



## **Class Acts: How New York City Newspapers Covered the Budget Crisis after 9/11**

By  
**Robert M. Entman**  
*North Carolina State University*

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## Executive Summary

In the spring of 2003, as New York City was enmeshed in the debate about how to resolve its significant budget crisis, the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy faced two questions it felt compelled to explore:

Were New York City’s major newspapers doing a good job of helping the general public to understand the budget debate and the proposals being discussed by their elected representatives?

Would they help New Yorkers of all income levels to understand how these policy proposals would *specifically affect them*?

“Class Acts: How New York City Newspapers Covered the Budget Crisis After 9/11” offers one answer. Written by Professor Robert M. Entman of North Carolina State University, “Class Acts” is a critical analysis of the local newspaper coverage of New York City’s budget crisis.

Most people get their information about the policy debates that will affect them from the news media. That makes the media almost as important an institution as government. Yet, many of us know little about how the news media actually works – how it fulfills its responsibility of informing the public, or how it shapes the opinions of ordinary citizens.

Dr. Entman’s paper analyzes how four daily newspapers – *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *New York Times* and *Newsday* – covered New York City’s budget crisis between January 2002 and January 2003. The study found that these newspapers didn’t maximize their roles as conveyors of information to inform and engage their readers in debates about public policy. More specifically, the coverage did little to explain how various policy decisions would affect New Yorkers of different social classes.

Main findings:

- Newspaper coverage of the budget crisis often read like a melodrama. Coverage emphasized the way the budget is negotiated—the political tussling and the position-taking among political leaders—over the substantive implications of the policy decisions.
- Newspapers relied heavily on government officials to narrate the budget process and paid far less attention to citizens, city workers or experts. This fostered the perception that the budget-making process was “inside baseball.”

- Since the press coverage seemed so removed from the everyday lives of readers, it gave them little or no incentive to engage the public debate on the most significant matter that comes before the legislature.
- The coverage provided little information on how policy proposals and decisions might affect the interests of *any* specific group, let alone different social classes.
- By failing to clarify these stakes, the media risks perpetuating the prevailing inequality of political influence across social classes.
- Although the burden of the crisis-fueled service reductions has fallen most heavily on the poor, the working class, and middle class, the papers give relatively little space to how these cuts play out in the lives of ordinary New Yorkers.
- By failing to spell out such impacts, they implied that everyone's interests are identical, that essentially all city residents are bound together by an overriding affiliation *as* New Yorkers.
- These shortcomings made it more difficult for people to hold their elected officials accountable for their decisions.
- As a result of the above, New York's four daily newspapers did a mediocre job of informing citizens about the choices being discussed by their representatives to resolve the city's severe budget crisis, thereby limiting their ability to participate in the debate.

More affluent and organized New Yorkers have advocates to represent their interests in budget debates, but average New Yorkers most rely on the media to highlight their concerns about this process. If New York's newspapers fail to clarify those interests, it deprives ordinary citizens of the information they need to hold their elected officials accountable.

## About the Author

**Robert M. Entman** is Professor of Communication and Political Science at North Carolina State University where he received the Alumni Outstanding Research Award in 2002. He has taught at Northwestern (1989-94) and Duke (1980-89) and was the Lombard Visiting Professor at Harvard for the fall semester of 1997. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from Yale, earned while a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellow, and an M.P.P. in policy analysis from the University of California (Berkeley).

Dr. Entman's recent books include *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago, 2000, with Andrew Rojecki) and *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge, edited with W. Lance Bennett). *The Black Image* won the Goldsmith Book Prize from Harvard University, the Robert Lane Award for Best Book in Political Psychology from the American Political Science Association, and the Mott/KTA Journalism Honor Society Award for Best Book in Mass Communication Research. *Mediated Politics* will be published in Chinese translation by Tsinghua University Press in 2004. Dr. Entman is working on a book about media bias and is also editing (with Clay Steinman) *Key Works in Communication Studies* for publication by Blackwell in 2006.

Entman's other books include *Media Power Politics* (Free Press, with D.L. Paletz) and *Democracy Without Citizens* (Oxford). He also has written dozens of articles, book chapters, and reports and has lectured at many universities in the U.S. and abroad. With Lance Bennett he edits the book series *Communication, Society and Politics* for Cambridge University Press.

## Acknowledgements

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*Entman's timely analysis should, if taken to heart, inform coverage and foster a deeper understanding of both the real choices and impacts of New York's budgets.*

**Editors: Note**

It is critical to the “vitality of democracy” that citizens have “access to substantive information on policy decisions.” So says Professor Robert Entman of North Carolina State University in his report, *Class Acts: How New York City Newspapers Covered the Budget Crisis After 9/11*.

This may seem both a truism and an article of faith among hard-working journalists and editors who chronicle the daily doings of leaders and citizens in the world's most celebrated city. But for those interested in “the vitality of democracy,” caution is advised: In the daily rush to put out information continuously and on deadline in New York's hypercompetitive media market, it doesn't always work out that way.

Entman suggests that merely narrating the budget as the *process* of “who gets what, how and why” can distract attention from important explanations of the implications of policy choices and how they affect New Yorkers by social class.

The author employs a straightforward methodology for analyzing a year's worth of New York newspaper coverage on the 2003 city budget process: He identifies who was chiefly quoted in the stories and for whom they spoke. Revealingly, the overwhelming majority (69%) of “chief sources” cited or quoted by newspapers were city, state or federal officials. On the other hand, only 10% of the quotes originated from “Citizens of NYC.”

The news media, particularly the daily papers, play a critical role in helping to shape the opinions of citizens and their decision-makers. That's why it is appropriate and even necessary to “flip the script” and evaluate the information process in New York City by the standard of “who gets what, how and why.”

In doing so, Professor Entman calls on the guardians of the public's right to know to focus less on the “inside baseball” of budget making in New York and to look more broadly toward the human and social consequences of the budget choices that leaders make. Having worked with the reporting press in this city for over 20 years in public life, I know how dedicated they are to serving New Yorkers. That's why Professor Entman's analysis should, if taken to heart, inform coverage and foster a deeper understanding of the real choices and impacts of New York's budgets.



Fernando Ferrer

## Introduction

MANY GROUPS, INCLUDING LEGISLATIVE BODIES, political parties, and interest groups, bear responsibility for educating and involving ordinary citizens in debates over public policy. Most people, however, have little direct interaction with these institutions, receiving their information from the news media instead. Yet, considering their importance in public life, the news media are vehicles about which we know relatively little.

Scholars have generally neglected the way that the media convey the different implications and impacts of policy decisions—especially on different socioeconomic strata of society.<sup>1</sup> Little is known about how the media provide the tools to help individuals understand how the policy decisions made by those they elect to represent them will impact their interests. The distinguished political theorist Robert Dahl (1989) is one of many who has emphasized the importance of citizens having access to substantive information on policy decisions to the vitality of democracy.

*We know surprisingly little about the role of newspapers in shaping public opinion in urban areas.*

We know surprisingly little about the role of newspapers in shaping public opinion in urban areas. Most recent research on media and cities has probed the impact of local television news on race relations and on perceptions of crime and welfare (e.g., Entman and Rojecki 2000). And we know even less about how newspapers shape opinion through the lens of social class. Yet the most compelling way of understanding public policy—and of motivating those ordinary citizens affected by policy to involve themselves in the democratic process—lies in understanding the differential stakes that varying social classes have in what government does.

It is for this reason that we analyzed news coverage between January 2002 and January 2003, as New York City grappled with its most serious budget crisis in decades. This report describes a pilot study of the major daily newspapers serving New York City—*New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *New York Times*, and *Newsday*—and how they fulfilled their critical roles as conveyers of information to New Yorkers, both as

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<sup>1</sup> Among the recent empirical studies that do delve into representations of class in the U.S. media are Dines and Humez 2003, Kumar 2001 and Tracy 2001; also see Rowbotham and Beynon 2002.

individuals and as members of groups sharing common concerns and socioeconomic class status.<sup>2</sup>

The specific focus of this paper is how New York’s dailies portrayed the social class dimensions and implications of the debates over the budget crisis. Some of the major findings are:

- The newspapers rely heavily on government officials to narrate the budget process.
- The coverage emphasizes the way the budget is negotiated—the political tussling and the position-taking among political leaders—over the substantive implications of the policy decisions.
- The coverage provides little information on the *impacts* of policy proposals and decisions and how they might affect the interests of *any* specific groups, let alone social classes. Although reasonable solutions to the budget crisis might include both budget cuts and tax increases, the coverage does surprisingly little to illuminate and justify such solutions in terms of their fairness to the great majority of citizens.

*...New York’s four daily newspapers did a mediocre job of informing citizens about the choices being debated by their representatives to resolve the city’s severe budget crisis...*

- Although the impacts of the crisis-fueled budget cuts fall most heavily on the poor and middle class, the papers give relatively little space to how these New Yorkers will fare and much more to how the city and its overall economy and livability might be affected.
- The newspapers generally recast what might be seen as class conflicts in ways that discourage city residents from identifying with large social class groupings. Instead the coverage either 1) suggests people are divided into narrower “special” interests (teachers, firefighters, school children, and neighborhoods) that preclude identification with a broad socioeconomic category; or 2) suggests that everyone’s interests are identical, that essentially all city residents are bound together by an overriding affiliation *as* New Yorkers.

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<sup>2</sup> The daily *New York Sun* was excluded because it has a far smaller circulation than the others, and its content was not comprehensively available on the Internet.

- As a result of the above, New York's four daily newspapers did a mediocre job of informing citizens about the choices being discussed by their representatives to resolve the city's severe budget crisis, thereby limiting their ability to participate in the debate.

*This paper examines how easily and thoroughly those who occupy these different relative class positions can learn from their newspapers about what they stand to gain or lose in the discussion of the city's budget crisis.*

## **Research Concepts and Data**

INQUIRIES INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN the news media and social class on issues of public policy may be hindered in part by the lack of a widely accepted definition of the very concept of social class. Generally, class is defined in terms of three criteria:

1. People's working conditions (especially the degree of autonomy and authority they exercise).
2. Their market power (income, job security, and opportunities for career advancement).
3. Their status (prestige of their occupation).

We cannot assume that there are rigid lines distinguishing members of different classes. Rather, analysts must assume a hierarchy on which everyone can be arrayed according to these three criteria.

For the purpose of manageable analysis, and in accordance with recent sociological research (Saunders 2001; Breen and Rotman 1995), this study assumes that there are significant differences in the socioeconomic circumstances, prospects and interests enjoyed by those at the upper end of this class hierarchy from the vast majority who occupy the middle and lower positions. With less wealth and income, as well as less mobility in the marketplace to replace any lost income, members of the latter and larger group are more vulnerable to changes in government policy on taxes and budget spending priorities. Government decisions on these matters have significantly greater impacts on the living standards, health, social mobility and other aspects of life for those further down in the class hierarchy because they possess fewer resources to cope with adverse government actions. Therefore, exactly *whose* taxes the government increases and *which* programs it cuts will differentially affect New Yorkers, depending on their class positions.

This paper examines how easily and thoroughly those who occupy these different relative class positions can learn from their newspapers about what they stand to gain or lose in the discussion of the city's budget crisis.

Two primary data sets form the basis for the analysis. Newspaper coverage between January 1, 2002 and January 15, 2003 was sampled using the Nexis online archive of news, which included the first three papers, and the online site of *Newsday*.<sup>3</sup> Criteria for inclusion and other methodological details are described in the Appendix. The total number of items retrieved was as follows:

*Daily News*: 354

*Newsday*: 78

*Post*: 212

*Times*: 467

Note that these initial numbers were substantially reduced by the rules for inclusion in the analysis. Letters to the editor were excluded, as were stories that contained fewer than three paragraphs specifically discussing the budget crisis (thereby excluding many stories with passing references to the situation). Unsigned editorials and signed opinion columns were included. From these reduced groups of items, random samples of 35 items were drawn from each paper and coded according to a detailed protocol also described in the Appendix. The reason for combining “opinion” and “news” content in the general sample is that we do not really know who reads what. It may well be that editorial items, usually written by people of some prominence, are read intently by other influential citizens, and the views of those elites are then reflected back into news coverage, as suggested by most research in media studies (e.g., Bennett 2002). Thus, we cannot assume that there is a basis in this study for separating out news from editorial content when determining overall presentation of class interests in the budget crisis.

A separate group of stories was also coded for explicit coverage of class-related themes of income distribution and redistribution. Additionally, a different and somewhat simplified content analysis was performed on every unsigned editorial about the budget that appeared in the *Daily News*, *Post*, and *Times* during the sample period. The total number of such editorials was 68. Finally, all relevant stories were subjected to an interpretive analysis that provided a sense of the overall tone of the coverage and helped put flesh on the numbers.

As an estimate, the sample of 140 news stories and editorial items during the period of January 1, 2002 through January 15, 2003 represents about one fourth of all meaningful coverage of the budget in the four papers. As such, the sample should provide a reasonable basis for conclusions about the overall tenor of newspaper coverage. We can

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<sup>3</sup> *Newsday* content became available on Nexis starting in 2003.

have less confidence in drawing conclusions from the differences among papers since the findings are not as reliable at that level. Although this report's data analysis and conclusions are based on an extensive content analysis, they remain suggestive, indicating the need for larger-scale studies.

### **Whose Voices Are Heard? Whose Voices Count? All Sources Point to the Mayor**

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART of any news story is its source. Besides verifying information, it also gives a story its slant. The analysis for this study categorized and coded each source that was cited or quoted in the coverage as supporting or opposing policy proposals. Table 1 displays the breakdown of the sources cited in each item and demonstrates that the main players in the coverage were, not surprisingly, government officials who account for two-thirds of the sources.<sup>5</sup> The papers cited or quoted New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg or "the city administration" (and similar formulations) as a source fully 263 times, making the mayor the focal point of the coverage. But what is more interesting is the distribution of other voices. The second most frequent voice was that of individual citizens who were named or represented with general terms like "public opinion" or "New Yorkers." These citizens were never described in more specific terms, and, although the coding protocol had a category for "Poor, poverty stricken, hungry," no one was described with such specificity.<sup>6</sup> The papers cited interest groups and business spokespersons relatively infrequently as sources for policy positions, and suburban officials and residents who have a substantial stake in the commuter tax, transit tolls and fares and other city policy issues barely appeared at all. The most frequent representation of organized interests that appeared was union officers, typically quoted in stories about cutting education, police or fire budgets and services. Experts played only a minor role in the discussions.

*Perhaps the most important part of any news story is its source. Besides verifying information, it also gives a story its slant.*

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<sup>5</sup> A more detailed display can be found in Appendix A. Table 1 aggregates the original coding categories for clarity. Category #1 in the table consists of the following codes from the appendix table on Actors: 1,21,22,27,31. #2=codes 2,3,4,17,18. #3=codes 7,8,9,30. #4=codes 10,11,12,28,29. #5=codes 20. #6=codes 23,24,25. #7=code 15. #8=codes 13, 16. #9=code 98.

<sup>6</sup> It is possible that one or more of the ordinary citizens quoted was in fact a poor or hungry person, but the context of the stories did not indicate that this was the case.

*Table 1: Chief Sources Cited or Quoted by Newspapers\**

Sources	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>Newsday</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
Citizens of NYC	17	32	3	10	62
State and federal officials	6	2	10	12	30
NYC officials	114	107	67	107	395
City workers/unions	8	21	4	12	45
Suburbanites and their officials	0	1	1	1	3
Business	0	1	2	2	5
Experts	4	4	1	3	12
Interest group spokespersons	6	14	2	11	33
Journalists	8	10	13	7	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>623</b>

\*Note: This table includes all news and editorial content in the sample. For a table that distinguishes sources cited in news pages from those cited in editorial items in the 35-item samples, see Appendix C, Table C-1.

The overall impression from the data displayed in Table 1 and from analyzing the newspapers' entire body of coverage is that the discussion on the budget was largely limited to government officials themselves. This proved to be particularly true of the *Times* and *Post*, whereas *Newsday* and the *Daily News* were more attentive to citizens' voices. *Newsday* alone accounted for half the latter category, putting a particular emphasis on citing non-official actors.

Of course using government officials as the main sources in covering the government's own budget policy proposals and actions seems reasonable. But coverage of this kind both reflects and reinforces a relatively detached view of government as it makes critical

decisions concerning the budget crisis, lending an impression that distant powers are deciding this the way they will-and without hearing voices of ordinary citizens.

*In fact, since the press coverage seems so removed and abstracted from their lives and interests, most readers have little or no incentive to pay any attention to the public debate.*

Wealthy individuals and the groups representing them, as well as other large organized groups with professional representation, can use political influence and lobbying groups to ensure that their interests are heard in the normal course of policymaking. It is the unorganized, ordinary working or middle-class New Yorker who does not belong to an interest group who depends the most on the “sunshine” of media attention to compel government attention to his or her interests. If the newspapers fail to clarify those interests, then ordinary citizens lack sufficient information to participate in an informed way that allows them to hold their elected representatives accountable for their policy decisions. In fact, since the press coverage seems so removed and abstracted from their lives and interests, most readers have little or no incentive to pay any attention to the public debate.

When newspapers do not clarify for their readers the stakes they may have in government decisions, officials who monitor the coverage carefully for evidence of “public opinion” (Herbst 1998; Entman 2004) can feel more confident that their decisions will not receive detailed scrutiny from the general public. But they will have every incentive to pay the most attention to the wealthy and the well-organized. In other words, by failing to clarify the stakes of policy decisions on various socioeconomic classes, the media perpetuate the structure of inequality in political influence.

### **When the Message Isn't in the Medium: Policy Positions Versus Policy Effects**

DOES THE NEWS COVERAGE CLARIFY FOR the citizens of New York their stakes in the budget shortfall? Can the city's newspaper readers readily discern how policies debated in the news might affect their own personal interests? Conflict theorists tell us that for disputes to be settled effectively, participants need to understand and focus on *interests* rather than *positions* (see Jameson and Entman 2004 for a discussion of conflict theory in this context).

The conflicts examined here occur in the political arena where most citizens are not directly involved but are represented by elected officials. If we value the public's interest and its informed participation in democratic discourse that helps to guide this process of representation, it is vital that the mass media clarify the interests in play during the debates about what course the government should follow.

*...by failing to clarify the stakes of policy decisions on various socioeconomic classes, the media perpetuate the structure of inequality in political influence.*

The content analysis for this report assessed both endorsement of various policy proposals and descriptions of the impacts these proposals might have. Whereas the mere attribution to different political actors of *positions* on proposals to cut education spending or raise property taxes can help citizens map the political terrain and understand the alignment of forces, describing the impacts of a given proposal reveals the underlying *interests* being served. When newspapers explain impacts effectively, they tell their readers exactly what difference it would make to them, to members of other groups or to the community at large if, say, school budgets are cut three percent, or property taxes are increased. This is the most important information individuals need for two reasons: 1) to arrive at an informed position on the policy him or herself; and 2) to understand the *reasons* why other individuals, groups or government officials might support or oppose that position.

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding of this paper is the paucity of discussions of impacts, especially given the number of policy positions that were included in the coverage. In the general sample, the four papers included 389 statements of policy stands but only 103 mentions of impacts. *Positions* were discussed nearly four times more often than *interests*. Table 2, below, illustrates this point in detail.

**Table 2: Assertions Supporting and Opposing Policy Positions and Proposals**

<b>Increase taxes/ maintain spending</b>	NYT for	NYT vs.	DN for	DN vs.	Post for	Post vs.	NYN for	NYN vs.	Total Pro	Total Anti
Increase property tax	3	1	3	4	3	1	8	5	17	11
Impose commuter tax	7	1	5	1	4	3	6	2	22	7
Increase aid from state	9	0	4	0	7	0	7	0	27	0
Increase federal aid	5	0	2	0	8	1	10	0	25	1
Increase city income tax	2	0	2	1	2	0	2	0	8	1
Increase state income tax	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Increase school spending	5	0	0	0	4	1	4	1	13	2
Increase day care \$	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Increase city salaries	2	1	1	0	4	1	0	0	7	2
Increase \$ health/welfare etc'	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Maintain or cut taxes and reduce government spending</b>	NYT+	NYT vs.	DN+	DN vs.	Post+	Post vs.	Newsd ay for	Newsd ay vs.	Total Pro	Total Anti
Cut union fringes concessions	4	2	7	3	4	0	3	0	18	5
Cut health/welfare/related	2	0	2	2	1	0	2	2	8	4
Cut school/education	3	9	3	8	6	3	8	11	20	31
Lay off workers/freeze hire	7	0	3	0	6	4	4	2	20	6

Lower city income tax	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	4	1
Eliminate recycling	3	5	1	0	0	0	2	0	6	5
Cut service to elderly	2	4	6	5	0	0	1	4	9	13
Cut state aid	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1
Cut library and cultural programs	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	1	6	4
Cut parks/rec budget	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1
Total	22	21	26	22	21	7	25	21	95	71

Table 2 enumerates the pro and con positions taken on those policies that could be categorized readily as either “emphasizing increases in taxes and/or maintaining or increasing current government spending” or those “opposing tax increases and/or endorsing reduced spending.” The newspapers focused primarily on covering the agenda of options proposed by Mayor Bloomberg. Within this limited spectrum, they represented a reasonable range of policy proposals for addressing the budget crisis. A number of the proposals, such as those calling for “shared sacrifice,” “public/private partnerships,” “early retirement of city workers,” as well as the inherently mixed categories of budget cuts and tax increases generally, were categorized as mixed or neutral and are not included in Table 2. (A more detailed discussion of the policy position data can be found in Appendix B. Table B-1 contains a complete enumeration of all policy proposal categories, and Table B-2 displays only those assertions appearing in editorial or op-ed items.)

Table 2 also reveals that both pro- and anti-spending proposals received considerable attention. Those policies suggesting continuance or expansion of taxes and programs received substantially more endorsements on the news and editorial pages than statements of opposition to these positions. Policies seeking tax and program cuts generally received balanced treatment according to this measure—that is, about an equal number of sentences supporting the policies as opposing them. Only in the *Post* did the anti-spending propositions receive a clear preponderance of backing. Yet even the *Post* contained more assertions supporting than opposing program maintenance. Overall, defenses of spending and taxes outnumbered attacks by 190 to 120.

Taken as a whole, the newspapers' portrayals of the budget crisis suggest a widespread desire to protect the city government's programs. Most assertions supporting these programs came from citizens or workers affected by programs or from city officials who run them, such as the police commissioner. Surely few citizens or leaders like the idea of spending less on things like education and crime control simply for the sake of spending less. In this sense, the coverage reflects a natural and widely shared preference for useful government services.

Proposals to cut spending actually received more attention than those seeking increases or maintaining spending (166 versus 149), and they generally received balanced treatment (at least according to this measure). Many stories did include support for significantly cutting popular programs. However, most of them suggested that when city officials and others endorsed program cuts, they did so reluctantly, out of necessity rather than by choice.

*The Times' coverage of its home city was particularly marked by its emphasis on position-taking... Sometimes this approach offered revealing insights into the substantive policy issues and impacts, but as often it yielded a kind of "inside baseball" perspective on the process...*

The *Times'* coverage of its home city was particularly marked by its emphasis on position-taking. The nation's leading newspaper used a *process* orientation and an *accounting* approach. Much of the *Times'* reporting, which was the most voluminous of the four papers, consisted of cataloging the positions of the major players and conflicts and maneuvering among them. Sometimes this approach offered revealing insights into the substantive policy issues and impacts, but as often it yielded a kind of "inside baseball" perspective on the process—on the games that interest groups, bureaucrats and politicians play obscuring rather than illuminating why and how the budget decisions matter. The accounting mindset was manifested in the frequent discussions of percentages of budgets being cut or taxes being raised, with relatively little attention given to whom would be affected by these actions and how.

Although the newspapers paid relatively little attention to policy impacts and the underlying interests at stake in resolving the budget crisis, such coverage was not completely absent. All of the newspapers offered some stories and editorials that highlighted impacts in some detail.

Table 3, below, displays the impact categories that were included in at least five stories and the total of all other impacts mentioned. The effects that received the most attention were the lessening of educational quality, the negative consequences for the New York City economy and the difficulties for poor people resulting from the budget cuts. Note that income distribution effects *per se* were not a major focus of the stories in this random sample.

**Table 3: Newspaper Mentions of Potential Policy Impacts**

<b>Impact</b>	<b><i>Daily News</i></b>	<b><i>News-day</i></b>	<b><i>Post</i></b>	<b><i>Times</i></b>	<b>Total</b>
Education will deteriorate	2	10	5	0	17
Economy of NYC will be harmed	5	4	1	5	15
Poor will suffer	3	7	0	2	12
City will be less livable	2	2	1	2	7
Cultural/recreational services will deteriorate	6	0	0	1	7
Fire protection will suffer	0	4	0	1	5
Health and environmental hazards will increase	3	2	0	0	5
Rents will increase	4	0	1	0	5
All others	12	7	2	11	31
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>103</b>

Note: This table includes both news and editorial items. For a table that displays impact assertions only for editorial items in the 35-item samples, see Appendix C, Table C-2.

These data further highlight the tendency of the *Times* to catalog the positions of prominent politicians. The *Daily News* and *Newsday* each mentioned almost twice as many policy impacts as did the *Times* (37 and 36 versus 20). Only the *Post*, with its generally sparse coverage, paid less attention than the *Times* to substantive impacts of policy decisions.

Certainly it would be impossible for even the most thorough newspaper to catalog every possible effect of every budget scenario. Even if a paper did approach that standard, it's doubtful that anyone would read all of the stories. But given that the sample consists of 140 newspaper stories, the data in Table 3 indicate that the average story offered fewer than one mention of an impact per story (103 impacts/140 stories = 0.74 impacts). This represents a missed opportunity on the part of the newspapers. Coverage could become a catalyst for political awareness and action if more stories illustrate the actual difference it

makes to individuals and community life when a firehouse closes, a school loses ten teachers or property taxes go up.

Journalists may believe that the impacts of budget cuts or tax increases are obvious: Cutting the police department budget “obviously” diminishes the quality of police protection available to citizens. Slashing education spending “obviously” lowers the quality of education. Yet beyond these truisms lay crucial choices among budgeted activities which are not apparent in statements of policy positions. Should the city take more from fire and police services to preserve the education budget? Or vice versa? Even assuming that question is settled, deciding exactly which programs, services and staff members to cut can have major and *significantly differing* implications for distinct individuals and groups. Such cuts can fall with particular severity on those with less income and wealth to find substitutes in the private sector for government services that range from schooling to police protection to transportation. In addition, tax increases do not have identical implications for everyone—a result that is magnified depending on the specific tax. Different groups may bear a greater or lesser burden as a proportion of their income and wealth. Moreover, some of the policy antidotes do not involve budget cuts or tax increases but other moves such as increased efficiencies or union concessions.

*Faced with such complexity, only citizens who are armed with specific information about policy impacts and interests can participate fully in the democratic process.*

Faced with such complexity, only citizens who are armed with specific information about policy impacts and interests can participate fully in the democratic process. Although these newspapers cannot be held responsible for the political participation of every citizen, they can and must be expected to provide sufficient information so that those New Yorkers who do care enough to read a newspaper can understand what is at stake for them and for the city as whole in such policy debates.

### **Conspicuously Absent: The Concept of Class in the Budget Debate**

HOW SPECIFICALLY ARE THE INTERESTS OF different socioeconomic classes portrayed in coverage of the budget crisis? We would expect some differences among the papers in the news coverage and editorial views expressed because of their reputations with regard to the different social classes they target.

*Consequently the interests of those who are often most directly and severely affected by budget and service cuts receive less attention than those on whom the impacts of budget decisions are less onerous.*

*The New York Times* is generally thought to direct its coverage to the most affluent and educated residents of Manhattan, the suburbs and beyond (though the *Times* now relies on a large portion of its circulation from a national edition distributed outside the metropolitan area). *Newsday* serves Queens and the Long Island suburbs, many of whose largely middle class residents commute to work in the city. It also offers a New York City edition. The *New York Daily News* and the *New York Post* are generally believed to place more emphasis than the other two papers on serving readers among the more numerous but less affluent middle and working classes who live within the city limits or in nearby older suburbs.

The poor constitute a large part of the population of New York City: 20.2 percent live at incomes under the government's poverty level, and another 13 percent have incomes just above that line (Newfield 2003). Despite this, it doesn't appear that any one of the papers considers the poor part of its target audience. The poor, by definition, are of little interest to most businesses that can afford advertisements in daily newspapers—ads that seek the attention of people with significant disposable incomes. As we will see, the coverage generally neglects the interests of the poor in covering the budget debate. Although there are many possible explanations for this, this disregard could reflect, in part, the commercially driven decision to address the presumed tastes of the papers' non-poor readers. Consequently the interests of those who are often most directly and severely affected by budget and service cuts receive less attention than those on whom the impacts of budget decisions are less onerous.

One analysis for this study looked specifically at portrayals of interests in terms of social class. American newspapers rarely use class as an analytical category, except perhaps when referencing the ubiquitous "middle class." Explicit discussions of class conflict are virtually absent. Therefore, the analysis sought stories that included the words "rich," "wealthy," "poor," "poverty" or "low income" from among all items that mentioned Mayor Bloomberg and the budget crisis. This analysis was not limited to the samples of 35 items used to generate the data in Tables 1-3. (*Newsday* was excluded from this analysis because only one story qualified.) For these purposes, words connoting the extremes of income distribution were used as stand-ins for class, reflecting newspaper usage and common usage in American political discourse.

As Table 4 (below) shows, the newspapers did not often discuss the budget crisis in terms of its implications for the poor or rich. Despite their substantial working class readership, the *Daily News* and *Post* mentioned class-oriented words in fewer than five percent of items; the *Times* in fewer than seven percent. Clearly the interests of different economic classes in weighing alternatives for resolving the city’s budget crisis was not a major theme of coverage – far from it. It seems a fair generalization to say that readers who sought information about which income/market power/status groupings would benefit or suffer under various policy scenarios would have had a difficult time finding it in the city’s newspapers. Given what we know about local television news, with its emphasis on crime, accidents, weather and sports, it seems unlikely that it offered much of this information either, although that issue was not studied here (cf. Kaniss 1991; Campbell 1994).

**Table 4: Stories Mentioning Class Groups**

Newspaper	Total # items in sample	# Stories mentioning rich	# Stories mentioning poor	# Stories mentioning rich & poor	Total # stories mentioning class words
<i>Daily News</i>	354	3	13	2	14
<i>Post</i>	211	4	5	2	7
<i>Times</i>	467	15	23	8	30

The stories (including editorials and op-ed columns) that did mention the specific words selected were then analyzed to determine whether they mentioned any of three class-related implications of implementing various policy proposals: *distributive impacts*, *redistributive impacts* and *quality of life impacts*. The unit of analysis was the sentence. A story was coded as discussing *distributive impacts* if it included sentences showing the effects of a proposal on a particular income or wealth group; as covering *redistributive impacts* if it included sentences describing changes in the relative tax burden or other alterations in relative income or wealth among groups; as addressing *quality of life impacts* if it included sentences that discussed impacts of policies on the living conditions or chances for upward class mobility of the poor (i.e. those identified in the stories as poor, low-income, or poverty-stricken).

Analysis of the stories mentioning class terms yielded the results displayed in Table 5. Given the disparities in the number of stories appearing in the *Times* as opposed to the *Daily News* and *Post*, the most useful measure is the average number of sentences mentioning class terms per story included in this subgroup.

**Table 5: Stories Mentioning Income Distribution and Other Class Effects**

	Total # stories mentioning class words	Avg. # sentences distributive effects per article	Avg. # sentences redistributive effects per article	Avg. # sentences life quality effects per article	Avg. # sentences per article
<i>Daily News</i> # sentences	14	<b>.86</b> (12)	<b>2.2</b> (31)	<b>3.4</b> (47)	<b>6.4</b> (90)
<i>Post</i> # sentences	7	<b>.86</b> (6)	<b>1.0</b> (7)	<b>.43</b> (3)	<b>2.3</b> (16)
<i>Times</i> # sentences	30	<b>.57</b> (17)	<b>1.1</b> (33)	<b>.77</b> (23)	<b>2.4</b> (73)

The *Times* contained far more references to class than did the *Daily News* or *Post* as measured by absolute number of stories. But even for the most frequent category (on redistributive impacts) this meant an average of just over one sentence per story. Readers of the *Daily News* and *Times* received more information about impacts of the policies on income and wealth distribution or redistribution and on the lives of the poor than did readers of the *Post*. But it is important to note that we are talking about a total of only 90 sentences that appeared in the *News* over the course of an entire year and only 73 sentences in the *Times*. For a period during which policies with major impacts, especially on the lives of the poor, were almost continually being debated and decided in the councils of government, such figures represent a decidedly insignificant slice of the news. All four newspapers portrayed the budget debate within categories of analysis different from those that would measure the economic or quality of life impacts on New Yorkers, especially New Yorkers as grouped into social classes.

The most striking differences among the newspapers were in their coverage of impacts of the budget crisis on the quality of life among low income New Yorkers, with the *Daily News* paying twice as much attention to the matter as the *Times*, and the *Post* barely noting the issue. Coverage of this kind includes a *Daily News* story (December 17, 2002, p. 2) that described how hunger was worsening in the city as a result of budget cuts and bureaucratic efforts to make it more difficult for the poor to obtain food stamps. The *News* also ran opinion columns by Albor Ruiz that discussed hunger issues (e.g., November 19, 2002, p. 7, and June 6, 2002, p. 8). Other coverage in the *News* included stories on the effects of budget cuts on services to poor children—services such as daycare and library hours (significant because “latchkey” children often use libraries as safe havens after school).

Four major observations arise from a broader interpretive reading of this subgroup of stories:

- Although Table 5 indicates that the *Times* and *Daily News* offered about equal class-related coverage, a single *Daily News* story titled “Soak the Middle Class,” on a paper issued by the Working Families Party, a small, liberal political party, included 29 sentences on redistribution, accounting for most of the mentions in the paper. It provided a detailed but readable description of the impacts of various tax scenarios on different income groups. This is the kind of reporting that, if it were used as a model in covering the budget crisis, would have the potential to fully inform readers about the underlying stakes and class interests in this political conflict. But as the figures in the table suggest, this was not the norm.
- What in essence might be seen as class conflict is recast in ways that may diminish city residents’ consciousness of their identities within social class groupings, at the same time fostering more narrow identifications. Many stories, for example, focused on proposals to cut the police department budget or to lay off city workers or to raise taxes for commuters. The implication in these stories is that people who care most about police protection or city workers or commuters are the identifiable and relevant categories of people with stakes in the matter—*not* particular social classes.
- One class-related element that popped up occasionally in the narratives was the importance of pleasing “Wall Street” and “the financial community.” The media’s treatment suggests that, without question, New Yorkers must please Wall Street or all will suffer. There was no explicit suggestion of a differential class interest in the matter. Rather there was the implicit assumption that all New Yorkers share the same stakes in appeasing Wall Street. This is a complicated issue. At one level, the coverage obscured the vast differences between ordinary people and the wealthy individuals and entities most exposed to risk if the city’s bonds decline in value. But at another level, it is true that every New Yorker shares an interest in the city’s fiscal health. For example, if it costs more for the city to borrow money, services must be cut or taxes increased. So, although the papers did not often frame stories about the budget in class terms, differentiating class interests in matters involving the city’s financial rating and overall economic health is difficult, and sorting out such highly technical complexities of economics and finance may be beyond the practical means of daily newspapers.

*Given that tax increases become more painful for those lower in the class hierarchy, the differential class impacts of various tax proposals surely could have received more attention.*

- The same cannot be said of issues such as taxes and their redistributive effects. Given that tax increases become more painful for those lower in the class hierarchy, the differential class impacts of various tax proposals surely could have received more attention. The same holds true for the differing impacts of many program and service cuts. When school budgets are cut, for instance, the wealthiest New Yorkers suffer little because most send their children or grandchildren to private schools, leaving the education and future of those students unaffected. But the data reveal that framing of either tax hikes or program cuts in such class terms was infrequent.

When dealing overtly with class, the *Times* seemed to emphasize the concerns of the middle class as opposed to those of the poor. An opinion column headlined “Coping: Nuisance to the Rich, Worse to the Poor” (December 1, 2002) focused on middle class, *not* poor, car owners facing higher parking fines. In another item addressing the effects of school budget cuts, the *Times* asserted that schools serving middle class neighborhoods would suffer more than those in poor areas from budget cuts. In “The Mayor’s Budget Proposal: Education: Middle-Class Parents Say Schools Have Been Cut to the Bone” (February 15, 2002, p. C-2), the *Times* stated that the budget cuts were causing “particularly deep pain in middle-class schools, which do not have the cushion of city, state and federal antipoverty and remedial aid money to fall back on.” The story said that per-student spending at one “successful” middle class school was \$3700, just over half the \$7100 spent at “a high-poverty school performing far below standards.”

The *Times* also published one of the clearest expositions of the class interests at stake in the budget debate. A column by Clyde Haberman (November 22, 2002) referred to “looming class warfare” and clarified, in a way missing from almost all of the coverage of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s tax proposals, that “New York’s wealthier people will not only be spared pain, but will actually pay less to keep the city afloat. The biggest winners in this ... would be the superrich. ... [T]his privileged group would end up paying a lot less.” At the same time, the column criticized protests against cuts in budgets for schools, health, fire protection and elderly services as a “parade of self-interest.” The columnist implicitly called not for redistribution from the super-rich, but rather for an equitable sharing of the sacrifices in the face of the budget crunch. The *Times* published another column by Daniel Cantor (April 27, 2002) of the Working Families Party that

actually called for raising taxes on the wealthy as a means of redistributing income and forestalling some cuts in services.

For its part, the *Post* ran a story headlined “Soak the Rich” that, contrary to the analyses of the full tax picture in the *Times*, misleadingly claimed “the wealthiest New Yorkers” would be “hit the hardest” by focusing on income tax rates alone. This story did more to obscure than clarify the class interests at stake.

### **The Newspapers’ Institutional Stances on the Budget**

IN ORDER TO EXPLORE THE MAJOR THRUST of the newspapers’ editorial stands—that is, those representing its institutional preferences on the budget—another somewhat simplified content analysis was conducted on *all* unsigned editorials that appeared in the *Daily News*, *Post*, and *Times* during the same period. During the sample period, *Newsday* was not available in the Nexis database and therefore could not be included in this group. Op-ed opinion columns were not included here since they do not speak for the paper’s management as do unsigned editorials. The specific purpose of this analysis was to determine how the city’s papers responded in their editorial, institutional voices to the budget crisis and to compare these responses to the indicators in the general (news plus editorial and op-ed item) sample. Criteria for inclusion in this group of all editorials are the same as for the general sample (see Appendix A). The numbers of unsigned editorials analyzed were as follows:

*Daily News*: 18 (approximately 7,000 words)

*Post*: 35 (approximately 18,000 words)

*Times*: 15 (approximately 7,000 words)

Relative to the amount of attention in the news columns, the *Daily News*, and especially the *Post*, gave much more attention to the budget in their editorials than the more nationally and internationally minded *Times*. In fact, in the *Post*, about one in every six of the 212 items that mentioned the budget crisis was an unsigned editorial. This compares with a ratio of 1:26 for the *Times* and 1:20 for the *Daily News*.

*Some attention was given to the impacts of policy proposals, but most editorials were devoted to endorsing a policy without exploring its ramifications, especially as they relate to class.*

A less detailed protocol was applied to this sample than for the general one. Table 6 (on the following page) summarizes the results. It lists the number of editorials that endorsed or opposed budget cuts and tax increases, and then breaks down those endorsements according to whether or not the editorial also mentioned an impact of that action and, if so, whether or not the impact was class-related. To count as “class-related,” the editorial had to refer to effects on income distribution or redistribution or quality of life for different classes (the same as for the data displayed in Table 5).

Overall, as the farthest right hand column in Table 6 reveals, when the editorials took a clear stand on budget cuts, they slanted strongly in favor of them (by 42-5). The overall slant against tax increases was less marked (17-9) though still clear. The biggest difference among the papers concerned tax hikes. The *Daily News* had mixed opinions, supporting them five times, opposing them four times. The *Times* was the most comfortable with tax increases, voicing support for them four times and never opposing them. At the other extreme, the *Post* never met a tax it liked, voicing opposition all 13 times it mentioned proposals for increases. Table 6 also shows that in unsigned editorials, the papers paid more attention to policy impacts than they did in the news items that made up the bulk of the general sample. Therefore, it might be argued that the editorial discussions were more informative for citizens than the news was. That would hold true especially for the *Times*, which was far more concerned with discussing positions than impacts in its news coverage.

As for mentioning impacts specifically related to class, it was only the *Times* that showed much editorial interest. Indeed, although the other two papers are widely considered to be oriented primarily to those outside the upper reaches of the social class hierarchy, at least editorially, these papers had almost no interest in assessing the class implications of budget policy. Generally this exploration of every editorial that paid serious attention to the budget during the sample period yields findings that parallel the general sample: Some attention was given to the impacts of policy proposals, but most editorials were devoted to endorsing a policy without exploring its ramifications, especially as they relate to class.

**Table 6: Editorial Positions of the Big Three New York City Newspapers**

	Daily News				Post				Times				Grand Total
	No impact	Non-class impact	Class impact	Total	No impact	Non-class impact	Class impact	Total	No impact	Non class impact	Class impact	Total	
Endorse budget cut	8	3	0	11	13	9	1	23	4	2	2	8	42
Oppose budget cut	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	0	0	2	2	5
Endorse tax hike	4	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	4	9
Oppose tax hike	0	4	0	4	5	8	0	13	0	0	0	0	17
Mention budget cut w/o clear position	2	1	0	3	5	0	0	5	2	0	1	3	11
Mention tax hike w/o clear position	3	1	1	5	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>92</b>

**Notes:**

1. This table is based on *all unsigned editorials* (those presumed to represent the position of the newspaper's management) that fulfilled the criteria for inclusion in the study (see Appendix A) during the period January 1, 2002 through January 15, 2003.
2. A single editorial could be counted more than once; if, say, it endorsed some budget cuts and opposed others, or if it endorsed tax hikes and budget cuts, each instance would be counted and assessed for whether it mentioned impacts of such actions.

**Conclusion**

ALTHOUGH IT WAS DERIVED FROM A HIGHLY detailed analysis of media content, this study was limited to a single issue, though arguably the most important one for local government, and it was limited in the number of stories it could include. Comparisons among newspapers should be viewed as particularly tentative. Larger samples of stories over a wider range of issues would yield more confidence in generalizations about the different papers. But we can have a little more confidence in generalizations garnered from the overall tenor of the four papers taken as a whole—to which we now turn.

The first issue for the study was to determine who obtains a voice in the newspapers' coverage. Data suggest that the preponderance of attention went to members of the government, especially to the mayor and his administration. Other voices were heard, including those of ordinary citizens; but the range of non-governmental actors represented was narrower than one might expect.

The second issue was whether readers could readily grasp the implications of policy proposals on their own interests or values. Discussions of how policy options might affect different groups and values were surprisingly sparse. The nation's most prestigious newspaper, the *Times*, paid relatively little attention to policy impacts and focused more on the process and technical details of budget decision-making. The *Daily News* and *Newsday* offered more opportunities for readers to figure out the real meaning of the proposed budget cuts or other actions and the impacts on their lives. But even in those papers, far greater emphasis was placed on laying out the *positions* of actors on proposals rather than on the substantive *interests* at stake in policy choices. The *Post* seemed the least interested of all the papers in covering the budget crisis in its news pages, especially in terms of describing the policy options or policy impacts.

A third issue concerned how the newspapers portrayed varying interests in the budget crisis among different socioeconomic classes. Some stories in the three city-based papers (*Newsday* was excluded from this analysis) did make explicit that the budget policy decisions would have an impact on income and wealth distribution. But this discussion occupied only a small fraction

of the coverage. In no way did it serve as an ongoing forum through which audiences might have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the budget choices and disputes-and why they should become informed about them, care about them and demand a voice in their resolution. In this sense, and in others discussed earlier, the coverage was less effective than it might have been in drawing ordinary citizens into lively political discussion and participation in the democratic process in New York City. Newspapers' treatment of the budget crisis left the stakes and outcomes of decision-making largely to the usual, small cast of government officials, politicians and organized groups.



## NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

### Appendix A

This appendix describes the coding process for the detailed content analysis of the four newspapers. Stories were gathered by the following search in Nexis in the full text of stories in the *New York Times*, *Daily News* and *Post* appearing between Jan. 1, 2002 and Jan. 15, 2003: “Bloomberg” and “budget” within 10 words of “cut,” “trim,” “crisis” or “deficit.” The search for *Newsday* stories was limited to the use of stories available on the paper’s Worldwide Web site ([www.Newsday.com](http://www.Newsday.com)) for those dates. The search terms were “Bloomberg” and “budget.”

Each item retrieved was given a number and then a random sample of each paper’s stories was drawn with the goal of analyzing 35 stories from each paper.

Stories were selected for coding if they included at least three paragraphs focused primarily on the New York City budget deficits and associated problems of the current (2002) or upcoming (2003) fiscal year. Stories on state budget problems were included when they met this criterion; otherwise they were excluded. Also excluded were short summaries appearing in “News Summary” sections and letters to the editor.

Each item selected randomly was evaluated for whether it met criteria for inclusion. Stories were selected for coding if they included at least three paragraphs focused primarily on the New York City budget deficits and associated problems of 2002 or 2003 fiscal years. Stories on New York State budget problems were included only when they met this criterion; otherwise they were excluded. Stories on MTA and city schools budgets were included when explicitly linked to the overall city budget crisis and decisions by Bloomberg or the City Council. Also excluded were short summaries appearing in “News Summary” and letters to the editor. Captions and headlines were not coded. If a story was excluded on these grounds, the next number in the random number list was used to select the next story. The unit of analysis for coding was an assertion describing a current or proposed policy action and/or its associated policy impacts.

Coding was conducted by the author and Jane Mabe, a graduate of the Department of Communication at North Carolina State University and future graduate student in Communication. Each set of stories was coded twice by the author or Mabe; then checked with the other or with Dr. Jessica Jameson of the Department until uncertainties were resolved by consensus. An independent check for coding reliability was performed using half (n=18) the stories in the *New York Post*, and inter-coder agreement averaged about 85 percent using the original detailed coding protocol. Recoding the unusually precise categories for actors to the more general ones displayed in Table 1 of the main paper yielded reliability closer to 95%.

The end of this appendix provides a table listing all the code categories that had at least one observation, and the numbers of cases that fell into each category for the main categories of actions proposed, actors cited, and policy impacts.

### Coding Instructions:

Each line of the code sheet is for one action. Up to 10 policy actions proposed or currently being taken on the budget crisis are coded. Mere description of past actions already taken or actions proposed without a statement of a position (or a predicted decision) on that action should NOT be coded. A decision taken yesterday, described as current in the story datelined that day, does count as a decision “currently being taken” and should be coded. A sentence like “The city cut the budget 5% last year” should not be coded as an action proposal, for instance. Nor should a general sentence like “The city needs to do something to balance the budget” or “I support

Bloomberg's budget plan." But "The City Council voted today to slash the police department budget" does get coded. Only code specific public policy actions currently being taken or being proposed/considered for the future-toward which some actor takes a position, makes a prediction, or asserts an impact-are included. We do not code actions that the mayor or others are "considering" or "may propose"-code only actual proposed actions.

An actor is a person, agency or group that is mentioned as having a position or prediction on proposed policy actions regarding the budget crisis or on the impacts of actions. Actors can be "the city" or "Wall Street," as well as named specific groups and individuals. Also, a "spokesman" or "aide" to an actor, such as Pataki's press officer, should be coded as the voice of the principal actor him/herself.

The first 7 actors taking positions on each action will be coded in the columns Cited Actor 1-7. In the columns headed Actor1-7 position, the stance of the cited actor will be coded as support, mixed (including qualified or partial support) or oppose; in some cases, the actor's stance will not actually be pro or con but will instead PREDICT that a policy action will/may be taken, or will not/may not be taken. Code these also.

When an actor's position is paraphrased and then an illustrative quote is given in the same or next paragraph, this is all coded as one statement. Any time an impact or position is unattributed-such as "crime will increase"- the actor cited should be coded as 98 which records the voice of the journalist him or herself.

If the same actor is quoted more than once giving the same opinion on the same action, code it only once. However if the same exact actor (not actor category, but actual specific actor) takes more than one position (say, makes a prediction and says he's against a proposal), code the second position/prediction also, but only if there's room, i.e. if 7 different actors don't appear. The first priority is coding different actors; only if there are blank columns for actors should a second position from the same actor be coded. If a different actor in the same category takes a stand, that one is always coded. The analogous rule applies to the coding of impacts.

If two actors from different categories are mentioned in the same sentence, code all. A sentence like "Mayor Bloomberg and city council leaders agree that the commuter tax is a good idea" would be coded under both Cited Actor 1 and Cited Actor 2. If two different actors from the same category (say, 2 different city officials, code #9 under Actors) are quoted, code both, up to limits above (that is, in any case, do not code more than the first 7 actors quoted/cited on any given policy action). However, unnamed actors (such as "financial experts") should be coded only once when giving the same opinion more than once.

Speculation on future policy modifications/reconsiderations/adjustments, like "the property tax increase should be temporary" or "some cuts in school spending should be restored" should not be coded. Trying to code these would require entire new coding categories and would introduce confusion as they are simultaneously favoring and disfavoring the original proposal, and this often involves strategic maneuvering rather than genuine proposals.

This is to be distinguished from characterizations of one actor's specific pro/con position on an action that is given by another actor. No "hearsay" of this sort should be coded. For instance, if a sentence says "Mayor Bloomberg says that Gov. Pataki supports an income tax increase," don't code it as an assertion of support by Pataki. Code only direct attributions of positions to actors by the paper, or quotations of the actors. We are interested in which actors have voice in this controversy, not in how other actors may strategically make public claims about others' positions.

Predictions consist of statements that foretell the ultimate disposition of a proposal-that tell us whether that actor believes the proposed action will ultimately be taken. Predictions must concern the final outcome, not intermediate steps. "Mayor Bloomberg will support a tax increase" is not a final outcome since any such increase will have to be approved by the city council and perhaps by the state government as well.

The first 7 IMPACTS will be coded for each action in the columns Impact 1-7. These are predicted, suggested or feared effects of the policy action coded on that line. For instance, a policy action might be "Increase property tax." For each impact, also code the actor who is quoted or cited as predicting the impact. These go in columns Impact 1-7 Actor. A claimed impact of the property tax might be "businesses will relocate to the suburbs," and the actor making that prediction might be "financial experts." Don't code as an impact a claim that merely restates the proposed action, such as "Taxes will increase" or "the city will gain more revenue" or "programs will be cut" unless there are SPECIFIC effects on individual citizens or groups of citizens stated, such as "The average homeowner will pay \$250 more in property tax." Impacts on the budget situation itself ("This will generate \$100 million in added revenue.") DO NOT COUNT AS IMPACTS. The interest in this study is how impacts on citizens are depicted.

If 2 actors are named in one sentence, code each actor separately.

Newspaper Codes:

1=*NY Times*

2=*Daily News*

3=*NY Post*

4=*Newsday*

News=1

Editorial=2

Position/Prediction Codes:

1=Support

2=Mixed, qualified or partial support

3=Oppose

7=Prediction that the action will not or may not occur (no support or opposition voiced)

8=Prediction that the action will or may occur (no support or opposition voiced)

**Table A-1: Categories and Totals for Each Newspaper**

Code	Actors	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>News-day</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1	Neighborhood, community or consumer groups; demonstrators/protesters	13	5	2	4	24
2	Albany/state government; state government officials (non-elected); "the state" as in state government	1	1		5	7
3	Governor Pataki	2		1	6	9
7	City council members; borough board members and presidents	26	17	8	23	74
8	Mayor Bloomberg, the "administration" or "Bloomberg administration" or "city government"	68	83	49	63	263
9	City officials and top level executive branch members	14	7	10	21	52
10	City workers and city worker union members (not policymakers) generally		1		1	2
11	NYC police and fire department workers and union members/officials	3	6		2	11
12	NYC schools and health care workers and unions members/officials	1	13	3	8	25
13	Taxpayer and business (non real estate) organized groups (NYC)		1		1	2
15	Experts/analysts unaffiliated with groups, including former officials not identified by party (e.g., Harrison Goldin)	4	4	1	3	12
16	Ideological and watchdog groups/think tanks and their spokespersons/experts	6	13	2	10	31
17	State or federal party or legislative leaders (Democrats)	2	1	6	1	10
18	State or federal party or legislative leaders (Republican)	1		3		4
20	Commuters, suburban residents generally, or suburban government officials		1	1	1	3
21	NYC residents, New York(City)ers generally		6	1		7
22	Unspecified public opinion, as in labeling a proposal "controversial" or "widely popular"		4		3	7
23	Store owners/family business/local business		1			1
24	Real estate landlords and organizations			2		2
25	Financial experts, analysts, "Wall Street," "the financial community" (non governmental)				2	2
27	Named, quoted or paraphrased individual citizen of NYC	4	16		2	22
28	Named, quoted, or paraphrased individual city worker of NYC	1	1		1	3
29	Other union leaders	3		1		4

30	Heads of quasi-public agencies such as museums or economic development agencies	6				6
31	Named, quoted or paraphrased celebrity (not unknown person in street), such as rap stars or Cynthia Nixon		1		1	2
98	Voice of journalist/editorialist	8	10	13	7	38
	TOTALS	163	192	103	165	623
	<b>ACTION</b>	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>News-day</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1	Budget cuts (with amounts, percents or programs specified)	14	7	12	8	41
2	Increase property tax (including on absentee landlords)	3	6	3	6	18
3	Increase productivity/efficiency of city government (w/o mention of union concessions)	3	4		4	11
4	Cut fringe benefits and wages (or planned hikes thereof) of city workers; get union concessions	5	3	4	6	18
5	Impose commuter tax	4	6	2	6	18
6	Increase transit tolls and fares, such as subway fare and bridge tolls	5	8			13
7	Cut fire and police services and line personnel	5	7	2	3	17
8	Cut health care, welfare and related services, such as youth programs, hunger programs and Medicaid and line personnel	2	2	1	3	8
9	Cut school/educational services and line personnel	4	9	6	7	26
10	Lay off city workers (staff, not line personnel, such as secretaries, janitors); freeze hiring	2	5	8	7	22
11	Deferred maintenance; cut capital spending projects	1	2	1	5	9
12	Increase aid from state	5	6	5	7	23
13	Increase aid from federal government	3	8	5	5	21
14	Tax increases generally, if \$ amounts or specific programs mentioned	1	4		2	7
15	Lower city residents' income or property taxes	1		4		5
16	Increase city income tax or add surcharge	4	2	2	4	12
17	Increase state income tax		1			1
18	Borrow money	1	3		4	8
19	Shared sacrifice, everyone must do his part		4	1	6	11
20	Public/private partnerships	3				3
21	Eliminate recycling program	1	2		3	6
22	Increase spending on schools		3	2	4	9
23	Cut sanitation service	3			1	4
24	Cut service to elderly	3	1		3	7
25	Raise cigarette tax	1	4		6	11
26	Cut state aid to city programs				1	1
27	Permission from state or fed government to raise taxes or change policy	2	4	3	4	13

28	Sell city assets	1			1	2
29	Increase fees and fines; sin taxes (on alcohol)	3	3	1	3	10
30	Increase day care	1				1
31	Early retirement for city workers		2	2	2	6
32	Cut library and other cultural programs such as museums	4	2			6
33	Cut parks/recreation budget	1	1		1	3
34	Increase some capital spending			2	2	4
35	Increase some city worker salaries	1		3	3	7
36	Increase spending on health, welfare, hunger programs	1	2			3
98	Other	1	2		1	4
	TOTALS	89	113	69	118	389
	<b>IMPACTS</b>	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>News-day</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1	City will become less attractive and livable for people; lower quality of life in NYC; city residents will move to suburbs	2	2	1	2	7
2	Negative impacts on businesses and the economy; businesses will leave NYC	4	3	1	2	10
3	Higher income businesses or individuals bearing larger share of taxes		1		3	4
5	NYC mass transit users will be harmed		1			1
7	Poor people will become less healthy, more hungry, less educated, less housed, have fewer opportunities for upward mobility	3	7		2	12
9	Crime will go up, unsafe streets	2		1		3
10	Schools will deteriorate	2	10	5		17
11	Rents will go up	4		1		5
12	Taxes will go up-specific \$ or % given for individual or average taxpayer	1		1	2	4
13	NYC credit rating or financial standing will deteriorate				1	1
15	Fire protection services will deteriorate		4		1	5
17	Prices in NYC will rise generally	1			1	2
19	Laid off city workers will have trouble finding new jobs; unemployment will worsen		1		1	2
20	Reduced incentive to move from NYC to suburbs				1	1
21	Fairness of tax system enhanced		1		1	2
22	New jobs created in government sector				1	1
23	Suburbanites will face worse or more expensive services like transit	1				1
24	Users of cultural and recreational services will suffer	6			1	7
25	Loss of federal or state matching funds will harm programs	1				1

26	Health and environmental hazards will increase	3	2			5
27	Cutting a program will actually increase costs to government eventually by harming individuals in short run	1	2			3
28	Budgets and services from private/public joint ventures like Lincoln Center and MOMA will be hurt or will have to raise more private \$	3	1			4
29	Businesses will get tax breaks or other savings	3				3
30	Traffic congestion will persist or worsen		1		1	2
	TOTALS	37	36	10	20	103

**APPENDIX B**  
**Exploring Representation of Policy Positions**

The content analysis of the general sample recorded every mention of a policy option for dealing with the New York City budget crisis that was accompanied by a statement of opposition or support.<sup>8</sup> The journalistic requirement for “objectivity” or “balance” focuses particularly on this dimension. In the main text, the data on positions (Table 3) combine news and editorial items, and the table leaves out policy ideas that did not fit clearly on the *pro-spending/raise taxes vs. cut spending/maintain or cut tax rates* sides of the ledger. This appendix provides more detail.

The reason for sampling and combining the news and editorial categories together is that this study attempts to capture the overall contributions of the newspapers to public discourse on the budget crisis. There are two major bases for concern about combining news and editorial data. One is that editorial items are produced under different “rules of the game” that allow writers to openly express their opinions without having to offer a balanced view. However, it is *not* the case that news items can or do consistently offer balance either. For example, as Table 3 in the main text shows, there were 27 assertions on increasing state aid to the city, and every one of those favored it. In New York City newspapers that mainly quote and cite the positions of city officials and citizens, that should hardly be surprising. It would distort the reality of city political discourse to insist that the papers include 27 sources opposing more state aid to the city.<sup>9</sup> The second reason for concern is that editorials might markedly sway the totals. Since this study is more concerned with the overall portrayal of the budget crisis in the city’s papers than in making distinctions among the different papers, this should be a minor issue. In any case, relatively few assertions come from editorial items, and Table B-2 suggests that combining the data, as in main text Table 3, yields the most complete overall picture of the papers’ discourse on the budget. Appendix Table B-2 reveals a heavy ratio of pro over anti statements on the *raise taxes/keep spending* side in the sample’s editorial items (3:1). This was also true in the combined data in text Table 3 (there by an even greater 5:1 ratio). There is, however, a notable difference in the *cut spending/don’t raise taxes* side. None of the editorial items in the sample contained assertions opposing these ideas, whereas in the combined sample there was plenty of opposition to cutting spending. However, editorial content accounts for just 15 assertions in the total of 166 displayed in the bottom half of Table 3. Eleven of the 15 come from the *New York Post*. The absence of editorial opposition to budget cuts is largely a result of the *Post*’s predominance in this category; in turn, this is due to the fact that the bulk of the *Post* budget coverage actually came in the form of editorial material rather than in news.

**Appendix Table B-1: Complete Enumeration of All Mentioned Policy Proposals**

Actions	Times	Daily News	Post	News-day
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<sup>8</sup> In addition, predictions that a policy would or might be implemented, or would not or might not be implemented, were also coded. As noted in Appendix A, vague proposals on the order of “Taxes must be increased,” or “budgets will have to be slashed,” or both are not coded. Only specific proposals for action were coded-e.g., cutting the education or police budget a specific percentage, freezing city hiring, or raising the property tax rate.

<sup>9</sup> For more discussion of the problematic nature of balance in news coverage, see Bennett 2002 and Entman 1989, 2004; the empirical relationships between editorial position and news slant (and thus the problematic distinction between content labeled as “news” vs. “editorial”) is demonstrated in Kahn and Kenny 2002.

	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.
1 Budget cuts with specifics	8	0	14	6	13	1	4	8
2 Increase property tax	3	1	3	4	3	1	8	5
3 Increase productivity	4	0	3	0	0	0	4	0
4 Cut fringes; get union concessions	4	2	7	3	4	0	3	0
5 Impose commuter tax	7	1	5	1	4	3	6	2
6 Increase transit tolls and fares	1	0	4	4	0	0	9	3
7 Cut fire and police	3	1	5	5	2	1	8	13
8 Cut health welfare and related	2	0	2	2	1	0	2	2
9 Cut school/educational	3	9	3	8	6	3	8	11
10 Lay off workers/freeze hire	7	0	3	0	6	4	4	2
11 Deferred maintenance	3	1	1	0	1	1	2	0
12 Increase aid from state	9	0	4	0	7	0	7	0
13 Increase fed aid	5	0	2	0	8	1	10	0
14 Tax increases generally	3	1	1	0	0	0	4	0
Actions	Times		Daily News		Post		News-day	
	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.
15 Lower city income tax	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
16 Increase city income tax'	2	0	2	1	2	0	2	0
17 Increase state income tax	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
18 Borrow money	1	6	1	0	1	0	4	0
19 Shared sacrifice	6	0	0	0	1	0	4	0
20 Public/private partnerships	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
21 Eliminate recycling	3	5	1	0	0	0	2	0

22 Increase school spending	5	0	0	0	4	1	4	1
23 Cut sanitation service	0	1	3	3	0	0	0	0
24 Cut service to elderly	2	4	6	5	0	0	1	4
25 Raise cigarette tax	6	0	2	0	0	0	5	2
26 Cut state aid	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
27 State or fed permission to raise \$	4	0	2	0	3	0	4	1
28 Sell city assets	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
29 Increase fees and fines sin tax	3	0	5	0	1	1	2	2
Actions	Times		Daily News		Post		News-day	
	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.	For	Vs.
30 Increase day care	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
31 Early retirement for city workers	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
32 Cut library and cultural pgms	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	1
33 Cut parks/rec budget	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
34 Increase capital spending	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
35 Increase city worker salaries	2	1	1	0	4	1	0	0
36 Increase \$ for health, welfare, etc	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
98 Other	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0

Table B-2 Editorial and Op-Ed Assertions Only

<b>Increase taxes/ maintain spending</b>	NYT For	NYT Vs.	DN For	DN Vs.	Post For	Post Vs.	Newsday For	Newsday Vs.	Total Pro	Total Anti
2 Increase property tax		1					2	1	2	2
5 Impose commuter tax	1				2	3	3	1	6	4
12 Increase aid from state							5		5	
13 Increase fed aid							5		5	
16 Increase city income tax		1			1				1	1
17 Increase state income tax										
22 Increase school spending					3	1			3	1
30 Increase day care										
35 Increase city salaries	1				4	1			5	1
36 Increase \$ for health welfare			1						1	
Total increase tax/maintain spending	2	2	1		10	5	15	2	28	9
<b>Maintain or cut taxes and reduce government spending</b>	NYT+	NYT vs.	DN+	DN vs.	Post+	Post vs.	Newsday+	News vs.	Total Pro	Total Anti
4 Cut fringes unions get	1				1		1		3	
8 Cut health/welfare/related	1		1		2				4	
9 Cut school/educational					1				1	
10 Lay off workers; freeze hire'					3				3	
15 Lower city income tax					4				4	
21 Eliminate recycling										
24 Cut service to elderly										
26 Cut state aid										
32 Cut library and cultural										
33 Cut parks/rec budget										
Total keep tax/reduce spending	2		1		11		1		15	0

Note: The numbers in the table register assertions in favor or opposed to the listed proposals that were contained in the editorial items. They do not necessarily represent the position of the editorial writer who might have been quoting the assertion without favoring it.

## APPENDIX C

### Data Displayed to Distinguish News Stories from Editorial Commentary

Table C-1 (corresponds to text Table 1)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are from *news* items. Numbers without parentheses include both news and editorial items and are identical to those shown in Table 1 in the text.

Category	Sources	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>Newsday</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1	Citizens of NYC (News items only)	17 (16)	32 (30)	3 (3)	10 (10)	62 (59)
2	State/fed officials (News items only)	6 (6)	2 (2)	10 (7)	12 (11)	30 (26)
3	NYC officials (News items only)	114 (110)	107 (76)	67 (52)	107 (104)	395 (342)
4	City workers/unions (News items only)	8 (8)	21 (18)	4 (2)	12 (12)	45 (40)
5	Suburbanites/officials (News items only)	0 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (1)	3 (1)
6	Business (News items only)	0 (0)	1 (1)	2 (2)	2 (2)	5 (5)
7	Experts (News items only)	4 (2)	4 (4)	1 (1)	3 (3)	12 (10)
8	Int. group spokesperson (News items only)	6 (5)	14 (12)	2 (2)	11 (7)	33 (26)
9	Journalists (News items only)	8 (4)	10 (1)	13 (1)	7 (6)	38 (12)
	Total (News items only)	163 (151)	191 (144)	103 (70)	165 (156)	623 (521)

Table C-2 Editorial Item Mentions of Policy Impacts (corresponds to text Table 3)

Impact	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>News-day</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
Education will deteriorate					
Economy of NYC will be harmed			1		1
Poor will suffer	1	1			2
City will be less livable			1	1	2
Cultural/recreational services will deteriorate					
Fire protection will suffer		1			1
Health and environmental hazards will increase					
Rents will increase					
All others		2		4	6
Totals	1	4	2	5	12

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