

POST-HURRICANE SANDY NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY: PRINCIPLE FINDINGS

As heavy rainfall, storms and hurricanes grow more powerful with climate change, communities in coastal areas and vulnerable floodplains are increasingly susceptible to the impacts of flooding. This was vividly on display with the powerful hurricane season of 2017. As communities struggle to clean up and rebuild, the topic of relocation is often assumed to be taboo and politically fraught. However, more research is showing that voluntary, community-driven relocation can contribute to recovery for residents. A range of key factors must be taken into account when considering whether this can be a successful approach in a community. NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge and Rebuild by Design researched residents who have moved from neighborhoods that were affected by Hurricane Sandy, and those who stayed. Below are the key findings for a survey of 225 respondents from 11 areas in New York City, New York State and New Jersey, with the largest portion of respondents coming from Broad Channel, NY.

1. Residents that moved fared better psychologically. Residents in communities that successfully organized for buyouts appear to have benefited psychologically, though now feel less close to their neighbors; those who wanted buyouts but did not receive them reported feeling closer to their neighbors; and community members who wanted to remain and rebuild in place reported higher levels of stress and experienced larger declines in socializing and meeting attendance (although residents in all communities reported socializing less than before the storm). It may be that staying in a damaged or threatened neighborhood and dealing with ongoing costs causes stresses that adversely affect even a close community. It may also be that the process of collective organizing for a shared goal – a buyout – gave residents something to work for and built social cohesion.

2. Longer-standing communities appear more resistant to moving. Our respondents almost unanimously felt closely connected to their communities prior to the storm, but community members in areas that wound up preferring to stay and rebuild in place tended to be the most deeply rooted in their communities, having lived in their neighborhoods longer (by an average 9 to 16 years) and with more extended family nearby than the average for respondents that wanted buyouts.

3. Economic factors drive decisions followed by physical safety risk.

Economic factors – the costs of flood insurance, and concerns over future financial security – were on average considered the most important, followed closely by physical concerns such as the likelihood of future flooding and threats to physical safety. These were followed by proximity to a support network, government support, and the opinions of family and friends. The opinions of one’s neighbors were reported to be the least important.

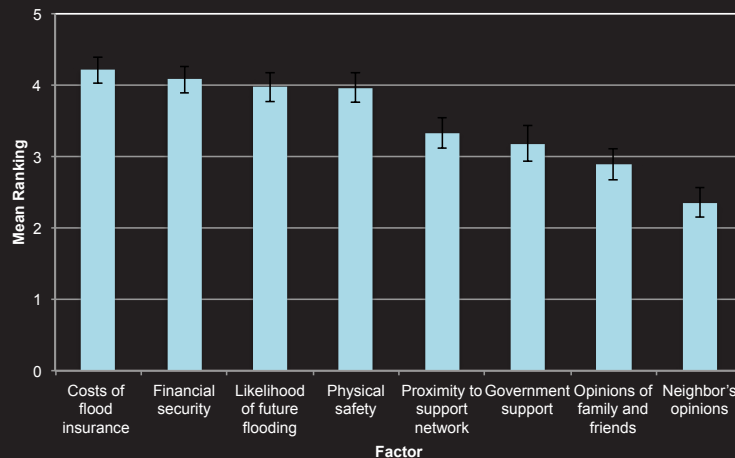


Image: Scoring factors by importance in Post-Sandy decision-making. Respondents scored a series of factors on a scale of 1 to 5 based on how important they were in the decision to stay in place or relocate. The bars depict the mean with error bars (95% confidence interval calculated as follows: mean value \pm 1.96*standard error). Financial and safety factors were considered the most important.

4. Greater awareness or acceptance of climate change. Community members in our survey report that they talk more about climate change than they did before Hurricane Sandy. A majority of respondents believe that climate change is at least partly caused by humans. Most respondents identified as a Republican (37 percent). Other political affiliations were evenly distributed (21 percent Democrat; 16 percent Independent; 18 percent Undeclared).

5. Negative feelings about government response. A large majority of respondents said that the government should do more to protect people from extreme weather events. Confidence in various levels of government declined: 41% said that they felt worse about local/city government after the storm, 48% felt worse about the state government, and 53% felt worse about the federal government.

About:

***Rebuild By Design** is reimagining the way communities find solutions for today’s large-scale, complex problems by processes for working with a mix of sectors - including government, business, and the non-profit community - to gain a better understanding of how overlapping environmental and human-made vulnerabilities leave cities and regions at risk. Rebuild convenes local communities and experts to drive systemic change, transforming our built environment in ways that are equitable and design-driven.*

*The **Institute for Public Knowledge** (IPK) brings theoretically serious scholarship to bear on major public issues. Located at NYU, it nurtures collaboration among social researchers in New York and around the world. It builds bridges between university-based researchers and organizations pursuing practical action. It supports communication between researchers and broader publics. And it examines transformations in the public sphere, social science, and the university as a social institution as these change the conditions for public knowledge.*

More information: rebuildbydesign.org and ipk.nyu.edu

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