

**Citizen Mobilization in Post-Katrina New Orleans:
Do Local Government Failures Inspire or Inhibit Political Participation?**

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Abstract

On the morning of August 29th, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States with full force, leaving in its wake one of the most catastrophic natural disasters in the nation's history. In the near aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the local government in New Orleans failed: it neglected to establish and implement a viable evacuation strategy, to provide temporary aid to victims of the storm, and to uphold basic human rights and democratic representation. With over 80% of New Orleans flooded, questions arose about whose homes and neighborhoods would be rebuilt, who would be able to afford to come back to the city, and, perhaps most importantly, who would get to be a part of these conversations. Political engagement in post-Katrina New Orleans was arguably never more important in determining the future of the city and its people. To study forces influencing the likelihood of mobilization – or demobilization – among residents in the wake of local government failure, I analyze community testimonies at public hearings and voter turnout rates in mayoral elections between 2002 and 2014. I find that local government failure was *mobilizing* for individuals who were *able* to evacuate – particularly White Republicans – but *demobilizing* for individuals who were *not able* to evacuate – particularly Black and low-income people. While White and middle-upper class residents were empowered to make demands for the rebuilding process, Black and low-income residents, most of whom were Democrats, experienced an additional set of government failures that influenced their perception of government and their likelihood of political engagement. Black and low-income individuals' loss of hope in the efficacy and legitimacy of government ultimately led to political and social alienation, findings that raise concerns about citizens' ability to elect a representative, responsive, and democratic government.

Setting the Stage: Hurricane Katrina and the Political Landscape of New Orleans

Within days, Hurricane Katrina had destroyed over 72% of New Orleans' homes and had reeled in over \$100 billion in damages (Ambrose, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2011). Nine months later, in May 2006, residents of over 68,000 households from Louisiana (the majority from New Orleans) were still living in trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as their primary housing (*The State of Housing in New Orleans One Year After Katrina*, n.d.). Trailer parks were spatially, socially, and politically isolated and lacked basic goods like reliable food, water, and electricity. In the first year alone, more than 1,800 people had lost their lives, most often from drowning, being trapped inside collapsed buildings, or suffering malnourishment from a lack of food or water (Quigley, 2007). By the end of 2006, the population of New Orleans had decreased by 267,000 people (59%) (Quigley, 2007).

Even before Katrina, the degree of racial and economic segregation in New Orleans was stark: New Orleans ranked #2 among all U.S. cities for having the second-highest share of residents living in extreme poverty, with over 40% of individuals living below the poverty line (Berube & Holmes, 2015). Hurricane Katrina only exacerbated these existing inequalities and affected those already most vulnerable (Kates et al., 2006). Decades-long zoning laws and redlining policies had placed low-income and public housing projects in the most low-lying, flood-prone areas of New Orleans; as a result, Hurricane Katrina disproportionately affected Black and low-income populations, as well as renters and public housing residents (Quigley, 2007). According to a 2005 report by the Congressional Research Service, over 73% of New Orleans' residents displaced by the hurricane were Black, and nearly 35% of these people were poor (Gabe et al., 2005). Neighborhood-level analyses of race and flood damage further show that predominantly Black neighborhoods suffered disproportionate levels of severe flooding:

over 75% of Blacks suffered severe flooding, compared to only 50% of Whites (Quigley, 2007, p. 54).

Black and low-income residents of New Orleans were also disproportionately affected because of another critical, systemic error: the failure of the mayor's evacuation plan to account for residents without access to cars or means to pay for transportation out of the city on immediate notice. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about one in four New Orleans residents had no access to a car (Berube & Raphael, 2005). In fact, New Orleans ranks fourth highest out of the largest U.S. metropolitan areas in its proportion of households that lack car access (Berube & Raphael, 2005). The racial divide in car ownership in New Orleans is particularly stark: only 5% of Whites in the city lacked access to a car, compared to over 27% of Blacks who had no access to a car (Berube & Raphael, 2005).

Low-income residents' lack of accumulated wealth meant they could not afford to pay out-of-pocket for immediate transportation, housing, or healthcare costs; they could not afford to "ride out" unemployment as the government had expected. Residents who lived paycheck-to-paycheck could not afford to buy hotel rooms, rental cars, or airfare to other states. Public transit, including buses and trains, was abandoned and left to flood, leaving no way for those without access to cars to evacuate. The ordered evacuation of New Orleans by Mayor Ray Nagin just one day before Hurricane Katrina meant only the most well-off could afford to evacuate the city in time, while thousands of poor, mostly Black residents were left with no option but to remain in the city and endure the storm. Consequently, the Black population in New Orleans fell by over 61% in one just year, dropping from 302,000 people in 2006 to only 89,000 in 2007 (Quigley, 2007, p. 8). Moreover, an estimated 67% of Whites who lived in New Orleans

pre-Katrina had been able to return to New Orleans within one year after evacuating, compared to less than 40% of Blacks who had been able to return (Logan, 2008).

Hurricane Katrina had a dire effect on the political economy and electoral base of the city. From 2004 to 2006, the size of the Black electorate fell from 63% to only 57% (“Voice: Voting and Political Expression in the Gulf,” 2005, p. 1). The decrease in the size and power of the Black electorate had severe consequences on the representation of Black people’s interests in government and in the diversity of the voter bloc. In general, Blacks tend to be more liberal than Whites and more loyal to the Democratic Party (Huddy & Feldman, 2006). Blacks are also generally more supportive of government involvement in social welfare policies such as affirmative action, government payout programs, and public housing developments (Huddy & Feldman, 2006). The weakened size and capacity of the Black electorate should therefore be of concern not only for the responsiveness of government to Black people’s interests, but also for the democratic accountability and representation.

Radically changing the demographics of the city, Hurricane Katrina rendered New Orleans a whiter, wealthier, and more politically conservative city (Holman & Lay, 2020). In a study on the 2006 New Orleans mayoral election, Quigley (2007) finds the displacement of Black voters and the decrease in the Black share of the electorate increased Republican candidates’ advantages and harmed the prospects of Democratic candidates winning elections (Quigley, 2007, p. 51). These demographic changes have significant implications for the political landscape of New Orleans, raising questions about political engagement, mobilization, and government efficacy.

Statement of Problem & Research Question

Given the increasing frequency of natural disasters and likelihood of exposure to future events, as well as rising income inequalities across U.S. cities, the political implications of natural disasters (and subsequent government responses) can no longer be ignored (Green et al., 2016).¹ Studies on voter turnout in New Orleans have so far only focused on the relationship between flood damage and voter turnout in the 2006 mayoral runoff (Clarke, 2008; Sinclair et al., 2011; Walters, 2008). My research fills this gap by examining the influence of a group's evacuation ability on their political mobilization, as well as racial and partisan differences in turnout rates, even when controlling for flood damage.

When the government fails, like it did during (and after) Hurricane Katrina, questions arise about how citizens might react and engage politically. These dilemmas motivate my research question, which is: *how did the local government's failure to help victims of Hurricane Katrina affect New Orleans residents' motivation to participate in local politics, and to what extent does one's evacuation ability, race, class, and neighborhood of residency affect their likelihood of mobilization?* Through my research, I explore how different racial and socioeconomic groups – particularly those who *could* and *could not* evacuate – were differently mobilized in local politics.

Voting Likelihood After Natural Disasters

Current discussions on the political effects of natural disasters offer competing theories about why natural disasters might lead to mobilization or demobilization among affected

¹ The levee failure in New Orleans had been predicted for years leading up to Katrina, yet neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations took any action to address the levee infrastructure. Since the 1990s, the Federal Army Corps of Engineers had publicly warned the federal government and FEMA that New Orleans' levee system was in poor condition and could not sustain even a category 3 storm (Day & Rosenblum, 2006).

communities. Cohen and Dawson define mobilization as an “activity designed to increase political involvement of citizens in a specific campaign” (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). Some studies argue that natural disasters should *increase* political engagement through inspiring citizens to hold their leaders accountable and reward higher levels of voter turnout, while other studies predict disasters should *decrease* political engagement by depleting economic resources and instilling a sense of hopelessness for the future (Fair et al., 2017; Sinclair et al., 2011).

Natural disasters may have the potential to increase citizens’ political engagement in three specific ways. First, Fair et al. (2017) suggest natural disasters can inspire altruistic behavior and the creation of self-help organizations, whereby citizens become more aware of the benefits of collective action and feel inspired to change their behavior (Fair et al., 2017, p. 101). When individuals exhibit socially conscious, altruistic behavior, they argue, people may be more likely to express their concern for the welfare of others by voting for politicians they feel will best address their needs. Second, though contingent on an effective government response, natural disasters may instill a sense of unity and camaraderie among similarly affected individuals, which would likely translate into greater interpersonal trust, social capital, and community bonds (Fair et al., 2017, p. 101). It is plausible, then, that these changes in social capital could influence one’s voting behavior, perhaps inspiring more prosocial, inclusive voting choices.

Lastly, natural disasters may increase citizens’ levels of political engagement by showcasing the important role of local, state, and federal governments in disaster relief efforts and by highlighting exactly what is at stake (Fair et al., 2017, p. 101). Fair et al. find that individuals who receive access to the most political information in the near aftermath of natural disasters are those who are most likely to vote in elections (Fair et al., 2017, p. 102). They argue that as citizens become increasingly aware of government responsibility, voter turnout should be

increasing to “the extent to which citizens think the choice of government matters for future welfare” (Fair et al., 2017, p. 102). However, the pathways demonstrated in this study are limited because they are contingent on one critical factor: the efficacy of the government response and state relief programs. Would these findings therefore apply to the case of Katrina in New Orleans, which is not recognized as having received an effective government response?

Other scholars are more pessimistic about the effects of natural disasters on citizens’ mobilization. Sinclair et al. (2011) highlight the importance of economic resources for sustained political engagement, arguing that economic destruction from natural disasters should decrease an individual’s likelihood of voting by increasing the cost of voting (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 8). The fewer resources an individual has, they argue, whether time, money, social networks, or civic skills, the less likely an individual will be to participate in politics. Kosec and Mo (2017) similarly raise concerns about the economic effects of natural disasters on political engagement. They argue that “economic shocks resulting from natural disasters can reduce citizen aspiration levels,” whereas “having high aspirations may similarly encourage future-oriented political behaviors such as voter turnout, participation in civic organizations, and political knowledge” (Kosec & Mo, 2017, p. 49). These findings inform their prediction that natural disasters should *decrease* political participation.

Though flooding from Hurricane Katrina did ultimately decrease the likelihood of an individual voting on average, the effect was not uniform across all neighborhoods. Sinclair et al. (2011) find that residents who suffered more than six feet of flooding were *more* likely to participate in the 2006 mayoral election than residents who experienced less severe flooding (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 1). They hypothesize this is because residents most affected by Katrina should feel the greatest sense of motivation to hold local leaders accountable for their response

and feel most determined to engage in behavior that influences the future of the city (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 1). On the other hand, Sinclair et al. show that Katrina most dramatically harmed individuals who had historically faced the greatest barriers to voting – including voter suppression and gerrymandering – and thus increased the cost of voting to the point where these individuals were unlikely to have the resources to vote (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 3).

Neighborhood Context and Black Mobilization

Many scholars highlight the critical role race plays in party politics, particularly in influencing local elections and in driving political mobilization or alienation (Quigley, 2007). Some political science scholars suggest that residential concentration produced by segregation can create an advantage for collective action and community organizing among Blacks residents, leading to greater political mobilization. Shaw et al. find that face-to-face interactions among neighbors in predominantly Black areas significantly increase Black political participation (Shaw et al., 2019). Cohen and Dawson (1993), however, find the opposite result of racial and economic segregation: they find that Blacks who live in poor neighborhoods are *less likely* to participate in politics than are Blacks who live in wealthier neighborhoods (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). Specifically, they find people living in neighborhoods of poverty are at least 21% less likely to talk about politics with family or friends compared to those living in neighborhoods with little to no poverty (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). This disparity in political engagement among the urban poor – particularly among Black residents – should be of great concern to democracy, especially given our understanding that poor and Black individuals often hold different political opinions and policy preferences than do White and upper-income voters.

Moreover, Strolovitch et al. (2006) argue that systemic hierarchies and power dynamics influenced how Blacks and Whites differently perceived race and racism as factors (or not) of the slow government response (Strolovitch et al., 2006). Other studies on the racialized reaction to Hurricane Katrina highlight factors likely to affect Black political alienation and social isolation. Huddy and Feldman (2006) find that events that polarize Black and White voters along racial lines – like Hurricane Katrina – are “likely to increase cynicism and alienate Black voters, fueling dissatisfaction with the administration” (Huddy & Feldman, 2006). These findings raise implications about the political effects of spatial isolation – and gentrification – on Black urban residents. Knotts et al. (2006) find a negative correlation between gentrification and political participation, such that as gentrification increases, citizens’ political engagement decreases, especially among long-standing residents (Knotts et al., 2006). Slee and Desmond (2021) similarly find that as housing evictions increase, voter turnout decreases, even – and especially – among those who were not displaced themselves but whose larger neighborhoods were affected by evictions (Slee & Desmond, 2021). These findings are particularly important to consider as forced evictions become increasingly common in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In the case of New Orleans, these findings would lead one to believe that the increased cost of living and the gentrification of the city post-Katrina would negatively impact political engagement among Black residents who have lived in New Orleans their whole lives.

Since 1978, New Orleans has been governed almost exclusively by Black mayors, a critical factor affecting the political engagement among Black residents (McBride & Parker, 2008, p. 351). The descriptive representation of Black residents in New Orleans raises questions about whether or not a correlation exists between Black political incorporation and civic

engagement.² Spence and McClerking (2010), for example, examine the effect of Black mayors on Black citizens' likelihood of participating in politics. They find that Black residents in Black-led cities participate more in politics than Blacks in non-Black led cities, though the effect lasts for only a short period of time. They speculate this is because Blacks would feel more empowered to vote in elections where they had political control and where they felt their needs were being addressed (Spence and McClerking, 2010). Interestingly, Spence and McClerking find that longer periods of Black empowerment (i.e., longer tenures of Black politicians) *reduce* participation among Black residents and makes Blacks less likely to vote in local elections (Spence & McClerking, 2010). Spence and McClerking further conclude that "mayors in cities characterized by long-term Black empowerment are not as interested in mobilizing citizens, preferring instead to win victories in low-turnout elections," claiming that Black mayors in majority-Black cities tend not to have the incentive to mobilize voters because their seats are not at risk (Spence & McClerking, 2010, p. 914). Would these findings apply to Black New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, who failed to mobilize the Black electorate after Katrina?

The Politics of Blame and Accountability: Partisan and Racial Differences

Studying the politics of blame and accountability is especially critical for understanding how victims of Hurricane Katrina might become mobilized or demobilized after government failures. In an October 2005 joint CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll of Katrina victims (defined as those who applied for disaster relief through the American Red Cross), only 24% of New Orleans respondents rated the federal government's response in positive terms (Jones & Carroll, 2005).³

² The proportion of Black leaders in New Orleans' local government rose by nearly 20% in 1970 to over 43% in 1978 and 53% in 1985 (Go, 2013, p. 33).

³ This October 2005 poll was conducted in collaboration with the American Red Cross and involved a random sample of 1,510 adults who applied for disaster relief from the American Red Cross. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with different levels of government (local, state, and federal) in the adequacy of their disaster response (Jones & Carroll, 2005).

When asked about satisfaction with the local government, 38% of New Orleans residents said the local government response was poor (Jones & Carroll, 2005). While most Katrina victims blamed both the federal and local government for the inadequate disaster response, the extent to which people blamed different levels of government differed drastically between Democratic and Republican voters.

It is widely recognized in academic scholarship that partisanship strongly influences attributions of blame (Lyons & Jaeger, 2021; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). Malhotra and Kuo (2008) find that party cues cause individuals to blame government officials of the opposite party, even without knowing about their proper jurisdictions and responsibilities (Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). Other scholars focus on the role of race in influencing perceptions of government responsiveness and in determining blame attributions. A poll by the Pew Research Center found that nearly 70% of Blacks, compared to less than 17% of Whites, believed that the government response to the hurricane would have been faster if “most of the victims had been White” (Strolovitch et al., 2006). In a study on the effect of the media’s portrayal of most of the disaster victims as poor and Black, Haider-Markel et al. (2007) find that because Blacks were more likely to feel greater connection and sympathy towards images of disaster victims, they were more likely to hold negative views about the government response to Katrina (Haider-Markel et al., 2007). Blacks also gave significantly lower ratings of President Bush than did Whites, a finding that confirms both the role of race in influencing government approval ratings and the weight of such blame in driving voting behavior and political engagement in the wake of natural disasters.

These partisan and racial disparities in blame attribution among Katrina survivors have consequences not only for prospects of mobilization and voting behavior in local elections, but also for our understanding of modern democracy. Malhotra and Kuo accordingly raise these

concerns, stating that “proper blame (and credit) attribution is necessary for citizens in a democracy to hold elected leaders accountable” (Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). Especially among New Orleans residents who lacked access to government information and public discourses, understanding *who* and *why* citizens blame in the aftermath of Katrina should help illuminate why people become either mobilized or demobilized in the wake of government failure.

The Politics of Demand-Making

Demand-making is a critical component of political participation, particularly during the rebuilding phase after a natural disaster like Katrina. As the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) led negotiations with local and state governments about the allocation of disaster relief – how much support each institution should provide, to whom, and for long – some communities mobilized more successfully than others, making demands on the state for greater provision of public goods and services. These forms of civic engagement were highly consequential: the neighborhoods in New Orleans that exhibited the highest levels of political participation were those that ultimately won the greatest access to public resources and federally provided disaster relief (Go, 2013). As a result, urban residents may become more politically engaged in city rebuilding efforts to gain immediate access to public resources (Go, 2013). These findings raise additional questions about the extent to which demands-making on the state for disaster resources would translate into other forms of political participation, such as voting in elections and appearing at public government hearings.

Despite competing findings from past literature, one important question remains unanswered: who is most mobilized to participate in city politics and vote in local elections, and who is most demobilized? Is there a difference between people’s eagerness to vote in local

elections, and if so, how does one's evacuation ability (i.e., socioeconomic status), race, and neighborhood of residence affect their likelihood of mobilization? This is precisely what I intend to answer through my research.

Hypotheses & Hypothetical Explanations

I hypothesize that the government's failures during and after Hurricane Katrina will have different effects on people's political mobilization based on their race, socioeconomic status (specifically their ability to evacuate or not), and their neighborhood of residency. Below, I outline three hypothetical outcomes of political participation for both Blacks and Whites in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

Among Black residents of New Orleans, there are three possible outcomes. First, Black residents could be *mobilized* after Katrina and be more likely to attend public meetings and vote in local elections. I hypothesize this would be a result of racial residential concentration that promotes community organizing and racialized linked fate. Black residents who suffered from the poor government response might also feel compelled to become more involved in politics to hold their leaders accountable and vote for politicians they feel will best represent their needs and interests. Many residents in the Lower Ninth Ward, for example, lacked flood insurance and were most reliant on the state for disaster relief; therefore, one might expect these individuals to make the greatest number of demands on the state. Second, and alternatively, Black residents could be *demobilized* after Katrina, losing hope in the efficacy of local government and lacking the time and resources to participate in city meetings and vote in elections. Drawing from past literature on forces affecting one's likelihood of voting, we would expect that being Black and/or poor would have a negative impact on mobilization and political participation after government

unresponsiveness. The third possible outcome is that Black residents are *neither mobilized nor demobilized* after Katrina. It is possible that the mobilizing and demobilizing forces discussed above nearly cancel one another out and produce no net change in political participation.

Among White residents of New Orleans, there are also three possible outcomes I see likely. First, White residents could be *mobilized* after Katrina and be more likely to attend public meetings and vote in local elections. I hypothesize this would be the case since most White residents in New Orleans are middle-upper income and have both the economic resources and time to participate in politics. White residents who were less affected by the hurricane might also learn more about the workings of local government and feel inspired to vote for politicians who best serve their interests. Residents of neighborhoods who suffered severe flood damage but had the financial means to evacuate might become mobilized as people learn about local government capacity in disaster response. These people might feel most prone to vote for candidates who prioritize an efficient local recovery and who advocate on behalf of the state in federal deliberations. A second hypothetical outcome is that White residents become *demobilized* after Katrina. White, upper-income residents of Lakeview, for example, can nearly all afford flood insurance, so I would expect these people to be less reliant on the state for disaster relief. I therefore would expect their political engagement – specifically in terms of demands-making – to decrease some degree. Finally, White residents could be *neither mobilized nor demobilized* after Katrina, suggesting government failure had little to no effect on the political engagement of those who were least affected by the storm.

Research Design

I conduct a two-pronged research design that incorporates qualitative and quantitative measurements of mobilization and political participation in post-Katrina New Orleans. The qualitative research centers on testimonies from victims of Hurricane Katrina, particularly distinguishing the experiences of those who were able to evacuate from those who were *not* able to evacuate. Then, the quantitative research examines voter turnout by race, party affiliation, and neighborhood in New Orleans mayoral elections between 2002 and 2014. In this section, I quantify mobilization through voter turnout rates for local mayoral elections. This two-pronged design is crucial for my study; my qualitative research tells me what people are *thinking*, and my quantitative research tells me how people are *acting*. I ultimately aim to explore the extent to which individual testimonies and community participation at public hearings can help explain why we see the turnout we do.

Part I. Community Testimonies

I examined three public hearings to gather information on how New Orleans residents expressed their concerns to their government. These hearings gave me the most localized and specific time-stamped conversations on political engagement, government responsiveness, and voting likelihood in post-Katrina New Orleans. I chose to focus only on hearings that were open to the public and where community members were explicitly given the time to voice their concerns and ask questions either to the mayor or to a panel of congresspeople. Each of the hearings I examined invited questions and comments from community members, which I felt was most important since I was interested in seeing which community members showed up, how many showed up, and what different people said.

The first hearing I analyzed, titled *New Orleans Hurricane Briefing with Mayor Nagin*, was held in New Orleans on September 21st, 2005, less than one month after the hurricane. Mayor Nagin held weekly hearings with the public on updates to the Katrina response, during which community members were given time to ask questions to the mayor and express their concerns with the response (*New Orleans Hurricane Briefing with Mayor Nagin*, 2005). The second hearing I analyzed, titled *Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, was held three months later on December 6, 2005, by a select bipartisan committee. In this hearing, New Orleans evacuees testified before Congress about their experiences suffering Katrina and discussed their greatest concerns with the government's response and rebuilding plan. This hearing focused on the role of socioeconomic factors in affecting the government's disaster response and individuals' experiences during and after the storm. Five witnesses were present at this hearing, all of whom were Black residents from New Orleans (four women, one man) (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005).

The final hearing I analyzed, titled the *Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, was held by Mayor Nagin's *Bring New Orleans Back Commission* on March 20, 2006. In this hearing, New Orleans residents were given time to ask questions to the mayor, express their concerns, and lay out their biggest needs. Community members present at this hearing were overwhelmingly angry and frustrated with the mayor's response to Hurricane Katrina (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Thirty-one community members spoke before the session ran out of time, and more residents had attended the hearing than was expected; the hearing room quickly reached standing capacity, and overflow space was filled with community members eager to express their concerns to the mayor. As a result of high demand from

community members, the chairman of the committee was forced to decrease each individual's allotted speaking time from three minutes to only one and a half minutes.

This data collection phase, however, did not come without its challenges. The accessibility of publicly available data was limited, and many sources lacked any records of hearings that took place before 2009. Specifically, I had hoped to acquire archives of New Orleans City Council meetings, either through digital recordings or transcribed minutes; however, the City Council had not recorded (or transcribed) any hearings from sessions that took place before 2009. This presented a significant obstacle since I aimed to examine community testimonies in the first two years after Hurricane Katrina (2005 - 2007). Similarly, I searched the Louisiana State Senate website for archives of hearings related to rebuilding in New Orleans, but encountered the same issue, with no archives available before 2008.

Part II. Voter Turnout in Post-Katrina New Orleans

My quantitative data analysis focuses specifically on Orleans Parish, the parish that experienced the greatest loss in population (302,000 people) from Hurricane Katrina and recorded the most deaths among its residents (Logan, 2008). Orleans Parish encompasses the entire city of New Orleans but excludes the surrounding suburbs. Using data from the Louisiana Secretary of State website, I analyze voter turnout data in Orleans Parish for four local elections between 2002 and 2014. Data on voter turnout rates in Orleans Parish were calculated by finding the total turnout rates of each of the 17 wards within Orleans Parish (wards are designed specifically for quantifying electoral outcomes). Local elections in Orleans parish occurred every four years, in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. I examine voter turnout for local elections held on the following four dates: February 2, 2002, April 22, 2006 (postponed from February 2006)⁴,

⁴ See Appendix A for more details on the state's decision to postpone the 2006 Mayoral election.

February 6, 2010, and February 1, 2014. I will use data on voter turnout from the 2002 local election as baseline benchmarks so that I can then compare voter turnout in the subsequent elections *after* Hurricane Katrina. This 12-year time frame will allow me to track changes in political participation over a span of time, anchored around Hurricane Katrina while controlling for different national political landscapes (i.e., under presidents of different parties).

To select neighborhoods to compare, I chose to focus on Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Ward, two neighborhoods in Orleans Parish that experienced the most severe flooding and housing destruction. According to data from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) collected on August 31, 2005, nearly 83% of homes in Lakeview suffered at least two feet of flooding, compared to just over 86% of homes in the Lower Ninth Ward that suffered at least two feet of flooding.⁵ Some of the severest damage, quantified in terms of areas that experienced over seven feet of flooding, also similarly impacted these two neighborhoods; in Lakeview, approximately 48.2% of homes saw over 7 feet of flooding, compared to 38.1% of homes in the Lower Ninth Ward that saw such flooding.

While these two neighborhoods experienced similar hurricane damage, what is striking is the effect of these neighborhoods' racial and socioeconomic composition on individuals' mobilization. The Lower Ninth Ward consists almost entirely of Black, low-income renters and is largely recognized as New Orleans' poorest, most underinvested ward (Landphair, 2007). On the contrary, Lakeview is a predominantly White and middle-upper-income neighborhood in New Orleans, and nearly 96% of Lakeview households have at least one car (Landphair, 2007; U.S. Census, 2000). Both neighborhoods suffered severe flood damage from Hurricane Katrina,

⁵ The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) classifies "severe" flood damage as over four feet of water.

though nearly all residents of Lakeview were able to evacuate in time, while most residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were not. Table 1, below, highlights key differences and similarities between the two neighborhoods, which I use to better understand how race and class might differently affect political engagement in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and government failure.

Table 1. Demographic Information about Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Ward⁶

	Lakeview	Lower Ninth Ward
Flood damage	Severe	Severe
Racial Makeup	Predominantly White	Predominantly Black
% of population that is Black	0.80%	98.70%
Income Level in 2000	High-income	Low-income ⁷
Poverty Rate	4.90%	36.40%
% of households with access to at least 1 car, in 2000	95.90%	42.30%
% of households with no access to a car, in 2000	8.50%	32.40%

Methodology

Part I. Community Testimonies

In each of these public hearings, I study the most common grievances and concerns raised by New Orleans residents. In each of the hearings, I examined how many community members were present, which communities and organizations were represented, and what demands people most frequently made. For this analysis, I relied on NVivo, a qualitative analysis

⁶ All data in Table 1 is derived from the 2000 U.S. Census.

⁷ The average household income in the Lower Ninth Ward in 2000 was \$42,074.

software, to identify key phrases in individuals' testimonies and track recurring themes. I also study how residents discussed their satisfaction with different levels of governments, whether or not people made mostly retrospective versus prospective demands, and which groups of people were most likely to mention their intention to vote and engage in future elections.

Part II. Voter Turnout in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Once I had gathered all the data on voter turnout rates in each of the four mayoral elections, I sorted turnout by race only, party affiliation only, and both race and party affiliation (i.e., White Democrats, White Republicans, Black Democrats, and Black Republicans). Under this assortment, I looked at aggregate totals of turnout across all wards and precincts in Orleans Parish. After I found totals across all of New Orleans, I then sorted the data by wards to look specifically at turnout rates in the neighborhoods of Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Ward. While the Lakeview neighborhood comprises *all* precincts in Ward 4, the Lower Ninth Ward includes only precincts 1 through 8 in Ward 9. Because turnout rates are gathered only by precinct and ward, I found the sum of voter turnout in precincts 1-8 for Ward 9 to find turnout rates in just the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood.

Results, Part I. Takeaways from First-hand Accounts of Evacuees' Experiences

Mobilization in local politics among New Orleans residents differed significantly by people's experiences *during* and *after* the storm, specifically in terms of an individual's ability to evacuate. I find that those who could *not* evacuate experienced a very different set of local government failures than those who evacuated; moreover, I find that the set of local government failures experienced by people who *could* and *could not* evacuate produced a unique source and

funnel of mobilization (or demobilization). These findings help explain discrepancies in levels of local political engagement in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. These experiences during the storm also varied by race and class, which raises critical questions about the influence of race, class, and evacuation ability on political mobilization. Do these variations in experiences of local government failures help explain differences in mobilization after the storm? In other words, might the set of government failures experienced by individuals who could and could not evacuate be a source of mobilization (or demobilization) among these individuals after the storm? Moreover, could this be the primary source of *variation* in mobilization?

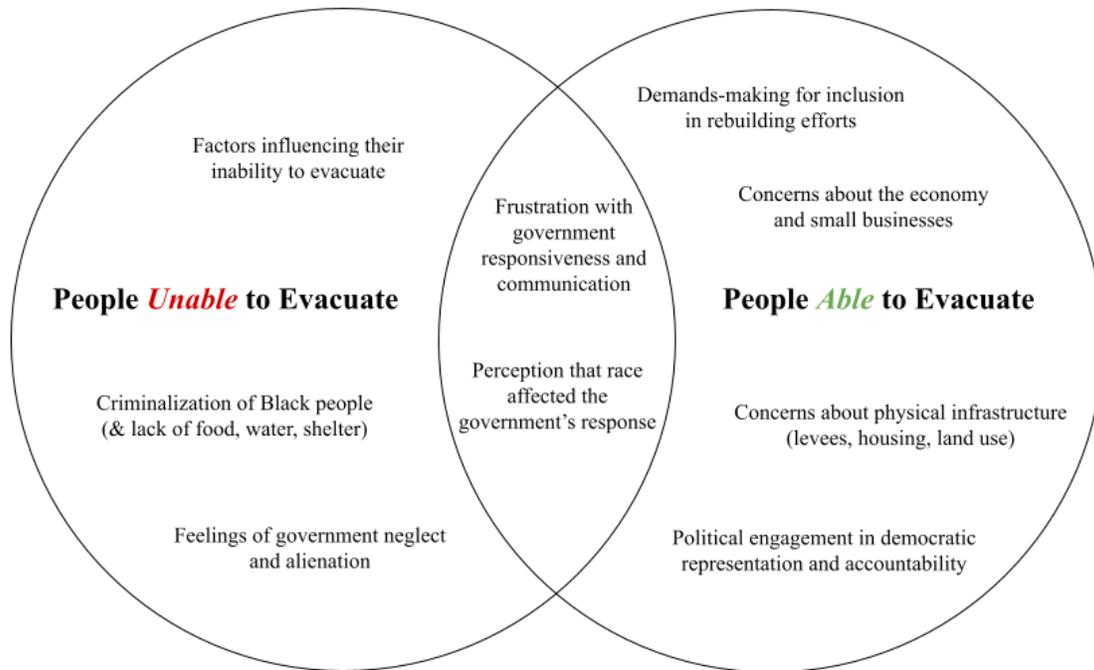
I distinguish witnesses who testified at hearings into two distinct categories: those who were *not* able to evacuate before Katrina, and those who *were*.⁸ Testimonies from people who were *unable* to evacuate before Katrina highlight problems related to the experience *during* the storm, specifically referencing the local government failures they experienced. On the other hand, testimonies from people who were *able* to evacuate mostly concerned problems related to rebuilding *after* the storm. The hope is that gaining an understanding of victims' grievances will allow us better to speculate how and why these issues may lead people to become mobilized or demobilized in local politics in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

I find two common themes among New Orleans residents who *were* and *were not* able to evacuate the city before the storm. Both groups of people (A) expressed frustration with the government's responsiveness and poor communication, and (B) believed that the race of victims

⁸ It is worth noting that some people who evacuated were physically *forced* to evacuate: not all evacuees were able to do so on their own economic means. Interestingly, we do not see many of these forced evacuees testifying at public hearings, largely because most did not return to New Orleans after the hurricane. While data from this population is limited, it is important to recognize a group of forced evacuees exists and holds an entirely separate set of grievances and demands worth further investigation. Forced evacuees often cited they appreciated the opportunity to get out of New Orleans and have no intention of returning to the city (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). They were also less likely than other Black residents to believe victims' race played a role in the government's response to the hurricane, a finding unique to this demographic and troublesome for Blacks' efforts towards racial solidarity and the government's understanding of systemic racism and inequality. See Appendix D, Table D1, for direct quotations from residents who were physically forced to evacuate.

played a role in the government’s response (particularly in its effectiveness and intention to help people in need). *Figure 1*, below, illustrates the similarities and differences between the major themes discussed in testimonies by people who *were* and *were not* able to evacuate.

Figure 1. Testimony Themes Among People Who Were *Unable* vs. *Able* to Evacuate



Common Themes Among All New Orleans Residents, Regardless of Evacuation Ability

A. Frustration with Government Responsiveness and Communication

New Orleans residents expressed widespread frustration with all levels of government and claimed not one branch of government was adequately prepared. The lack of coordination between levels of government often dominated witnesses' testimonies as they struggled to blame just one entity. Nearly all people, regardless of their ability to evacuate, blamed Mayor Nagin for the failure to protect New Orleans residents from Hurricane Katrina, particularly for the failure

to develop an adequate evacuation plan. Though people blamed the local government for its failure to evacuate all residents of New Orleans, poor, Black residents also blamed the federal government for another set of failures.

Table A. Frustration with Government Responsiveness & Communication*⁹

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
White	"I've called the mayor several times and gotten no response. This is what's wrong with the administration. They're not responsive, don't talk to the people, and don't listen to people's needs. I never got a call back from him. I also tried to talk to Mitch Landrieu, but he left the forum I was at early, so I never got a chance. So then I talked to the reverend, but he referred me to a website. It was clear none of them were willing to listen to me in person. "
Black*	"Why did the FCC allow the media to consolidate news coverage? I only heard one thing. We couldn't get access to enough information. We had no idea what was going on. "
Black*	" FEMA created a nightmare inside a nightmare. No government agencies were helpful. Churches outside Louisiana were actually the most helpful."
Black	" I keep looking for continuity in what Nagin says, but he keeps contradicting himself. He doesn't know what he's doing and can't make up his mind. No one believes him or knows what to trust; he's too unreliable. We need continuity and answers, and we need answers <i>without</i> him. No branches of government have given any adequate information. "
Black*	" I blame FEMA, the Red Cross, the Bush administration, media, and law enforcement officials. FEMA in particular failed; they should have spent more money on storm victims."
Black	" No branch of government was prepared. It was all confusion and a big blame-game. Different politicians were saying different things, and there was no coordination between levels of government."
Black	"I blame the local, state, and federal governments: I'm disappointed by every branch of government that exists. "

As shown in Table A above, witnesses expressed frustration with the lack of communication from the government before, during, and after the storm. They were angry at the lack of responsiveness from the government and said they had trouble accessing clear and reliable information regarding both the evacuation plan and the aftermath of the storm. Witnesses said they looked for continuity and clarity in what Nagin was saying but were unable to get answers or know who to trust. "Our mayor keeps contradicting himself," one witness said,

⁹ *Indicates people who did *not* evacuate.

adding that “he can’t make up his mind, so much that we have no idea what or who to believe anymore” (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). In one hearing, Chairman Tom Davis (R), a House Representative from Virginia, asked the witnesses if they had confidence in the number of deaths being reported by authorities. All witnesses instantly and unanimously said *no* (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Many witnesses also called government officials “liars.” Concerns of government corruption and lack of transparency became widespread.

B. Perceptions of the Role of Race in Affecting the Government’s Response

Nearly all the witnesses believed race was a factor in the inadequate government response, but perceptions of the extent to which race mattered differed by groups of people. As shown in Table B, below, witnesses expressed frustration and anger towards the government’s treatment of Black people, which they note is the result of systemic racism and exclusion from equal opportunities. Many witnesses similarly claimed that people’s rights as Americans had been taken away.

Table B. Perceptions of the Role of Race in Affecting the Government’s Response*¹⁰

Speaker’s race	Direct Quotation
Black*	“The response to hurricane Katrina was an act of genocide and ethnic cleansing ... the city abandoned us and left us stranded to die ... New Orleans turned into a mass grave”
Black	“ Everyone knows the poorest areas of the city are Black. The city knows that. People didn't choose to stay because they wanted to be drowned. They suffered through it because they had no way of getting out. I think that if the residents were White – if we were White – there would have been a better evacuation plan to get people out. ”
Black	“ Race has everything to do with it. Fish were evacuated, stray animals were evacuated 2 days before the storm, but people were left to die. People were purposefully left to die. The military failed to move out people the way they moved out dogs and fish. It was an ethnic cleansing of Black people. I blame the President, Kathleen Blanco, and Ray Nagin.”

¹⁰ *Indicates people who did *not* evacuate.

Black*	“It’s a race issue, I’m sure about it. It feels like I was told to go outside and evacuate just to get guns pointed at me and be treated like a criminal. It felt like I was being told to go outside to be killed. When the city was evacuated, it was all Black people that were left, and the city knew that. They left us there on purpose. We were treated badly by everyone – by the national guard, by the local police, by everybody. My daughter even went to jail during the storm for a curfew violation.”
Black	“Our Mayor isn't representing the poor people. This committee is racist, unrepresentative, and excludes poor people. It has failed our community.”
Black	“I see so much racism in the government. So much racism in New Orleans I don't even know where to start. I don't know what to believe. I’ve seen so much racism, in schools, everywhere. It’s similar to the 60s.”
Black*	“Racism and capitalism are what bother me most ... Hurricane Katrina and the government’s response was a genocide against Black people. ”
Black*	“I tried to cross the bridge to Gretna, a neighboring area, but the police prohibited me from entering. They forced me to turn back. And I know Gretna is a mostly White area. I was told to go to the Superdome instead, so I went. I felt abandoned as I passed many disaster relief agencies standing by, helicopters flying overhead, and police standing by refusing to help. No one wanted to help me and my family.”
Black*	“Our rights as Americans have been taken away ... Women’s rights violated, economic and social rights violated, human rights, rights against torture violated, migrant workers’ rights violated. This is oppressive government practice against Black and poor people. These violations are historical, systemic. ”
Black*	“New Orleans is not for sale! Don’t kick us Black people out: we want to be here and will do whatever it takes to stay. Please, stop gentrifying, moving new people in, and selling for higher prices. We’re not going to give up our property.”
Black	“Now I live in College Station, in Texas, and I’m happy there. No way I’m going back to New Orleans. I feel not wanted there – that became clear after the hurricane. ”

As illustrated above in Table B, most Black witnesses, even those who evacuated, stated they were sure of the role of race in the disaster response; “race had everything to do with it,” one witness said, with another adding, “it was definitely a race issue” (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Another witness stated that the city of New Orleans *knew* that when the evacuation was called, there would be only Black people left in the city, but they still decided to do nothing. The former president of New Orleans’ NAACP, and lifelong resident of New Orleans’ Seventh Ward, called the intentional decision to withhold aid from Katrina victims a “genocide” against Black people (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Another

Black woman from the Gentilly neighborhood corroborated that everyone in the city knew the poorest areas were Black. She said she believed that if residents had been White, there would have been a better evacuation plan to get people out (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Other witnesses pointed to the fact that even fish and stray animals were evacuated two days before the storm, while Black people were “purposefully left to die” and were treated with less urgency than animals (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005).

It is important to note that all these witnesses who said they believed victims’ race played a role in the government’s response were Black. While it is possible White people could have also believed race influenced the response, they did not bring it up explicitly in their testimonies like Black people did, with one exception: White people *only* from the Lower Ninth Ward mentioned any concerns about racism in the government and its influence on the response. I find that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward expressed particularly similar grievances with one another, regardless of their race or ability to evacuate.

Specifically, I find that White residents of the Lower Ninth Ward expressed high levels of racial sympathy and were more likely than White residents of other neighborhoods to express frustration with racism in the government. A White man from the Lower Ninth Ward, for example, said he was worried about racism in the housing and real estate industries. He said that he felt lucky he was able to choose where to live but felt frustrated for the Black people who weren’t shown real estate in predominantly White areas like Lakeview or Uptown (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).¹¹ A Black homeowner from the Lower Ninth Ward (who was *able* to evacuate) similarly said she was “appalled” at the local government for neglecting to help the poor Black people from the Lower Ninth Ward. This suggests racial

¹¹ Direct quotation included in Table 2c.

solidarity among residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, regardless of their race or class (measured through evacuation ability).

1. People Who Were *Unable To Evacuate*

The testimony excerpts below are from people who were unable or unwilling to evacuate and who remained in New Orleans throughout the worst of the storm. I identify three key themes among people who were unable to evacuate: (a) factors influencing their inability to evacuate, (b) the criminalization of Blacks, and (c) feelings of government neglect and alienation.

(a) Factors Influencing the Inability to Evacuate

Witnesses said they believed the mandatory evacuation was called too late (less than 24 hours before Katrina hit) and that the government should have helped people leave sooner. While some witnesses said they were able to evacuate in time, others said they were either not able to do so or chose to stay back to help others who could not evacuate. As shown below in Table 1a, witnesses highlighted the irony in expecting people who rely on public transportation – many of whom cannot afford to own individual cars – to evacuate a city in less than 24 hours without any help from the government (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005).

Table 1a. Factors Influencing the Inability to Evacuate

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
Black	“How can you expect a city that relies on public transit, a city with low car ownership rates, to evacuate immediately? There’s no way to do so! Especially once you allow buses to flood. Why didn't we save public transit equipment?”
Black	“I didn't leave before the hurricane because I didn't want to leave my children and grandchildren there”

Black	“I lived in a three-bedroom apartment, but we squeezed 22 people there during the storm. I didn't want to deny anyone shelter ... people were sleeping next to dead bodies, next to garbage”
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Table 1a, above, highlights specific factors influencing individuals’ ability to evacuate New Orleans. A Black resident, for example, testified that she decided not to evacuate and instead to open her home as a makeshift shelter for those who could not afford to evacuate in time (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Many Black residents, she explained, did not evacuate because they did not have the resources (cars, time, money, etc.) to do so. The government inexplicably failed to account for these structural, socioeconomic factors in its evacuation plan.

(b) The Criminalization of Blacks

Individuals who could not evacuate also testified that it was easy to get arrested for trespassing while evacuating or searching for family members in different neighborhoods. Black residents who had been detained described being tortured with sleep deprivation and being denied basic goods like food and water. Witnesses described the Lower Ninth Ward as a “war zone,” citing streets lined with police units and military-style weapons rather than first-aid kits or medical supplies.

Table 1b. The Criminalization of Blacks

Speaker’s race	Direct Quotation
Black	“ It looked like a war zone. We saw war and guns, not first aid kits or medicine. We were loaded onto military trucks. It felt like we were prisoners of war ... we were tortured with sleep deprivation and forced to sleep in garbage dumps, by our own police and military. We were denied food and water in the camp we were staying in.”
Black	“ I resent the city for not protecting me and for treating my family like criminals, rather than evacuees. Guns were pointed at us, and I felt scared for my life whenever we were

	confronted by police.”
Black	“Parents were separated from their children, and people were accused of looting when looking for their children. ”
Black	“Why were people in public housing surrounded by gunpoint and forced to leave? It was easy to get arrested for trespassing when evacuating or searching for people. ”
Black	“My brothers were detained on the Gretna bridge when they were searching for evacuation points. The police treated them awfully. They insulted them, used racial slurs, and threatened to kill my brothers. ”
Black	“Why were we held hostage and not allowed to rescue our people? Why rescue with guns but no supplies? We were treated like criminals. I would rather die than leave New Orleans by gunpoint.”
Black	“This whole thing was preventable. Military forces should have taken people out sooner, but instead we were labeled as criminals ... we saw floating dead bodies.”

People who were unable to evacuate described the abuse and mistreatment they experienced by the local police and national guard. Black residents, particularly those from the Lower Ninth Ward, described the trauma they experienced during and after the hurricane, passing floating dead bodies and kids laying in the streets next to piles of garbage. People who could not evacuate overwhelmingly struggled to find food, water, and shelter, and many even died from their inability to access basic goods.

Moreover, the exclusion of Blacks from predominantly White neighborhoods in Jefferson Parish became a common thread in Black witnesses’ testimonies. Witnesses stated that as Black evacuees attempted to cross the Gretna Bridge to enter Jefferson Parish, White residents of Jefferson parish denied access to Blacks trying to get into their neighborhoods, claiming “criminal and disorderly” behavior (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). For example, Patricia Thompson, a middle-aged Black woman and lifelong resident of New Orleans, described attempting to cross the bridge to the neighboring Gretna area. She said guns were pointed at her and her Black friends and was prohibited entering their neighborhood – a

neighborhood she said she knew was predominantly White (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). These experiences with the state were particularly demobilizing and led to spatial, social, and political isolation among Black residents.

(c) Feelings of Government Neglect & Alienation

People who were unable to evacuate also frequently stated they felt like the government did not understand their needs or care to listen to people's real needs. Many individuals who were unable to evacuate also took a firm stance on New Orleans' Mayor Nagin and were highly critical of his disaster response.

Table 1c. Feelings of Government Neglect & Alienation

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
Black	"It feels like no one is listening to us. You don't know the city. You're trying to do something without understanding the city, the layout, the community. You're humiliating and disrespecting us – stop making me seem unintelligent. Government officials are liars."
Black	"I want FEMA to leave our neighborhood, stop harassing us, and get out of New Orleans. That's all I want – I'm not asking for money or anything. We can be poor and happy, but we just want to be left alone and not harassed in our own neighborhood. I fish often for food, and I'm happy doing it, but I just want FEMA to stay away. They're causing more problems than helping."
Black	"I've been noticing the people on this panel, the people being spoken to, have been veering off, not paying attention, falling asleep. Are you all not even going to listen to the people that have shown up to talk to you?"
Black	"Only one elected official has bothered to pass by."
Black	"Where was the mayor? Why hasn't he resigned? He has failed the people. He has abandoned the citizens who have elected him."
Black	"Why did it take so long to get basic utilities and electricity? Why are some neighborhoods decorating for Christmas, but others have nothing to decorate? Some people in New Orleans are not sharing with other people in New Orleans, especially the newcomers in New Orleans who are replacing us."

As seen in Table 1c above, people who could not evacuate expressed anger towards FEMA and even said they wanted FEMA to leave their neighborhoods entirely. Another Black

woman stated during her testimony that she felt like the panelists on this committee and other government officials were not listening to victims' needs. "You don't know our city," she said, adding: "You're trying to do something without understanding our city – the layout, the community, the history" (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). This woman said she felt "disrespected" and "humiliated" and was made to seem unintelligent (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). Another Black community member said during his testimony that he noticed the officials on the panel were "veering off, not paying attention, falling asleep." He asked the panel directly: "Are you all not even going to listen to the people that have shown up to talk to you?" (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

2. People Who *Were Able* to Evacuate

All of the testimonies below are from New Orleans who *were* able to successfully evacuate before the storm. I identify four key themes among evacuees' testimonies related to problems *after* the storm: (a) demands-making for inclusion in rebuilding efforts, (b) concerns about the economy and small businesses, (c) concerns about physical infrastructure (levees, housing, land, etc.), and (d) political engagement in democratic representation and accountability.

a. Demands-Making for Inclusion in Rebuilding Efforts

Many New Orleans citizens also felt excluded from discussions about rebuilding and said they wanted to be a part of rebuilding efforts. Table 2a below highlights testimonies from evacuees related to rebuilding efforts.

Table 2a: Demands-Making for Inclusion in Rebuilding Efforts

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
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Black	“I have a question for you, Mr. Mayor. Can I go back to my home in New Orleans East just to grab a few things? I want to take part in rebuilding the city , but I don’t have a place to stay.”
White	“I’m a city councilwoman for District E. I represent the Lower Ninth Ward, Eastern New Orleans, and Desire neighborhoods. People want to be included in rebuilding plans . I’m calling for equity for all neighborhoods. This is what builds great community and diversity. The most devastated sections deserve the most attention.”
Black	“ The biggest problem I see with the recovery plan is that the workers, the roofers, the plumbers, the people that built the city, are not included. You’re talking about plans to rebuild a city without them. How can you do that? We are the roots of the city. We must be included in rebuilding plans. This is our city: it should be up to us to rebuild it, just like the people in St. Bernard are. Why should we be any different? We put together a housing plan for our workers. We want our workers back to rebuild our city. Somebody is trying to keep us away ... We are going to be firm, stand our ground, create programs, rebuild, and fight back against the enemies who want to keep us out of here. We can't think pre-Katrina anymore – we need to be creative. For the chocolate city.”
Black	“I’m a homeowner in the Lower Ninth Ward. It bothers me that the mayor and other people keep saying ‘rebuild at your own risk.’ Lakeview, Mid-city, Gentilly, Pontchartrain, and Chalmette were also flooded, but no one’s saying ‘don’t rebuild there,’ and those are all White areas. In the Lower Ninth, we can’t even get a school to open.”
Black	“ Mayor, you left one word out of your whole rebuilding plan: quality. Quality education, quality police officers, quality all around. Have a system of consciousness. This is why we are where we are today: we have not invested in quality systems, not invested in our children, in quality entrepreneurship. We are the best and the brightest if you seek us out. Let’s make everything about quality. Don’t make everything about race, but quality.”
Black	“Katrina was a storm of purification. We need to rebuild, restore hope , and restore families.”

As illustrated in Table 2a above, many people who evacuated made explicit demands on the state, many of which focused on inclusion in rebuilding efforts. Not only did residents express frustration with being excluded from rebuilding discussions, but many also compared discourses around rebuilding predominantly Black neighborhoods (i.e., the Lower Ninth Ward) to discourses around rebuilding predominantly White neighborhoods (i.e., St. Bernard Parish). A resident of the Lower Ninth Ward stated firmly: “This is our city – it is up to us to rebuild it, just like the people in St. Bernard are” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). This witness’ statement reflects his desire to be as needed (and integral) in the rebuilding effort as are the more wealthy, White residents in St. Bernard Parish. “Why should we be any different?” he

asked, stating: “Somebody is trying to keep us away” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Other witnesses similarly testified, stating, “Lakeview, Mid-city, Gentilly, Pontchartrain, and Chalmette were all flooded, but no one is saying don't rebuild there” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). This witness said she was confident this was “because they’re all White areas” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). On the contrary, residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were being told by the mayor to “rebuild at your own risk” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). The witness reminds the mayor that New Orleans has suffered storms in the past and the city has *still* not built any levies in the Lower Ninth Ward; “why won’t you build levies here?” she asks, “just like you do in other low-lying areas?” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

A City Councilwoman who represents the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East said that her constituents – the residents of the neighborhoods that were most damaged by the hurricane – wanted to be included in rebuilding plans but were unable because of financial and transportation reasons to appear at this public meeting (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). As a result, she stated that she was here representing them, citing she was lucky to have the means and time to attend this hearing, unlike her constituents. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, she explains, even a year after the hurricane, were still demobilized and far less likely to participate in local politics than were other residents of New Orleans.

On the other hand, those who were able to evacuate showed greater optimism for the future than people who could not evacuate, despite all being frustrated with rebuilding plans. For example, a Black man who evacuated showed hope in his testimony as he stated that residents of New Orleans “are the best and the brightest, if you seek [them] out” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Another Black evacuee emphasized the need to “restore hope” in

the city (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Another young Black evacuee said that the city needed to “put its heads together” to improve local flood infrastructure.

b. Concerns about the Economy and Small Businesses

Many people who were able to evacuate also expressed concerns about the strength of the economy and support for small businesses. Community members – mostly Whites – expressed economic grievances ranging from needing immediate economic relief (such as government payouts, loan deferments, etc.), difficulty finding jobs, ensuring affordability for basic goods, and pleading for support for small businesses. Other witnesses similarly express their frustration at finding jobs and a steady income, explaining that many people have been laid off and are no longer able to provide for their families.

Table 2b: Concerns about the Economy and Small Businesses

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
White	“My problem with the rebuilding plan is that I don't see anything to truly jumpstart the economy. I'd suggest a tax-free city for 5 to 7 years, imposed by the federal government. It's not good to base an economy on tourism because it just brings its residents lower-end jobs. If we had a tax-free city, we would have businesses coming in, entrepreneurs coming in, and people would be employed by many small businesses. Then, people could reinvest in their own businesses and create a strong economy.”
Black	“I've heard I'm not eligible for FEMA grants or a loan. What am I supposed to do? I had flood insurance, but it isn't doing anything. How can I get electricity? Who should I contact?”
Black	“The disaster in the Lower Ninth Ward was man-made. The Corps of Engineers failed and were negligent. I believe the economic development plan is good and approve of it, but not the infrastructure plan. You can't equate business money with human lives.”
Black	“I'm a City Council candidate for District E and a resident of New Orleans East. I've heard too much about what New Orleans East should and should not be. New Orleans East represents 40% of the tax base of this city. We can't afford not to rebuild New Orleans East.”
Black	“I got a voucher of only \$100 for clothes, for my daughter and I combined ... we settled at a hotel but we were forced to pay out of pocket for all costs.”
White	“I'm a small business owner, representing a group called Second Wind, which is a voice for small business. Small businesses are hurting. Money shouldn't just be going to housing, but should also be going to businesses. You can't bring people back to a city to live there

	if there is no work for them to do.”
White	“People need to know how to handle their insurance adjustments. We need a task force of leadership of different communities. People were given deferments on loans, but they’re due at the end of 90 days. That’s not fair, or reasonable. People need to be given a voice.”
White	“I’ve been buying insurance with Allstate for 59 years. I bought flood insurance for 36 yrs. Why did I buy insurance if FEMA is going to tell me I can only get \$150 compared to other people who are getting handouts who didn't buy insurance? I’m giving all the money I paid for flood insurance back to FEMA now. Why did I buy insurance all those years? If other people are getting handouts, I should too. It feels like I'm being punished for buying flood insurance, and it is not fair that those who didn't buy flood insurance are getting more help than me.”
Black	“Why are we paying taxes for police protection if we’re not even protected?”

As shown in Table 2b above, many people expressed economic grievances. For example, one Black woman from Gentilly said she was only able to get one voucher of \$100 total to pay for clothes for her and her daughter, combined. After evacuating, she said she and her daughter temporarily settled at a hotel and were forced to pay out-of-pocket for all costs (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). She said she was angry that she was not given more assistance and detailed her struggle to afford basic goods like food and water. Other evacuees said they were frustrated that they were not even eligible for FEMA grants or a loan but are struggling immensely (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). The President and CEO of Liberty Bank in New Orleans also testified before the mayor. He noted that most people have been given only slight deferments on loans, with payments still due at the end of 90 days (*New Orleans Hurricane Briefing with Mayor Nagin*, 2005). He said he believes this is unfair and unreasonable for people struggling to afford even basic goods and services. The President of Affordable Housing Contracts, LLC, similarly testified to the difficulty finding jobs and paying off loans (*New Orleans Hurricane Briefing with Mayor Nagin*, 2005).

Other witnesses expressed economic frustration with the way flood insurance worked, including an elderly White woman who had bought flood insurance with Allstate for the past 36

years. She expressed her frustration in her statement: “Why did I buy flood insurance if FEMA is going to tell me I can only get \$150, compared to other people who are getting handouts who didn't buy insurance? If other people are getting handouts, I should too. It feels like I'm being punished for buying flood insurance, and it is not fair that those who didn't [buy flood insurance] initially are now getting more help than those of us that did” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

Finally, a City Council candidate for District E and resident of New Orleans East said that the city cannot afford not to build New Orleans East or other poor areas, citing that New Orleans East represents 40% of the city’s tax base (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). “You can’t equate business money with human lives,” another witness concluded (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

c. Concerns About Physical Infrastructure (levees, housing, land use, etc.)

Among people who were able to evacuate, concerns about physical infrastructure and land use were frequent. Witnesses pleaded not only for better engineers, but also for more transparency and community involvement in flood protection decisions. The testimonies below ultimately show that the federal government, rather than the local government, received most of the blame for the destruction of property, levee system failures, and the (mis)allocation of housing funds and grants.

Table 2c. Concerns About Physical Infrastructure

Speaker’s race	Direct Quotation
White	“I noticed the city did not take a definitive position on when the Mississippi Gulf outlet and New Orleans port should close. They are allowing the drowning of thousands of people and spending too much federal money on this. There’s also been talk about creating a flood gate. I have met with many engineers about this and strongly suggest you don’t do this. It will flood New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth ward, and St. Bernard parish because of

	backflow.”
White	“Why do you believe the Corps of Engineers when they say anything? They’re spewing that man could have never determined or predicted this. That is not true. We need better engineers. ”
Black	“I’m from the Lower Ninth Ward. Why hasn’t a levee been built in the Lower Ninth Ward? We’ve had storms in the past and still haven’t done anything about it. I don’t like people saying ‘rebuild at your own risk.’ ”
Black	“I’m an engineer by training. I want to solve problems. We need to put our heads together with the best and the brightest. Why can't we figure out today how to mitigate floods? We can totally do that. It can be done, we just haven't done it yet.”
Black	“ My main concern is around housing. If housing goes away, New Orleans goes away. Tulane got so much money from HUD, and a grant for its historic housing. Why is Tulane getting the only funding? We want funding. We’ve been here longer – I’m a Tulane graduate. What’s going on? We need housing help in our neighborhoods, not just Tulane housing. The city has not responded or asked how they can help, but we need housing. ”
White	“I’m with a group called C3 (Concerned Community Compassion). I’m a civil engineer and urban planner. I represent people in public housing. There’s thousands of public housing units that could be reopened, but haven’t. There’s going to be a town hall meeting on March 25th for residents to talk about what they want their communities to look like, just like other neighborhoods have.”
White	“My concern is about CDBG money. You’re planning to give 25% of CDBG money to low- and moderate-income housing. But after I read the law, 70% of CDBG money is supposed to go to low-income people. Why is this number so low? Where is that other money?”
White (LN)	“ I’m most worried about the housing and real estate industry. Racism in the real estate industry is the biggest problem. I’ve lived in New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward. Black people can’t live in Lakeview or Uptown. I’m lucky because I’m White and get to choose where to live, but I’m angry that Black people aren’t shown real estate in White areas. Something must be done about real estate.”
Black	“I’m here for my mom who lives in New Orleans East. My mom lives in a senior citizens home, and seniors have been held hostage, told their building is not going to open again. Is it going to open? Someone needs to give them answers. ”
White	“My concern is that the people who come back, come back to an area that is safe healthwise for them, and it is not okay to say it is no worse than it was before, because before there was lead and arsenic in the land. Please concentrate on health and safety in neighborhood planning meetings. ”

As illustrated in Table 2c above, many residents raised concerns about physical infrastructure and the legitimacy of the Corps of Engineers who designed the levees in place. A White resident of Lakeview claimed the Corps of Engineers should not be trusted. He asked the

commission why they should believe these engineers when they say anything and reminded the mayor that the Corps is claiming they could have never determined or predicted this disaster. “That is not true, you know it!” he exclaimed (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

Evacuees also expressed three major concerns surrounding housing in New Orleans. First, people were concerned with the availability of housing, particularly the reopening of public housing. A middle-aged Black man said he was most concerned with housing, arguing that “if housing goes away, New Orleans goes away” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). A middle-aged White man also said he was confident that thousands of units of public housing developments could be reopened but had not, and he asked why this was (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Witnesses similarly pleaded for help ensuring affordable housing and reducing evictions.

Second, evacuees said they were frustrated with the allocation of funds towards housing. A Black witness questioned the allocation of housing funds, noting that Tulane got significant funding from HUD and a grant to preserve historic housing while other areas that qualified did not (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Another witness, an elderly White man, said he was concerned about the allocation of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money. He noted that the mayor stated he planned to dedicate 25% of CDBG money to low- and moderate-income housing, but after reading the law, he found that 70% of CDBG money is required to go to low-income people. Addressing the mayor, he asked why money is being withheld: “Where is the rest of that money? Why is this number so low?” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

Lastly, witnesses were concerned with the reopening of senior housing. Testifying on behalf of his mother who lives in a senior citizens home in New Orleans East, a middle-aged Black man explained “seniors have been held hostage and told their building is not going to open again” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). He pleaded for answers and justification in the mayor’s decision, but with little luck.

d. Political Engagement in Democratic Representation and Accountability

Finally, residents who were *able* to evacuate the city before Hurricane Katrina demonstrated an understanding of political accountability and felt eager to improve democratic responsiveness and representation, particularly by voting in local elections. Table 2d, below, highlights key quotations from testimonies related to government accountability and representation.

Table 2d. Political Engagement in Democratic Representation and Accountability

Speaker’s race	Direct Quotation
Black	“I’m most concerned about government effectiveness and the declining power of the council. The Council is the voice of the people. We need that. We don’t want high rises; we want senior villages. I have been meeting with my councilwoman, and she has been helpful in working with us. I want the mayor to work more closely with the people too – right now he’s not coming into the community at all.”
Black	“This is a government of people, by people, for people. People are being deprived of their constitutional right to vote. Elections aren’t meaningful if people are no longer electing their officials. We have fought for the right to vote. We have police records for fighting for that right. We have already suffered so much. We may lose our homes, our belongings, but must we also lose our representative form of government? ”
Black	“I’m watching the election very closely. Absentee or no absentee, I’m making sure to vote. The people that believe these same things are also going to be sure to go out and vote.”
Black	“I’m unhappy with the local government. I’ll think of the mayor and local officials when it’s time for me to go out and vote. Vote with a conscience, not with the color of your skin.”
Black	“I urge the mayor to hold a special meeting after this to reconsider the recommendation to take authority away from the city council. The people elect a city council. Our mayor wants to take the legislative branch away when it comes to zoning and rebuilding. It is the people who decide who represent them, so let the people decide. What good do elections do at this

point? It is not too late to give power back to the people.”
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Table 2d, above, highlights testimonies that suggest critical consequences of the Hurricane on political engagement and government accountability. Only residents who were *able* to evacuate hinted at their likelihood of voting in upcoming elections, while people who were *unable* to evacuate did not. As shown in the table above, one Black evacuee said he is watching the election very closely and will make sure to vote, regardless of whether he can vote with an absentee ballot or not (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Evacuees corroborated the declining power of the City Council and expressed concern over the community’s ability to elect local politicians: “the City Council is the voice of the people. We need that,” another witness added (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). A middle-aged Black man reminded the mayor that in democratic countries, it is supposed to be a “government of people, by people, and for people” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006).

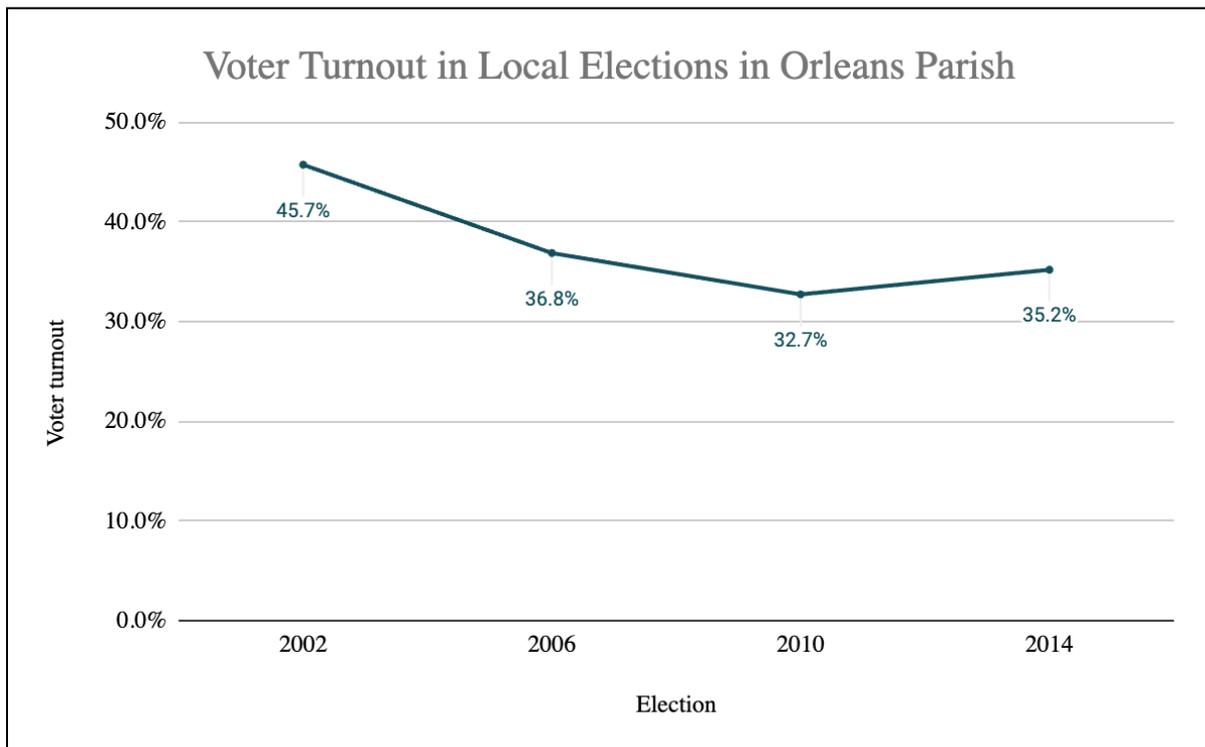
Black witnesses also described their feelings of having their voting rights stripped from them. One Black woman claimed that the government was “depriving people of their constitutional right to vote” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). Another Black woman reiterated to the panel that Black people had “fought for the right to vote” and “had “police records for fighting for that right” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). The plea for voting access and equality continued, with one Black witness stating: “we may lose our homes, our belongings, but must we also lose our representative form of government?” (*Future of New Orleans Final Public Meeting*, 2006). These testimonies illustrate efforts to hold elected officials accountable. The section below examines how – and to what extent – groups’ attitudes about accountability and democratic representation translate into explicit voter turnout.

Quantitative analyses of voter turnout data (explained in the following section) confirm the finding that people's evacuation ability affected their likelihood of mobilization in politics and of voting in local elections.

Results, Part II: Voter Turnout Rates in New Orleans Mayoral Elections

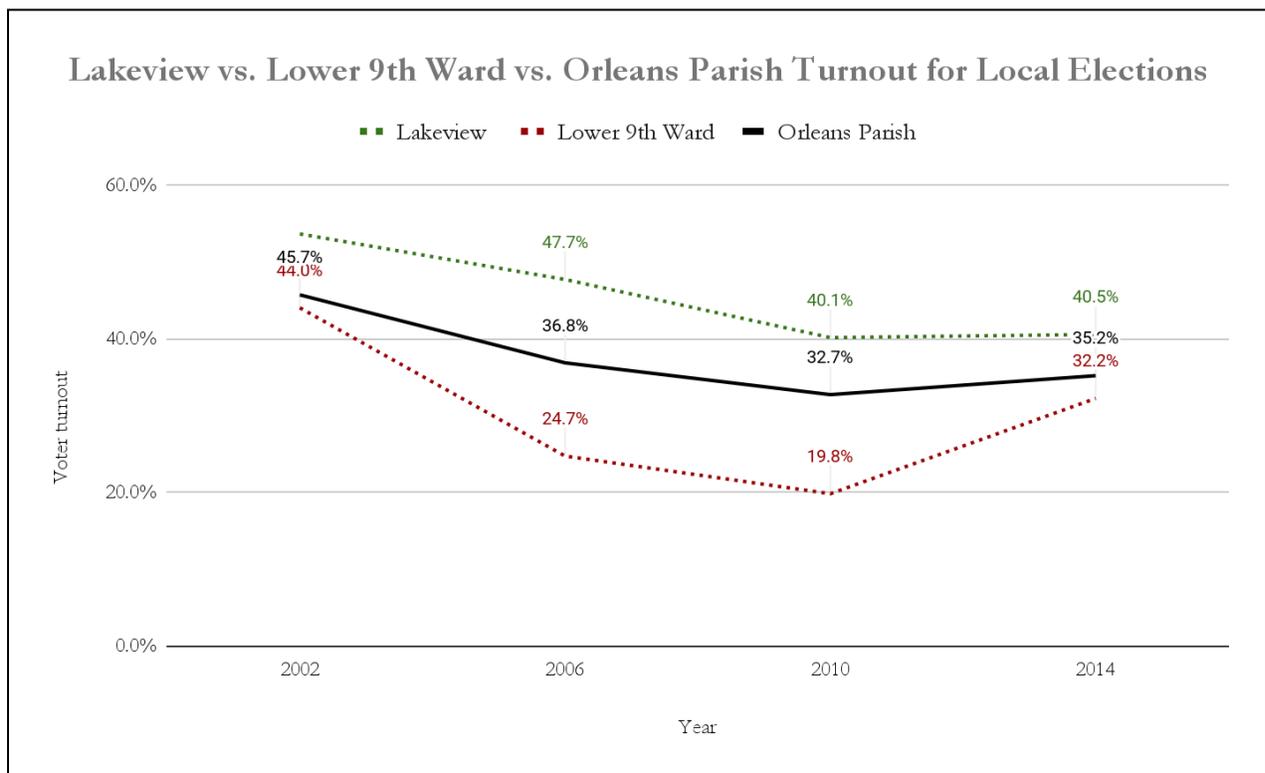
The following quantitative analyses on voter turnout reveal stark findings on different groups' levels of participation in local politics after the government's neglect of citizens during Hurricane Katrina. Louisiana Secretary of State data reveal a significant drop in voter turnout across Orleans Parish when ignoring demographic factors like race, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood of residency. Figure 2, below, illustrates rates of voter turnout in Orleans parish for mayoral elections in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014.

Figure 2. Voter Turnout in Local Elections, in Orleans Parish



As pictured in Figure 2 above, voter turnout in Orleans Parish decreased by 8.9% in the 2006 mayoral election compared to the 2002 mayoral election, a finding that raises concerns about adequate political engagement among citizens and the representativeness of local government. While it is clear the overall turnout for local elections decreased after Hurricane Katrina, the effect was not uniform across different groups. In the following section, I closely examine two neighborhoods that suffered severe flood damage but who have drastically different racial and socioeconomic demographics: Lakeview (Ward 4) and the Lower Ninth Ward (Ward 9, voting precincts 1-8). Figure 3, below, compares voter turnout in these neighborhoods not just to one another, but also to overall turnout rates across Orleans Parish.

Figure 3. Voter Turnout in Lakeview, the Lower 9th Ward, and Orleans Parish



As illustrated in Figure 3 above, Lakeview residents voted in local elections at significantly higher rates than did residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. This comparison between neighborhoods controls for flood damage, as both neighborhoods suffered equal levels of flooding. The difference, however, is that residents of Lakeview had the economic means and transportation to evacuate, while residents of the Lower Ninth Ward did not. Although turnout rates in both neighborhoods dropped in 2006 compared to 2002, turnout rates in the Lower Ninth Ward fell at a much higher rate than in Lakeview. Also interesting is the spike in turnout – and apparent mobilization – in the Lower Ninth Ward in the 2014 mayoral election. This spike in turnout in 2014 was not seen in Lakeview, where turnout remained nearly the same between 2014 and 2010. Future studies should consider examining what forces led to this specific increase in turnout among residents of the Lower Ninth Ward in the 2014 mayoral election.

These findings bring us to my next set of findings, which focus on racial and partisan disparities in turnout rates. Figure 4, below, examines more closely the racial disparities in turnout rates for local elections, *not* separated by party.

Figure 4. Voter Turnout in New Orleans Mayoral Elections, By Race

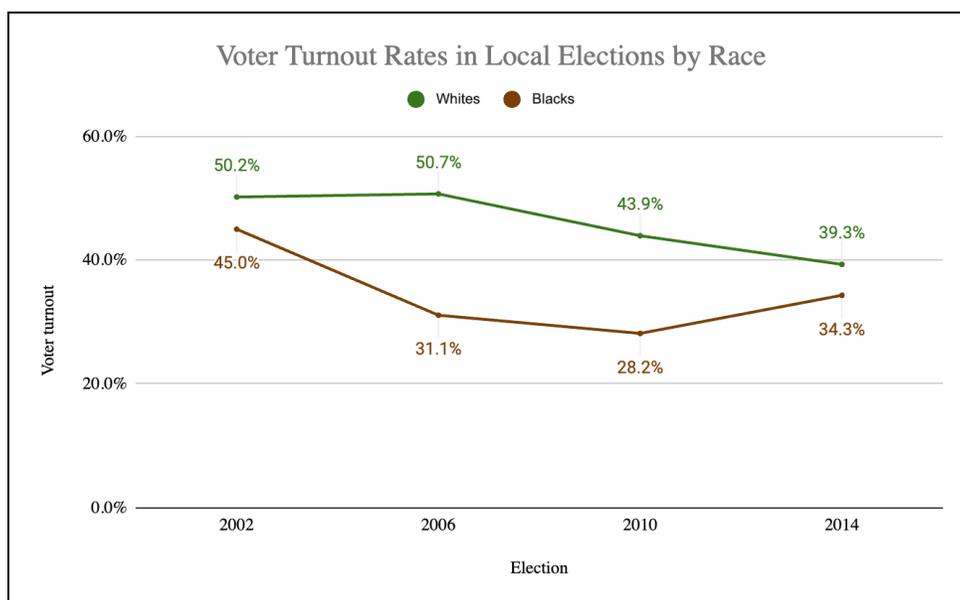


Figure 4, above, exposes racial disparities in turnout rates for local mayoral elections after Hurricane Katrina. First, I find that individuals' race had a greater effect on turnout rates than did their party affiliation. Second, Hurricane Katrina had a much more extreme negative impact on the political engagement of Blacks than of Whites. In fact, turnout in local elections *increased* among White voters after Katrina, with the White turnout rate increasing from 50.2% in 2002 to 50.7% in 2006. Interestingly, though, this slight increase – or stability – did not continue in 2010 or 2014, where we conversely witnessed a sharp drop in voter turnout to 43.9% in 2010 and down even further to 39.3% in 2014.

I also examine voter turnout exclusively by party affiliation (registered Democrats versus registered Republicans). Figure 5, shown below, more closely examines partisan differences in turnout rates for local elections, *not* separated by race.

Figure 5. Voter Turnout in New Orleans Mayoral Elections, By *Party*

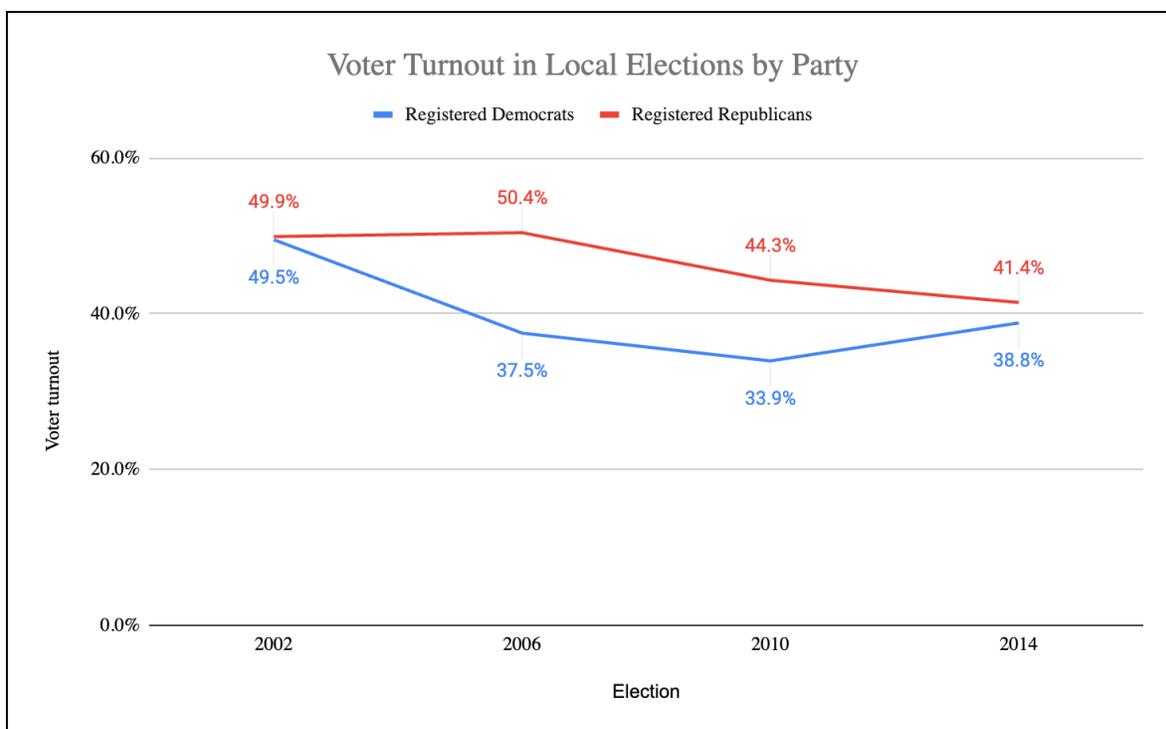


Figure 5, above, depicts partisan differences in rates of political participation: while New Orleans Republicans were mobilized after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Democrats were demobilized, specifically in the 2006 and 2010 mayoral elections. Turnout among Republicans increased by around 1% from 2002 to 2006, whereas turnout among Democrats decreased by over 24% from 2002 to 2006. The pattern does not remain constant over time, however. In 2010, voter turnout dropped similarly among Republicans and Democrats (though slightly more among Republicans), with Republican turnout dropping by approximately 12% and Democratic turnout dropping by around 9.6%. It is also worth noting that Republican turnout decreased in the 2014 mayoral election, whereas Democratic turnout somewhat significantly *increased* in the 2014 election.

These findings above raise questions about the specific voting behavior of White Republicans, White Democrats, Black Republicans, and Black Democrats. In the following section, I concisely analyze racial *and* partisan influences in voter turnout rates for New Orleans mayoral elections between 2002 and 2014, incorporating the findings above in Figures 4 and 5. Figure 6, below, depicts specific turnout rates in each mayoral election among White Republicans, White Democrats, Black Republicans, and Black Democrats.¹²

¹² See Figure E1 in Appendix E for turnout rates among White voters, separated by *party affiliation*, and Figure E2 in Appendix E for turnout rates among Black voters, separated by *party affiliation*.

Figure 6. Voter Turnout for New Orleans Mayoral Elections, By Race and Party

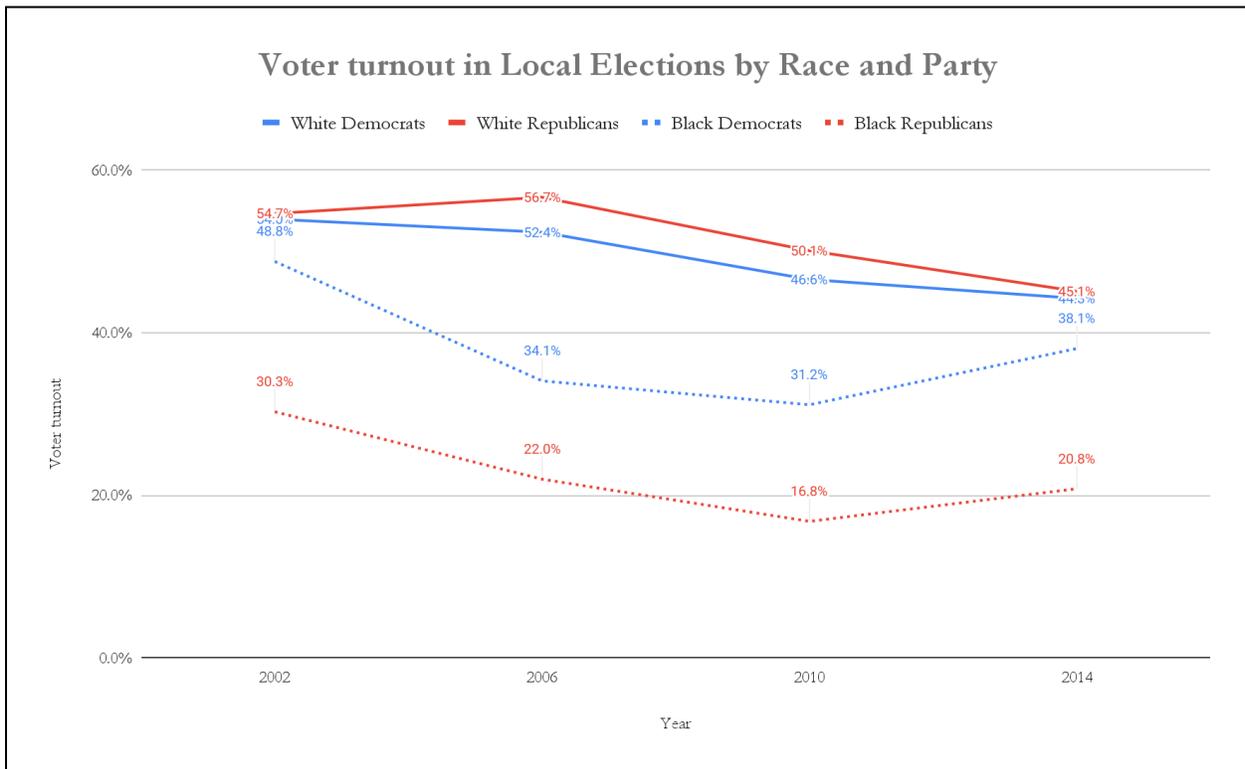


Figure 6, above, illustrates racial and partisan differences in turnout rates for New Orleans mayoral elections between 2002 and 2014.¹³ I find that Hurricane Katrina had a much more substantial negative effect on turnout rates among Black voters than among White voters. All Black voters, regardless of party affiliation, were less likely than White voters to participate in local politics after Hurricane Katrina: both Black Republicans and Black Democrats voted in significantly lower numbers in 2006 and 2010 compared to 2002. These findings suggest that all Black voters, regardless of their party affiliation, were demobilized after Hurricane Katrina and were overall less likely to engage in local politics than their White counterparts. Interestingly, though, turnout in the 2014 mayoral election *decreased* among White voters compared to the 2010 mayoral election, while turnout *increased* for Black voters. Further research should

¹³ Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, just months before the scheduled mayoral election in February 2006. The election was ultimately postponed until April 2006. See Appendix A for more information on election administration and the decision to postpone the 2006 mayoral election.

examine more closely what factors converged to explain this change in pattern among Blacks and Whites in the 2014 mayoral election.

Though the hurricane decreased *all* Blacks' likelihood of voting in the 2006 and 2010 mayoral elections, the *degree* of demobilization differed by voters' party affiliation. I find that the turnout rate decreased among Black Republicans at a higher rate than among Black Democrats, a finding that has important electoral and partisan consequences. Before the Hurricane, Black Democrats voted at higher rates than Black Republicans (48.8% and 30.3% in 2002, respectively), and this trend continued even after Katrina. Black Democrats voted at higher rates than Black Republicans in both 2006 and 2010. In 2006, Black Democratic turnout was 34.1%, compared to only 2.0% among Black Republicans. Interestingly, however, is that although Black Democrats voted at higher rates than Black Republicans, turnout among Black Democrats fell at a disproportionately high rate in the 2006 election compared to Black Republicans. Turnout among Black Democrats dropped by 30.1% between 2002 and 2006, whereas turnout among Black Republicans dropped by 27.4%.

The number of years following the hurricane also had substantial effects on turnout rates among voters, particularly by party affiliation. While voter turnout fell at a disproportionately high rate among Black Democrats between 2002 and 2006, between 2006 and 2010, turnout fell at a disproportionately high rate among Black *Republicans*. Turnout among Black Republicans fell by 23.6% from 2006 to 2010, while turnout among Black Democrats fell by only 8.5% during these years. These findings suggest that hurricane Katrina had a greater demobilizing effect on Black *Republicans* in the 2006 election but on Black *Democrats* in the 2010 election. We see clearly here the extent to which temporal factors influence the likelihood of political engagement and mobilization among Black voters.

On the contrary, I find that party affiliation had a more minimal effect on White voters' likelihood of voting than on Blacks' likelihood. While the scale of differences is not extreme, it is worth highlighting some partisan differences in White voter turnout. I find that White Republicans voted in *higher* numbers in the 2006 mayoral election than in the 2002 mayoral election. While White Democrats and White Republicans exhibited nearly identical turnout rates in the 2002 mayoral election before the hurricane (54.0% and 54.7%, respectively), after Katrina, only White Republicans voted at even higher rates than before (56.7%). Voter turnout among White Republicans increased by over 3.6% in 2006 compared to 2002, an increase seen in no other voter demographic. This increase in turnout among White Republicans suggests this group was uniquely mobilized and well-equipped to participate in politics post-Katrina. White Democrats, however, did not follow the same pattern as White Republicans. Voter turnout among White Democrats stayed relatively constant after the hurricane, with this group's turnout rate dropping from only 54.0% in 2002 to 52.4% in 2006. Though the decrease is not significant, White Democratic turnout continued to drop in the 2006, 2010, and 2014 mayoral elections. White Republicans, therefore, were the *only* demographic mobilized after Katrina, at least measured through turnout rates in local elections.

Overall, my quantitative research on voter turnout rates in post-Katrina New Orleans illustrates the extent to which Black voters were less likely to participate in local politics and become mobilized than were White voters. I find that while voters' race was the largest determinant of turnout for mayoral elections, party affiliation did play a role in driving political participation, particularly among Black voters.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal alarming differences in Hurricane Katrina's effects on New Orleans' residents. Taken together, the qualitative findings provide crucial explanations for citizens' social and political behavior, and the quantitative results both confirm those findings and measure the extent of behavioral changes. Individuals' experiences during the storm shaped the perception that Black people were discriminated against; nearly all Black residents who testified – particularly those that did not evacuate – believed the race of the victims affected the disaster response. I find that people's experiences during the storm largely influenced their political engagement and political preferences in the wake of the government failure, demonstrating the importance of studying the participatory effects of discrimination: when is discrimination mobilizing, and when is it demobilizing?

I find that Hurricane Katrina had a significantly greater demobilizing effect on Black voters than on White voters. Testimonies from Black, low-income, and Lower Ninth Ward residents demonstrate demobilization in local politics. Individuals from these groups made mostly retrospective demands about their experience during the storm and placed overwhelming blame on the government for its failure to account for those who were unable to evacuate. The data reveal a stark racial divide in voter turnout for local elections, a finding that confirms the legitimacy of these testimonies and demonstrates the extent to which individuals' verbal grievances translate into physical voting behavior. The alarming low turnout rates among Black voters in New Orleans expose the hurricane's most detrimental and demobilizing effect on Black voters. As explained through their testimonies, Black and low-income people, most of whom were Democrats, ultimately lost hope in the effectiveness and legitimacy of the government: they said the government's presence in their neighborhoods was doing more harm than good, and

many also continuously cited distrust of local politicians and harassment from the police. Their lack of trust in the government evidently led to political and social alienation.

On the contrary, people who were *able* to evacuate were generally more optimistic about the future of the city than were those who could *not* evacuate. Individuals who were able to evacuate were also most likely to discuss prospective voting behavior and pin a connection between local government failures and political engagement. Testimonies from White, middle-upper income residents who were able to evacuate help explain the turnout we see in the 2006 and 2010 New Orleans mayoral elections and align with the voting behavior seen among these groups. Through their testimonies, they had demonstrated an understanding of political engagement, with many mentioning their likelihood of voting in the future, factors influencing their voting preferences, and concerns about voting and election administration. As a result, we see voter turnout among White residents – especially White Republicans who could afford to evacuate – *increasing* after Hurricane Katrina in the 2006 mayoral election and remaining relatively stable in the 2010 mayoral election. These findings suggest that Hurricane Katrina had a uniquely *mobilizing* effect on White Republicans, many of whom were likely to live in Lakeview.

The disparity in mobilization between neighborhoods is bleak: residents in Lakeview voted in disproportionately high numbers after Hurricane Katrina, while residents in the Lower Ninth Ward voted in disproportionately low numbers. These findings illustrate that Katrina and the subsequent government response had a more minimal negative effect on Lakeview residents' likelihood of voting than it did on Lower Ninth Ward residents' likelihood of voting. This disparity in political participation can confidently be attributed to racial and socioeconomic differences among their residents (particularly their ability to evacuate), rather than a result of

flood damage, which is too often cited in literature as the primary factor driving disparities in political engagement. We know this is not the case for Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Wards, as both neighborhoods suffered equal flood damage from Hurricane Katrina. The drop in political engagement ultimately caused a stark decline in the political influence of underinvested neighborhoods in New Orleans, particularly of poor, Black areas like the Lower Ninth Ward.

The hope is that the findings of this study can help inform and predict not only the trajectory of New Orleans' political landscape, but also the trajectory of other disaster-prone states in the Gulf Coast and Mid-Atlantic. In particular, I hope my study can help predict – and potentially mitigate – any negative participatory impacts of the recent September 2022 disaster, Hurricane Ian, on political participation in Florida, a critical swing state and political battleground for both local and federal elections. Further research should address the electoral consequences of demobilization and weakened political participation in swing states after natural disasters, particularly among minority and low-income voters. The increasing frequency of natural disasters, combined with the growing polarization of American voters, makes the implications of climate disasters in swing states more consequential than ever.

Conclusion

Though Hurricane Katrina is largely considered a “natural” disaster, its consequences were the direct result of centuries of policies, built infrastructure, and systemic racism. The government's failure to evacuate everyone in New Orleans grossly exacerbated existing inequalities, with stark rises in rates of homelessness, unemployment, displacement, and poverty. Residential segregation and land use policies in New Orleans rendered predominantly Black neighborhoods most susceptible not only to flooding and underinvestment in infrastructure, but

also to political alienation and demobilization. Moreover, the government's failure to account for those who lacked access to cars in its evacuation plan meant the most vulnerable, low-income (mostly Black people), were disproportionately affected and were ultimately left behind to suffer through the storm. These people who could not evacuate experienced an additional set of government failures, ones that significantly affected their perceptions of government legitimacy and their likelihood of participating in local politics.

This study clearly concludes that Hurricane Katrina had disparate and devastating effects on the mobilization of residents of New Orleans, even among those who suffered equal levels of flood damage. The effects of structural racism and exclusion on Black residents in New Orleans are substantial and irrefutable: after Katrina, local government failures *demobilized* poor, Black residents who could *not* evacuate, but conversely *mobilized* middle-class, White residents – particularly White Republicans – who *could* evacuate. Among people who could *not* evacuate, their experiences of local government failures ultimately made them demobilized, leading to low faith in government efficacy and political alienation.

Perhaps even more importantly than the general decline in voter turnout for local elections might be the changing demographics of the New Orleans electorate. Demobilization and political alienation among minority groups, as well as shifts in partisan power and rises in real estate have made the city of New Orleans whiter, wealthier, and more conservative since the hurricane in 2005. Hurricane Katrina ultimately highlighted the problems of American democracy and voting opportunities, government efficacy and responsiveness, and racial segregation in spurring political alienation among Black and low-income residents.

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Appendix A

Election Administration

Discourse exists around voting accessibility and election administration following natural disasters. Originally scheduled for February 2006, the New Orleans mayoral election was the first election scheduled to be held after Hurricane Katrina and raised widespread concerns over election administration, the ability to hold fair elections, and the accessibility of polling stations (Morley, 2017). Many people feared people would not be able to get to the ballots and vote, particularly for the 2006 mayoral election scheduled for February of 2006. Many scholars pointed to Black leaders' calls for election postponement for the 2006 Mayoral election, citing racial disparities in people's abilities to safely return to the city and participate in elections (Clarke, 2008). Noting that many of the city's polling locations and voting equipment were destroyed in the Hurricane, Louisiana Secretary of State Al Ater and State Elections Commissioner Angie LaPlace decided to postpone the mayoral election to April 22, 2006, hoping this would allow more people to get to the polls and cast votes (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 5).

Appendix B

Rebuilding Initiatives after Hurricane Katrina

Four primary rebuilding initiatives were part of the post-Katrina recovery efforts. The Long-Term Community Recovery, also known as the Federal Emergency Management Agency Emergency Support Function No. 14 (ESF-14), was New Orleans' first rebuilding effort initiated after Hurricane Katrina. The second rebuilding effort led by the city was Mayor Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) plan. Critics of the BNOB plan, however, claimed that it was an almost entirely "top-down process with minimal citizen involvement" (D'Agostino & Kloby, 2011, p. 756). BNOB also reportedly "had the potential to shrink the city's footprint and impact resident diversity by class and race" (D'Agostino & Kloby, 2011, p. 756). Shortly after BNOB was implemented, therefore, it became clear that it did not have the political or community support to move forward; as a result, New Orleans' City Council introduced the Lambert Plan to replace BNOB. The fourth major rebuilding initiative in New Orleans was the UNOP. As D'Agostino and Kloby argued, some rebuilding initiatives in New Orleans were criticized for "excluding the public while including powerful business interests," while other initiatives were criticized for "[relying] heavily on the input of planners and technical experts" instead of ordinary residents (D'Agostino & Kloby, 2011, p. 756).

Appendix C

Local and Federal Urban Development Initiatives

Since the 1960s, federal funding programs have played a pivotal role in neighborhood redevelopment projects. These programs include Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs), Urban Development Action Grants (UDAGs), Empowerment Zone (EZ) Initiatives, and public housing guidelines outlined in the 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act. While the federal government's policies and actions affect urban neighborhoods and politics, many scholars and politicians point to the local government as the most pivotal actor in urban development and rebuilding efforts, particularly after natural disasters. Local governments, however, often have political difficulty addressing inequalities and inequities in access to resources, and few cities have strong distributive policies (Stephens, 2012). Yet despite these recognitions, academic scholars, politicians, and nonprofit organizations alike consistently point to local political structures as being highly influential in city politics, especially in the aftermath of major disasters. Local politics matter for resource (and disaster relief) distribution, urban development initiatives, and the economic wellbeing of citizens (Hyra, 2008). Especially when the federal government fails to address the needs of local communities, as was seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, individuals hoped that the local and state government would take national matters into their own hands and provide for their citizens. Unfortunately, though, this did not appear to be the case in New Orleans.

Appendix D

Direct Quotations from Forced Evacuees

Table D1. Forced Evacuees*¹⁴

Speaker's race	Direct Quotation
Black	"I have no desire to move back to New Orleans. I see no future for city of New Orleans"
Black	"I went to my mom's house in Uptown, until armed forces came and forced me to evacuate. I got guns pulled on me and my Black friends when we told the rescue team we didn't want to evacuate. Then we obeyed once we realized we were in danger from the police."
Black	"I was put on a plane one day and wasn't told where I was going. I learned I was being brought to Washington, D.C. I was eventually thankful to have left New Orleans."
Black	"Katrina was a failure by the local government. People were economically unable to help themselves, and the government didn't take that into consideration for the evacuation plan."
Black	"New Orleans is a 'money city.' The politicians here will do anything to take people's money."
Black	"No one cares about each other in New Orleans"
Black	"Politicians are stealing and robbing the city of New Orleans"
Black	"Katrina gave us the opportunity to get out"
Black	"I want every elected official to be replaced"
Black	"I think it was more of a socioeconomic issue than a race issue. People couldn't evacuate because they were poor. I don't think anyone had a crazy plan to go after any particular race. I mean, St. Bernard Parish had poor white people, and they still suffered. So I think the real problem was economic in nature"
Black	"The American Red Cross has been helpful ... Strong Families, HUD, and FEMA have been somewhat helpful. Federal agencies have been helpful. Help has been there, but sporadic."

¹⁴ *All of these people were evacuated out of New Orleans forcibly.

As shown in Table D1, above, a middle-aged Black man from Uptown, for example, described his initial decision not to evacuate New Orleans, citing the lack of information from the government and inability to find transportation out of the city in time. On August 28th, armed forces dragged him out of his house, where he was then forced onto a plane without being told where he was going. He described having guns pulled at him and his Black friends when they first expressed hesitancy to evacuate (*Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Experience*, 2005). This experience was not unique to just him but rather common among Black residents in New Orleans.

Appendix E

Figure E1. Turnout Rates Among *White* Voters, By *Party*

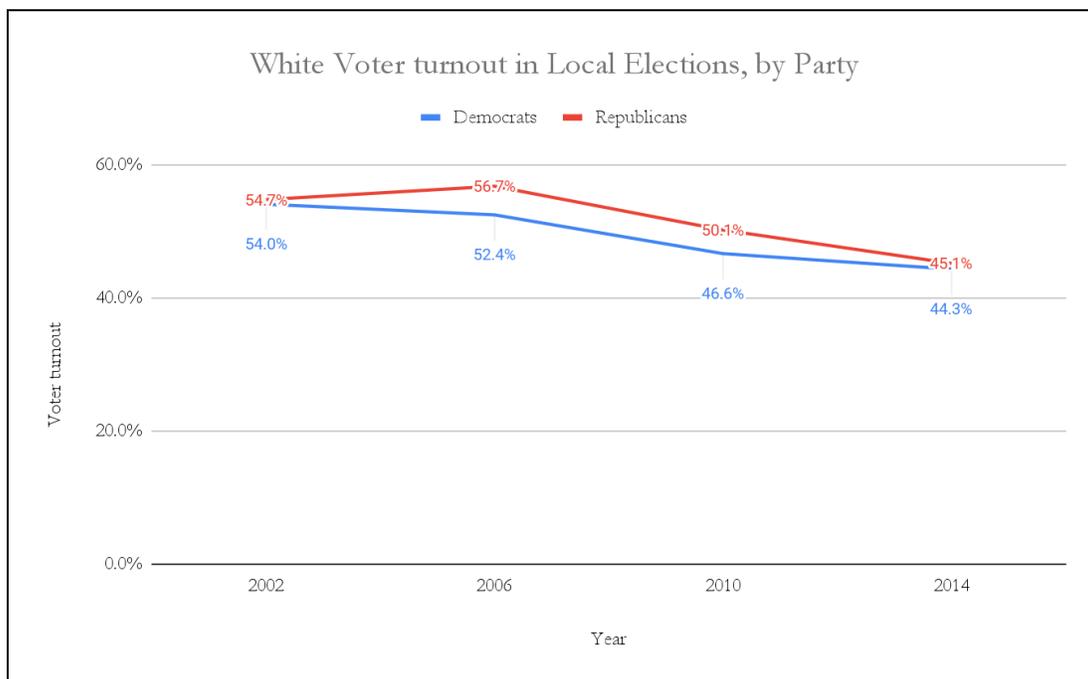


Figure E2. Turnout Rates Among *Black* Voters, By *Party*

