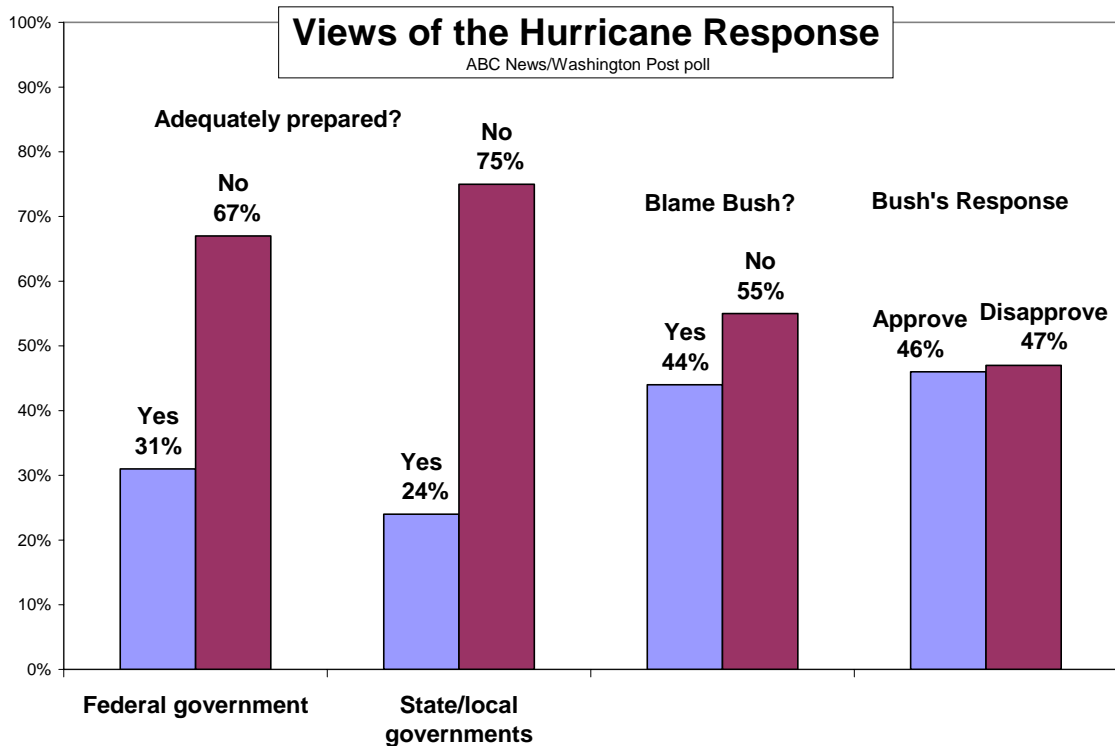


# Hurricane Preparedness is Faulted; Fewer Blame Bush for Problems

Americans are broadly critical of government preparedness in the Hurricane Katrina disaster, but far fewer take George W. Bush personally to task for the problems, and public anger about the response is less widespread than some critics would suggest.

In an event that clearly has gripped the nation – 91 percent of Americans are paying close attention – hopefulness far outweighs discontent about the slow-starting rescue. And as in so many politically charged issues in this country, partisanship holds great sway in views of the president’s performance.

The most critical views cross jurisdictions: Two-thirds in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say the federal government should have been better prepared to deal with a storm this size, and three-quarters say state and local governments in the affected areas likewise were insufficiently prepared.

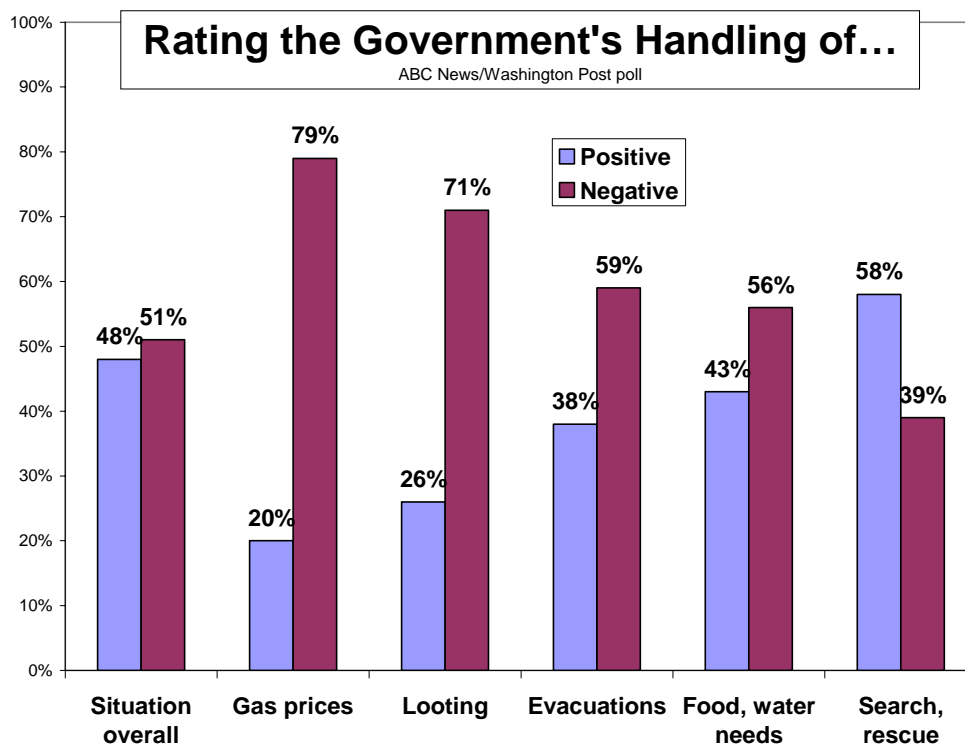


Other evaluations are divided. Forty-six percent of Americans approve of Bush’s handling of the crisis, while 47 percent disapprove. That compares poorly with Bush’s 91

percent approval rating for his performance in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but it's far from the broad discontent expressed by critics of the initial days of the hurricane response. (It also almost exactly matches Bush's overall job approval rating, 45 percent, in an ABC/Post poll a week ago.)

Similarly, 48 percent give a positive rating to the federal government's response overall, compared with 51 percent who rate it negatively – another split view, not a broadly critical one.

When it gets to specifics, however, most ratings are worse: Majorities ranging from 56 to 79 percent express criticism of federal efforts at delivering food and water, evacuating displaced people, controlling looting and (especially) dealing with the price of gasoline. In just one specific area – conducting search and rescue operations – do most, 58 percent, give the government positive marks.



Partisanship, as noted, plays a huge role: Nearly three-quarters of Republicans approve of the president's performance, and two-thirds rate the government's overall response positively. About seven in 10 Democrats take the opposite view on both scores.

	Bush's response to Katrina	
	Approve	Disapprove
All	46%	47%
Dem	17%	71%
Ind	44%	48%
Rep	74%	22%

Most Americans, 55 percent, also say Bush does not deserve a significant level of personal blame for problems in the federal response to the crisis. And while 44 percent do assign him blame, only about half of them, 23 percent overall, blame him “a great deal.”

Some of these views seem to take into account the magnitude of the natural disaster: Forty-four percent say the situation shows serious problems in the federal government’s emergency preparedness overall – but more, 54 percent, instead say that this particular disaster was a special case. Republicans in particular take the latter position.

There’s another division on the suggestion that the deployment of National Guard troops and equipment to Iraq made it more difficult for state officials to respond to the hurricane: Forty-six percent think this is so, and fewer, 31 percent, think it had a big impact. Forty-nine percent don’t see much impact of the deployment.

There’s even division on what do with New Orleans: Forty-nine percent favor rebuilding the city with a stronger levee system; 43 percent, though, think low-lying areas of the city should be abandoned, with those homes and businesses rebuilt elsewhere. House Speaker Dennis Hastert seemed to make such a suggestion earlier this week, to broad criticism.

EMOTION – Emotional responses to the rescue efforts fall short of broad outrage. Forty-five percent of Americans are angry about the federal government’s response to the hurricane situation – plenty of anger, but short of a majority. (Sixty-three percent of Democrats and 51 percent of independents express anger; among Republicans it’s 27 percent.) Similarly, 44 percent call themselves “ashamed” at the federal response.

Few are proud of the response – just 27 percent – but the most prevalent emotion is hopefulness, expressed by 64 percent. (Fifty-five percent say they’re “shocked,” which could reflect a response to the magnitude of the disaster as much as the federal response.)

Feelings about the hurricane response  
(% yes on each item)

	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Hopeful	64%	50	61	80
Shocked	55	68	56	42
Angry	45	63	51	27
Ashamed	44	63	46	28
Proud	27	17	21	43

PERSONAL LINK – Many people have a personal link to the disaster: Twenty-eight percent – more than one in four Americans – say they have close personal friends or relatives in the Gulf Coast area who were directly affected by the hurricane and flooding. Of that group, as of Friday night, about four in 10 were still waiting for word on how those friends or relatives had fared.

People who know someone affected by the hurricane are no more likely to criticize the president's or federal government's performance, and in some specifics (delivering food and water and evacuating displaced people) they rate the federal response more positively than others. Nor are those who have a friend or relative affected more apt to be angry at the federal response.

The data suggest that people still awaiting word on the status of friends or relatives are more apt to be displeased with the federal government's response and people who had already heard are more apt to be pleased, but these subgroups in this sample are too small for reliable analysis.

**GAS** – As noted, the federal government's worst rating – 79 percent negative – is for dealing with the oil supply and the rising price of gasoline – the issue that impacts most people most personally. The rating is similar to recent views of Bush's handling of gasoline prices; in an ABC/Post poll a week ago, 73 percent disapproved.

One reason for the poor rating is the broad view that the rise in prices is unjustified: In a rare example of bipartisanship, just 16 percent of Americans think higher gas prices can be explained by the drop in oil production caused by the hurricane; 72 percent, instead, think oil companies and gas dealers are taking unfair advantage of the situation. Three-quarters of Democrats and independents think so, and in this case, so do two-thirds of Republicans.

Lower consumption is possible in the weeks ahead, but not mainly for the reason Bush suggested. He called for Americans this week to conserve the nation's fuel supply by buying gas only if they need it. Half of Americans think they'll be driving less in the weeks ahead, but the vast majority of them say it's not conservation that'll be motivating them – but the price.

**RACE and POLITICS** – Finally, this poll finds greater criticism of Bush and the federal effort among non-whites than among whites; non-whites, for example, are 23 points more likely to disapprove of Bush's performance, 21 points more apt to think the deployment of National Guard troops in Iraq hindered the hurricane response, and 13 points more likely to rate the federal response negatively. Much of this, however, looks to be associated with political affiliation; non-whites are 23 points more apt than whites to be Democrats.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Sept. 2, 2005, among a random national sample of 501 adults. The results have a four-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow (\*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. How closely have you been following news about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast - very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely or not closely at all?

	-----Closely-----			-----Not closely-----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	At all	opin.
9/2/05	91	54	37	9	7	2	*

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation caused by Hurricane Katrina? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
9/2/05	46	26	20	47	16	31	8

3. How would you rate the federal government's overall response to the situation caused by the hurricane and flooding - excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	----Excellent/Good---			-----Not so good/Poor-----			No
	NET	Exc.	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	opin.
9/2/05	48	11	37	51	23	28	1

4. Thinking about how the federal government has handled specific issues - how would you rate the federal government's performance on (ITEM) - excellent, good, not so good or poor?

9/2/05 - Summary Table

	-----Exc/Good-----			---Not good/Poor---			No
	NET	Exc.	Good	NET	Not so	Poor	op.
a. dealing with looting and other crime	26	4	22	71	34	37	3
b. delivering food, water and medical help	43	10	33	56	27	29	1
c. conducting search and rescue operations	58	15	42	39	20	19	3
d. dealing with the oil supply and rising gasoline prices	20	3	16	79	29	50	2
e. evacuating and resettling people who've lost their homes	38	8	30	59	30	29	3

5. Do you think the federal government (should have been better prepared) to deal with a storm of this size, or do you think it (was as prepared as it reasonably could have been)?

	Should have been better prepared	Was as prepared as it reasonably could have been	No
			opin.
9/2/05	67	31	2

6. How about the state and local governments in the affected areas - do you think they (should have been better prepared) to deal with a storm of this size, or do you think they (were as prepared as they reasonably could have been)?

	Should have been better prepared	Were as prepared as they reasonably could have been	No opin.
9/2/05	75	24	1

7. Do you think the deployment of some National Guard troops and equipment to Iraq has made it more difficult for state officials to respond to the hurricane situation, or do you think it hasn't had much effect on the relief effort? (IF MORE DIFFICULT) Do you think it's had a big impact on the relief effort, or a limited impact?

	-----More difficult-----			Hasn't had much effect	No opin.
	NET	Big	Limited		
9/2/05	46	31	15	49	4

8. Do you think the Bush administration does or does not have a clear plan for dealing with the hurricane situation?

	Does	Does not	No opin.
9/2/05	40	55	5

9. How much blame if any do you think Bush should get for problems in the federal response to the situation - a great deal, a good amount, only some or none?

	--Great deal/Good amount--			----Some/None----			No problems (vol.)	No op.
	NET	Grt.deal	Good amt.	NET	Some	None		
9/2/05	44	23	20	55	33	22	*	1

10. Do you think the situation shows serious problems in the federal government's emergency preparedness overall, or do you think this was a special case?

	Serious problems	Special case	No problems (vol.)	No opin.
9/2/05	44	54	1	1

11. Please tell me if each of the following does or does not describe your own personal feelings about the federal government's response to the hurricane situation.

9/2/05 - Summary Table

	Does	Does not	No op.
a. Angry	45	54	*
b. Proud	27	71	2
c. Ashamed	44	54	1
d. Hopeful	64	34	1
e. Shocked	55	45	1

12. Do you have any close personal friends or relatives in the Gulf Coast area who were directly affected by the hurricane and flooding, or not? (IF YES) Do you know how they're doing, or are you still waiting for word?

	-----Friend/relative in area-----			No	No
	NET	Know	Waiting for word	opin.	opin.
9/2/05	28	16	12	71	1

13. Do you think New Orleans should be rebuilt where it is with a stronger levee system, or do you think low-lying areas of the city should be abandoned, with those homes and businesses rebuilt elsewhere?

	Rebuilt	Abandoned	No opin.
9/2/05	49	43	8

14. On another subject, thinking about how much driving you do, would you say that in the weeks ahead you'll be driving more, less, or about the same amount as you usually do? (IF LESS) Is that because of the price of gasoline, to conserve the country's gasoline supply or for some other reason?

	More	-----Less-----				Same	Don't drive/ no car (vol.)	No op.
	NET	Price	Conserve	Other				
9/2/05	3	50	38	9	2	44	3	1

15. As you may know, gas prices have increased to \$3 a gallon or more in some areas. Do you think (this increase is justified by the drop in oil production caused by the hurricane), or do you think (oil companies and gas dealers are taking unfair advantage of the situation)?

	Increase justified	Taking advantage	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
9/2/05	16	72	7	2	3

\*\*\*END\*\*\*