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Public Opinion on the Third Term City Charter Amendment

October, 2001



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- This survey of registered voters in New Orleans was conducted three weeks before the election and prior to intense campaigning. It should be considered a baseline survey. That is, this is the state of opinion that the Mayor faces in trying to change the Charter.
- As the referendum on the third term charter change amendment approaches, opposition remains strong. Over half of registered voters say they will vote against the amendment, and a third say they will support it.

TABLE 1
Support for Third Term Charter Change

	All %		Black %		White %	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
For 3 rd Term	35	31	46	44	16	10
Against 3 rd Term	60	57	49	41	81	83
Don't Know	5	12	5	15	3	7
(n)	(425)	(555)	(265)	(343)	(145)	(203)

2001 Question: “As things stand today, do you think you will vote for or against the change in the city charter that allows Marc Morial to run for a third term for mayor?”

2000 Question: “As you may know, the mayor of New Orleans is currently limited to two terms in office. As things stand today, would you favor or oppose changing the city charter so that the mayor would be limited to three terms.”

- Over the past year, **opposition to the charter change has decreased among black voters.** The number of undecideds among black has tripled, indicating that some black voters are re-thinking their initial opposition. As we will see later in this release, many black voters are **ambivalent** about the Charter change, having reasons to vote for it and reasons to vote against it.
- Thus, while the overall distribution is quite negative, the trend we observe among black voters is in the Mayor’s favor.
- On the other hand, white voters have become even less favorable than they were a year ago, with only 10 percent saying they will support the amendment.

TABLE 2
Support for Term Limits in General

	All %		Black %		White %	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
Favor Term Limits	70	66	63	57	83	81
Oppose Term Limits	22	22	28	27	13	13
Don't Know	8	12	9	16	4	6
(n)	(425)	(555)	(265)	(343)	(145)	(203)

Do you favor or oppose putting limits on the number of terms an elected official can serve in office?

- The increasing ambivalence among blacks over this issue can be seen in their attitudes about the general principle of term limits. More blacks are unsure about their view of term limits in general than a year ago. However, a majority of black voters still favor the idea of term limits.
- There is racial polarization on the general principle of term limits, which probably simply reflects the racial polarization on this particular third term amendment.
- Opinion on the third term amendment, attitudes toward term limits, and approval of the Mayor are all inextricably tied. These three attitudes influence each other, and it is difficult to say which causes which. For example, the decreasing opposition to the charter change among blacks is accompanied by increased intensity of approval of the Mayor.
- In contrast, white voters' disapproval of the Mayor has intensified along with their decreasing support for the third term amendment.

TABLE 3
Mayoral Approval

	All %			Black %			White %		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
Strongly Approve	35	27	32	48	36	44	12	11	13
Approve	40	37	31	35	34	28	46	41	36
Disapprove	9	14	14	6	12	12	16	19	16
Strongly Disapprove	9	16	17	5	13	11	17	21	28
Don't Know	7	6	6	6	4	5	10	8	7
(n)	(479)	(425)	(565)	(291)	(265)	(350)	(170)	(145)	(206)

In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job Mayor Marc Morial is doing? Is that strongly or not very strongly?

Special Focus on Black Voter Opinion on Third Term Charter Change

- We are focusing on black voters because whites are overwhelmingly opposed to the third term charter change. The most striking demographic division among blacks is based on education. A majority of those with high school education or less favor the amendment, while only 29% of blacks with a college degree support the amendment.
- Furthermore, support for the 3rd term amendment has dropped 15 percentage points in the last year among college educated blacks.
- This, of course, makes it crucial for the Mayor to turn out less educated black registered voters, who typically vote at lower rates than those with higher education.

TABLE 4
Third Term by Education
(Blacks Only)

	Less Than High School %		High School %		Some College %		College Degree %	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
For 3 rd Term	44	49	53	59	45	41	44	29
Against 3 rd Term	46	28	41	32	54	45	52	52
Don't Know	10	23	6	9	1	14	4	19
(n)	(39)	(39)	(68)	(94)	(84)	(111)	(75)	(94)

- Last year there was a significant gender gap in support for the third term amendment. Black women were much more in favor of the amendment than black men. That gap has decreased from 19 percentage points to only 6 percentage points, produced by women becoming less favorable and men becoming more favorable. Again, we can see the ambivalence among black voters. More men and women have moved into the undecided category.

TABLE 5
Third Term by Gender
(Blacks Only)

	Female %		Male %	
	2000	2001	2000	2001
For 3 rd Term	55	46	34	40
Against 3 rd Term	41	38	60	46
Don't Know	4	16	6	14
(n)	(160)	(203)	(105)	(140)

- The high level of intense approval of the Mayor among black voters (44%) is the counterbalance to the high level of support for general term limits (57%). Both of these attitudes are related in predictable ways to vote on the 3rd term, and both are contributing to the ambivalence among blacks.
- Black voters strongly approving of the mayor are distinctly supportive of the amendment. However, it is interesting that among those who just plain “approve”, opinion is evenly divided and the undecided category is unusually large. These respondents are obviously cross-pressured between their approval of the Mayor and some reservations about the amendment.

TABLE 6
Third Term by Mayoral Approval
 (Blacks Only)

	Strongly Approve %	Approve %	Disapprove %	Strongly Disapprove %	Don't Know %
For 3 rd Term	69	39	14	5	--
Against 3 rd Term	20	38	79	89	56
Don't Know	11	23	7	6	44
(n)	(153)	(94)	(43)	(37)	(16)

- The Mayor also benefits from the fact that 73% of black voters do not have another candidate in mind that they would like to support in the election for mayor. Thus, there is a vacuum that he can potentially take advantage of. A majority of these voters are already inclined to support the 3rd term amendment.

TABLE 7
Third Term by Alternate Candidate Support
 (Blacks Only)

	Supporting Another Candidate %	Not Supporting Another Candidate %
For 3 rd Term	21	52
Against 3 rd Term	68	31
Don't Know	11	17
(n)	(93)	(250)

Summary

In sum, these results should be regarded as a baseline. The Mayor faces an uphill struggle to pass the charter change amendment. Complicating matters is the split in the black electorate, particularly the opposition among college educated blacks, who are most likely to vote. Even more confusing is the fact that various black demographic groups are going in different directions. Furthermore, approval of the Mayor, which is quite high among black voters, does not automatically translate into support for the amendment. It is only those who approve intensely who are solidly in support of the charter change.

On the positive side, opposition to the amendment among black voters has decreased over the past year as more of them see both sides of the issue. There is growing ambivalence, as illustrated by the larger percent undecided. Can the Mayor capitalize on this ambivalence and allay the concerns of the undecideds? He will have to change minds as well as turn out supporters in order to pass this amendment.

Sample Information

N = 555 Registered Voters

Dates of Interviewing: September 23 – 30, 2001

Racial Distribution:

White 37%

Black 63%

Gender Distribution:

Female 58%

Male 42%

Sampling error: +/- 4.2%