

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly three years after Hurricane Katrina and the devastating levee breaches that followed in its wake, the Kaiser Family Foundation is releasing the second of at least three planned surveys of the New Orleans area, this one focused specifically on Orleans Parish. In the first survey, fielded in the fall of 2006, we were able to quantify the myriad ways in which the storm had impacted people's lives – from their financial and employment situations to their access to needed health care to their personal relationships – as well as to paint a portrait of a city underwhelmed but not discontented with the progress being made in rebuilding. By surveying the population again in 2008 we hope to offer an over-time assessment of residents' needs, goals and concerns, to give people a continuing chance to speak out regarding the massive rebuilding effort playing out in their midst, and to help inform those struggling with recovery. As always, we also hope to keep the challenges facing New Orleans from fading out of the national spotlight.

The results of the new survey – fielded in the spring of 2008 – are sobering, suggesting that many New Orleans residents are disappointed by the pace of the recovery effort, that some perceive a lack of opportunity in the city, and that many feel forgotten by their nation and its leaders. The survey finds that the city's population, while substantially reduced in size, is overwhelmingly made up of people who lived in New Orleans before the storm hit, with nine in ten reporting they are Katrina survivors. These residents knew the city pre-disaster, and not only have that pre-flood city as their baseline but may also have overly high expectations about the power of the rebuilding process to create a "new" New Orleans, one in which pre-existing social problems would be lessened or even erased. The survey provides a sense that these high expectations are not being matched by the reality on the ground. In many ways, in fact, the problems and challenges facing the city are as daunting as they were a year and a half ago, when we first surveyed the population at Katrina's one-year anniversary. In at least one area – mental health challenges – they seem to have become even more visible.

At the same time, however, most living in New Orleans continue to believe that, although change may come slowly, the city will yet come back. The survey also finds pockets of hope – from improving views of race relations to better access to health care to satisfaction with local opportunities for worship – and areas where life, for many people, has returned to normal.

KEY FINDINGS

Rating the official recovery process: Right direction, inadequate progress

As was true in 2006, a narrow majority of New Orleans residents (56 percent) say that the rebuilding and recovery process is going in the right direction. But at the same time, fully half of those living in the parish say they are either dissatisfied (41 percent) or angry (11 percent) with the amount of progress that has been made.

The survey suggests this widespread frustration with the pace of the recovery effort is linked to a feeling that on certain tough but high priority issues facing this urban area progress is not meeting public expectations. Of the top four issues that city residents name as their rebuilding priorities – storm protection, crime control, health care access and the public schools – only on storm protection do the majority of residents say they see at least some progress.

Specifically, six in ten say they do see at least some progress on the critical issue of levee repair, but at the same time seven in ten say they see little or no progress in controlling crime and assuring public safety. More than half say they see little or no progress on health care and the public schools, compared to roughly four in ten who see at least some progress in each area. As was true in 2006, a large majority of city dwellers (89 percent) say there are not enough health care services available for lower income residents in the area. It's worth noting that some of the worst ratings on the progress report card are saved for the issue of affordable housing, where nearly three in four say there has been little progress.

New Orleans faced challenges on many of these fronts before the storm, of course, with high crime rates and poor health statistics. Those tasked with recovery thus have the difficult mission of providing visible progress on long-standing problems while still dealing with the process of rebuilding after a hurricane.

Opportunities currently seen as limited, though future more hopeful

Perhaps as a result of their disappointment in the progress being made on many tough issues, city residents tilt to the negative when it comes to rating opportunities available in the city. In particular, more than half – 56 percent – say that it's a bad time for children to be growing up in New Orleans.

Those living in Orleans Parish are also pessimistic about the job and career opportunities in the city. Nearly two in three say that “good jobs are difficult to find.” And nearly as many (61 percent) rate New Orleans as “not so good” or “poor” when it comes to career opportunities for young people. These sentiments are likely to be in part specific to the city and in part a reflection of the wave of economic unease sweeping the nation in 2008.

In one of the survey's more disturbing findings, the proportion of residents who say they are considering moving from New Orleans has risen. In 2006, 12 percent of Orleans Parish residents told us they were “currently planning to move or seriously considering moving” from the area. In this 2008 survey, that proportion had risen to 22 percent. The decision to move is strongly related to age, with younger residents – nationally a more mobile group-- significantly more likely to say they are thinking about moving from the city.

Despite these somewhat downbeat findings, there is one solid bright spot to consider: there is still widespread hope that things will improve over time. Three in four (74 percent) say they are optimistic about the area's future, a level of confidence that has hardly wavered over the past year and a half despite the increasing frustrations expressed by the populace.

Federal help judged to fall short; City feels forgotten by nation and its leaders

In many ways, New Orleans residents seem to feel that their nation has let them down in a time of need. They feel ignored by policymakers in Washington, underwhelmed by the financial help provided by the federal government, and forgotten by their fellow Americans.

Overall, six in ten (60 percent) say they do not think the rebuilding of New Orleans is a priority for Congress and the president, and even more (65 percent) say they think “most Americans have forgotten about the challenges facing New Orleans.” Three in four say the federal government has not provided enough money and other support to the city.

But there is plenty of blame to go around: seven in ten say that the federal dollars that *have* been provided for hurricane recovery have been “mostly misspent.” This dovetails with a widespread view that New Orleans has a problem with political corruption (86 percent say the city has either a very serious or somewhat serious problem).

Finally, city residents feel unsatisfied with the help offered by insurance companies – with eight in ten giving them low ratings for their response to the disaster – and have mixed reviews of the way the national media has covered their attempt at recovery (51 percent give the national media good ratings, 45 percent rate them “not so good” or “poor”). Only the local media – with their unique role of providing practical “how to” information to a recovering population – comes off looking good here, with three in four saying they are doing a good job covering the rebuilding process. Across a range of public and private organizations, then, many city residents feel disappointed.

Immigration, diversity and race relations in New Orleans: A mixed story

The majority of city residents (58 percent) say that the growing number of immigrant workers in general has been “good for New Orleans.” An even larger percentage – three in four residents – says that, in general, the diversity of racial and ethnic groups in the city is good for New Orleans.

At the same time, however, a large majority (70 percent) describe the people of New Orleans as “mainly divided by things like race or income,” and most see this as a problem. It’s worth noting that significantly more of the population says it is the divide between rich and poor which is the problem (33 percent) than says it is mainly race that causes the fracture (15 percent). Roughly two in ten see both as causing divisions. Without pre-storm data, of course, we cannot precisely determine how much of this perceived divide is new and how much predated the disaster.

The survey does suggest that race relations in the city may be improving. This year, the percentage who said race relations were “worse [than] they were before Hurricane Katrina” dropped 9 percentage points from 2006. While a substantial minority of African Americans still see the recovery process as stacked against them (46 percent), the percentage of African Americans who feel the recovery process is racially biased has declined from 2006, dropping from a majority of 55 percent.

Recovery on a personal level: Disruption remains, stress levels elevated

The survey finds the storm-related personal disruption recorded at the one-year anniversary in 2006 is relatively unabated in 2008. Overall, fully four in ten (41 percent) of those Orleans Parish residents who survived Katrina would currently describe their own personal situation as at least somewhat disrupted by the storm, compared to 46 percent in 2006.¹ As was true then, the city’s African American population is much more likely than white residents to report their lives still being disrupted: 50 percent of those African Americans who lived in New Orleans when Katrina hit are still disrupted vs. 26 percent of white residents.

There is some progress on the margins here, though, with a 5 percentage point increase in the overall proportion who say their lives are “largely back to normal” and a similar sized drop in the percentage who are “still very disrupted.” And overall, the majority (59 percent) continue to say they are at least “almost” back to normal.

The survey suggests that as much as the dramatic physical damage caused by the storm and flooding, it is Katrina’s psychological aftermath that stands out as one of its primary legacies. Asked to more specifically compare their lives pre- and post-Katrina, those who had lived through the storm were most likely to report that their “general level of stress” was worse now, with a narrow majority (53 percent) saying so. Similarly, four in ten described their mental and emotional health as worse. And one in four of those with children in their home said their children’s mental or emotional health was worse than before the storm.

Stress was not the only area where a sizeable group of residents judged their life worse after Katrina: four in ten storm survivors say their *financial* situation is worse now than before the storm. In this aspect, as in many others, the storm was hardest on the most vulnerable residents: just over half (53 percent) of low-income residents report that their financial situation is worse today.

Overall, then, it is noteworthy but perhaps not surprising that quality of life ratings have not bounced back among New Orleans’ population. In our 2006 survey, 65 percent said they would have rated their life pre-Katrina as very satisfying. But only 25 percent said they would have rated life in the fall of 2006 as very satisfying. That number remains unchanged in 2008.

Across these measures comparing life pre- and post-Katrina, it is worth keeping in mind that many residents report a good deal of stability: roughly half of those who survived the storm (48 percent) say their housing situation is the same as before the storm, and the rest divide between it being better (23

¹ The survey found that nine in ten residents lived in New Orleans at the time the storm hit in August 2005.

percent) and it being worse (27 percent). Similarly, 47 percent say their relationship with their spouse or partner is the same, compared to 18 percent who say it is better and 12 percent who say it is worse.

It is also worth noting that the survey can only report the disruption still felt by those who returned to New Orleans. The views and experiences of those former residents who uprooted themselves from the city and now live elsewhere in the state or nation are not captured in this project.

Self-reported mental and physical health problems on the rise

Officials in New Orleans face the challenge of rebuilding while also trying to meet the needs of a fairly diverse population, one whose problems are not easily solved and in no hurry to disappear. In 2008, we find that 86 percent of adults living in New Orleans are facing a challenge in at least one of five critical areas: a physical or mental health challenge, a problem with health care coverage or access, a health or health care problem facing a child, or an employment challenge. This overall figure does not represent a substantive change from 2006.

The survey does, however, find an increase in self-reported mental health problems in the year and a half since our last sounding. The percentage of residents who say they have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness such as depression rose from 5 percent in 2006 to 15 percent now. The proportion who report taking a prescription medicine for problems with their mental health in the past six months rose from 8 percent to 17 percent. And self-reports of being in “fair” or “poor” mental health have also doubled over the time period, from 10 percent to 20 percent now.

Though the survey cannot directly tie these increases to Katrina-related aftereffects, this is certainly high on the list of plausible culprits. It’s possible that, having survived the disaster and the immediate aftermath, the slow recovery is taking a toll on the population, somewhat like the shift from an acute to a chronic illness. But it’s equally possible that the increased rates of reported mental health problems are an indication that the health system is at least partially up and functioning again. Residents may have a better opportunity to be diagnosed and treated for any mental health issues, an opportunity that was not as widespread at the time of our 2006 survey.

As is true regarding self-reported mental health, the survey also finds a higher proportion of residents reporting a physical health challenge. Overall, 65 percent report either having some sort of chronic condition or disability or being in “fair” or “poor” health, up from 45 percent in 2006. Three in ten (31 percent) of those with a child under 19 at home say that at least one of their children suffers from a chronic condition or disability, up from 21 percent in 2006. As is true for mental health, it is not clear to what extent these changes are driven by an actual deterioration in health status and to what extent it is driven by other possible factors, including: increased access to care leading to increased diagnoses of problems; the return of a less-healthy segment of the population; or the simple fact that with the passage of time, and as more immediate life crises fade, people are more able to concentrate on their own health status.

Health care coverage and access challenges widespread and persistent

The survey finds that just as many residents have some sort of health care coverage or access problem in 2008 as a year and a half ago, but the nature of those problems has changed somewhat. On the positive side of the ledger: more residents report having health insurance coverage (the number of all adults who report being uninsured dropped from 26 percent in 2006 to 18 percent now), and fewer say that they have no usual source of health care or are depending on a hospital emergency room as their primary source of care (down from 34 percent to 25 percent).

On the negative side: affordability seems to be a bigger issue, perhaps in part due to the difficult economic climate gripping Louisiana and the rest of the nation in 2008, perhaps partly due to the fact that the free care available in the short-term aftermath of the disaster may be reduced, and perhaps as a result of increased access to health services. Overall, fully one in four (25 percent) say they had a problem paying for medical bills in the past six months, up dramatically from 9 percent in 2006. At least

twice as many as in 2006 report that they had recently skipped or postponed needed care (18 percent vs. 9 percent) or had skipped needed doses of medication in the same time period (15 percent vs. 6 percent), bringing these experiences more in line with the current national average.

Next steps

The current survey is the second in a planned series of at least three surveys designed to measure the needs and opinions of residents, and to help the city in its rebuilding effort, as New Orleans attempts to come back from one of the biggest natural and social disasters in the nation's history. The Kaiser Family Foundation will return to the New Orleans area in roughly 18 months in the hopes that these findings will once again train the eyes of the nation on a city that currently feels forgotten.

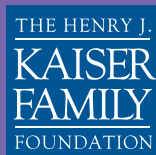
A NOTE ON SURVEY METHODOLOGY

New Orleans Three Years after the Storm: The Second Kaiser Post-Katrina Survey, 2008 was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation including: the survey research team led by Kaiser Vice President and Director for Public Opinion and Survey Research Mollyann Brodie along with Claudia Deane and including Liz Hamel, Sasha Buscho, and Pam Murnane; the health policy team led by Kaiser Executive Vice President Diane Rowland and including Adele Shartzter, Samantha Artiga and David Rousseau; and Kaiser President and CEO Drew Altman. Dr. Brodie had overall responsibility for the project. The survey was conducted from March 5 to April 28, 2008, among 1,294 randomly selected adults ages 18 and older residing in Orleans Parish. The sample design was a multi-stage stratified area probability sample starting with 275 randomly selected segments based on Census Block Groups distributed proportionate to expected population in each of fourteen Census tract defined neighborhoods in Orleans Parish and then selecting a random sample of addresses from those areas using the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. To ensure coverage of all residents, interviewing was conducted using a mixed-mode design including by telephone (669 interviews), web (178), and face-to-face (447). Interviews were completed in English and Spanish. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on other subsets of respondents the margin of sampling error may be higher. The 2006 Kaiser survey referenced throughout this report was conducted in a four parish area, but for reasons of comparability the 2006 results included here are based only on Orleans Parish residents.² ICR/International Communications Research collaborated with Kaiser researchers on sample design and weighting, and supervised the fieldwork. See "Appendix C: Survey Methodology" for more details on survey sampling, fieldwork, and weighting.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the people of New Orleans who gave us their time, invited us into their homes, and answered our questions. We would also like to thank Dr. Karen DeSalvo and her colleagues in New Orleans for their helpful guidance and feedback throughout this project, especially for shepherding the questionnaire through Tulane University's Office of Human Research Protection.

² See: "Giving Voice to the People of New Orleans: The Kaiser Post-Katrina Baseline Survey," Kaiser Family Foundation 2006. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/pomr051007pkg.cfm> and "Health Challenges for the People of New Orleans," Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/7659.cfm>



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