



The Political Effects of Hurricane Katrina

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A report released by FairVote on Friday, February 3, 2006 forecasted the federal-level political effects of Hurricane Katrina and suggested a remedy. Future reports will address a similar crisis facing local legislative bodies.

The Problems

Hurricane Katrina displaced a known 525,000 residents from the Louisiana Gulf Coast. There may be up to 1.5 million more displaced; there are at least several hundred thousand. Following each decennial census, voters are organized into single-member congressional districts. This ensures a naturally mobile population fair and equal access to representation and constituent services. Hurricane Katrina so upset the size and demographic composition of these districts that:

- 1) African American voters may no longer be able to elect a Representative of choice in the 2nd district;
- 2) Reps. Melancon and Baker face difficult reelection campaigns;
- 3) The 6th district faces up to a doubling of constituent demands, its residents that less likely to have needs met;
- 4) An individual vote in the 2nd district is up to twice as strong as it was before the storm, but a vote in the 6th district has lost up to half its strength.

A Solution

That Louisiana elect its members under a one-vote, de facto district system made up of the affected areas.

One obvious solution is to conduct a reapportionment and redistricting. This would require a mid-decade census, which demands of time and resources prohibit, and which would be premature since evacuees will remain mobile through the end of the decade.

By repealing the ban on multi-member elections, Congress would permit Louisiana to set up a superdistrict. Adopting the proportional one-vote system thereafter would ensure African Americans, Democrats and Republicans remain able to elect candidates of choice – regardless of where Hurricane Katrina left them in Louisiana’s political geography.

More Information

Read FairVote’s demographic projection and analysis at <http://www.fairvote.org/katrina/>.

