about.”<sup>9</sup>

Still, national security was not the only issue on citizens’ minds; voters were also concerned about the economy and the situation in Iraq (Morin and Balz 2004). As a consequence, the context was such that the salience of the crisis situation was susceptible to manipulation. The existence of numerous positive indicators about the economy, health, and the environment provided additional information with which to diminish concerns of a crisis and, instead, make salient conditions of prosperity and well-being.

Finally, in conditions in which the crisis is externally provoked, current research suggests that the incumbent leader is the most likely beneficiary of heightened perceptions of charisma and their effects. Consequently, within this context, we focus on the effect of crisis on evaluations of and behavior toward the incumbent president, George W. Bush.<sup>10</sup>

Our experimental study was designed to test the following hypotheses, which follow from our theoretical framework. First, under conditions of crisis, people will perceive Bush as more charismatic (H1). Second, elevated perceptions of charisma increase tendencies to overlook poor performance by Bush (H2). Third, heightened perceptions of charisma increase willingness to engage in self-sacrificial behavior on behalf of Bush (H3).

We also leave open the possibility that crisis will have a direct effect on blame attribution and self-

sacrificial behavior. Scholars of presidential approval have found that during times of crisis citizens increase their levels of support for the incumbent administration (e.g., Brody 1991; MacKuen 1983; Mueller 1970, 1973) and this rally “round the flag” effect can presumably lead to a “halo” effect across domains not related to the crisis (Bowen 1989).<sup>11</sup>

## Method

To test our hypotheses, we implemented an experimental study just prior to the 2004 U.S. elections. Participants in the study were randomly assigned to one of three groups: *Status Quo* (control), *Good Times* (a treatment designed to diminish concerns of a terrorist attack), or *Crisis* (a treatment designed to increase concerns of a terrorist attack). Following exposure to the treatments (or no exposure in the case of the control), subjects were asked a number of evaluative and behavioral questions concerning the incumbent candidate, George W. Bush.

## Participants and Design

Our computer-based study ran from October 14 to October 27, 2004. Participants were recruited from undergraduate political science classes at a large public university, in exchange for extra credit.<sup>12</sup> The average age of our 299 subjects was 19.89 years, 52% of whom were female and 56% of whom identified as Democrat; with respect to race/ethnicity, 42% self-identified as white, 34% as Asian, 12% as Hispanic, and the remainder as black or other.<sup>13</sup>

Subjects were randomly assigned to the *Good Times* (n = 102), *Status Quo*(control) (n = 103), and *Crisis* (n = 94) groups. Difference of means tests on basic demographic and dispositional indicators revealed that the only significant difference among the three groups with respect to these variables is a slight underrepresentation of female subjects in the *Good Times* condition, compared to the other two. We also compared these same statistics to values in the 2004

<sup>9</sup>Vice President’s Remarks at a Town Hall Meeting in Minnesota, August 6, 2004. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/08/20040806-15.html>. Accessed August 24, 2004.

<sup>10</sup>If, as was not likely to be the case in our study, the incumbent is perceived as the cause of the crisis, then citizens will likely project charisma onto challengers (see for example Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai 2005). The literature on rally effects demonstrates that incumbents receive a boost in approval, across many issue domains, when there is a dramatic foreign policy event (e.g., Bowen 1989; Mueller 1970, 1973). Consistent with our decision to focus on Bush, throughout the 2004 campaign, polls showed that the public perceived Bush (as opposed to Kerry) as a strong leader (Morin and Balz 2004). Further, in analyses not reported here, we found that our treatments did not result in higher perceptions of Kerry as a charismatic leader. Similarly, Landau et al. (2004) also found that reminders of 9/11 increased the appeal of George W. Bush, but did not have a similar effect for John Kerry.

<sup>11</sup>In a related vein, scholars have found a direct effect of orange alerts (Willer 2004) and perceptions of terrorist threat (Huddy et al. 2005) on presidential approval (though see Davis and Silver 2004 for more nuanced results).

<sup>12</sup>Student subjects are a convenient population and previous studies in this research domain have obtained compelling results with similar subject pools (e.g., Hunt, Boal, and Dodge 1999; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1996; Landau et al. 2004).

<sup>13</sup>See Web Appendix B for these and related statistics for the entire sample and by condition (<http://www.journalofpolitics.org>).

National Election Study. Compared to this more general sample, our student sample is younger, somewhat more interested in the campaign, more Democratic, and has a higher proportion of Asians and Hispanics and fewer whites.<sup>14</sup> Some of these differences are not unexpected; for example, Funk (1997) also finds that her student sample is more informed than a national sample. While these differences should be kept in mind when drawing generalizations from our study, we do not expect them to adversely affect our hypothesis tests; in fact, a more informed and more left-leaning sample provides us with a more stringent test of our hypotheses, assuming that it is more difficult to evoke evaluative and behavioral changes from the better informed and that Democrats should be less willing to project additional charisma onto a Republican leader.

### Procedures

Subjects reported to the experimental lab in order to participate in a study about “current events.” Once seated, individually, in front of a computer terminal, the program randomly assigned participants to either the *Status Quo* (control) group, or one of two treatment groups. After a research assistant initiated the program, the subjects were asked some basic sociodemographic questions and their party identification. If assigned to the *Good Times* or *Crisis* condition, these questions were followed by instructions to put on headphones and watch a short presentation. After viewing the treatments (or not for those in the *Status Quo* condition, which proceeded immediately to the next set of questions), subjects completed a short survey, which included questions designed to allow for a manipulation check and questions tapping evaluations of George W. Bush and political behavior relevant to the campaign and election.

### Treatment/Independent Variables

Subjects in the *Crisis* and *Good Times* conditions were presented with audiovisual treatments of about one minute and a half in length. The *Crisis* treatment sought to make the possibility of another terrorist attack salient in the subject’s mind, to the extent that it was not already made so by the general election context. Thus, the treatment contained frightening images and information regarding security issues, and included statements such as “. . . the CIA is warning

Americans that al Qaeda has people in the United States on the verge of mounting a large-scale terrorist attack.” The *Good Times* treatment exposed subjects to happy images and positive information about the state of the United States and its citizens. Our voiceover noted that “overall, more Americans report in surveys that they are healthier and happier than ever before” and made a number of other similar upbeat statements about life in the United States. In short, we sought to induce subjects *not* to think about pending national threats.

The audiovisual presentations were modeled after media clips commonly found on news websites, which combine a slideshow of images with a voiceover. The text for the narration was drawn mostly from news and political reports and was edited together by the authors; the images were taken primarily from news archives and assembled by our graduate student computer programmer. In some cases we added text boxes with quotes (which were read within the narration). The voiceover was done by a male professional voice actor. Though only a brief summary of the treatments is offered here, we invite the reader to view the complete texts of both treatments and especially the visual images used in our Web Appendix A.

### Mediating and Dependent Variables

*Perceptions of Charisma.* In order to measure the degree to which respondents perceived Bush as charismatic, we asked respondents to evaluate Bush on a battery of items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X Long Form; Bass and Avolio 1995<sup>15</sup>). This questionnaire is widely used in studies of leadership (Awamleh and Gardner 1999; Tejada, Scandura, and Pillai 2001) to differentiate between different types of leaders, and research has demonstrated its validity across contexts (Bass and Avolio 1993, 1995; see also Table 1 in Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam 2003). We included the three batteries (12 statements) related to perceptions of charisma: Attributed Charisma, Idealized Influence, and Inspirational Motivation. Subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed (on a 6-point scale) with each of the statements, as they pertained to George W. Bush. The statements capture the degree to which individuals perceive the target to possess the traits that are considered to underlie the latent concept of charisma. The trigger words used in the battery are the following: vision, pride, goes beyond self-interest,

<sup>14</sup>See Web Appendix B for a table on which these assessments were made.

<sup>15</sup>We purchased the survey instrument from Mind Garden, Inc. (<http://www.mindgarden.com>).

respect, power, values and beliefs, sense of purpose, moral and ethical, sense of mission, optimistic, enthusiastic, and confidence.<sup>16</sup> We combined responses to the 12 statements into an additive index, which was then recoded to run from one indicating the lowest perception of charisma to six indicating the highest perception of charisma. The *Perceptions of Charisma* combined scale shows very good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ), giving us further confidence that these traits tap a single underlying dimension.<sup>17</sup> The mean value on the variable (and standard deviation) is 3.62 (1.12), and the distribution is normal.

*Blame Attribution.* To measure willingness to overlook poor performance, we asked respondents about Bush's responsibility for U.S. failures in Iraq. Respondents were first reminded that "Recent reports from the Senate intelligence committee indicate that the CIA provided faulty information on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which was one of Bush's main justifications for the war." The variable, *Blame Attribution*, is based on responses to the follow-up question, in which respondents indicated, on a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent they believe Bush is to blame for U.S. failures in Iraq. The mean value on the variable (and standard deviation) is 3.97 (1.10), and the distribution is slightly skewed toward higher values.

*Self-Sacrifice.* To measure willingness to engage in self-sacrificial behavior, we asked respondents to indicate how many of four campaign-related activities (make phone calls to get out the vote; attend a rally; drive this candidate's supporters to the polls; and, contribute money to the campaign) they were willing to engage in on behalf of George W. Bush.<sup>18</sup> To check our assumption that these acts tap a similar construct related to self-sacrifice, we performed principal factors analysis on the set of four responses (yes/no to each act). The analysis produced a single factor with an eigenvalue over 1.0 (the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the four items is .78). The additive *Self-Sacrifice* variable ranges from zero to four acts. The mean value on the variable (and standard deviation) is .57 (1.06), and the distribution is skewed toward 0, the modal value.

<sup>16</sup>These were presented in statements such as "articulates a compelling vision of the future" and "displays a sense of power and confidence."

<sup>17</sup>An alternative would be to use factor analysis; we did this using principal components factor analysis and the resulting factor correlates at .999 with our additive index.

<sup>18</sup>Expressed willingness could differ from actual behavior, which is not captured here.

*Party Identification.* We also measured respondents' party identification with a branching question similar to the one used in the National Election Study. Scholars have argued that partisan identification serves as a "perceptual screen" for incoming information (e.g., Bartels 2002; Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992), making individuals more likely to accept information that is consistent with their identification and reject information that is inconsistent. The implication of this argument is that, in addition to different initial baselines, the slope of the effect of new information on behavior might not be the same across partisan groups.<sup>19</sup> We created dummy variables for those who self-identified as *Democrats*, *Republicans*, and *Independents*.<sup>20</sup> In each of our analyses we tested whether the effect of the *Crisis* treatment on the dependent variables was more pronounced among Republicans compared to Democrats.

## Context and Manipulation Checks

Subjects in our study were all being exposed (though of course to varying degrees) to the electoral context of the 2004 election. To verify our contention that multiple issues were present in the information environment during our study, we had two research assistants, blind to our hypotheses, code the issues that were addressed in articles on the front page of the *New York Times* two weeks prior to and throughout the study.<sup>21</sup> Our subjects expressed fairly high levels of interest in the campaign (see Table B2, Web Appendix B), and, therefore we are reasonably confident that they were aware of the overall information environment. Most of the stories, 5.66%, concerned other domestic issues (e.g., campaign news, health care, the environment), 38.16% were about foreign policy (e.g., Iraq, Israel, treaties), 7.89% were related to homeland security (e.g., airport security, 9/11), and the remaining 3.29% were about the economy.<sup>22</sup> In short, the "status quo"

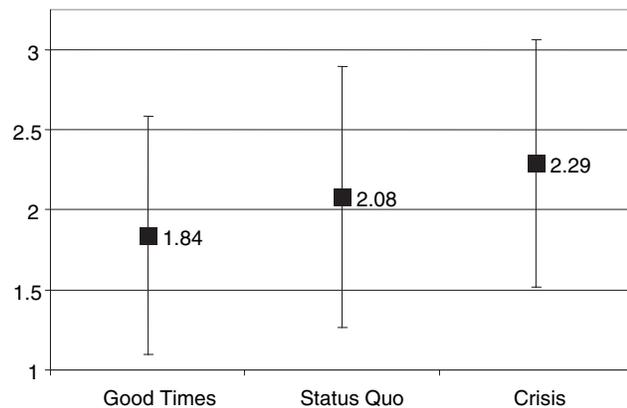
<sup>19</sup>Including partisanship measures in our multiple variable analyses also allows us to control for the fact that Democrats are over-represented in our subject sample.

<sup>20</sup>We use dummy variables rather than a 7-point partisanship variable in order to avoid issues of intransitivities (see Petrocik 1974) and because they elicit long-term identifications (see Miller 1991). However, the results are similar if the 7-point scale is used.

<sup>21</sup>Scholars argue that local/state newspapers take cues from elite newspapers (e.g., Crouse 1973), and this is more pronounced for coverage of presidential races (Shaw and Sparrow 1999). Thus, even if students were reading a different newspaper, the information environment should have been similar to the *New York Times*.

<sup>22</sup>Intercoder reliability for a randomly selected week of the study was .82 for the type of issue addressed in each article.

**FIGURE 1 Worried About a Terrorist Attack, by Condition**



The standard deviations (shown as whiskers) for the three mean values are as follows: Good Times, .741; Status Quo, .813; Crisis, .771. All pair-wise comparisons are significant at  $p < .05$ , one-tailed.

individual was being exposed to multiple issues, of which homeland security was one part.

To test the performance of our treatment stimuli, we asked respondents to indicate how worried they felt that there would be terrorist attacks in the United States in the near future; subjects responded on a 4-point scale where 4 indicated very worried. We expected that those who received the *Good Times* treatment on average would be least worried; those in the *Crisis* treatment would be most worried; and, those in the *Status Quo* group would fall in between, given that those who entered our labs were already primed by the real election context discussed above.<sup>23</sup> Figure 1 shows the mean response to this question, by group. Difference of means tests of all pair-wise comparisons, assuming unequal variance for a strict test, are significant at  $p < .05$ , one-tailed.<sup>24</sup> In sum, these results show that the treatments did have the intended effects on respondents, increasing concerns of a ter-

<sup>23</sup>An alternative manipulation approach would be to compare a pre-test and post-test worry question. However, since we conducted the study in a single session, a pre-test question might prime subjects in the *Status Quo* and *Good Times* conditions to be worried, which would influence their subsequent survey responses. Consequently, we only included a pre-test worry question for those exposed to the *Crisis* treatment; a differences of means test on these pre- and post-values shows the treatment resulted in a significant increase in worry ( $p < .10$ ).

<sup>24</sup>Given the unidirectional nature of the hypotheses (*Crisis* > *Status Quo* > *Good Times*), one-tailed hypothesis tests are appropriate (see Hanushek and Jackson 1977, 68–69).

rorist attack among those who viewed the *Crisis* treatment and decreasing them among those exposed to the *Good Times* treatment.

## Results

Our first hypothesis is that those in the *Crisis* condition will perceive George W. Bush as more charismatic. The dependent variable is our perceptions of charisma scale. In addition to dummy variables for the *Crisis* and *Status Quo* conditions (the baseline is *Good Times*), we include a dummy variable for female to control for an underrepresentation of females in the *Good Times* treatment and dummy variables for Democrats and Republicans (the baseline is Independents) to control for the critical role of partisanship.

The results in the first data column of Table 1 provide clear support for our principal hypothesis. As expected, those in the *Crisis* treatment were more likely to rate Bush higher on the charisma scale, compared to those in the *Good Times* treatment, and the effect is significant at  $p < .10$  (one-tailed). Given the short duration of our treatment in the lab setting, the coefficient on the crisis variable (.184) is substantively quite meaningful. Even in a context where a crisis is looming and not yet realized, individuals project charisma onto likely leaders.

We also, as expected, find differences in baseline perceptions of Bush's charisma by partisanship, with Republicans rating Bush as more charismatic and Democrats rating Bush as less charismatic, compared to the Independent baseline. Interestingly, however, we did not find that partisanship moderates the effect of crisis. We tested an alternate model with interactions between the two conditions and the two party dummy variables and the inclusion of these interaction terms did not enhance our baseline model, according to an f-test, nor were any of the interaction terms significant. Thus, we find that the effect of crisis on perceptions of charisma is not conditional on party identification. While different partisans may start with different baselines, all project additional charisma onto Bush given certain contextual conditions.

With support for our first hypothesis, we now turn to testing the behavioral consequences of perceptions of charisma. Our second hypothesis is that heightened perceptions of charisma will make people more willing to overlook poor performance by George W. Bush. The independent variables we include are the perceptions of charisma scale, and the dummy variables for the *Crisis* and *Status Quo* conditions, parti-

**TABLE 1** Determinants of Perceptions of Bush as a Charismatic Leader (OLS Regression Results), Blame Attribution (Ordered Probit Results), and Self-Sacrificial Behavior (Ordered Probit Results)

	Perceptions of Charisma	Blame Attribution	Self-Sacrifice
Perceptions of Charisma	—	-.663 (.084)*	.873 (.118)*
Crisis Condition	.184 (.131)*	-.410 (.164)*	.362 (.215)*
Status Quo Condition	.059 (.128)	-.325 (.166)*	.589 (.211)*
Democrat	-.180 (.132)*	.057 (.171)	-.251 (.229)
Republican	1.485 (.160)*	-.996 (.228)*	.777 (.257)*
Female	-.087 (.108)	-.096 (.135)	.040 (.171)
Constant	3.385 (.135)*	—	—
Cut 1		-5.728 (.442)	4.323 (.519)
Cut 2		-4.604 (.400)	5.204 (.558)
Cut 3		-3.855 (.376)	5.885 (.589)
Cut 4		-2.468 (.345)	6.657 (.615)
N	299	299	299
Adjusted/Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.34	.23	.32
F/Likelihood Ratio	31.40	181.32	187.37
Prob > F/Prob > Chi(2)	.000	.000	.000

\**p* < .10, one-tailed. Numbers in cells are coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. We use OLS analysis when the dependent variable is continuous (perceptions of charisma) and ordered probit analysis when the dependent variable is based on a 5-point scale (blame attribution and self-sacrificial behavior).

sanship, and female. Given that the dependent variable is comprised of a 5-point scale, we use ordered probit analysis.

The results, shown in the second data column of Table 1, support our hypothesis. Perceptions of Bush as a charismatic leader are clearly related to willingness to overlook poor performance—the negative sign on the coefficient indicates that perceptions of charisma decrease tendencies to blame Bush for failures in Iraq. The results also show direct effects of the conditions, with the *Crisis* and *Status Quo* variables statistically significant and in the expected direction, and with the effect more pronounced for the former.<sup>25</sup> Finally,

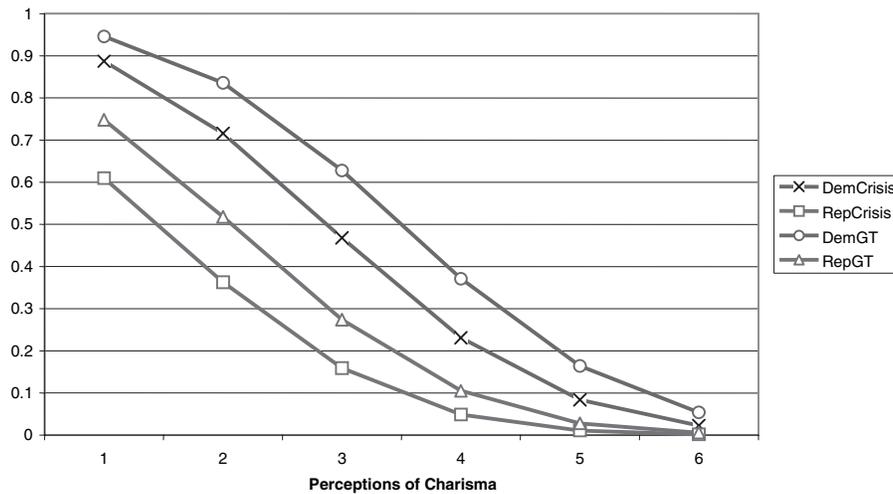
Republicans are significantly less likely to blame Bush for poor performance in Iraq, as expected, while there are no differences between Democrats and Independents. We again tested for and did not find that partisanship moderated the effects of the conditions; because these interaction terms did not enhance the model, we continue to omit them.

Since the coefficients from an ordered probit analysis are not directly interpretable, we calculate the substantive effects using Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001). In Figure 2, we present the probability of falling into the highest blame category (5) at different levels of perceptions of charisma by partisanship for those in the *Crisis* and *Good Times* conditions. The figure clearly shows that, as perceptions of charisma increase,

<sup>25</sup>We cannot directly calculate the combined effect of crisis because the first model uses OLS while the second uses ordered probit. However, we did estimate the ordered probit model with and without the moderator of perceptions of charisma. Once we added the moderator of charisma, the size of the effect of crisis dropped and the pseudo-R squared increased. As another approximation, we ran the second dependent variable using OLS, and the same

variables were significant. In this model, the direct effect of crisis was -.278, while the indirect effect through perceptions of charisma was -.077, for a combined effect of -.355.

FIGURE 2 Probability of Strongly Blaming Bush at Different Levels of Perceptions of Bush's Charisma, by Partisanship and Condition



subjects become much less likely to fall into this highest blame category, across conditions and partisan groups. As expected, we also find different baselines by partisan group, with Republicans being less likely to fall into the highest blame category at each level of charisma, compared to Democrats in that same category. However, we also see that in some cases Democrats are *less* likely to blame Bush than Republicans. For example, Democrats in the *Crisis* condition at higher levels of charisma are less likely to blame Bush compared to Republicans in the same condition at lower values.<sup>26</sup> Finally, we also see differences by condition, with Democrats and Republicans in the *Crisis* condition less likely to blame Bush at each level of charisma, compared to their counterparts in the *Good Times* condition.

We now turn to our final hypothesis, which concerns willingness to self-sacrifice. To refresh, we expect that heightened perceptions of charisma should make individuals more likely to engage in self-sacrificial behavior. We include the same independent variables as we used in the previous analysis. We expect positive signs on the coefficients given that the dependent variable is coded such that higher values mean more acts for Bush. The results are presented in the third data column of Table 1. Once again, we omit partisanship-condition interactions because, when tested for, they did not enhance the model.

<sup>26</sup>Of course, not many Democrats are predisposed to view Bush as highly charismatic; yet, in our sample, about 15% of Democrats gave Bush ratings of four or over on the perceptions of charisma scale.

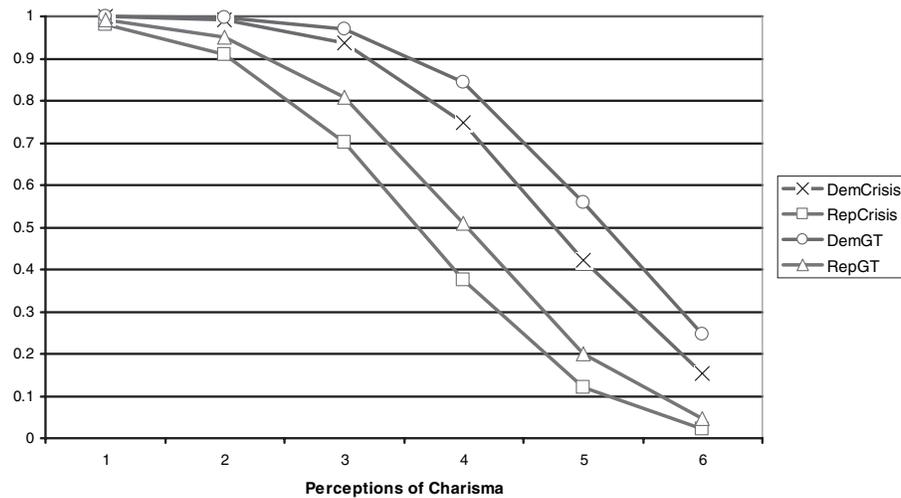
In the case of self-sacrifice, the perceptions of charisma scale is positive and significant. Thus, perceptions of charisma, magnified by crisis conditions, affect willingness to contribute one's own resources to the leader's cause. We also find significant direct effects for the *Crisis* and *Status Quo* conditions, and in the expected direction, though this time the latter exerts a more substantial effect.<sup>27</sup> Finally, we find a significant effect for Republicans, but no difference between Democrats and Independents.<sup>28</sup>

We again calculated the substantive effects and, to illustrate some of the effects of the variables, Figure 3 shows the probability of falling into the lowest category of self-sacrifice (0) at different levels of perceptions of charisma, by partisanship for those in the *Crisis* and *Good Times* conditions. We find similar results to the previous figure in that, as perceptions of charisma increase, subjects become much less likely to fall into this category. Further, the probabilities are

<sup>27</sup>We again could not calculate the combined effect of crisis. Once we added the moderator of charisma, the size of the effect of crisis dropped and the pseudo-R squared increased, as with blame attribution. When we ran the model using OLS, the same variables were significant. In this model, the direct effect of crisis was .163, while the indirect effect through perceptions of charisma was .071, for a combined effect of .234.

<sup>28</sup>As a final exercise, we also ran our models with a measure that asks the traditional NES question, how well the adjective "strong leader" describes George W. Bush in place of the charisma scale. This variable had a significant effect on our blame and self-sacrifice variables. However, the substantive effect of the charisma scale for each dependent variable was about two times larger than the effects with the "strong leader" measure. These results (available in Web Appendix B) support our argument that different leadership types produce distinct consequences.

FIGURE 3 Probability of Not Engaging in Self-Sacrifice for Bush at Different Levels of Perceptions of Bush's Charisma, by Partisanship and Condition



lower for Republicans and those in the *Crisis* condition, across each level of charisma. All groups cluster in the 90% range at very low levels of charisma (1 and 2). We then see a substantial decline in the probabilities and more differentiation across groups in the mid-range of the charisma scale. At the highest levels of perceived charisma, the four groups begin to move closer together again as they become more willing to self-sacrifice for Bush.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our data and analyses support our hypotheses that crisis conditions magnify perceptions of charisma (with respect to a likely candidate) and these, in turn, have politically relevant evaluative and behavioral effects, compared to normal or “better” times. People perceive certain political leaders, in this case George W. Bush, to be more charismatic in times of crisis. Crises then have indirect—through perceptions of charisma—and direct effects on individuals’ willingness to forgive policy mistakes and to engage in self-sacrifice.

These results have important implications for political scientists. For example, scholars debate two mechanisms that lead to rally and related effects: patriotism (e.g., Mueller 1970, 1973) and decreased criticism on the part of elites (Brody 1991). Our study suggests a third, noncompeting explanation—heightened perceptions of charisma. The relationships between crises and charisma may also help explain the duration of the rally. When the crisis or threat recedes,

there is no longer a basis from which the leader can enhance his charisma, and so the rally ends.

Overall, and most important from our perspective, the results have important implications for understanding the potential dangers that can occur in a democracy during times of crisis. Our results suggest that during times of crisis, individuals look for a strong, confident leader, and they project additional power, morality, and competence onto that individual. They further become more willing to overlook policy mistakes and to volunteer their personal resources for the leader’s purpose. These effects did not only obtain for partisans of the president; rather, they occurred across all partisan groups and there were certain circumstances under which Democrats were less likely to blame Bush for policy mistakes than Republicans (who viewed Bush at lower levels of charisma). Furthermore, the effects of charisma were often stronger than those of one’s partisan identification, one of the most stable predispositions. These findings help explain both the allure and the “Teflon” nature of leaders who come to power in times of crisis.

In our study, a crisis was only a looming threat, and one that subjects were reminded of by way of a minute and a half presentation. The charismatic bond that we invoked in our subjects is likely just a small representation of a much greater bond that can be established in such contexts. Citizens around the world often find themselves in the midst of grave crises, which daily realities and the media make salient for days and months on end. Our work suggests that calculating politicians can and do benefit from such

situations. One does not have to search far for an example of a politician cultivating crisis in order to enhance his appeal. During the 2004 campaign that is the focus of this study, the Bush team strategically ran ads designed to remind individuals of 9/11, and his vice presidential candidate worked hard to remind citizens of what Cheney ironically stated were things “you don’t want to think about.”

If crisis situations cause citizens to put greater trust in more charismatic leaders, then those leaders may also be able to use these situations to increase their institutional power and to enact otherwise unpopular policies. We need only look at the controversy over the domestic spying program, cleverly relabeled the “terrorist surveillance” program by the administration, for an example. In January 2006, a majority of the public supported the president’s authority to wiretap without warrants when framed with the words “in order to reduce the threat of terrorism” (Nagourney and Elder 2006). Put simply, the intersection of crises and charisma may have even deeper political consequences than we have presented here.

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