

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA

LATE RESPONSES, CARELESS ACTIONS: NON-TRANSPARENCY IN  
ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

By

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March 2017

## ABSTRACT

This thesis will take a qualitative approach by analyzing one case study to prove the argument that the demographics of a geographical area in the United States affects how efficient the government responds to a natural disaster. The ultimate goal will be to demonstrate that there indeed is a relationship between the demographics of an area and the efficiency of the governmental response by analyzing one case: 1) Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, New Orleans in 2005. The argument focuses on the response of the United States governmental response after a natural disaster. Several past natural disasters can also assist in proving the case, and because of this, other environmental catastrophes will be directed. The results collected by the case study and other minor analyzed cases validate the argument at hand. The U.S. government is prone to provide necessary and quick assistance to areas with favored demographics. Information gathered from experts in politics, and environmental issues seem to have various ideas but result in similar conclusions. Results show that there is a clear relationship between certain environmental catastrophes and allocation of resources the government provides.

Word Count: 184

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to my professors, family and boyfriend!

## **Introduction:**

In 2005 a powerful Category Five hurricane occurred that would long be remembered. Events that are out of our control may sometimes happen; the level of government preparedness and response is what will greatly determine to what extent its citizens will be affected. As once said, “Natural disasters occur in a political place. They are not driven by politics, nor are they immune from politics (Cohen et al., 2008).

According to The United States Geological Survey, a scientific agency of the United States government, there have been eleven earthquakes in the past thirty days. The recent “natural disaster scare” was plastered on all of the social media in the month of October and had people of all ages including college students concerned. However, the topic of natural disasters not only brings up that worry, but it has also called for the rise of research as to how the government responds to natural disasters in the United States.

The everyday person overlooks the efficiency in the responsiveness of the government when it comes to these unfortunate events, but not overlooked by educators and researchers. Natural disasters cannot be prevented, but one could certainly prepare for it and hope that the government can respond in a way that benefits all citizens. Addressing the topic will not only educate individuals about an issue on the environment, but also the politics behind it and how exactly politics plays a significant role in this matter. American Politics and Environmental Politics scholars have examined the precise relationship between natural disasters and politics. After taking a step forward, and conducting research, it is clear that natural disasters and how the government responds to these catastrophes are now being frequently discussed and studied in the political science department at Cal Poly Pomona. The research I conduct will contribute to this literature

by furthering the knowledge of the Cal Poly Pomona political science department, and at the same time focus on a particular issue in environmental politics. Also, a student researching this topic will benefit other students to realize how this is an issue everyone should look into and be educated about no matter what age.

This thesis will begin by first introducing the research question at hand, In adding the research question, the paper covers the significance and importance of studying the inequities before the superstorm effect on government response. Then, the introduction of the problem is the main argument of this particular thesis. The literature review helps inform one about both the research question and arguments. The research covered in this thesis includes work from the American politics subfield, focusing on the United States Government local, state and federal level responses. Furthermore, the thesis is also focused on environmental policy. The Category Five catastrophic superstorm of 2005 is indeed deeply wedded to our environment and politics. Political considerations before, during, and after a natural disaster can determine who is at risk, which will benefit from the actions taken. Following the examination, the hypothesis will be presented and tested in a single case study. Also, I conducted a questionnaire to two experts on this particular topic that allowed me to expand the knowledge for this thesis further. The results will show that the inequities of a superstorm are directly related to the effectiveness of the U.S. government response.

**Research Question:**

The question that my thesis presents is: How is the demographic composition of an area related to the effectiveness of the United States government response to a superstorm? My thesis examines the impact that demographics of New Orleans, Louisiana and how the government responded differently due to those factors.

My question is significantly important because political science can help understand the structure of the government and how the government should respond to the natural disasters. Not only is this a local level issue, but it is also a state and federal level issue. On the local level, it can be seen that Louisiana was not at the capability to assist its people. On the state level is viewed that it was attempted but in need of federal level assistance. However, the federal government failed to respond to its expected official duties, and because of this, many questions of inequities arose. My question deals with an issue that can affect every citizen in the United States. As noted by many scholars and the Homeland Security, it is more common for a natural disaster to occur than it is for a terrorist attack. Homeland Security Budget may spend more money on preventing terrorism security than it does on national preparedness and resilience, but it is important for citizens to be informed of what can and will affect them in the future.

**Arguments:**

As I had mentioned, the research the research question this thesis analyzes is how demographic composition has a relationship to the government response after a natural disaster. The main arguments that root from this thesis are as follows:

- A. There is a lack in response I particular areas depending on its demographics.

B. Vulnerable societies depend highly on the government response after a natural disaster.

In other words, the demographics of the area affected by the superstorm does cause the government to ineffectively and those area are vulnerable due to different factors and because of this, they suffer.

The objective is to not only support the argument provided but also bring awareness to this topic to students at Cal Poly Pomona. It is common for people to be aware of an issue, but it is even more common for people to ignore the problem due to the high level of controversy. Many may not feel that this matter needs to be addressed. However, if one realizes how poorly treated our planet is and looks at the recent natural disaster scares, one may come to understand this is no longer only an environmental issue, but a political one as well.

### **Literature Review:**

Researchers have examined past catastrophes in order to determine how efficient the U.S. government has responded to natural disasters in the past. Scholars who examine and consider literature about the responsiveness of the United States government look at various demographics of an area and whether the behavior of a government changes depending on demographics. These include the following: race and socioeconomic status. This research examines a national level issue. The issue is based in the United States and contains information on how the government avoids, and excludes providing governmental help in times of need to a particular group of the total population. This thesis argues the several studies conducted on whether the race and socioeconomic status

of a geographical area have an effect on how efficient the government responds to a natural disaster.

“Natural disasters occur in a political space. They are not driven by politics, nor are they immune from the politics” (Cohen et al., 2008). There is a long history of researchers analyzing the United States governmental response behavior towards certain groups due to the demographics. However, the study of the relationship between politics and natural disasters became a more conventional study when the catastrophic event, Hurricane Katrina, in 2005 took place in the state of Louisiana. This research explores how the United States government purposely avoided the issue of providing aid to those who became vulnerable due to the aftermath of a deadly natural disaster. The clear distinction between circling an idea and conducting legal actions to serve its entire people has ever since been an indisputably, heavily studied concern. Assumptions behind the result of a clear distinction between the lack of interest in assisting those of a particular race or low socioeconomic status have often been overlooked and considered to be seen as coincidental factors. Facts gathered through studies guided by the measures taken previously by the United States government only exemplifies the possibilities of the ability to prove the argument to be correct. Two hypotheses are rooted through this project: First, the race and socioeconomic status of a group of a geographical area are factors that determine how efficient the United States government responds to a natural disaster. Second, the race and socioeconomic status of a geographical scope have no effect on the responsiveness of a government when addressing its people victimized by a natural disaster.

The following literature review assesses several factors that are possible ways to predetermine or determine in what manner and why the United States government will and has responded to a natural disaster. The first section examines the policies, organizations, and pattern in which the United States government is expected to utilize, and that will be of service and benefit to the people. Within the discussion, it is seen how there are governmental organizations and information that can be used to avoid the rise of future political conflict. These sources could also prevent questions due to any gray areas raised by the responsiveness of a government to its people following a natural disaster. The second section emphasizes on past failures committed by the United States government when responding to particular demographics of its population affected by a natural disaster. The catastrophes analyzed include Hurricane Matthew but mainly focus attention on Hurricane Katrina due to its severe damage. The overall body of research outlines precisely how the United States has the clear relationship of treating individuals differently during times of need exclusively after a natural disaster.

#### *Prevention & History of U.S Governmental Position on Natural Disasters*

Up until the early 1800's there was no existence of legislative provisions for the relief of natural disasters that affected innocent people. This means that these innocent people were left with no type of assistance to escape the unfortunate situation in which they were placed. The study conducted by the Elizabeth Svoboda (2006) emphasizes on the beginnings of a change in the United States government system on how to approach the aftermath of a natural disaster. The Congressional Act of 1803 was the start of what can be considered a historic change in environmental politics. Over 100 bills relating to aid for damage done by natural disasters took place around this time. The thought of a

coordinated natural disaster response had not been considered. Throughout this study, it was made clear that the United States did not place importance on the particular issue of the damage of a natural disaster. It took many years for the idea of plans made to aid individuals during times of need. This only shows that there is no significance given to these types of issues until researchers make it a priority.

Putting aside the many people that suffered through previous catastrophes, it was not until destructive hurricanes hit the United States between 1960 and 1970 that action was taken. These devastating storms included: Carla (1962), Betsy (1965), Camille (1969), and Angles (1972). In the year 1979, Jimmy Carter issued the executive order that created the Federal Emergency Management Agency best known as FEMA. The creation of this Agency in the United States plays a huge role in understanding what and how much help was given to the victims of these tragic events. Jervis and Health (2008) conducts intensive research on the aid that was provided by the governmental organization, FEMA during Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Even after the death of an estimated number of 1200 people struck and killed by Hurricane Katrina, there was still little assistance given to the rest of the survivors. The concern of the United States laid more on the how help for these people would be extremely costly. The governmental organization, FEMA, was limited to spend less than \$250 million on housing for a total of six natural disasters combined. FEMA's was restricted to provide a max of three years short term housing for the sufferers. Looking at more than one natural disaster can be a possible consideration for a longer thesis paper. It was indeed seen in that disasters before and even after Hurricane Katrina suffered of the same issue. The issue of the government slow and ineffective response was seen in other events.

There was an open careless attitude by the United States government to help those who had little to survive. Limited timeframes to aid towards these innocent people who had nothing to look forward to has been investigated by researchers. Many researchers have named it careless acts committed by the United States. Paulison (2006) an educated expert on Hurricane Katrina and appointed as the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency states that FEMA did the most possible when Hurricane Katrina took place. However, he shared that over 2.1 million people were left homeless and FEMA was not capable of helping all victims. Throughout this research, one could see that Paulison addresses the poor suffering the most, but as a leader of FEMA, there was no clear explanation as to what was done for specifically the lower income families. This study completed in 2006 can be seen as extremely one-sided and bias towards the United States government giving the best aid possible during times of need. However, several gray lines can be brought up by several ideas addressed by Paulison starting with what exactly the United States is currently doing to assist those with little capacity to help them thrive today. While several sources focus on the impact that the federal government has on responses, the National Disaster Management Guidelines (2015) focuses a large amount on the NGOs responsibility. A more local fix to the issue of response for natural disasters.

Cohen (2008) adds to the idea that politics and natural disasters have a clear relationship due to the ability of the government playing a huge role in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Disasters, prevention, and relief, are the central theme seen in this particular study. It is indisputable that there is ways the United States could help avoid the perception of being uninterested in assisting as much as possible. The argument at

hand is whether or not prevention is the method necessary to put aside conflict between the people and its government. Clark (1993) also centers his study on the idea that prevention and preparedness would ultimately be the primary problem solver of all issues that arise through natural disasters including political disputes. Prevention taken on behalf of the United States would include encouraging political development and rewarding disasters. Within the studies that fall under prevention, there is a pattern of repeated suggestions as to how the United States could go about dealing with the aftermath of natural disasters. The recommendations include regulation, insurance, and liability. The political economy of natural disasters is understandable and predictable.

“With the onset of global warming, it is likely that incidence of natural shocks will only increase in years ahead” (UNEP 1999). Due to that reason, planning ahead can change the political economy, and questions brought up and related to natural disasters. The last study that falls under the theme of prevention was conducted in 2015. American Journal of Public Health (2015) conducted a nationwide survey of older U.S adults to determine the natural disaster preparedness levels. The survey reported that only 34.3% of people were informed about disaster preparation. As American Journal of Public Health, (2015) notes:

*The preparedness score indicated that increasing age, physical disability, and lower educational attainment and income were independently and significantly associated with poor overall preparation.*

The importance of this type of survey and the data collected through it is that it validates that everyday citizens are not prepared for such disastrous events, and poorer citizens are clearer not going to have a chance of surviving on their own. It is likely to agree that one

may feel that the United States government makes no attempt to help the individual with a low socioeconomic status. Prevention is a clear solution that has been proposed by researchers today to avoid any confusion between the people and the United States government. It is a clear way to avoid not additional physical and economic damage, but also the trust the people place on its government.

### *The Past Reveals the Truth of Discrimination*

Natural disasters alone create a lot of trouble for those that are affected by them, but on top of physical damage, citizens have to face a possibility of inefficient help depending on their race and socioeconomic status. Lambert et al. (2004) researched the racism within environmental policies and concluded that racism in decision making is an issue. The distinction between middle-class whites and poor minority citizens has been seen when the United States has dealt with the aftermath of a natural disaster. Bullard (2008) is social research that only validates and states that all communities are unequal and because of this if one is black, poor or on the wrong side of a geographical area, they will receive little protection. The statement presented in various parts of this study is unfortunate, but eye opening to those that feel discrimination is not a significant proportion of the responsiveness of the United States government to a natural disaster. Fothergill et al. (1999) and Sterett et al. (2015) are both researchers that add on to the idea that the poor are indeed treated differently from those who stands in a better socioeconomic status. The argument that the government's efficiency in responsiveness to a natural disaster lays on the majority race and socioeconomic status of a geographical area is a thought out idea. The inequities of an area are discussed in several literatures however, it was the CLiME organization that researches center on law, inequity and

metropolitan equity that pushed the idea of the government responded differently to those who were economically beneath others.

*Achieving regional equity means considering both people and place. A competitive and inclusive region is one in which members of all racial, ethnic, and income groups have opportunities to live and work in all parts of the region, have access to living wage jobs and are included in the mainstream of regional life. It is also one in which all neighborhoods are supported to be vibrant places with choices for affordable housing, good schools, access to open space, decent transit that connects people to jobs, and health and sustainable environments (Liberty, 2013).*

This statement is very significant to consider in my thesis especially when presenting ideas of possible solutions. The statement above highlights what would be the ideal structure in being able to tackle the idea of equity in an area.

The slow response of Hurricane Katrina is one of many examples that can be used to prove the proposed argument. McWhorter (2005) investigated the slow response by the government and with no hesitation stated that the rescue effort by the Federal Emergency Management Agency was more time-consuming than ever. He too added that the black people in Louisiana suffered a long slow response. Obama, (2015) apparently shares his amusement as to exactly what went wrong with Hurricane Katrina that is still haunting them today. Authorities are aware of this relevant issue, yet decide to put it aside and place little importance on the issue. It is significant to understand that Hurricane Katrina and Rita did extensive damage forcing migration and income loss. Yun (2016) studied that people with low income already struggling were put in even worse positions.

The United States government has received a lot of backlash on this topic. Walsh (2005) shared that President Bush was the first to hear unsatisfied citizens. In fact, he received low ratings in a result of his response to the natural disasters that took place in his term. This clearly shows how more than a handful of individuals felt the discrimination within the action adopted by the government to assist low income or a specific race of those affected by the natural disasters. Rogers et al. (2015) attempts to bring hope to the eyes of those affected by the disasters. He highlights the idea of growth in the future. Of course, it is important to understand that this should not be the case in the first place. There should not be an excuse for the push back of creating a better life for victims. Over ten years is more than enough for full growth in the state to be seen once again. It can also be said that the issue of cost brought up by Newkirk (2001) is a valid point, but the money was clearly no problem when non-poor citizens were in need of help. Cost being an issue can easily be dodged if the study of New Scientist (2008) is further examined. This study directly falls under the theme of taking preventive action and putting together a plan so that the issue of cost after a disaster is minimized.

Failures are visible in the United States government according to the study conducted by Labib et al. (2015). Because of this, researchers created a hybrid model to help addresses any possible strategies to minimize damage. The hybrid model included that there should be a specific way as to how to allocate the resources to those struck by the disasters. This was the most dangerous point brought up in the model because it only helps prove that the government lacks the knowledge as to how to allocate resources or completely avoids the right way of providing resources to benefit everyone. Lastly, the scholarly study conducted by Nicholls et al. (2013) brings to life the real idea that the

apparent discrimination of how efficient the government responds to natural disasters depending on characteristics of the citizen's surfaces many questions. Besides the many matters that are created, trust is also lost from the people to the government. Confidence in the government from its population is necessary. If lost, it could potentially be the reason behind made assumptions that the response from the United States government to natural disasters is filled with discrimination favoring some over others. "Beyond all the material and economic losses that natural disasters produce, post-disaster environments can alter the social capital of a community by affecting social norms, attitudes, and people's behavior" (Fleming et al., 2014).

### *In Need of Solutions*

Mission 2010, New Orleans shares one of the main issues that Louisiana is facing today. The issue is the lack of immediate solutions and long-term solutions.

*After intensive research, these are our plans for the future of New Orleans. We took an integrated approach by reviewing as a group the research and ideas of each team and designing our solution from there. We realize that New Orleans is no quick fix, so we took a multi-faceted approach. Consequently, our solutions not only include what needs to be done now to rebuild the city, but also how to redesign and sustain it for the long run. We focus extensively on the wetlands and flood protection system.*

This particular source focuses on the relevant need for a solution to take place. There can no longer be a quick fix it solution of a state such as Louisiana. After reviewing several literatures on this topic it is noticeable that the government will respond in the manner

they wish to respond in and that it is up to the people in this case to utilize resources. The specific idea that is brought up in this literature that catches my attention is when it is said that there should not be a quick fix. I think for my thesis this is an important issue to consider because quick fixes are known to not sufficient and effective solutions. If the government whether it be locally or federally were to consider a quick fix, than there would be no actual solution in place.

### **Hypothesis:**

Based on the information I have researched from scholars in regards to government response to natural disasters, there is a clear relationship between the demographics of an area and the response the government provides. Grounded on the collected information from the literature it is just that the following hypothesis be made:

H1: The inequities that exist prior to the superstorm are directly related to the effectiveness of the government's response to the disaster.

In contrast, the null hypothesis is that the demographics of an area gave no effect on government response.

### **Methodology:**

This thesis will take a qualitative approach by analyzing one case study to prove the argument that the demographics of a geographical area in the United States affects how efficient the government responds to a natural disaster. The ultimate goal will be to demonstrate that there indeed is a relationship between the demographics of an area and

the efficiency of the governmental response by analyzing one case: 1) Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, New Orleans in 2005. The argument focuses on the response of the United States governmental response after a natural disaster. Several of past natural disasters can also assist in proving the case. However, due to the demographics of the affected areas by Hurricane Katrina, this case is the best state to select as a potential case where a natural disaster has hit. The state of Louisiana is commonly seen to be either as a heavy minority state or financially struggling state. To provide a more exact idea of this state, in particular, Louisiana is in the South of the United States. The process in selecting which particular natural disasters have occurred in what states and which ones to analyze depend on the Federal Emergency Management Agency data on governmental response and demographics of the states, census data. It is significant to remember that there are limitations to qualitative research, however; there has been a considerably large amount of research conducted on Hurricane Katrina both in the form of data and analysis.

#### FEMA Data Collected on Governmental Response

“FEMA’s mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation, we work together to build, sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards” (Federal Emergency Management Agency). All information on the governmental response to natural disasters could be found at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) website. During Hurricane Katrina, wind forces went up to 140mph and caused beach erosion, infrastructure damage, and destruction of homes (FEMA, 2015). The Federal Emergency Management Agency started a project to create a map that shows flood impacts from the storm for areas such as Harrison, Hancock, and

Jackson Counties in also affected the state of Mississippi. The second map offered to view through [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) shows the preliminary high after mark flood elevations and flood inundation limits from Hurricane Katrina. Also, the Katrina Recovery Maps show coastal Advisory Base Flood Elevations, best known as (ABEFs). Lastly, FEMA provides an outline of a decade of progress after Hurricane Katrina. This is relevant information for this analysis because it reflects what areas were particularly affected by the natural disaster and how exactly the United States government and (FEMA) responded to the accident. When concluding this section of methodology, the framework of analysis developed so far are the states that were affected by the disaster including; Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

#### Census Data

Census data gives insight into the socio-economic status of an area, in this case, states. The census highlights where a particular area stood at a given moment. That includes population, poverty level, race, unemployment and level of education. This type of information is significant because it helps one decide whether a particular are can be considered a wealthy or minority group. At this point, all the available information about Louisiana around the time the natural disaster took place is significant to note.

Louisiana is seen as a predominantly minority and not so monetarily successful state. The information on this particular state can be found on the website [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov). The website can provide data from a particular area. This is significant because it allows for one to not only look at Louisiana as a whole but also instead looks at the cities within the state and see if it was predominately minority. Also, [www.popest.org](http://www.popest.org) is a website similar to the Census Bureau because it holds information

about age, race, sex, health, income, homeownership, and other household population characteristics. It is a 2006 Louisiana Health and Population Survey, conducted by “Louisiana Public Health Institute on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and the Louisiana Recovery Authority, with technical assistance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Census Bureau” (popest.org). Finally, the framework of analysis is going to be able to provide the information necessary to show that Louisiana is a struggling state.

In addition to the single case study on Hurricane Katrina, I decided to incorporate the input of two experts that I contacted who live and have practiced in fields related to my particular topic. One of the main reasons I decided to push this idea was so that I could not only gather information on the single case stud through written literature, but also be able to interact with a person who was willing to answer a possible questions including follow up questions. I feel this only strengthens my argument because it shows that individuals who have worked in these fields are aware of the inequities that many people deal with today.

### **Results:**

In this particular section, I will elaborate on the collected findings from both my proposed research question and hypothesis. To test my hypothesis, I analyzed the connection between the demographics of New Orleans; one of the largest cities in the U.S. and the largest town in Louisiana and how the U.S. government responded to this particular area after the occurrence of the natural disaster. The first step for the successful completion of data collection required collecting records of the demographics from the

state of Louisiana gathered on a decennial and yearly basis. The documents considered are from both the year of the incident in 2005 and the demographics for following year in 2006. Once I had the demographics of the states 64 parishes, the next step was to focus on the areas that were most prominently affected and consider its demographics. I was aware I had to examine the steps necessary for the government to take when addressing a disaster at the local, state and federal level. In result of those two steps, I was able to analyze the effect demographics of Louisiana had on the government response when responding during and after the catastrophic superstorm disaster with data aimed to test my hypothesis. Also, I decided to contact and congregate information from two experts on this precise topic to help strengthen my results whether it was to have proven or disproven my hypothesis. The results of my research include the intricate examination and analysis of the state of Louisiana and are as follows:

#### Necessary Local Government Response:

Communities that are struck by a natural disaster usually have more resilience if they have a dependable community that consists of support from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, leadership and the local government. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), those who are providers for people with disabilities need to be aware of possible threats and risks caused by natural disasters because the situation can easily cause for potential higher risk factors. Local response factors that have been promoted by FEMA set the notion that it is necessary for individuals and families to create a form of emergency plan. The creation of a plan of

urgency may help reduce the adverse effects that would rise in from an undesired occasion. There are a handful of individuals that become informed and respond to a disaster on the local level. Some include firefighters, police officers, medical providers, environmental response experts and the list may continue. In this particular level of government response, the local senior elected or appointed official that includes the mayor, city manager, or county manager is responsible for ensuring public safety and welfare of the residents of the affected area (FEMA, 2008). Information proposed by the National Disaster Management Guidelines Role of NGOs in Disaster Management claims that the role of non-governmental organizations in the phases of disaster management is significantly crucial. The NGOs are the relief and response providers that in a sense conduct the communication that occurs between the government and those that are affected by the disaster. The question necessary to consider is whether these local areas and community members have sufficient amount of resources to assist each other and themselves in situations of need.

#### Necessary State Government Response:

Like the state government, it is known that just like the local government, they first handed handle the individuals that are impacted by the catastrophic incidents. The state is the lead in the two steps of response and recovery. The States primary role during response time is to coordinate resources and capabilities throughout the State and obtain resources and capabilities from other States (FEMA, 2008). Essentially, each state usually has a State management and homeland security agency. In this particular case, it

is important to examine the Louisiana Homeland Security and Emergency and Assistance Act that provides structure and helps the growth of both the local and State governments. This act is one to examine when analyzing the steps that were taken by the State government in search to service the people of Louisiana.

#### Necessary Federal Government Response:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (2008) states that the Federal Government maintains a comprehensive array of capabilities and resources that are made available according to the request of the Governor. The 2005 category five storm occurred it exceeded the number of resources both the Local Government and State Government were capable of providing. In this step, the Federal Government is in the position necessary to provide resources and capabilities to support the State response.

#### What Went Wrong With The Response?

FEMA conducted a “Hurricane Pam” drill in New Orleans that raised concern in the area because citizens were aware of themselves being unprepared. The idea behind this was to continue more government preparation to be significantly ready for the approach of a future superstorm. On August 26, 2005, Governor Katherine Babineaux Blanco declared a state of emergency in Louisiana and asked for President Bush to do the same at the federal level the next day (Chaudhuri, par. 2). The mayor of New Orleans, C. Ray Nagin, declared an evacuation on August 28th, 2005. The removal, of course, was not considerate of all the citizens that were not able to leave the city. That is precisely

where the superstorm came in handy, however, after analyzing the conditions of the superstorm option, it was clear that not much consideration was made for the citizens. The conditions were horrible.

FEMA pushed that no assistance would be provided to the areas that were damaged by Hurricane Katrina without the organization of the state and local authorities. Without a doubt, this made the process to respond to these natural disasters extremely slow. According to the Chaudhuri, FEMA was in a sense pushing away the help that any NGOs were providing. An example that was provided was that the American Red Cross was not allowed into New Orleans. Like mentioned before, the Superdome idea was meant to create a quick solution for the people of New Orleans, but what is constantly forgotten is that the evacuations were made the day after due to overcrowding of the area. As I dug deeper into this single case, I noticed that the government's response quickly transpired into ineffective and careless. Assistance from all over the United States became a necessity in order for the federal government's response to be sufficient. It is clear that the federal government stood on the sidelines without many concerns.

#### Lets Look at Demographics:

Taking a look deeper into the finding provided by the decennial Census Bureau data and The American Community Survey (ACS) yearly data is shown that:

(Insert Table 1 Here)

There are 64 parishes in the state of Louisiana. Here we focus on the affected New Orleans Metro area. Population significantly dropped from 494,294 people to 230,172

people. The population drop included predominately black individuals. The black population consisted of 67.5% with the significant drop to 58.8%. While we see this significant drop we can see how the white population increased from 2005 at 26.5% to 33.1% in 2006. This shows a decrease of population for the black population and not the white population. The area is filled with the white population that is more economically well off than the black population. All but the black population increased which can be seen on the graph I created with information gathered from both the Census Bureau and the American Community Survey.

(Insert Table 2 Here)

The American Community Survey collected data that shows how there was a significant decrease in housing units. In 2005 the number stood at 592,800. The year following in 2006 decreased to 438, 278. The survey suggests that the people who had issues with affected housing units were predominately those who were not able to afford insurance. This means that there is a gap between those who can afford the cost and those who cannot. The government did not respond effectively to those who were not fortunate to afford the cost. It is important to note that the data table shares the amount of increase in 2014. However, from 2005 to 2014 there is still a struggle that is seen when dealing with the amount of housing units. Like mentioned above, there can be many factors that play a role in the reason behind why the low income individuals suffer due to natural disasters.

(Insert Table 3 Here)

The graph I composed here also consists of data from both the Census Bureau and the American Community Survey. The data shared here shows how there is a decrease in both the business establishments and employment from the year when Hurricane Katrina occurred in 2005 to 2006 which was only one year later. The business establishments decreased from 31,401 in 2005 to 29,002 in 2006. Once again those affected were individuals who could not afford the cost of insurance for their business establishments. The employment numbers dropped as well from 517,194 in the year of 2005 to 427,373 the year following the catastrophic disaster. Those who lost jobs consisted of people who had to move from the state due to the damage that had occurred to their place of living. The overall idea here is that people of low income cannot afford to remain in area that was affected. The data here also includes the amount of employees in 2014. It is important to note that even though the number has increased from 2005 there is a large gap between the amounts. The government is once again not responding effectively to those in need of assistance.

#### Expert 1 Questionnaire Collection and Analysis: Dr. James Dulgeroff

Expert one is Dr. James Dulgeroff who is a graduate from USC and a political economist at San Bernardino Valley College and Cal State San Bernardino. He was best suited for the questioning on this topic because not only is he an expert in politics and the economy, but Dr. James Dulgeroff was also worked for the Southern California Association of Governments for ten years. As Dr. James Dulgeroff shared, (SCAG) is the

nation's largest metropolitan planning organizing. His position was to deal with planning and policy initiatives that focus on preparing the nation for natural disasters. The following questions were collected as results for the thesis.

1. In recovery planning an efficient level of preparedness is achieved by increasing the level of preparedness as long as the benefits (regarding mitigated damage and recovery costs) are greater than the actual cost of planning and preparedness measures. The problem is that many higher income individuals can afford insurance and will have access to public services that lower income communities cannot provide. This is an instance where the ability to pay principle of taxation applies. If we believe that everyone is entitled to assistance in the event of a natural disaster, then those who can bear should "Ability to Pay" principle is often contrasted with "Benefits Received" Principle of Taxation that asserts those who receive the benefits should pay for the public services. But even here there are such huge positive externalities that cause government provisioning to be much less than the socially optimal amount. The problem here is that individuals do not consider benefits that do not accrue to themselves. Add to this the characteristic that disaster-related events are not easily assigned probabilities and the myopic bias of human nature--all of which leads to the fact that resources allocated toward disaster preparedness fall substantially short of a socially efficient allocation.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* This answer definitely helps my argument that there is a lack of response in particular areas according to demographics.

3. Answered above

4. There are documents and articles that indicate that problems with Katrina were in many ways mirrored in the response to hurricane Sandy. There is therefore a pattern

inadequacy response in planning and in the aftermath of the super storms. We've made Katrina stand out more in the national consciousness was that there were much higher levels of already in the South which correlated with the more severely impacted poor communities.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* This answer shows that although there was a response in some areas; it affected the areas that needed the most help, which is the poor communities.

5. Whether one considers the inadequate response as a problem of "race" or a problem of help a "class" of low-income communities, this is just a more specific expression of the more general problem of neglecting those who are living in poverty. The concentration of poverty in the United States is more geographically concentrated in the US then before the 1960s, when the federal government instituted the "War of Poverty" programs.

6. It is the government's role to respond to natural disasters, because the private market functions only one there is a profit to be made. Just like the areas of education and healthcare, Public Safety after Natural disasters requires the government to assist those in need, whether they can pay for those services or not. It is a matter of public health and safety, which should concern all citizens.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* This answer further reinstates my argument claim that as a vulnerable society, they tend to depend a lot on the critical response from the government.

Expert 2 Questionnaire Collection and Analysis: Professor Katherine Browne

Expert two is Professor of anthropology, Katherine Browne who teaches at Colorado State University. Her main focus is the study on how cultural history and everyday practices shape social forms of adaptation and resilience. She was specifically selected to answer the questionnaire because she has knowledge as to the incident in 2005. Reasoning being, Professor Katherine Browne tracked a large African American family after they lost everything to the disaster Katrina in 2005. Katherine Browne has also produced a film called *Still Waiting: Life After Katrina*. Lastly, in the year 2016, she turned her attention to the process of recovery for Katrina. The following questions were collected as results for the thesis.

1. No, the US is not prepared for what we are likely to see from natural disasters in the coming few years. Most of the budget for disaster works goes to recovery after the fact, and since FEMA was relocated in 2003 during the Bush administration, The formally major agency got transferred under Department of Homeland Security where it's budget and personnel were diminished. Today we spend four more of the Department of Homeland Security's budget on anti-terrorism then disaster mitigation (and terrorism is an exceedingly low risk compared to a natural disaster).

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* Important to see that a natural disaster is more common to occur than it is for a terrorist attack. Natural disasters happen frequently which only strengthens the reason behind why it is important to focus on this topic.

2. Yes, I would agree, as with every scientist I have read. There is no serious debate.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* The answer she gave shows as though this shouldn't even be in question that the response to Katrina was very inefficient and could've been handled significantly better.

3. This requires too much time to answer, but to start with this: imagine how I felt to be a resident of a major US city, trying frantically to squeeze into the overcrowded Superdome, with no food or water for nearly five days what kind of modern government allows that to happen?

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* The type of treatment these people were given opens doors for one to feel that the government was simply not completing their task to prepare for natural disasters. It is an interesting point made that can be related to the other portion of the results section. In the results section, it is emphasized that the Superdome was not the best environment and put people in positions that made them feel uncomfortable and treated unfairly.

4. Plenty. This is not our strong suit. We are just not equipped for masses of people, and unfortunately, we are going to be seeing a lot more of these in the years to come because of the inattention to climb and change and the appalling policies of the government that allow developers to build anywhere, even when it is known to be a high risk.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* It is interesting to see that this answer comes across as the government being more interested in what they can gain from building rather than the safety precautions that should be considered.

5. Absolutely. The poorer community, the less attention they get.

*PERSONAL ANALYSIS:* As you can see, she also feels the same way when it comes to how mistreated and ignored the lower income society feels. The reoccurring theme of my argument continues to be displayed in most of the answers. There will always be a lack of response to areas with a lower income.

6. Politics is inseparable from how natural disasters occur and how much damage they do. If we could accept the science of climate change is real and urgent, we could invest in mitigating risk. One sacrifices their ties to the company as the benefit for promoting climate change is a hoax, and we will pay for this terrible disguise of the truth.

The questionnaire provided to these individuals strengthens my arguments. The responses highlight that the government responds to low-income individuals unjustly. Also, that the conditions of these people prior to the situation inevitably create them to become more vulnerable.

**Conclusion:**

The results reveal the ineffective U.S. government response that was provided to the people of New Orleans, Louisiana. As we now know, politics does play a significant role in the way in which a natural disaster is approached by from the government. Major determinants that make people vulnerable are social, economic and political factors, which decide if people will be able to plan properly and respond on their own behaves to a natural disaster. There are simply differential impacts before and a disaster that reveal that communities are distributed differentially as well as responded to differentially.

In result, my hypothesis is proven to be correct. The inequities of a superstorm are directly related to the effectiveness of the government's response. This is certainly the case when considering the government's response when Hurricane Katrina occurred in 2005 and citizens in New Orleans were treated unfairly. Many of the citizens are already significantly vulnerable due to economic factors, but is it fair for these factors to not be

considered by the government? I have proposed a solution to help situations such as Hurricane Katrina run more smoothly in the future. The recovery plan consists of the following considerations:

1. The capabilities of areas to restore its past position before a superstorm may be difficult for some over others. There are many factors that play a role in why a certain group would not be able to recover from a superstorm such as Hurricane Katrina in the year 2005.

2. There is a need to attempt to set aside the inequities and provide several opportunities for the people of low-income areas to rebuild after a disaster. If inequities are not dealt with there will always be a gap between those who are receiving an effective response from the government and those who are not simply because of where they stand socioeconomically.

3. Come to the understanding that it is very likely for a zone to be geographically similar, but that due to the characteristics of the individual that inhabit these areas, it may be more difficult for some to handle the situation at hand in a usual manner. Also, even if the area is hit by similar magnitude as another area, one may have a more difficult time in recuperating.

4. Vulnerabilities do indeed exist before the occurrence of a tragedy, and because of this, it is necessary for the local government to promote unity. The idea of unity formed between the communities in areas that face issues with inequities could improve preparedness.

In response to Louisiana's horrific disaster, it is clear that there is no immediate solution to such a disaster. FEMA was aware of the soon to come disaster, yet, FEMA did very

little to help assist those who would need the most assistance. The focus for Louisiana needs to include a vision as to what one may imagine New Orleans, Louisiana as in the next couple decades. Also, considerations need to be taken into account such as why it is substantial to reduce the high level of poverty in the large city. Short-term recovery plans need to be further acknowledged so that a natural disaster in the future can create lower level damage. Lastly, it would be interesting to consider maybe other solutions that have possibly worked in other high-risk areas of living in the United States so that Louisiana may adjust and probably grow from the solution.

I feel my thesis is one to be considered in many different areas of study. Conducting a single case study may seem as if there was not a sufficient amount of information, but I feel that this case study alone was sufficient because it alone shows how the Federal Emergency Management Agency needs to refocus on their mission. This thesis can help better understand how the environment even though not highly discussed, can be the beginning of many various issues in politics. It is important to note that if the government tends to respond in a way that people of low-income tend to suffer, the awakening matters such as nonparticipation from citizens will rise. The reason being that these people many feel cheated, and as if their government is non-transparent. The question at hand is will the United States government, specifically the Federal Emergency Management Agency continue to respond in an unjust manner depending on demographics of an area? Or will the reveal of this ineffective response create a more just response to the citizens of the United States whether they are well off or poor? One thing is sure, the catastrophic occurrence in 2005 was responded to in a manner that more than just affected people realized something had gone wrong.

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## Appendix

	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Black	67.5%	58.8%
White	26.5%	33.1%
Hispanic	3.5%	4.8%
Asian	2.4%	3.0%
Am. Indian Alaska Native	0.3%	0.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.03%	0.1%

**TABLE 1: POPULATION** information collected from Census Bureau and the  
American Community Survey (ACS)

**2005**

**2006**

**2014**

**592,800**

**438,278**

**553,637**

**TABLE 2: HOUSING UNITS** information collected from Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS)

	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2014</b>
Business Establishments	31,401	29,002	29,794
Employment	517,194	427,373	475,098

**TABLE 3: BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT**

information collected from Census Bureau and the American Community Survey