

The disaster that I am focusing on is Hurricane Katrina, a hurricane that struck a few areas in the southeastern region of the United States of America on August 29, 2005. The disaster had a particularly big impact on New Orleans, as it completely submerged the city (which is under sea level). In all, 1,800 people were killed, 250,000 people were found dead, and damages exceeded 125 billion dollars.¹

When doing this project, I wondered why the relief was inadequate and provided relatively late for many victims. Thus, I decided to focus on what caused the local, state, and national governments to fail to react properly to the disaster.

I found that although Hurricane Katrina was inevitably going to cause a large amount of damage, the suffering that it instilled in its victims was exacerbated by the lack of accountability of different levels of the federal government in providing relief.

Much of the lack of government action was due to a lack of accountability at different levels of the government.

- When looking at media statements from the mayor of New Orleans, the Governor of Louisiana, the Federal Emergency Management Agency director, and the President, all of them stated that they were not responsible for many areas in the relief efforts and that the lacking efforts were due to issues with the whole “system”.¹
- Partially attributable to differences in race between the local town governments with a largely black legislature and the Louisiana state government with a largely white legislature, creating different priorities and not allowing the legislatures to agree on a relief plan in time.²

This failure to take charge in relief efforts created a deficiency in relief efforts, which manifested in multiple ways:

1. Uncertainty in Housing Relocation:

- Proper plans to relocate the victims of Hurricane Katrina and to allow them to sell or rebuild their homes, known as the “Hurricane Action Plan” and the “Road Home”, were only passed in the summer of 2006.
- People had to wait a year to recuperate 10 billion dollars in damages³

- Local Government Issue

2. Challenges in Getting Outside Volunteer Help: Due to the lack of action by the Louisiana and national government to allow volunteer groups across the country to assist in the relief efforts, many groups that were willing to help were left unable to do so.⁴

- This meant that many poor towns (such as Pearlinton, Mississippi) only received critical services and supplies over two weeks after the disaster struck, largely due to the lack of qualified personnel.⁴
- Contributed to over 50% of deaths being in poor, flood-prone, and lower population neighborhoods.²

3. There were also Issues in Providing Pediatric Care: Many children were left without guardians and with no help, requiring private efforts to match kids with their parents (which could have been more efficient if the government stepped in).⁵

- The government shelters that were provided to the millions of displaced families after Katrina were not properly stocked with food and hygiene supplies, largely because of the lack of a relocation plan by the government.⁵
- Many kids who spoke a different language or had special needs did not receive the proper support while in these government shelters.⁵
- Many of these efforts fell into private hands.

- Family reunion in New Orleans Superdome.⁵

- Overall, this research shows how the absence of accountability within the different levels of the government produced a late and insufficient set of relief efforts for the victims of Katrina.

- As I learned in my research, some of this lack of accountability stemmed from disagreements and lack of a solid plan, while some of it also may have stemmed from racial differences between the local New Orleans government and the state government of Louisiana.

- This led to many negative outcomes for the victims,

- Thus, the events of Hurricane Katrina illustrate how all levels of the government must have clear powers and protocols in place for what each level (local, state, and federal) has to do to ensure efficient and adequate relief efforts.