

AFTER A DISASTER STRIKES: PUBLIC OPINION ON REBUILDING AND RELOCATION POLICIES

In the months since Superstorm Sandy made landfall in the United States on October 29, 2012, policymakers have engaged in a debate about the optimal strategy to help homeowners along the coastal areas of New York and New Jersey. Should states incentivize the owners of damaged homes to rebuild or to walk away and relocate? In New York's State of the State address in January, Governor Cuomo described incentives for a government buyout program in targeted areas, noting, "We want to run a program that will provide the funds to buy out those homeowners who don't want to rebuild and want to move on to higher ground literally, and that would be smart."¹ New Jersey's strategy has focused more on incentivizing homeowners to rebuild homes and coastal neighborhoods, though the strategy does include a buyout option for about 1,000 damaged homes in the Sandy region.²

In June 2013, the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research released the results of a national survey, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, of 2,025 individuals, including an oversample of 1,007 interviews with residents in the New York and New Jersey region affected by Superstorm Sandy. The survey included questions to measure public opinion toward rebuilding and relocation policies in disaster-prone areas. A random half-sample of respondents was asked about support for rebuilding policies and the other random half-sample of respondents was asked about support for relocation policies.



REBUILDING POLICIES RECEIVE GREATER SUPPORT AMONG THE PUBLIC AND ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE WHOSE NEIGHBORHOODS WERE IMPACTED BY SUPERSTORM SANDY.

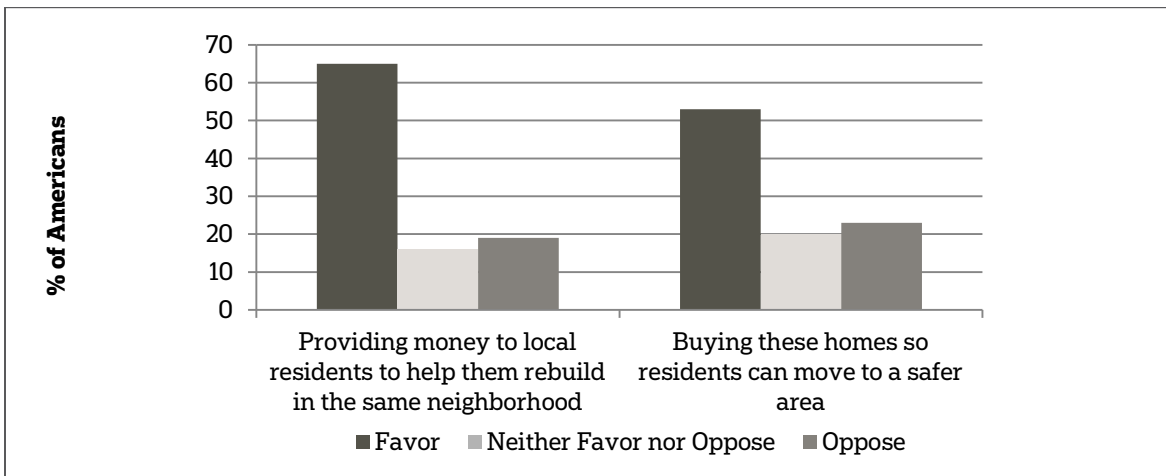
A majority of Americans favor state governments providing money to help local residents rebuild in the same neighborhood in the wake of disasters such as landslides, earthquakes, hurricanes, or flooding, even when the neighborhoods are known to be susceptible to natural disasters. Despite the risks for future disasters, 65 percent of Americans favor this type of assistance. A smaller majority of Americans (53 percent) favor state governments assisting relocation after such disasters by having the state buy homes so residents can move to

¹ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/press/01092013sostranscript>

² <http://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/552013/approved/20130516a.html>

a safer area. Among those who report their neighborhoods were very or extremely impacted by Superstorm Sandy, 79 percent are in favor of a rebuilding policy and 59 percent are in favor of a relocation policy.

In general, when disasters strike these areas, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the state government...?



SUPPORT FOR THE TWO POLICIES VARIES IN SANDY-AFFECTED AREAS OF NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK.

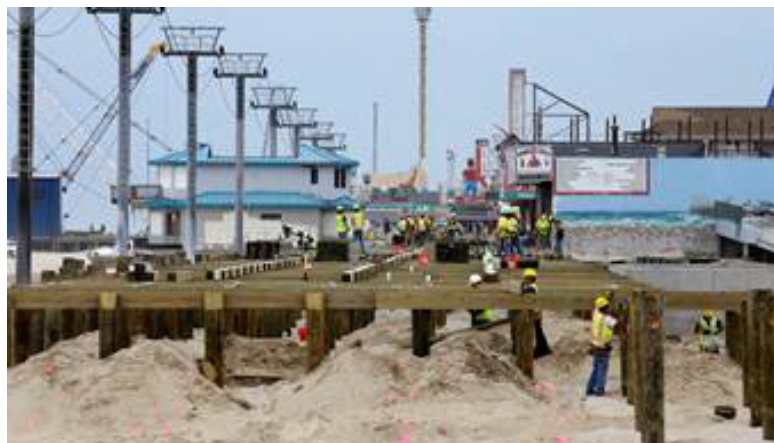
Overall, support for rebuilding and relocating policies is high among residents of New Jersey and New York in those areas hit hardest by Superstorm Sandy. Residents of New Jersey are equally supportive of rebuilding (70 percent) and relocating (68 percent) policies. New York state residents are far more supportive of rebuilding (80 percent) than relocating (61 percent). This pattern is also true among those who report that their neighborhoods were at least moderately affected by Superstorm Sandy. One in four New York residents report being strongly or somewhat opposed to the relocation policy.

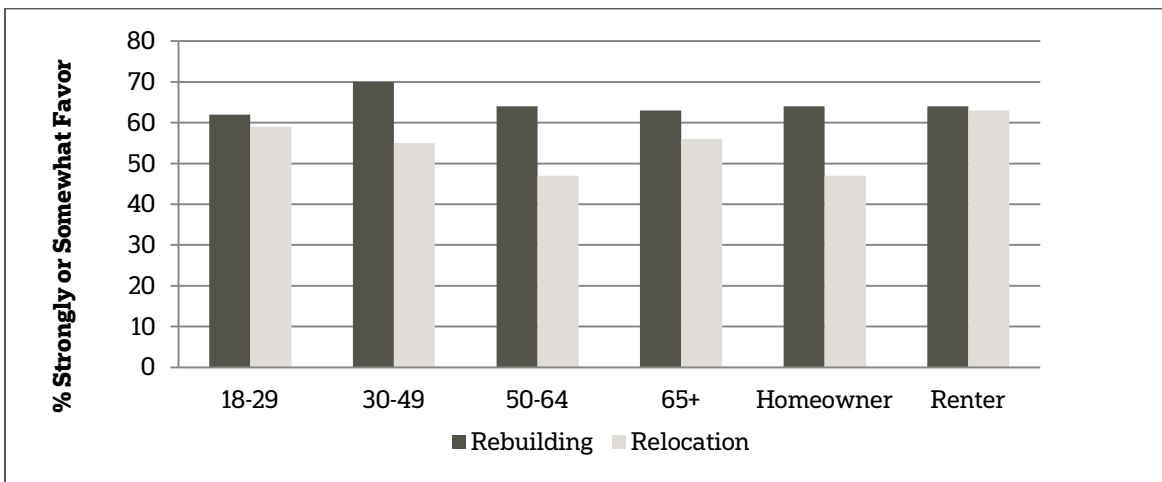
WHITES ARE LESS SUPPORTIVE OF RELOCATION POLICIES THAN AFRICAN AMERICANS AND HISPANICS.

Nationally, support for rebuilding policies is statistically equivalent among Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Within the region affected by Superstorm Sandy, African Americans are most supportive of a rebuilding policy, with 85 percent in favor, compared with 66 percent of whites and 63 percent of Hispanics (63 percent). For the relocation policy, national support is significantly higher among African Americans (77 percent) and Hispanics (66 percent) than whites (48 percent). Within the affected region, however, support for relocation policies is similar across racial and ethnic groups.

MIDDLE-AGED INDIVIDUALS AND HOMEOWNERS FAVOR REBUILDING POLICIES OVER RELOCATION POLICIES.

Nationally, support among young adults (18-29) and older adults (65 and older) is similar for both rebuilding and relocation policies. Individuals ages 30-49 and 50-64 are more supportive of a rebuilding policy than they are of a relocation policy. Sixty-four percent of homeowners and 64 percent of renters report support for rebuilding, but support among homeowners drops to 47 percent for a relocation policy. Within the Sandy-affected region, neither age nor home ownership is associated with support for either policy.





DEMOCRATS ARE MORE SUPPORTIVE THAN REPUBLICANS OF BOTH POLICIES NATIONALLY AND WITHIN THE AFFECTED REGION.

At least 7 in 10 Democrats in both the affected area (75 percent) and nationally (71 percent) favor state governments providing money to local residents to help them rebuild in the same neighborhood. Democrats are more likely to support the policy than independents, both nationally and in the affected region, but 75 percent of independents in the affected region are in favor of this idea compared with 56 percent of independents in other parts of the country. Sixty-one percent of Republicans nationally favor state governments providing money to help residents of disaster-prone areas rebuild in their same neighborhood. However, in the affected area, support among Republicans drops to 45 percent, significantly less than Democrats and independents. Democrats in both the affected area and nationally are also more likely than Republicans and independents to be in favor of state governments buying homes destroyed by natural disasters so residents can move to a safer area. Sixty-five percent of Democrats in the affected areas are in favor of the idea compared with 45 percent of both independents and Republicans.

About the study

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from The Rockefeller Foundation. The random digit dial survey of landline and cell phone numbers was conducted from April 19 through June 2, 2013. This nationally representative survey was conducted with 2,025 adults in the 50 states, including an oversample of 1,007 adults residing in the Superstorm Sandy-affected regions of New York and New Jersey at the time of the storm. The final response rate for the national sample was 13 percent (CASRO). The overall margin of error for the national sample was +/- 4.0 percentage points. The margin of error for the affected region sample was +/- 4.7 percentage points. The margin of error for the sample in the unaffected region was +/- 4.2 percentage points. Sampling weights were calculated to adjust for sample design aspects (such as unequal probabilities of selection) and for nonresponse bias arising from differential response rates across various demographic groups. Poststratification variables included age, sex, race, region, education, and landline/cell phone use. The weighted data, which thus reflect the U.S. general population aged 18 years old or older, were used for all analyses. The weighted data also reflect the two sub-populations of interest, adults living in the Superstorm Sandy affected areas on October 29, 2012, and adults living in the rest of the United States. **Photo Credits:** Homes severely damaged in Mantoloking, N.J. Six months after Sandy AP Photo/Mel Evans April 25, 2013. Seaside Boardwalk Repair AP Photo/Mel Evans May 18, 2013.

The complete topline data and an analysis of the findings, including a full description of the survey methodology, are available at www.apnorc.org.