



Follow-Up 2005: Where the American Public Stands on Terrorism and Preparedness after Hurricanes Katrina & Rita

Greater Confusion, Decreasing Confidence, and Public Divisions

**A Follow-Up to the 2005 Annual Survey of the American Public by the
National Center for Disaster Preparedness,
Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health**

Survey administered by The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

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Overview

In July 2005, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) completed its annual survey of the American public's attitudes and views on terrorism, preparedness, and associated issues. This national survey was the latest in a series that is conducted annually, and began in the months after September 11, 2001. The survey was completed just after the London Underground bombings and just before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In October 2005, NCDP completed a follow-up to the July 2005 survey. Given the extreme events of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the national dialogue on preparedness and response that followed, and the application of these events and dialogue to other preparedness issues including terrorism and the potential flu pandemic, NCDP reasked a selection of the most salient questions from the July 2005 survey to gauge changes in the American public's response. Further, several new questions were added dealing specifically with the events of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Both 2005 surveys were administered by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion (Marist)

As with all of the prior surveys, each is representative of the population. In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, NCDP commissioned both national and New York City public opinion polls to gauge the public's views and attitudes on a wide range of topics germane to disaster preparedness and emergency events. Since the first polls, which were completed three and six-months after September 11, 2001, NCDP has annually commissioned a survey that goes to the field in July-August, just before the anniversary of September 11. The 2005 survey was the fourth annual and the follow-up represents a one-time addition in response to the extraordinary circumstances of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina and the unique timing of the 2005 annual survey.

Each survey, including the 2005 follow-up, includes trended questions as well as "one-off" questions appropriate to the given time period. Trended questions include confidence in government; willingness and ability to evacuate; personal and family preparedness plans; personal sacrifice; community preparedness; perceptions and engagement of all-hazard preparedness; and other questions thematic with the afore listed.. All questions are cross-tabulated with a variety of demographics including race, age, gender, income, region, size of community, political affiliation, and education. Further, select questions establishing a division of respondent (e.g. those having personal and family preparedness plans versus those who do not) are cross-tabulated with other selected questions to observe correlations. (e.g. awareness of community preparedness plans). The surveys are developed by NCDP investigators in conjunction with Marist, who administers the survey, codes the data, and produces the frequency tables.

Full data and trend tables are available on request.

Major National Findings

- *Crisis of Public Confidence in Government Widens*

Continuing a downward trend, only 42% of the American public has confidence in the government to **protect the area they live from a terrorist attack**. This figure has steadily decreased, from just under half (49%) before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 53% in 2004 and 64% in 2003.

Further, less than half (42%) believe the United States is **prepared for a terror attack**, a decrease of 16% from prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

With respect to a natural disaster or emergency weather event, 45% of the American public has confidence in the government to **protect the area they live from a natural disaster or emergency weather event**.

- *Belief in Community Preparedness Declines*

In the event of a **natural disaster or emergency weather event**, less than half (41%) of the U.S. public believes their **community has an adequate response plan in place**, a decline of 12% from before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In the event of a **terrorist attack**, less than a third (31%) of the U.S. public believes their **community has an adequate response plan in place**, a decline of 6% from before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

This belief that communities are not prepared has **little difference between regions** with the East, Central, South, and West between 33% and 44% for a natural disaster or emergency weather event, and between 29% and 33% for a terrorist attack.

This balance holds **across size of community**. For a natural disaster or emergency weather event, those believing their community has an adequate response plan are between 36% and 40% among those in big and small cities, suburban, small towns, and rural communities. For a terrorist attack, the range is 28% and 36%.

- *The American Public is still not Prepared*

Despite an increased call for the public to prepare, only a third (34%) of the American public reports being familiar with **emergency or evacuation plans in their community in the event of a natural disaster or emergency event**. This figure is unchanged from before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and holds across region and size of community.

Likewise, less than a quarter (22%) reports being familiar with **emergency or evacuation plans in their community in the event of a terrorist attack**. This figure is also unchanged from before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and holds across region and size of community.

When asked if they felt **personally prepared for a natural disaster or emergency weather event** in their community, just over half (53%) described themselves as “prepared” or “very prepared.” This figure is unchanged from before Katrina.

Similarly, a third (35%) feel **personally prepared for a terror attack in their community**. This figure is also unchanged from before Katrina.

With respect to personal and family preparedness, less than half (43%), of the American public **reports having a family emergency preparedness plan that all members of the family know about**. This figure is also unchanged from before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and holds across region and size of community. Only 31% of the total population including those that do and do not have a plan, report **having all or some of the major elements** that are part of an emergency plan (e.g. two days food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place).

- *Persistent Public Confusion about Preparedness*
A wide gap continues to exist between those who report being personally prepared for a natural disaster or weather event (53%) versus those prepared for a terror attack (35%). Moreover, a third (34%) are familiar with evacuation plans in their community for a natural disaster or emergency weather event, but less than a quarter (22%) are for a terrorist attack.

These divisions between preparedness and familiarity of community plans for natural disasters/emergency weather events versus terror attacks reveal **a fundamental misunderstanding of the all-hazards message** of FEMA, DHS, the Red Cross, and other disaster planning and response agencies.

It also worth noting that having a family emergency preparedness plan, yet lacking knowledge of community evacuation plans, is likely to diminish the effectiveness of a family emergency preparedness plan.

- *Personal and Family Evacuation Plans Unchanged*
Despite the national dialogue on evacuations that has emerged after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, very little has changed with respect to the public’s views on evacuating in the event of a terror attack. As found before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, over half (56%) **would not evacuate their home or office to go to a distant location when ordered to do so** either because they would not leave or they would wait until concerns for children and loved ones are addressed. Over a quarter (29%) said they could not leave **without help** (versus 25% pre-Katrina) and just over a quarter (30%) said they could not leave because they **do not have transportation** (versus 26% pre-Katrina).

Nearly half (44%) said they would not leave if they **lacked confidence** in who is ordering them to evacuate. –an increase of 6% prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

- *Varying Perceptions of Responsibility and Priorities of Preparedness and Response*
 Nearly forty percent (38%) believe the federal government is **most responsible for ensuring communities are prepared for a terrorist attack**. However, another third (31%) believe local government are and a fifth (20%), state government.

However, when asked about **natural disaster or emergency weather events**, the response are completely reversed. Nearly half (45%) believe local governments are **most responsible for ensuring communities are prepared** with nearly a quarter (23%) saying state governments and less than a fifth (17%) saying federal government.

With respect to what the **highest national priority should be**, the country is nearly evenly split between preparing for future acts of terror (36%) and preparing for an outbreak of disease and other medical crisis (35%). About a fifth (22%) said preparing for natural disasters and emergency weather events.

When it comes to **how best to pay for rebuilding the gulf coast**, nearly four in ten (38%) select cutting spending for the war in Iraq with 20% saying to eliminate the tax cut and 16% to cut other domestic programs.

- *Political Affiliation and Perceptions on Homeland Security Widen*
 Across nearly all areas of confidence and perception, **Republicans have significantly differing views versus those of Democrats and Independents**. Notable points include:

Thinking the **United States is prepared for a future attack** (65%, vs. 31% and 36% with decreases from July 2005 of 10%, vs. 18% and 21%);

Confidence in the government to protect the area they live from a terrorist attack (63%, vs. 24% and 44% with Republicans and Independents unchanged from July 2005 and Democrats decreasing by 16%);

Confidence in the government to protect the area they live from a natural disaster or emergency weather event (63%, vs. 35% and 44%);

Ranking preparing for future terror attacks as the highest national priority (52%, vs. 29% and 37%);

Whom should be responsible for ensuring communities are prepared for a terrorist attack (43% of Democrats say the federal government versus 32% of Republicans and 36% of Independents);

Selecting the best way to pay for rebuilding in the gulf coast (52% of Democrats and 30% of Independents select cut spending for the war in Iraq versus 17 of Republicans; 35% of Republicans select cut other domestic programs versus 6% of Democrats and 17% of Independents)

- *Lack of Confidence in the Nation's Healthcare System to Respond to Pandemic Flu*
Only a third (35%) of the American public is confident in the health care system's readiness to **respond effectively to a deadly flu pandemic**. This is inline with the July 2005 finding of the public's confidence (39%) in the health care system to respond efficiently to a biological, chemical, or radiological attack.

Seven out of ten (71%), have read or heard about a threat of deadly flu pandemic.

Analysis and Recommendations

Survey Methodology

The **2005 follow-up survey** was a national survey conducted on October 12-13 and 17. 1,052 adults 18 years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone. Telephone numbers were selected based upon a complete list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region in the country was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3.0\%$. The margin of error increases for cross-tabulations. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish

The **2005 national survey** was conducted from July 15-22, 2005. 1,315 adults 18 years of age within the continental United States including the District of Columbia were contacted by telephone. Telephone numbers were selected based upon a complete list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region in the country was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the survey are statistically significant at $\pm 2.7\%$. The margin of error increases for cross-tabulations. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

The **July 2004** national survey was conducted from July 19 through 26. 1,234 adults 18 years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone, of which 407 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. There were 564 interviews with people employed by a company with 11 or more employees. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region of the country was represented in proportion to its population. The results of the survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$, $\pm 5\%$ for parents with children aged 4 through 18. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish

The **August 2003** national survey was conducted from August 5 through 14, and 18 through 20, 2003. 1,373 adults eighteen years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed by telephone, of which 484 were parents with children age four through eighteen living in their household. There were 663 interviews with people employed by a company with 11 or more employees. In the New York City survey, 1,317 adults 18 years of age or older were interviewed, of which 456 were parents with children age 4 through 18 living in their household. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges and selected for representation in proportion to the population. The results of the survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$, $\pm 4.5\%$ for parents with children aged 4 through 18. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish

The **August 2002** survey was conducted from August 12 through 22, 2002. 1,215 adults eighteen years of age or older within the continental United States were interviewed, of which 363 were parents with children age 4 through 18 living in their household. In the New York City survey, 1,313 adults 18 years of age or older were interviewed, of which 361 were parents with children age 4 through 18 living in their household. Telephone numbers were selected based on a complete list of telephone exchanges and selected for representation in proportion to the population. The results of the survey are statistically significant at $\pm 3\%$ and $\pm 5\%$ for parents with children aged 4 through 18. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish

Institutional Information

National Center for Disaster Preparedness

NCDP is an academically based, inter-disciplinary center focused on the nation's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorism and major disasters. NCDP's areas of expertise include disaster preparedness and response, mental health treatment, pediatric issues, and the socio-political dimensions of terrorism. NCDP is a national and international leader in disaster and terrorism readiness providing direct services to individuals affected by September 11, public health training, and applied research. NCDP produces curriculum on bioterrorism, develops mental health programs, provides training for public health professionals and other first responders, develops model programs, and has a wide-ranging research and public policy agenda. NCDP has collaborative relationships with faculty from Columbia University's schools of nursing, medicine, dentistry, journalism, Teacher's College, School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and Union Theological Center as well with scholars at leading national and international universities, centers, and across all levels of city, state, and federal government

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Mailman School of Public Health

The only accredited school of public health in New York City, and among the first in the nation, Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health provides instruction and research opportunities to more than 800 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees. Its students and more than 200 multi-disciplinary faculty engage in research and service in the city, nation, and around the world, concentrating on biostatistics, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, health policy and management, population and family health, and sociomedical sciences.

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Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

Founded in 1978, the Marist Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) is a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The Marist Poll has conducted independent research on public priorities, elections, and a wide variety of issues including the economy, health care, foreign affairs, the environment, science, information technology, and lifestyles. Through the regular public release of Marist Poll surveys, MIPO has built a reputation of independence, reliability, and accuracy. Frequently cited by journalists, public officials, and policy experts, the

Marist Poll has been recognized for fairness, accuracy, and timeliness. Its results are featured in print and electronic media throughout the world including The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and on radio and television news broadcasts. MIPO offers full service commissioned research for business, government, and nonprofits in all phases including study design, sample methodology, questionnaire construction, data collection, data analysis, report writing, and presentation. In all matters, MIPO, as a research organization, adheres to the current Code of the National Council on Public Polls and the Standards and Ethics of the Council of American Research Organizations (CASRO). MIPO also provides educational opportunities for students and is a public resource for information on survey methodology through internships, conferences, seminars, and coursework.

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