Summary of Findings: 2006 Survey of Opinions regarding Hurricane Katrina

Survey conducted by members of the Seminar in Methods of Social Research (SOCI 7320)
Department of Sociology, University of Memphis
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Statement of Inquiry

Social scientists argue that hurricanes are acts of nature but that the impact and consequences of such natural events are highly social and political. Much of the public debate surrounding Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath centered on the persistence of intersecting race and class inequalities in the United States and the growing divide between the quality of life of people living within inner cities and those living in suburban locations. This survey study aims to explore some of the dimensions of the public debates. Specifically, we aim to identify Mid-South college students’ explanations about causes of Hurricane Katrina, opinions of the mass media’s coverage of the disaster, the federal government’s response to the disaster, and the importance of race and economic status to the quality of governmental action surrounding the disaster. This survey also aims to identify what assistance college students gave in terms of monetary aid and voluntary assistance.

Methodology

Our target population was students taking undergraduate Sociology classes during the Spring 2006 semester at the University of Memphis. We randomly selected 16 classes to survey and received 410 completed questionnaires. Using enrollment figures for the 16 classes, we calculated a response rate of 61%. The responses were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and a summary of the findings are presented below.

Findings

Description of the Sample of Respondents

The respondents’ ages ranged from 19 to 58 and the average age of respondent was 24.3 years. Half of the respondents identified as Black/African (50.4%), 37.4% identified as White/European, 4.6% as Asian, 4.1% as having a mixed racial heritage, 2% as Hispanic/Latina/o, and 1.5% as some other racial identity. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were women and 25% were men. Forty-one percent of the respondents reported household incomes under $39,999, 66.5% reported household incomes between $40,000 and $79,999, and 22.6% reported household incomes over $80,000. In regards to political ideology, 30.9% of the respondents identified as liberal, 47.4% as moderate, and 21.6% as conservative.

Among the 410 respondents, 47 were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and 32.9% (135 respondents) had family members or friends directly affected by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Just under half of the respondents (49.9%) made a monetary donation to help those affected by the disaster and 16.8% did unpaid volunteer work to help hurricane evacuees/victims. Of the respondents who volunteered their time, 73.4% worked through a non-religious based organization to do so. Thirty-three percent of the survey respondents had extensive contact with evacuees.

Respondent’s Explanations of the Cause of Hurricane Katrina

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree to three statements regarding potential explanations for the occurrence of Hurricane Katrina. Results are presented in the table below.

| A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was | A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was | A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was |
| ordinary weather patterns. | divine intervention. | global warming. |
| Strongly Agree | 20 (5%) | 27 (7%) | 39 (10.2%) |
| Agree | 179 (44.8%) | 130 (33.7%) | 172 (44.9%) |
| Disagree | 157 (39.3%) | 139 (36%) | 140 (36.6%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 44 (11%) | 90 (23.3%) | 32 (8.4%) |
| TOTALS | 400 (100%) | 386 (100%) | 383 (100%) |
Opinions of Governmental Response to Katrina Evacuation

As shown below, a large majority of respondents rated the federal government’s response to Katrina as “poor” (56.3%) or “only fair” (27.3%). Only 1.7% of the students surveyed said the government’s response was “excellent.” In answering the question regarding their level of confidence in the federal government in the event of a future disaster, almost 70% of the respondents said that they were “not confident” or “not at all confident” in the government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the federal government’s response to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?</th>
<th>In the event of a future disaster, how confident are you in the efficiency of the federal government’s response?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Very Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>Not Confident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Not at all Confident</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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Respondents were also asked if they thought the federal government’s response to the hurricane would have been faster if the majority of the victims had been “White” or if the many of the victims had not been poor. As shown below, the vast majority of respondents agreed that the response would have been faster under these conditions. In a multivariate regression analysis of these data, we found that respondents who identified as liberal were more likely than those identifying as conservative to think that the government’s response would have been faster if most of the victims were “White” and “not poor.” We also found that African American students and those of mixed racial descent were more likely than White American students to say that the government’s response would have been faster if most of the victims had been “White” and “not poor.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would the federal government’s response to Hurricane Katrina been faster had most of the victims been White?</th>
<th>Would the federal government’s response to Hurricane Katrina been faster had most of the victims had NOT been poor?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>TOTALS</td>
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Opinions on Media Coverage of Katrina Hurricane

Respondents were also asked to rate the job of the mass media in covering the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans. As shown below, 64.3% of the respondents said that the mass media’s coverage was “excellent” or “good” and 35.7% of the respondents said the coverage was “only fair” or “poor”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the job of the mass media in covering the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all individuals who participated in this study and all professors who allowed us to administer the survey in their classrooms. For more information on the survey please contact: Dr. Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak (cpelak@memphis.edu).
HURRICANE KATRINA SURVEY – SPRING 2006

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Mark one response for each question unless otherwise noted.

1. Were you displaced by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?  ___Yes  ___No

2. Do you have any family members or friends who were directly affected by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?  ___Yes  ___No

3. Have you had extensive contact with any evacuees?  ___Yes  ___No

4. Have you made a monetary donation to help those affected by Hurricane Katrina?  ___Yes  ___No

5. Have you done any unpaid volunteer work to help Hurricane evacuees/victims?  ___Yes  ___No (If no, skip question 6)

6. Did you do any of this volunteer work with a religious organization?  ___Yes  ___No

7. How do you think the federal government responded to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?  ___Excellent  ___Good  ___Only fair  ___Poor

8. In the event of a future disaster, how confident are you in the efficiency of the federal government’s response?  ___Very confident  ___Confident  ___Not confident  ___Not at all confident

9. Do you think that the federal government’s response would have been faster if most of the victims had been white?  ___Yes, would have been faster.  ___No, would have made no difference.

10. Do you think that the federal government’s response would have been faster if most of the victims had not been poor?  ___Yes, would have been faster.  ___No, would have made no difference.

11. In general, how would you rate the job the mass media has done in covering the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans?  ___Excellent  ___Good  ___Only fair  ___Poor

12. Out of the following television sources, which were you more likely to watch during the coverage of Hurricane Katrina?  ___MSNBC  ___NBC  ___PBS  ___CBS  ___ABC  ___Fox News  ___Other (please specify)

13. A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was ordinary weather patterns.  ___Strongly agree  ___Agree  ___Disagree  ___Strongly disagree
14. A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was divine intervention.
   ___ Strongly agree   ___ Agree   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly disagree

15. A major factor of Hurricane Katrina was global warming.
   ___ Strongly agree   ___ Agree   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly disagree

Demographic Questions:

D1. What is your gender?  ___ Woman  ___ Man

D2. In what year were you born?  ______

D3. What ethnicity do you consider yourself? (Mark all that apply.)
   ___ Black/African  ___ Asian  ___ Other (please specify)
   ___ White European  ___ Hispanic/Latina

D4. What is the annual household income of your parents/legal guardian if you are a dependant or your personal household income if you are independent?
   ___ under $19,999  ___ $40,000 to $59,999  ___ $80,000 to $99,999
   ___ $20,000 to $39,999  ___ $60,000 to $79,999  ___ $100,000 or more

D5. Some people think of themselves as liberal and others think of themselves as conservative. Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?
   ___ Very liberal  ___ Liberal  ___ Moderate  ___ Conservative  ___ Very conservative

D6. Not including weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
   ___ Once a week  ___ Once or twice a month  ___ A few times per year  ___ Never

D7. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person? Are you...
   ___ Very religious  ___ Moderately religious  ___ Slightly religious  ___ Not at all religious

Please use the space provided below if you have any additional information or experiences you would like to share about Hurricane Katrina.

____________________________________________________________________________________

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Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey.