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## Some of the Uprooted Won't Go Home Again

By Richard Morin and Lisa Rein  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
Friday, September 16, 2005; Page A01

HOUSTON, Sept. 15 -- Fewer than half of all New Orleans evacuees living in emergency shelters here said they will move back home, while two-thirds of those who want to relocate planned to settle permanently in the Houston area, according to a survey by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health.

The wide-ranging poll found that these survivors of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath remain physically and emotionally battered but unbroken. They praised God and the U.S. Coast Guard for saving them, but two weeks after the storm, nearly half still sought word about missing loved ones or close friends who may not have been as lucky.

Most already know they have no home left to return to. The overwhelming majority lack insurance to cover their losses. Few have bank checking accounts, savings accounts or credit cards that work. Still, nearly nine in 10 said they were "hopeful" about the future. And while half said they felt depressed about what lies ahead, just a third said they were afraid.

"I'm setting goals for myself, and I'm ready to conquer them," said Lakisha Morris, 30, who was plucked from her roof and spent two nights outdoors on an interstate highway before boarding a bus for Houston. She said she wants to start her own business in this city, possibly day care for the children of fellow evacuees.

The poll vividly documents the immediate and dramatic changes that Hurricane Katrina has brought to two major American cities. It also suggests that what may be occurring is a massive -- and, perhaps, permanent -- transfer of a block of poor people from one city to another. That may have social, economic and political consequences that will be felt for decades, if not generations, in both communities.

Forty-three percent of these evacuees planned to return to New Orleans, the survey found. But just as many -- 44 percent -- said they will settle somewhere else, while the remainder were unsure. Many of those who were planning to return said they will be looking to buy or rent somewhere other than where they lived. Overall, only one in four said they plan to move back into their old homes, the poll found.

### About the Survey

The survey of Hurricane Katrina evacuees was conducted Sept. 10-12 among 680 randomly selected evacuees age 18 or older residing in Houston shelters. Interviews were conducted face to face. The margin of error for overall results is plus or minus four percentage points. Fieldwork was conducted by International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

A total of 439 interviews were conducted in the Houston Reliant Park Complex (which included the Reliant Astrodome and the Reliant Center), 152 in the George R. Brown Convention Center, and 12 whose location was not recorded. The sample also included 77 respondents from five of the 14 smaller Red Cross shelters in the greater Houston area. Interviews were distributed among shelters in proportion to best estimates of the shelter populations on the dates of interviewing.

Interviews were conducted by 28 professional, Houston-based interviewers under the supervision of staff from the Kaiser Family Foundation and ICR, and with input from Post staff in Houston. The American Red Cross gave The Post-Kaiser-Harvard team permission to interview at the various centers, but was not a co-sponsor of the survey and bears no responsibility for the results.

### About the Sponsors

This survey project was conducted by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health as part of an ongoing collaboration.

The three sponsors worked together to develop the survey questionnaire and analyze the results but are publishing independent summaries of the findings. Each organization bears sole responsibility for the work that appears under its name.

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Some cannot wait. "Every morning I wake up and pray for them to say we can go back to New Orleans," said Lynette Toca, 26, a homemaker with two young sons who had never been outside her city before they drove to Houston the Saturday before the hurricane swept through on Aug. 29.

According to the poll, most of those who did not plan to go back to New Orleans are already living in their new hometown. Fully two in three of the 44 percent who will not return said they plan to permanently relocate in the Houston area, the city that now is home to about 125,000 New Orleans evacuees.

A total of 680 randomly selected evacuees living temporarily in the Astrodome, Reliant Center and George R. Brown Convention Center, as well as five Red Cross shelters in the Houston area, were interviewed Sept. 10 to 12 for this Post-Kaiser-Harvard survey. More than 8,000 evacuees were living in these facilities and awaiting transfer to other housing when the interviewing was conducted.

More than nine in 10 of these evacuees said they were residents of New Orleans, while the remainder said they were from the surrounding area or elsewhere in Louisiana. The margin of sampling error for the overall results is plus or minus four percentage points. Potential differences between these evacuees and those not living in shelters or those who lived elsewhere in the affected Gulf Coast region make it impossible to conclude that these results accurately reflect the views of all Gulf Coast residents displaced by Katrina.

The Post-Kaiser-Harvard poll suggests these evacuees will start their lives with virtually nothing. Seven in 10 currently do not have a savings or checking account. Just as many have no usable credit cards.

Missing, too, from their lives are the vital support networks of relatives and friends that have temporarily absorbed the bulk of those who fled the Gulf Coast storm zone: Eight in 10 said they have no one that they can stay with until they get back on their feet.

research on health care and other public policy issues  paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team members from KFF included Drew E. Altman, president; Mollyann Brodie, vice president for public opinion research; and Erin Weltzien, research associate.

Harvard project team members included Robert J. Blendon, a professor at Harvard's School of Public Health and John F. Kennedy School of Government, and John M. Benson, managing director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program.

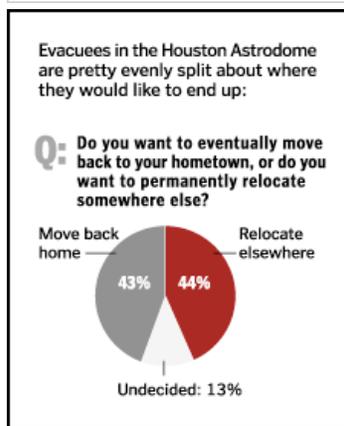
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Last weekend, a team of interviewers directed by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health conducted the first poll of New Orleans evacuees living in Houston emergency shelters. The survey's goal: to capture the attitudes, experiences and plans of those hit hard by the storm.



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