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<div align="center">
Memo: Analyzing data used in The Marshall Project's
"Her Baby Died After Hurricane Katrina. Was It a Crime?"
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What are the main findings of the story?

The Marshall Project showed in this article that Louisiana's broad application of second-degree murder charges is a prime contributor to its high rates of sentences of life without parole, and the resulting racial inequities in the Louisiana prison population.

A chart with the data notebook starkly shows how second-degree murder convictions are by far the No. 1 contributor to life without parole sentences. 2,242 people are listed as serving life without parole for second-degree murder convictions, compared to 935 for the second-most prevalent offense in this category, aggravated rape. And as the story states, more than 70 percent of people serving life without parole are Black.

What did the reporter(s) do to bring the story to life, beyond the data findings? Did they use the data as a tool to find and tell a compelling story? Was their approach effective? Why?

These statistical realities are exemplified in the case of Tiffany Woods and Emmanuel Scott. Readers are generally aware of Louisiana and the federal government's flawed and racially biased response to Hurricane Katrina, but this is an alarming new angle on that story. In the couple's case, a second-degree charge resulted from their child's death and accusations of neglect as they were displaced from a hurricane. It appears very unlikely other states would charge this case in a similar way and this is not the only such egregious case, as the article corroborates with third-party data and expert opinions.

It's unclear if the reporting on the Woods and Scott case arose from data analysis, but their story combined with the reporting showing Louisiana to be a rather extreme outlier in its life without parole guidelines makes the story quite effective in providing evidence of a societal problem and bringing that to light with this case study.

How did the reporter(s) communicate their specific data findings in the story? How could it have been improved?

The reporters incorporated data findings into the narrative of the story. They wrote each finding in a straightforward way, weaving numbers between the story of Tiffany Woods' and Emmanil Scott's second degree murder convictions. They focused on data findings that mirrored the story of Woods and Scott — for instance, pulling out rates of Black inmates sentenced to life without

parole, women sentenced to life without parole and people sentenced to life for second-degree murder convictions. They supplemented numbers with explanations from expert sources, like Preston Robinson from the prison reform nonprofit Second Look Alliance, who contextualized Louisiana data by explaining that prison sentencing in the state is "extreme."

Many of the data findings were supplemented by additional numbers derived by third party analysis from The Sentencing Project. These contextual statistics helped explain how high levels of second-degree-murder life sentences, especially for Black inmates, fit into the larger landscape of Louisiana's criminal justice system. But unlike the reporters' original analysis, the process behind deriving the third-party statistics was not explained, which dulled the transparency of the story overall. By providing their own analyses of Louisiana-wide numbers and weaving those in to compare and contrast with inmates like Woods and Scott, the reporters could have improved the cohesiveness of this piece.

How did the reporter(s) communicate any flaws or shortcomings in the data or analysis method that could affect their findings? Did they make it easy for readers to see their work?
The reporters did not disclose any flaws or shortcomings in the data itself or in their analysis methods. Evidently, there were no gaps in the data that could have led to such issues.

The process of data analysis itself was shared quite transparently. The Marshall Project linked an Observable notebook explaining how the reporters got the data and the way they analyzed it to reach various findings — for instance, they explained how they divided charges by sex-related and murder-related charge categories. The data is also presented in both JSON and CSV format for user downloads, which is a helpful feature and further adds to transparency by letting others curious about the piece perform their own analysis.

Where did the data set(s) come from? Did they have to build the data set themselves? Did they have to do extensive work to clean and prepare the data before analysis?

The data sets come from information the reporters gathered from the Louisiana Department of Corrections. The team sent out a records request, and gathered from the data the number of people serving life without parole in Louisiana by the latest available date at the time of gathering, September 2021.

The general data sets were given to the Marshall Project team, but for certain calculations like specific convictions of murder and sex-related charges they had to use the data given and manually find the answers to these questions. Some charges, for instance, were similar, which led the reporters to group charges for inmates based on similar counts. It seems the team did not have to conduct any unreasonably extensive work to analyze the data, but they went the extra

mile in the Observable notebook to present charts such as age demographics of people serving life without parole. They also broke down headers of columns and certain acronyms of the data set so the reader can further comprehend the research the Marshall Project team did.