Post-Hurricane Katrina Polls Conducted in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

27 September to 29 November 2005 (N=1,349) and February to April 2006 (N=1,008)

Frederick Weil
Edward Shihadeh
Matthew Lee
Sociology Department
Louisiana State University

www.lsu.edu/sociology

Selected Major Findings

- Half of Baton Rouge households housed evacuees, and 60% of Baton Rougeans did volunteer relief work, most more than once, and most with faith-based organizations.
  - It is sobering to think what would have happened to evacuees if private citizens hadn't provided so much relief: could government and relief agencies alone have coped? And given South Louisiana's close ties of kinship and community, it is sobering to think what would happen in a disaster of similar magnitude in a location without these close social networks.
- People in Baton Rouge mainly felt compassion toward evacuees, but there were negative feelings of fear and irritation, too.

(continues …)

Selected Major Findings (cont.)

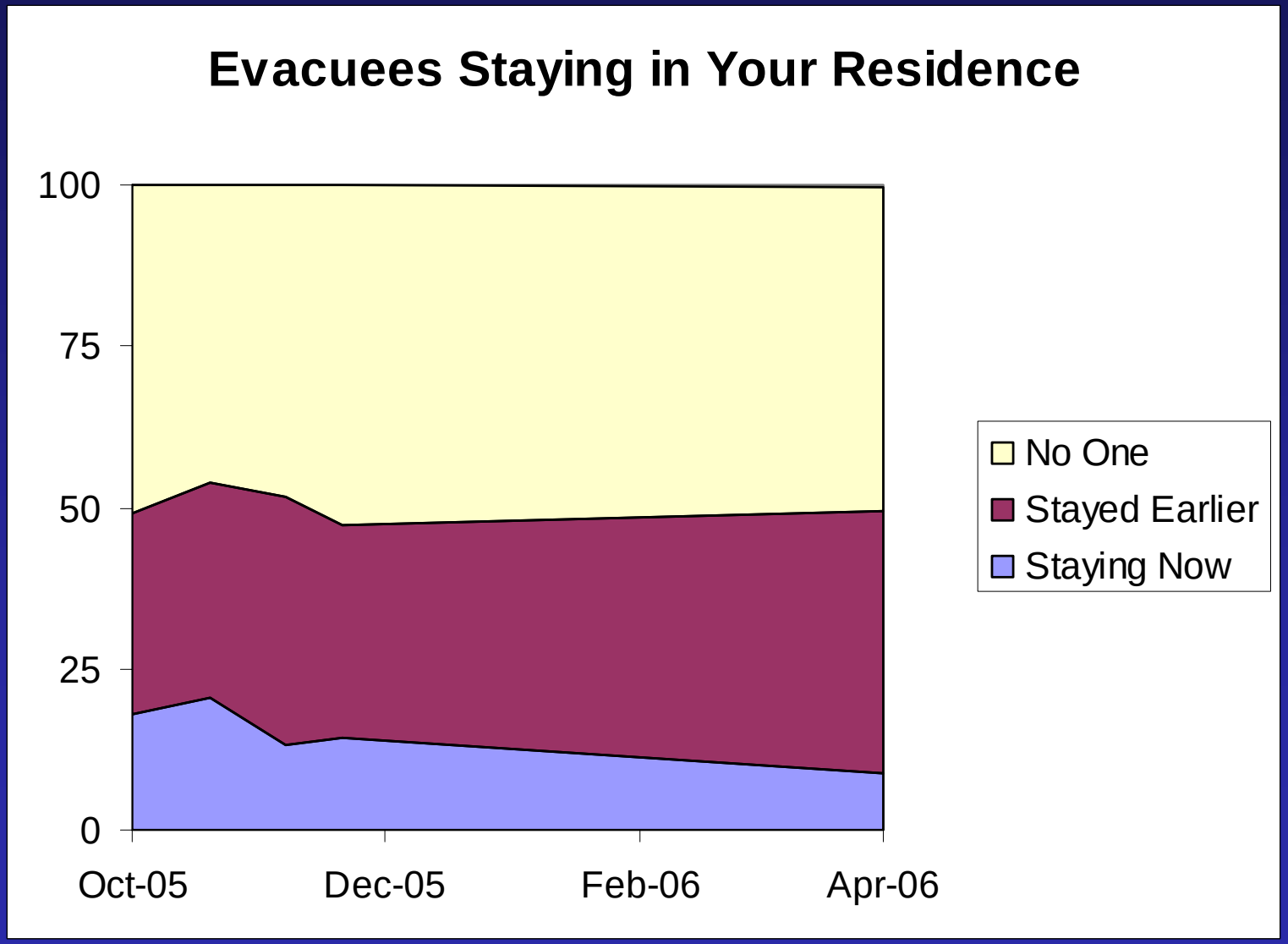
- Rumors of crime were initially widespread, but after initially spiking, fear of crime subsided fairly quickly. Fear of crime continued its years-long decline; and fear after Katrina was not as high or as sustained as it was during the time of the Baton Rouge serial killer.
- A majority of citizens are willing to pay higher taxes for recovery. They would prefer some other solution, but they are increasingly skeptical that a real alternative exists.
- Crowding in Baton Rouge produced substantial problems and irritants, though most of these have subsided over time. However, even as the situation improved, blame of government rose, especially of federal and state government. Local government was better regarded.

(continues …)

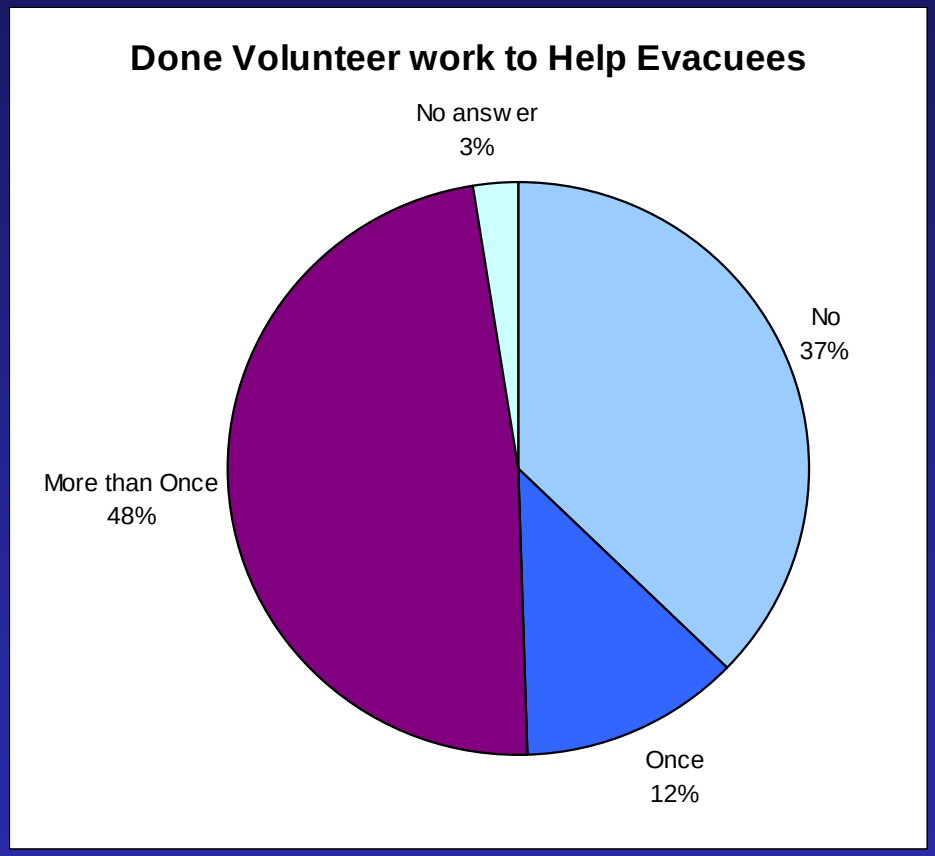
Selected Major Findings (cont.)

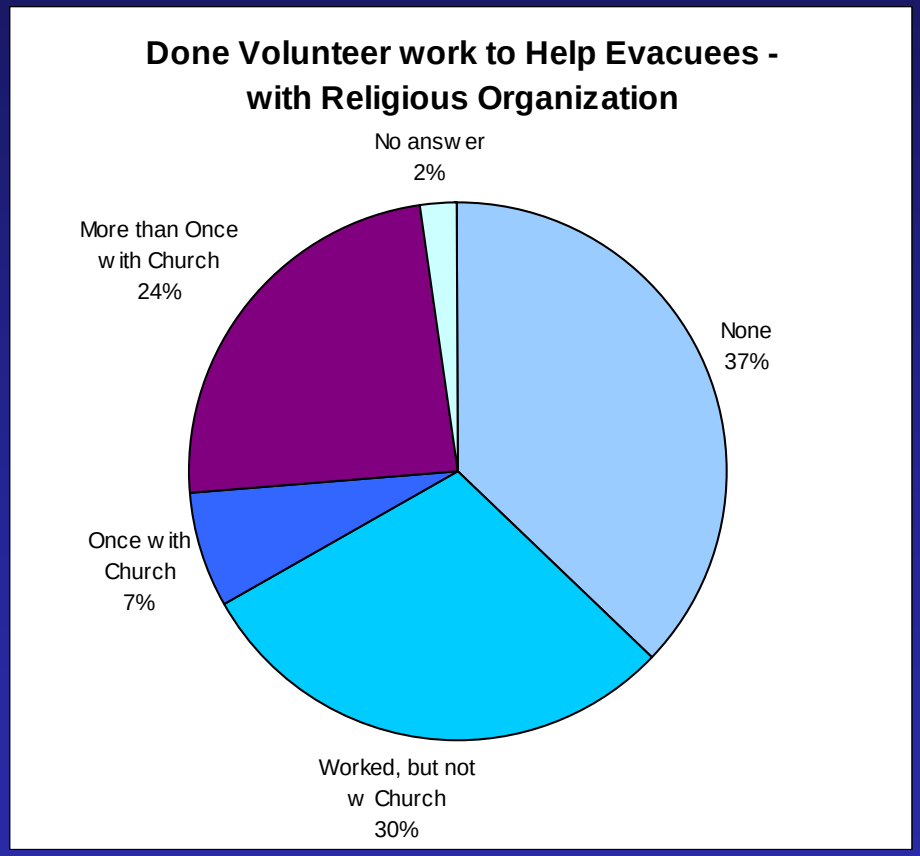
- Baton Rougeans were understandably angry and depressed after the disaster – but notably, their levels of optimism were even higher. However, they felt more hopeful about improvement in the economy than about Baton Rouge as a place to live.
- Most people don’t live near the FEMA trailer parks and don’t know much about them. Yet they would be upset if one were placed near them. They predict bad things would happen, and they would change their behavior. Still, a third of Baton Rougeans believe they themselves could end up in a trailer park if their own home were destroyed in a hurricane.

Half the households in Baton Rouge have housed evacuees – mostly relatives and friends. The number currently staying has steadily declined.

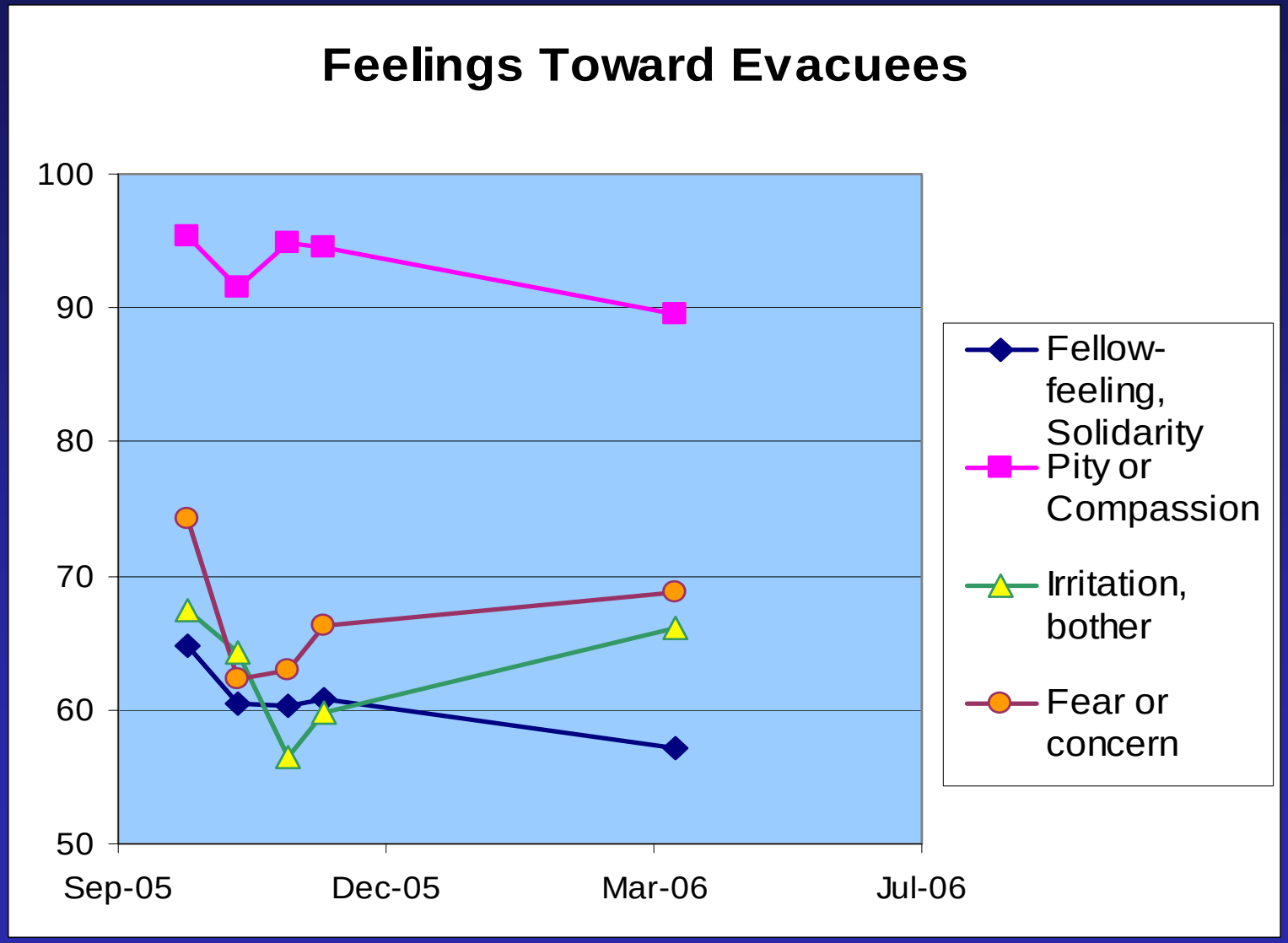


Six out of ten people in Baton Rouge have done volunteer relief work – most more than once. Most of them volunteered with religious organizations.

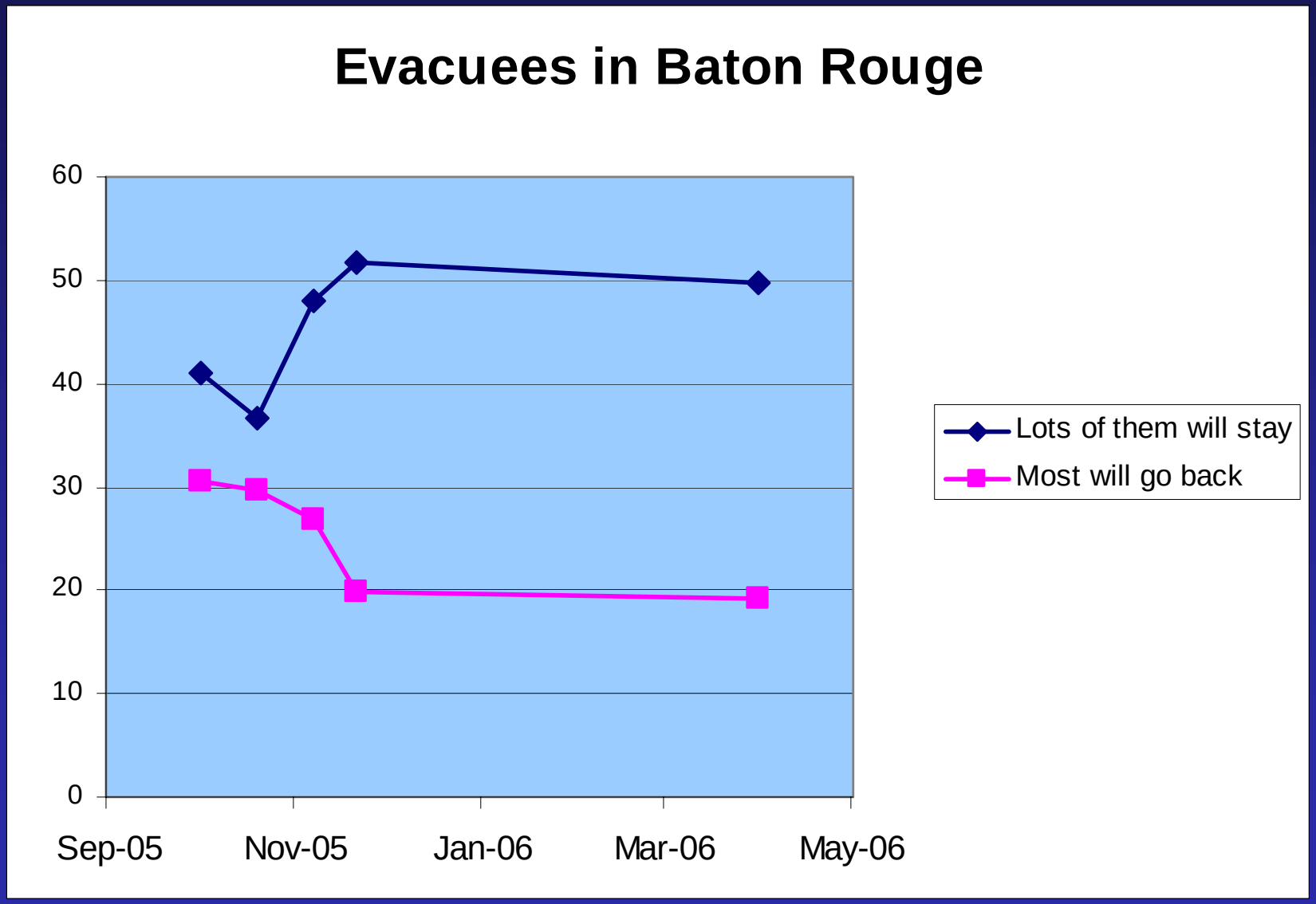




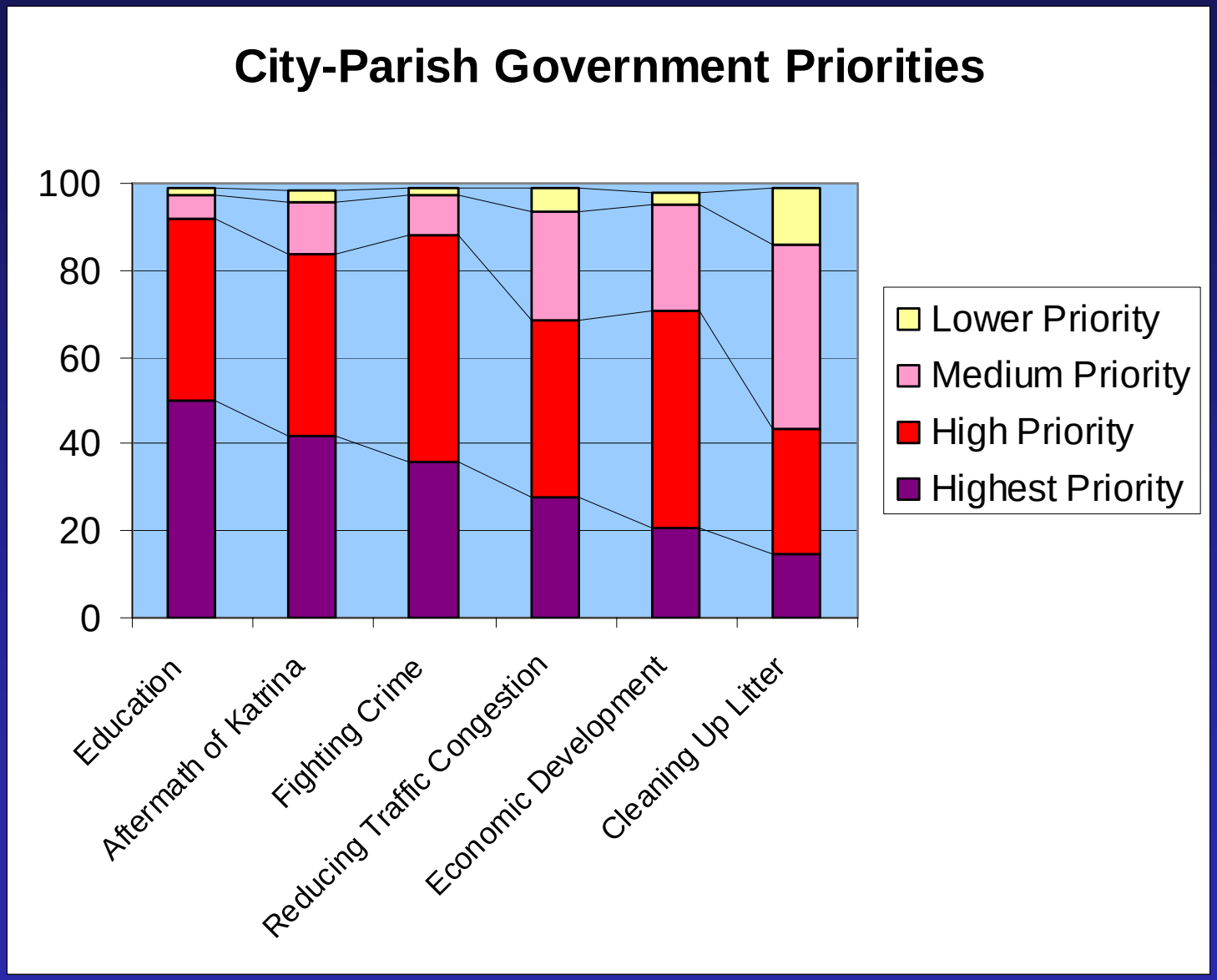
Most people feel pity or compassion toward the evacuees, but there are also feelings of fear and irritation. The negative feelings have risen slightly in recent months.



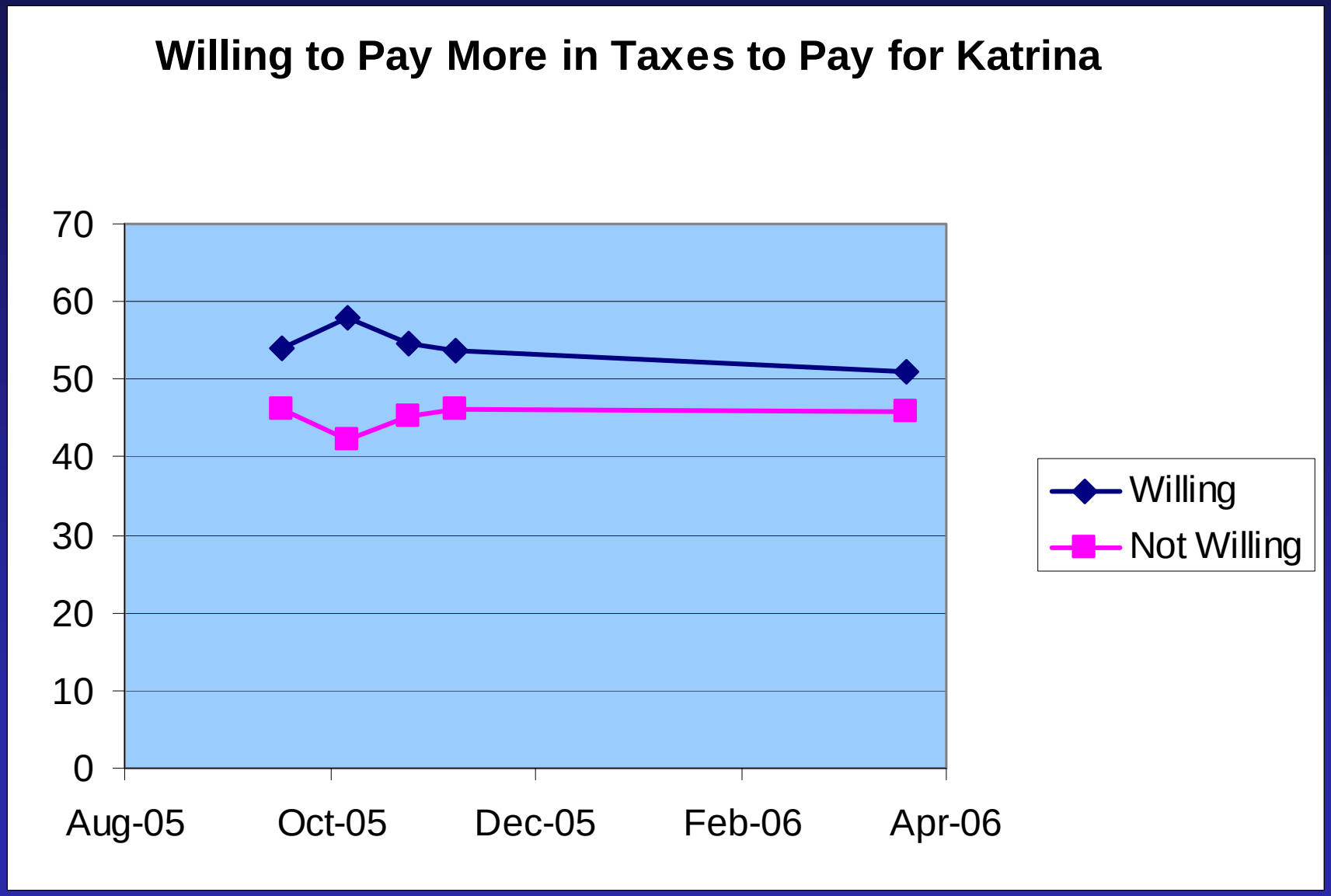
People quickly became convinced that lots of the evacuees are in Baton Rouge to stay.



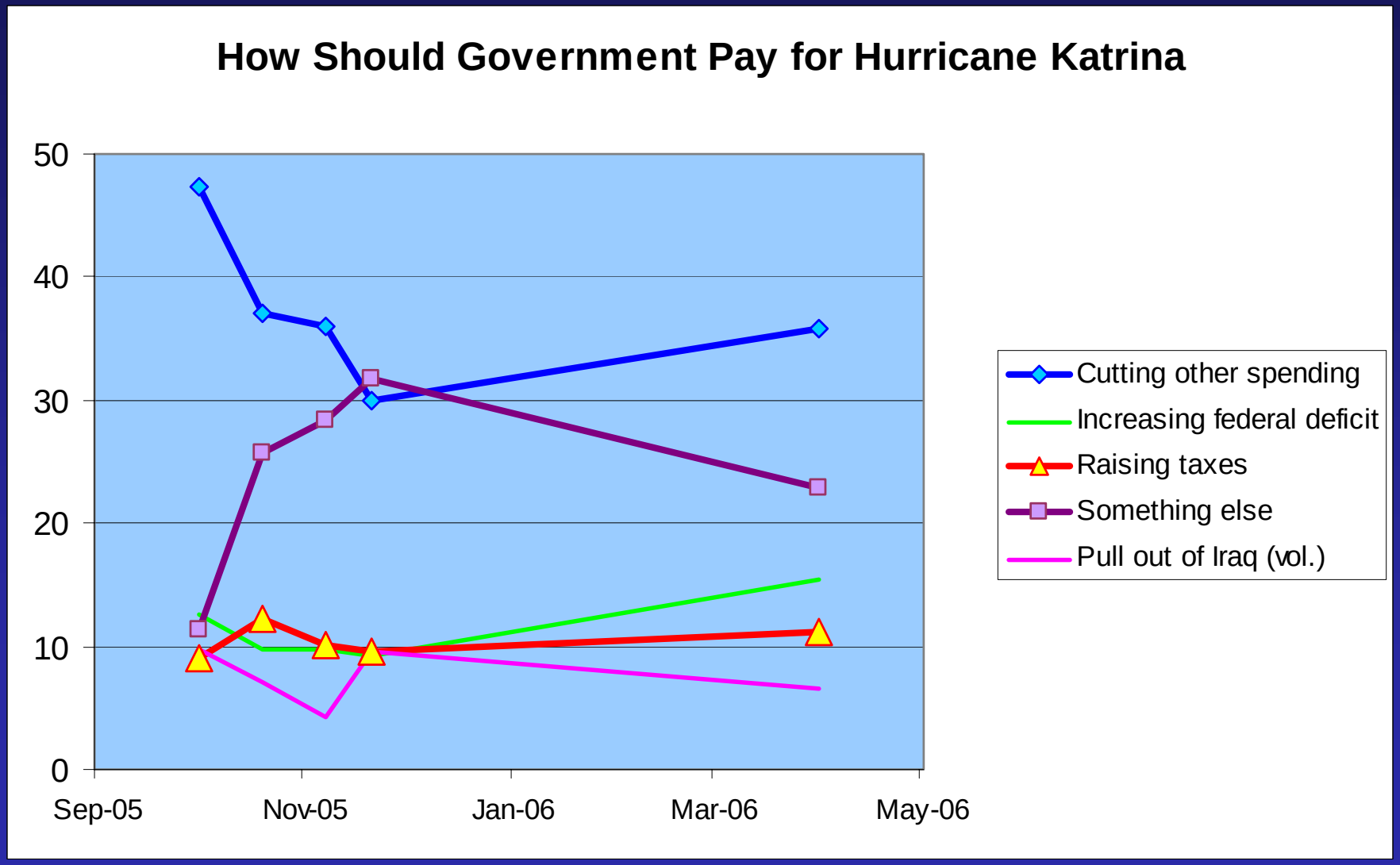
They believe that dealing with the aftermath of Katrina is one of the city's highest priorities.



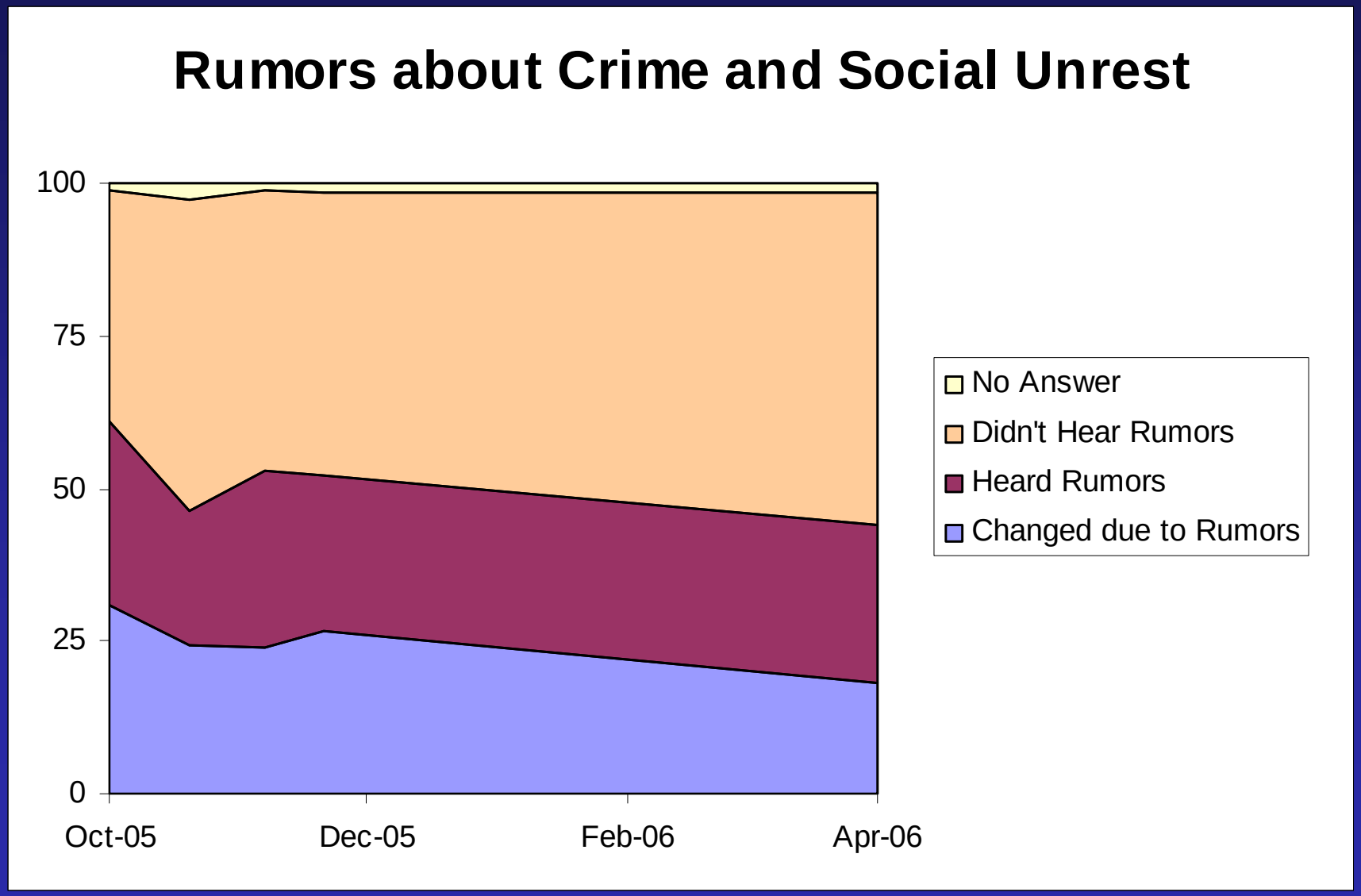
A steady, but bare, majority of people are willing to pay more taxes to help with recovery.



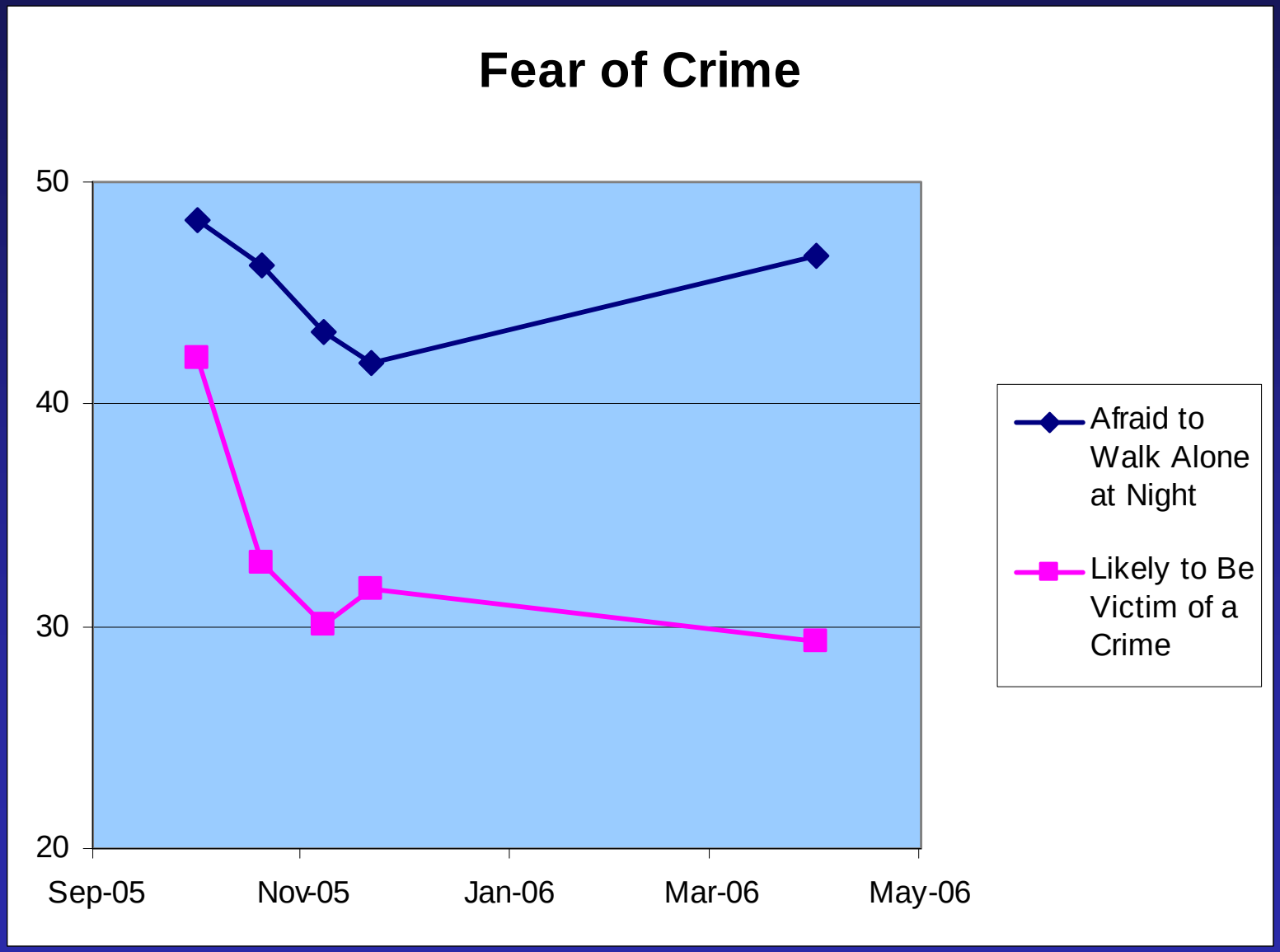
They'd prefer cutting other spending to pay for recovery. They became uncertain that this would be enough, though budget-cutting views have hardened more recently.



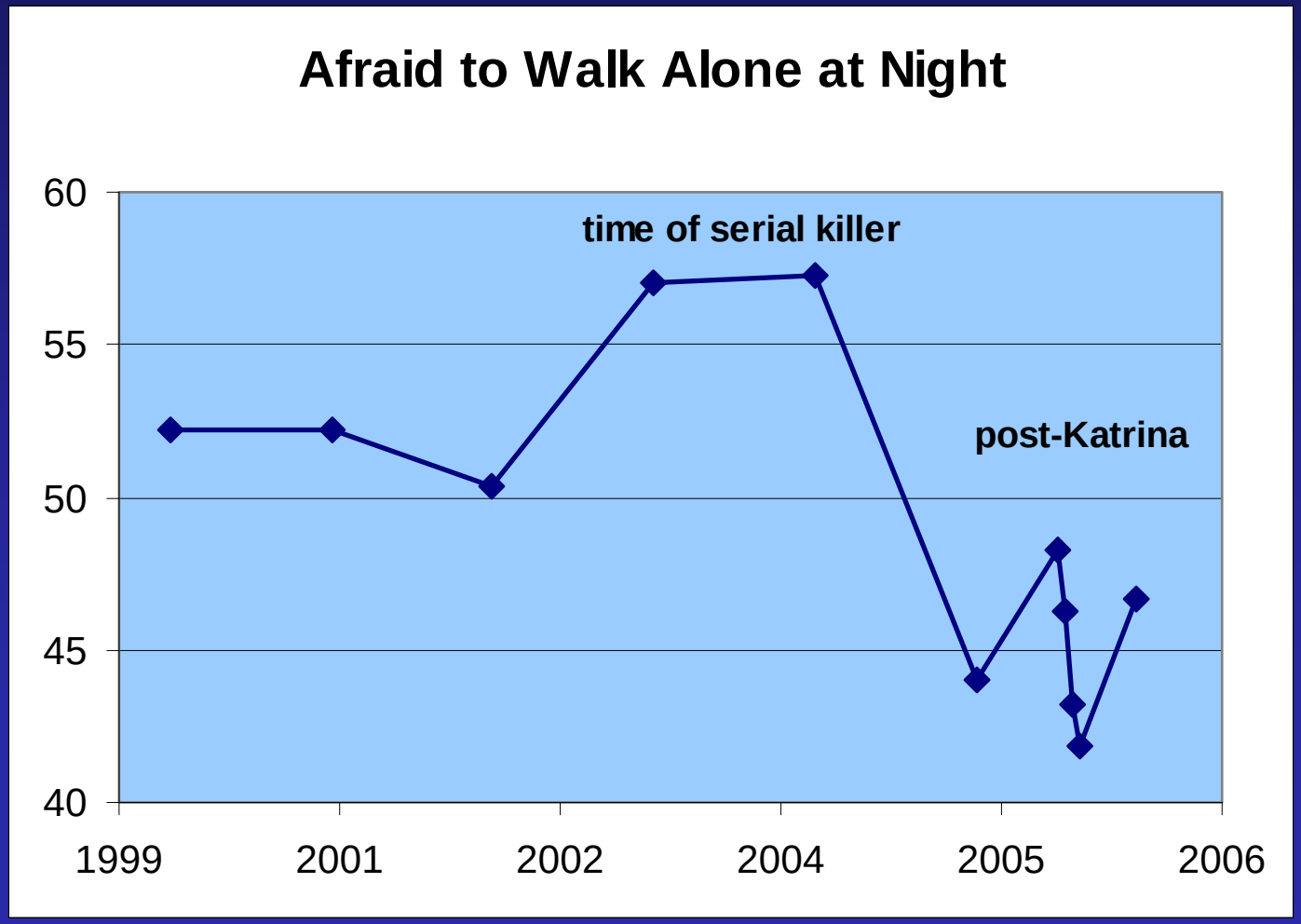
Most people initially heard rumors about crime and social unrest, and many changed their daily routines because of it. But the rumors have declined over time.



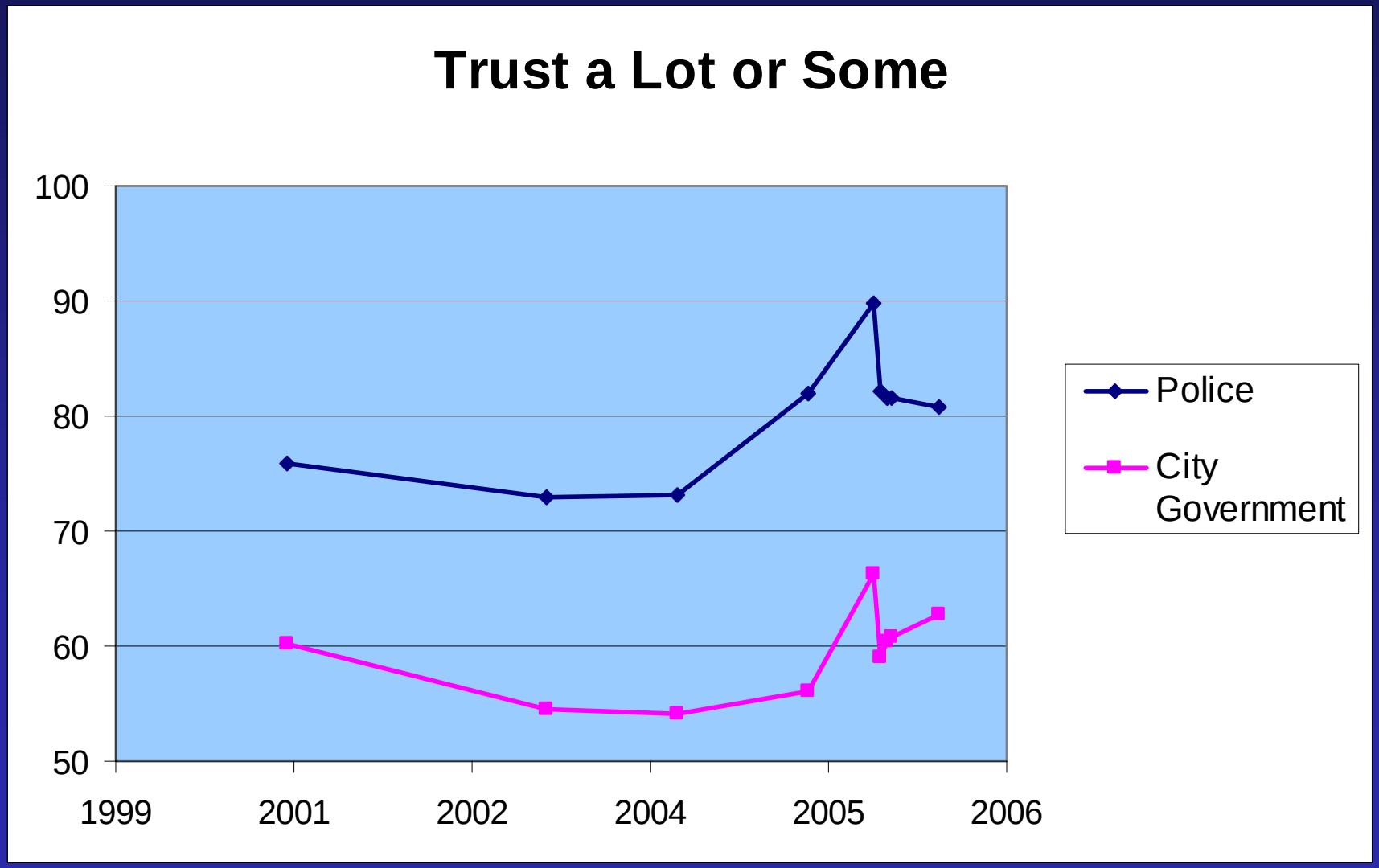
Fear of crime declined in the months after Katrina. Since then, it has changed more slowly, but in no clear direction.



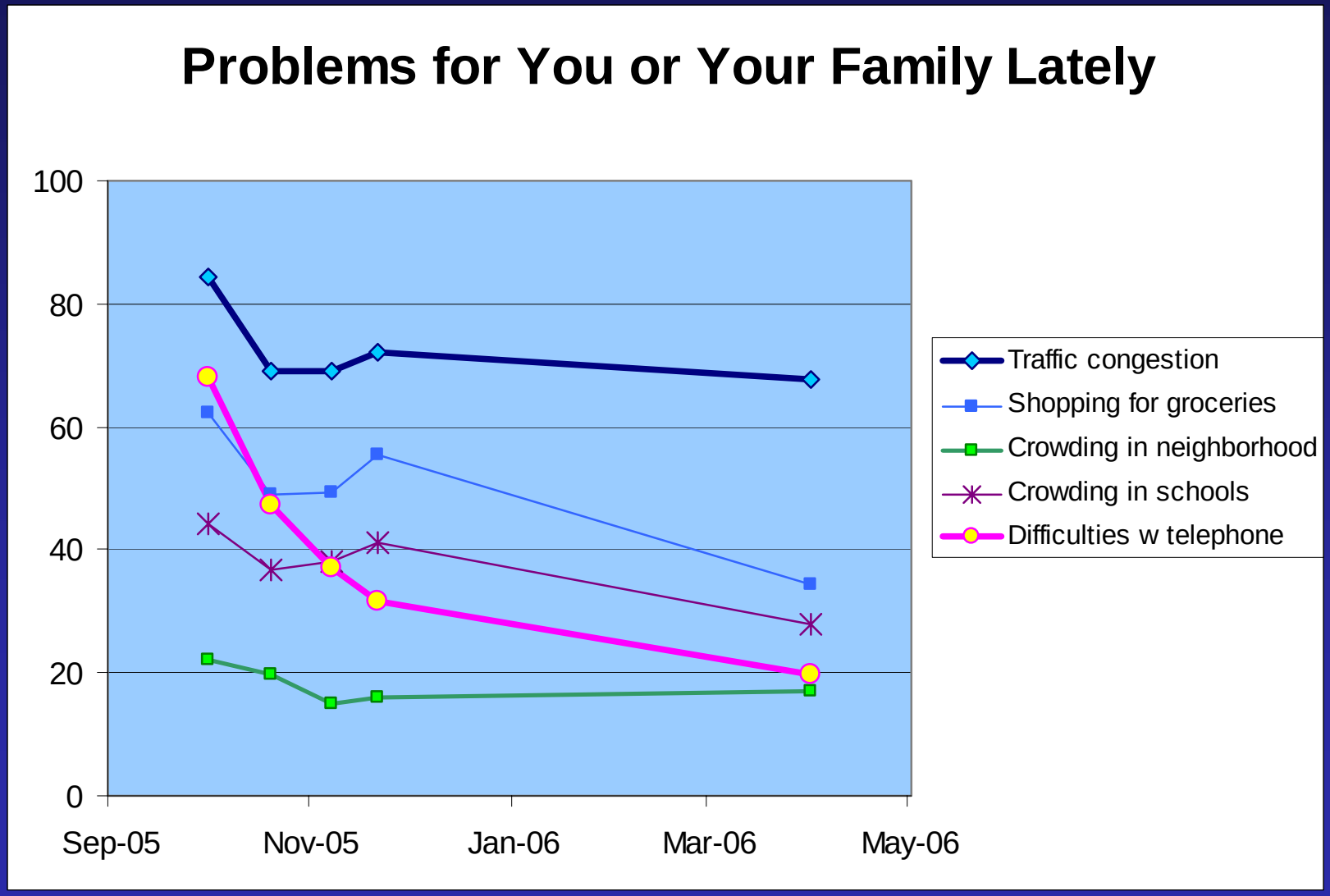
Indeed, fear of crime spiked after Katrina. But it didn't spike as high as it did during the serial killer time, and it was lower than before the serial killer. It probably spiked higher immediately after Katrina, but our measurements first start a month after the storm.



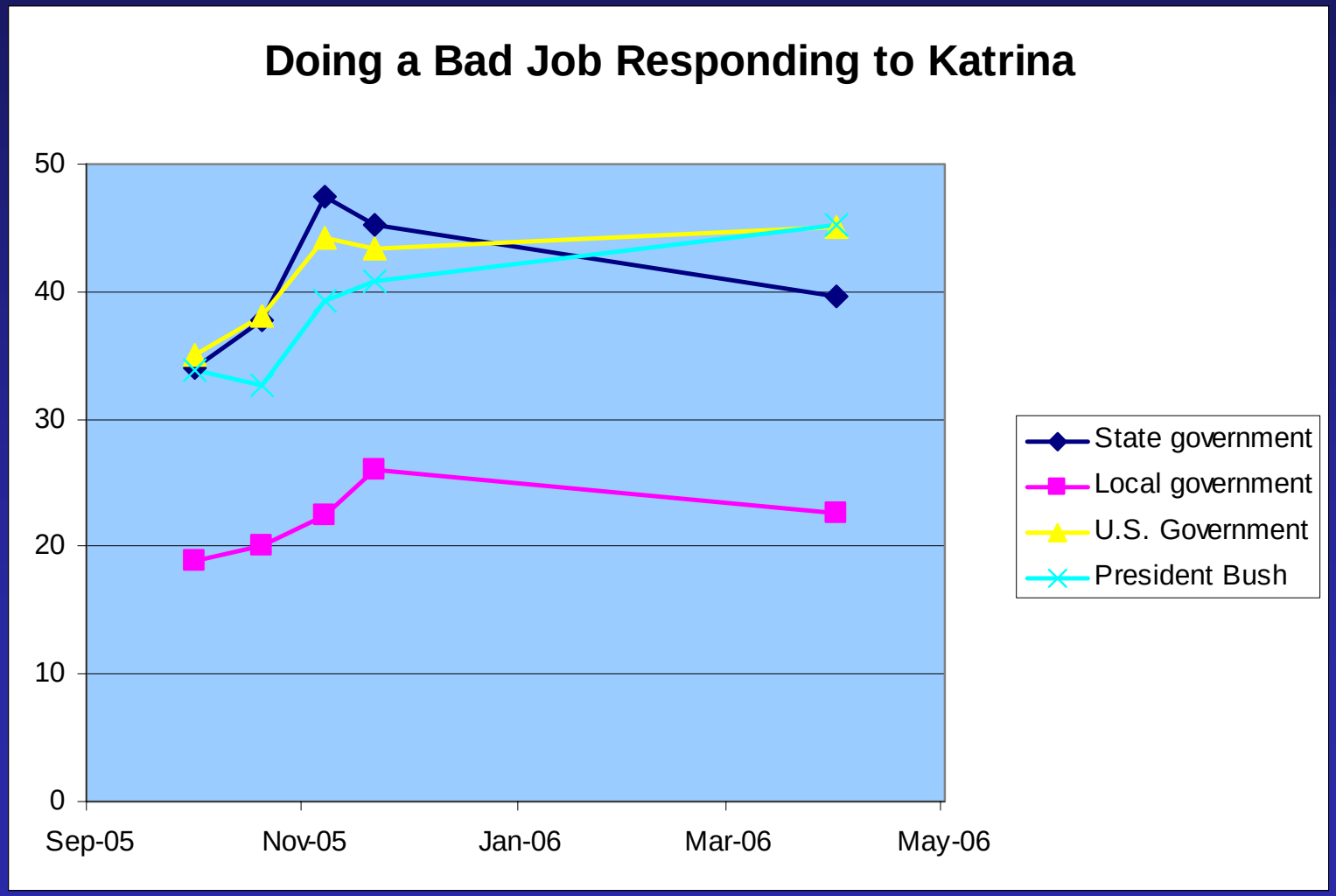
Something similar happened with trust in the police and city government. Trust had risen before the hurricane and declined post-Katrina. But it hasn't gone down to its previous lows.



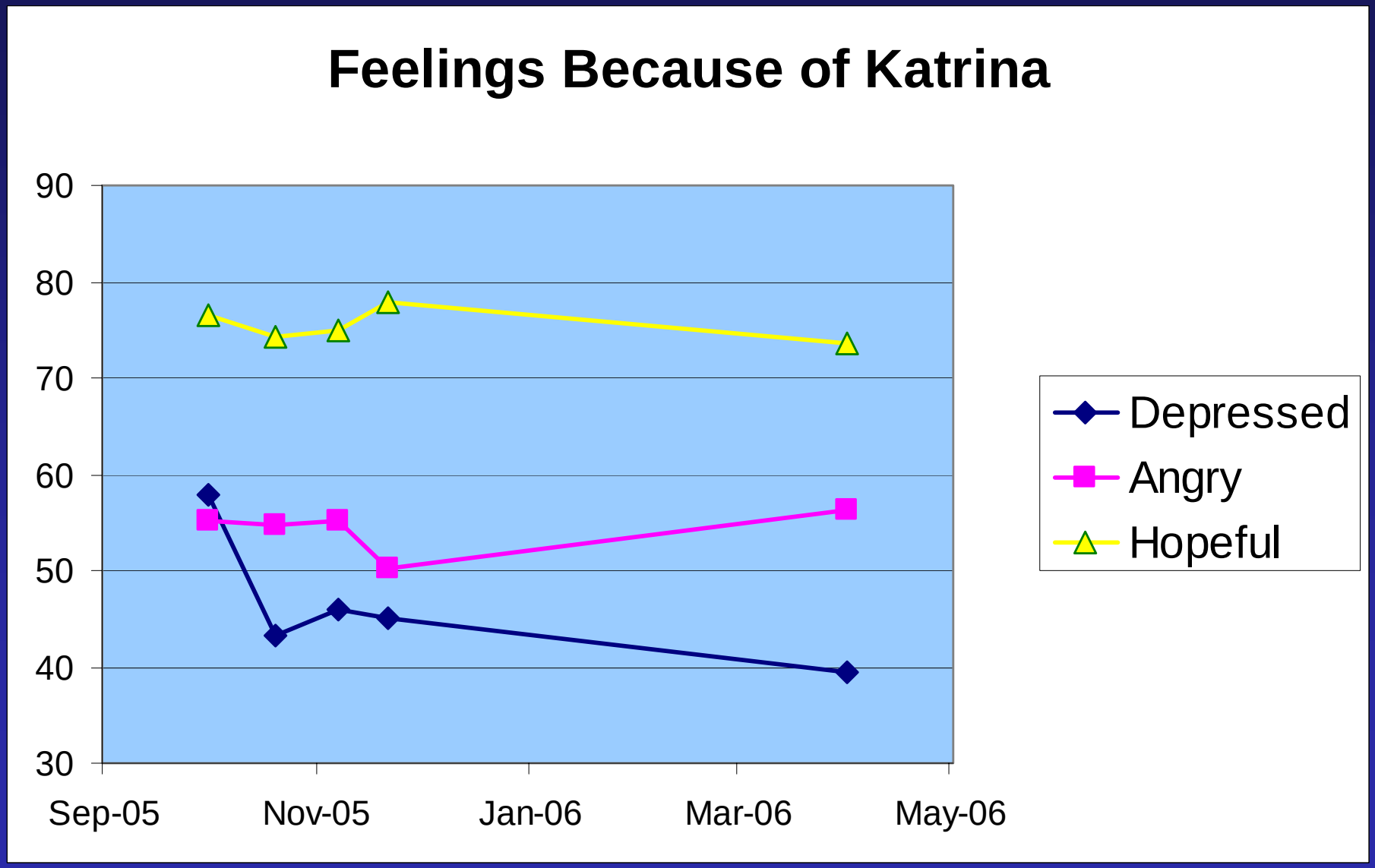
Crowding in Baton Rouge since Katrina produced substantial problems and irritants. The problems have eased somewhat over time, especially telephone. Traffic has remained a major irritant.



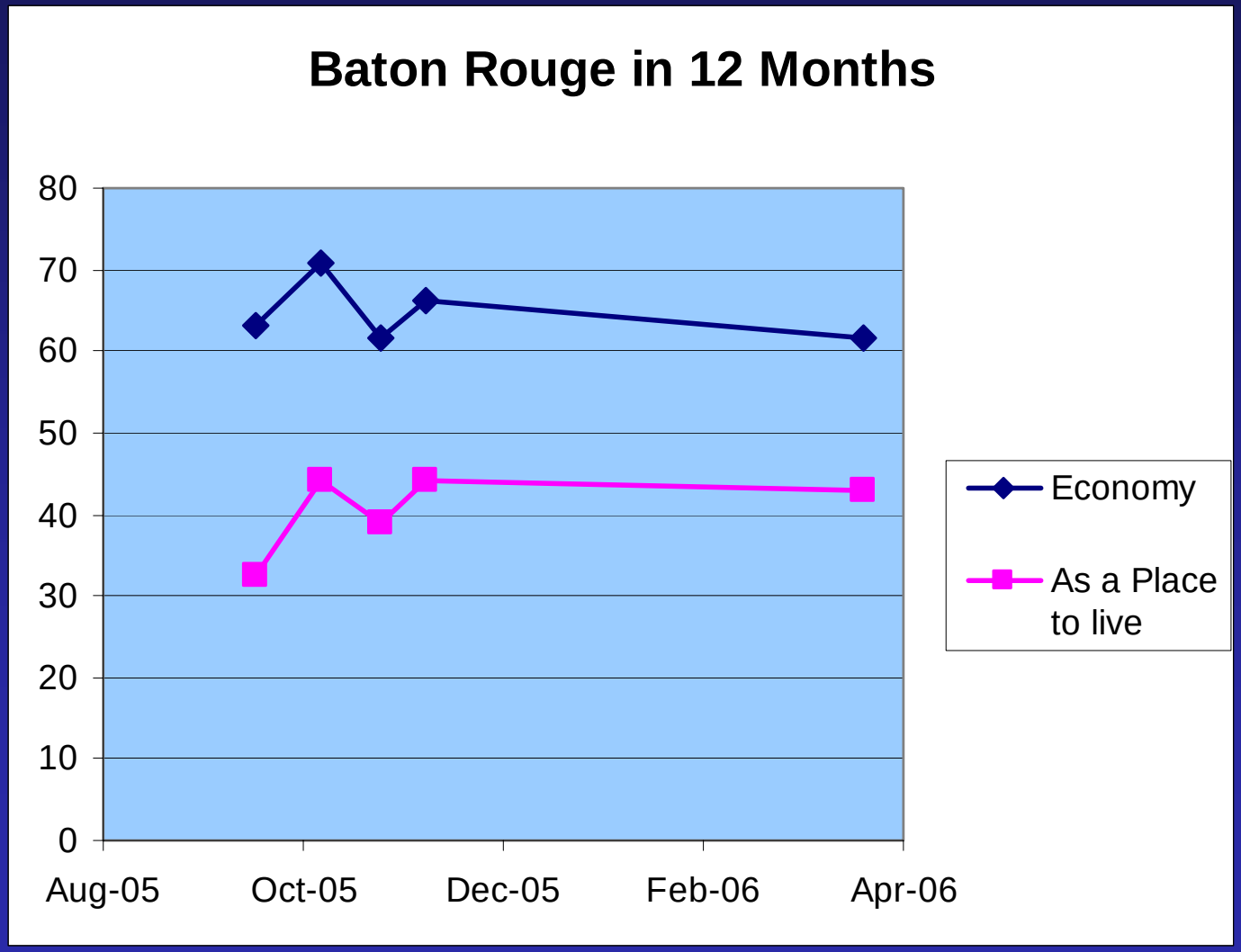
Despite easing of problems, blame of government has risen since Katrina, especially of the federal government. Blame of state & local government has eased somewhat, and local government was never blamed as much.



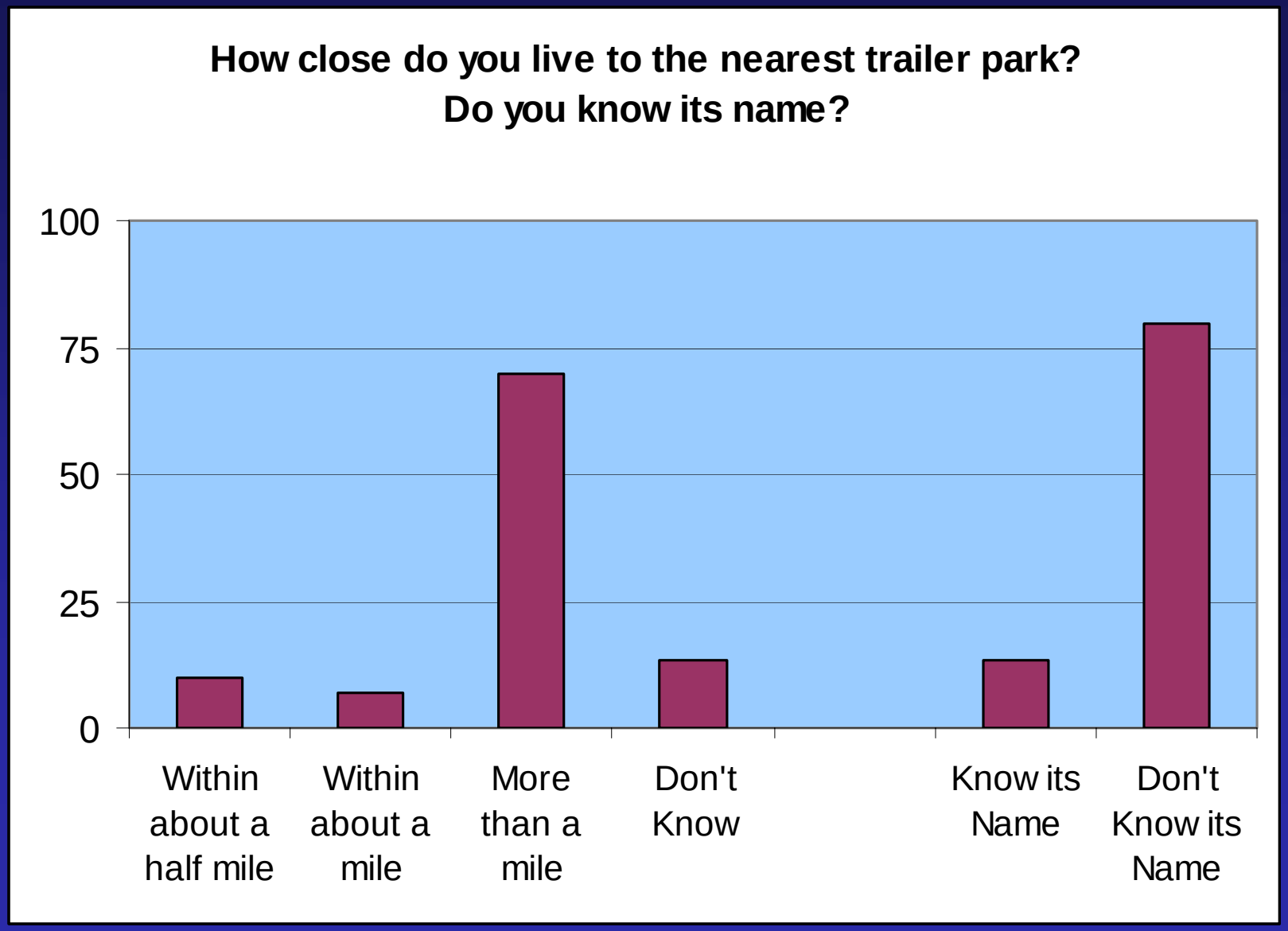
Bad feelings initially eased after Katrina. More recently, anger has grown somewhat, and depression continued its decline. More people have been hopeful throughout.



Most people think that things will get better in Baton Rouge in the coming 12 months. However, they are more optimistic about the economy than about Baton Rouge as a place to live.

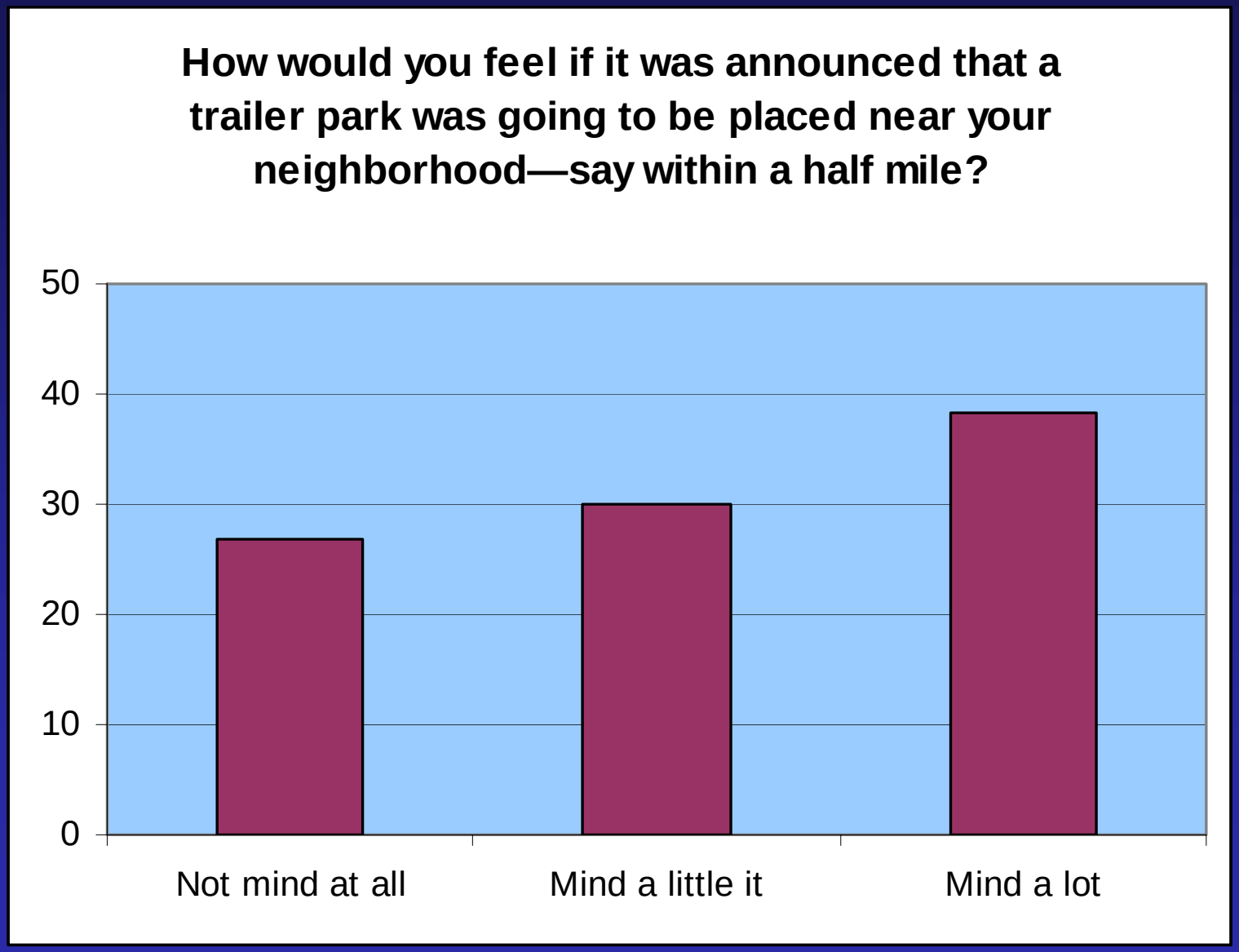


Most people live far from the FEMA trailer parks and don't know the name of the nearest one.

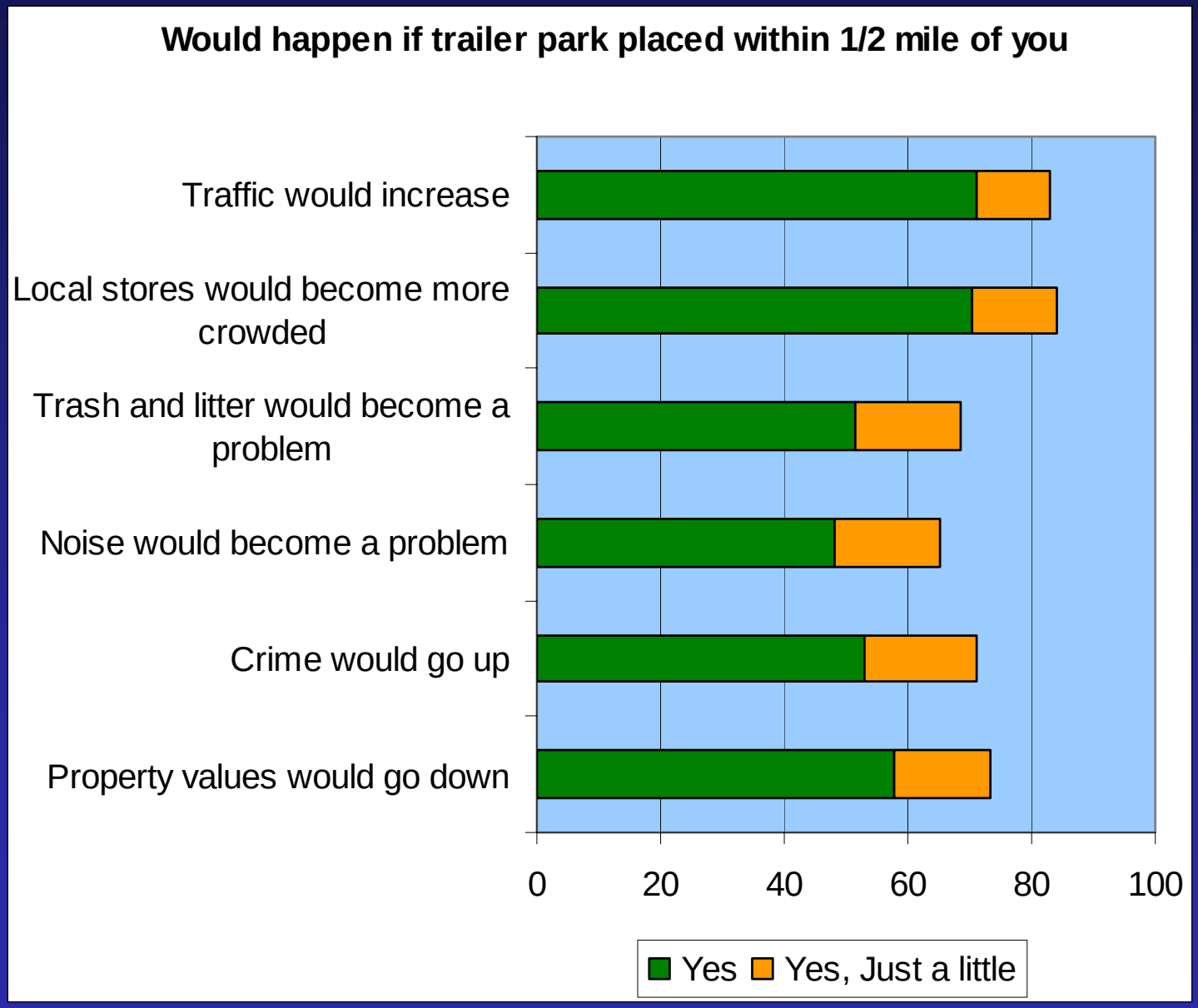


They're not aware of seeing people from the trailer parks around town.

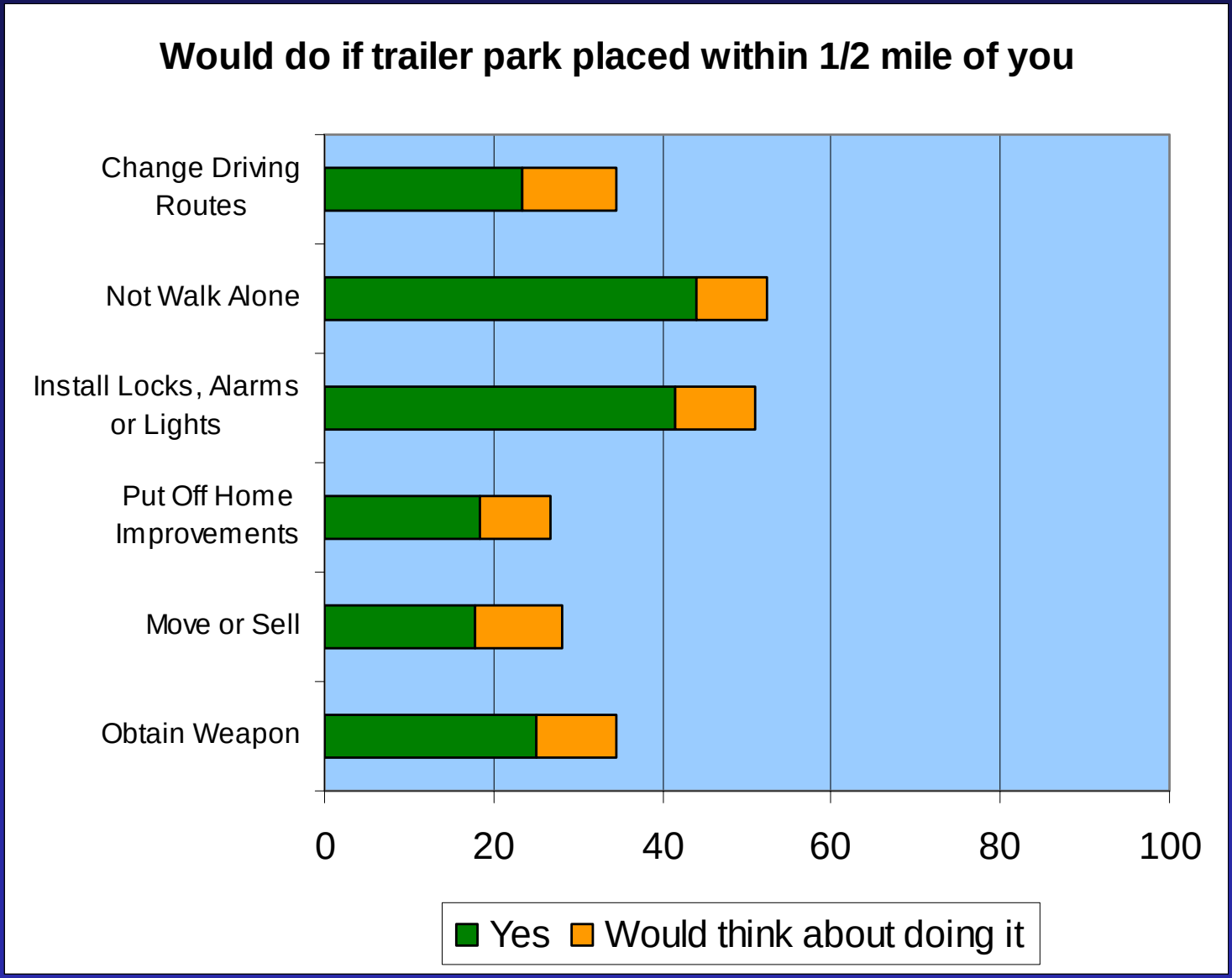
But they would not want a FEMA trailer park placed near them.



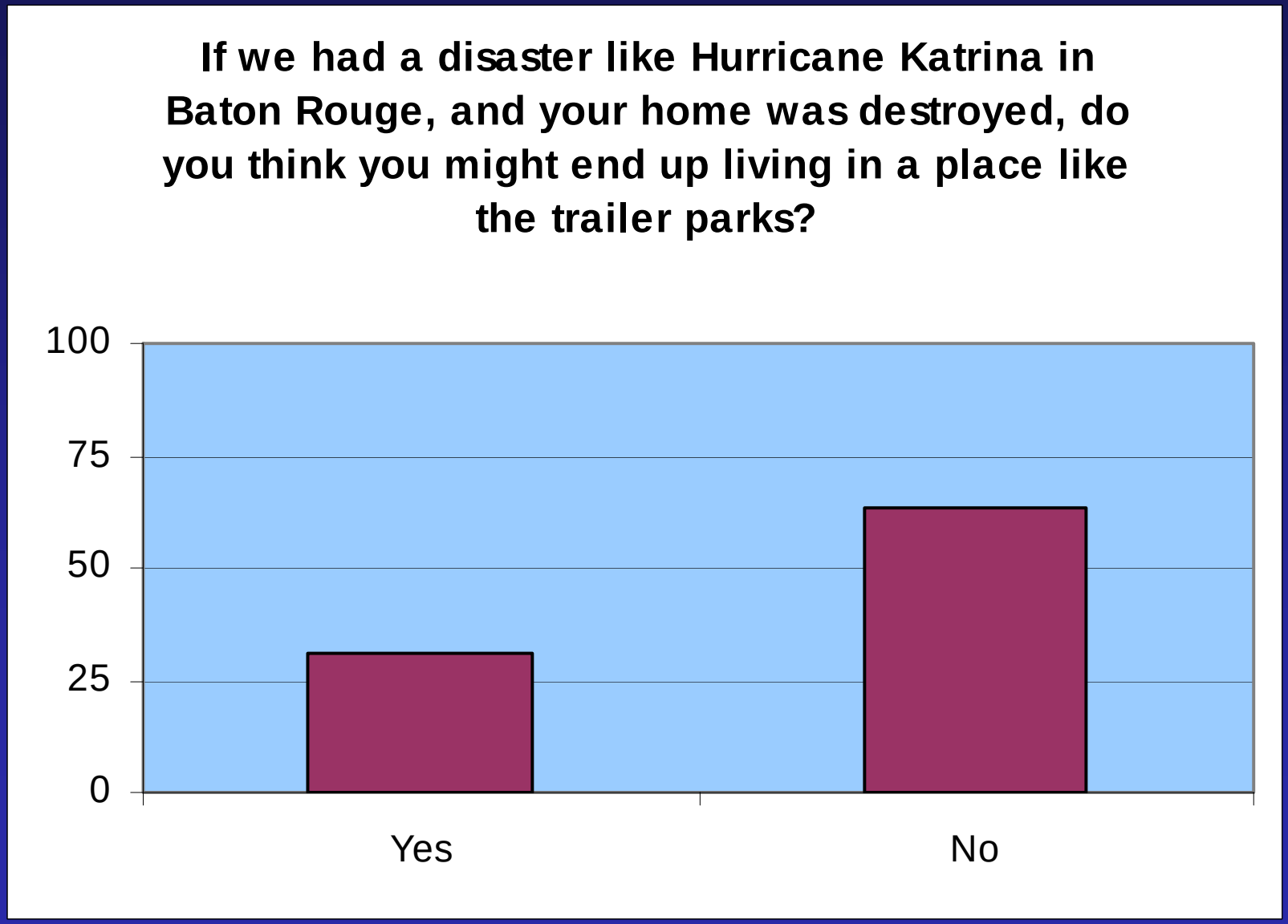
They believe bad things would happen to their neighborhood if a FEMA trailer park were placed near them.



They would contemplate changing their behavior – to a moderate extent – if a FEMA trailer park were placed near them.



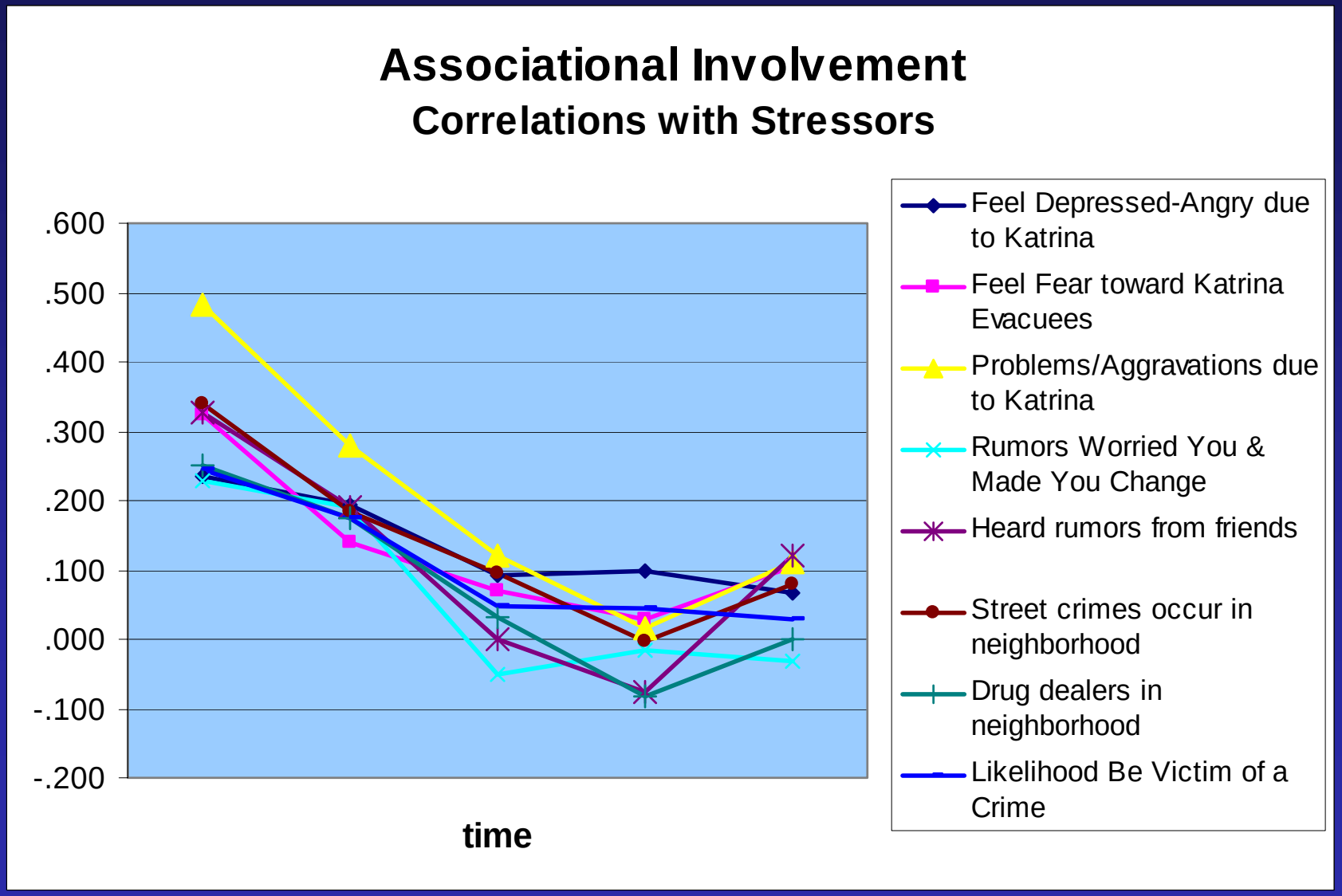
Still, almost a third of Baton Rougeans believe they could end up in a FEMA trailer park if a hurricane destroyed their own home.



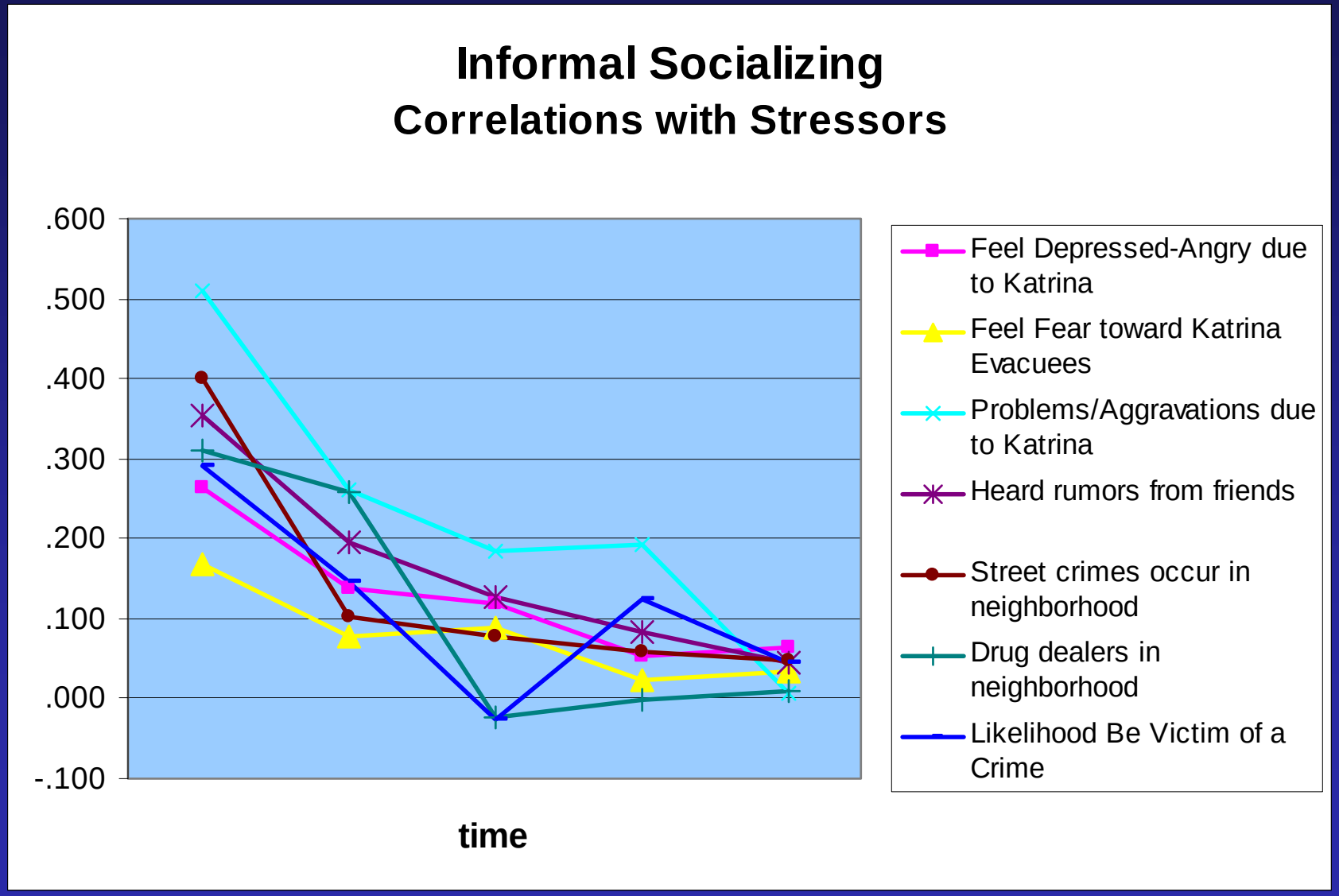
Effects of Social Capital: Involvement, Embeddedness, Trust

- Ordinarily, people with higher social capital handle stress better.
- However, after Katrina, people with higher social capital were initially stressed because they were most involved in relief work.
- As time went on, they recovered more quickly than did socially isolated people. Their very involvement and social support increasingly protected them from these negative feelings.
- Still, a half year after the disaster, they had still not recovered entirely. Disaster recovery has been slow and can feel overwhelming.

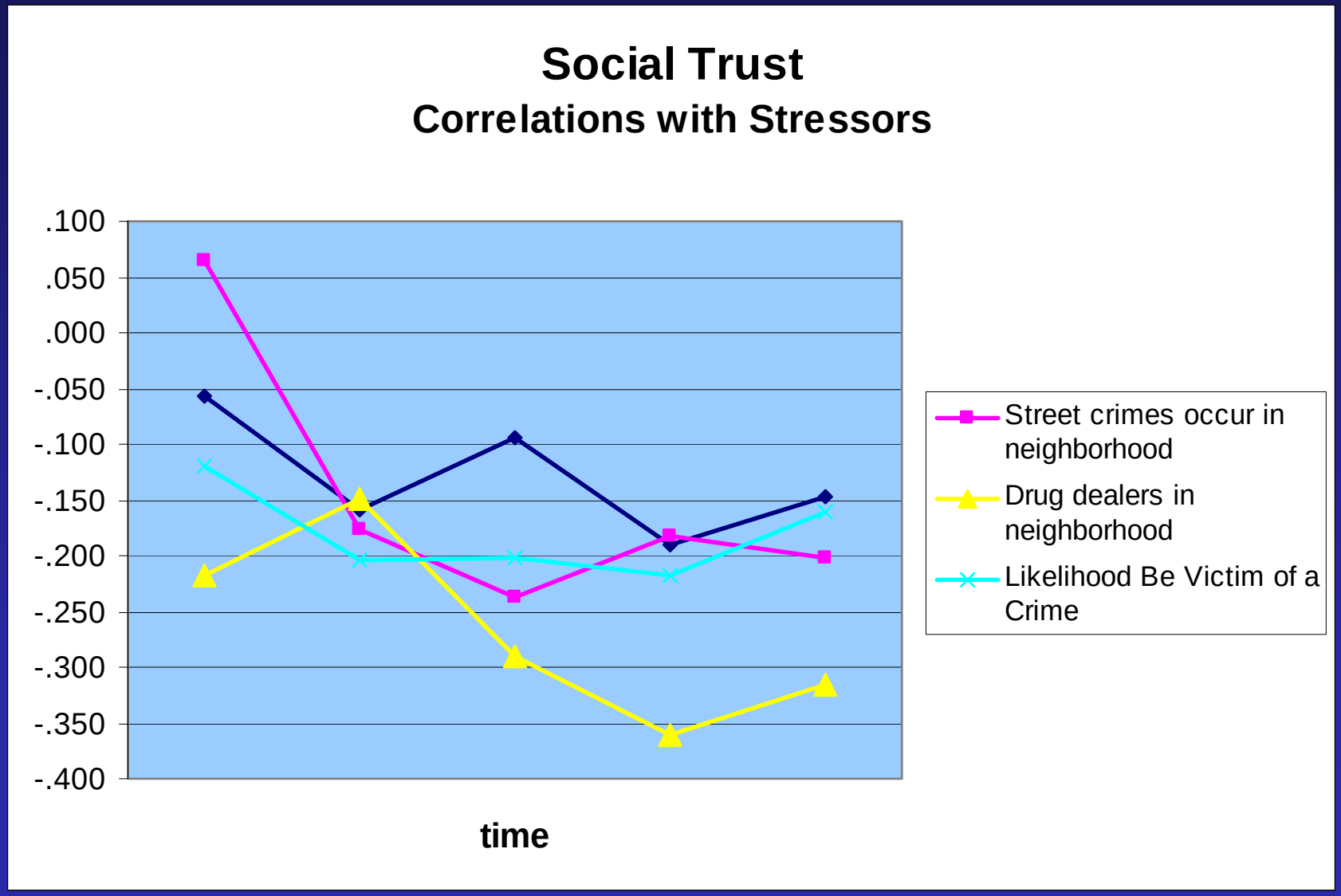
Effects of Social Capital 1: Associational Involvement



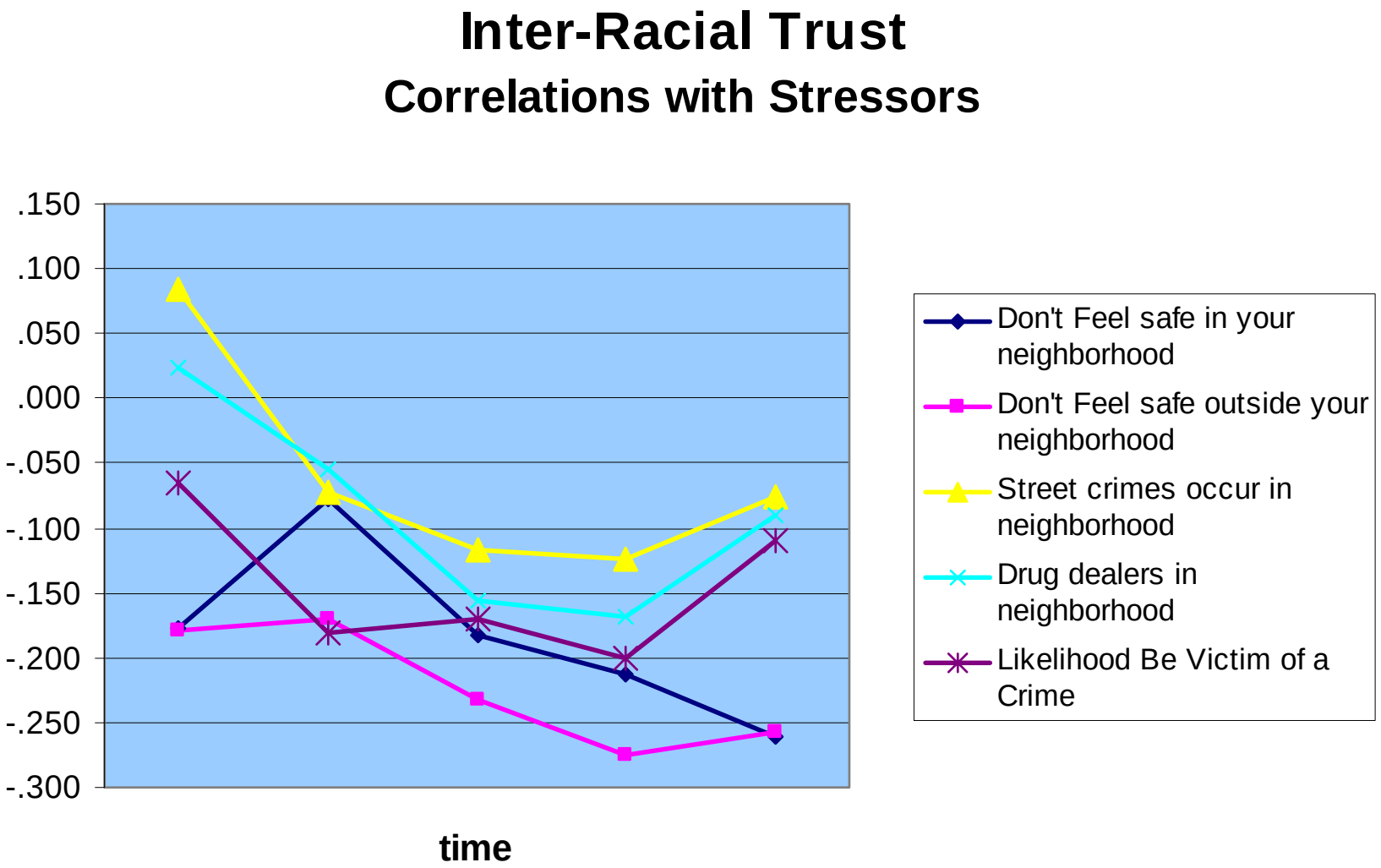
Effects of Social Capital 2: Informal Socializing



Effects of Social Capital 3: Social Trust



Effects of Social Capital 4: Inter-Racial Trust



Methodological Notes

Surveys conducted by Frederick Weil, Edward Shihadeh, and Matthew Lee of the Sociology Department at Louisiana State University. Interviews were done 27 September to 29 November 2005, and February to April 2006. Data are based on a random-digit-dialed telephone sample, representative of the general population age 18 and over in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, *who already lived there before the hurricanes*. Surveys include 1,349 and 1,008 completed interviews. The results are weighted to reflect the combined age-gender-race/Hispanic distributions, according to U.S. Census estimates for 2004. Data collection was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

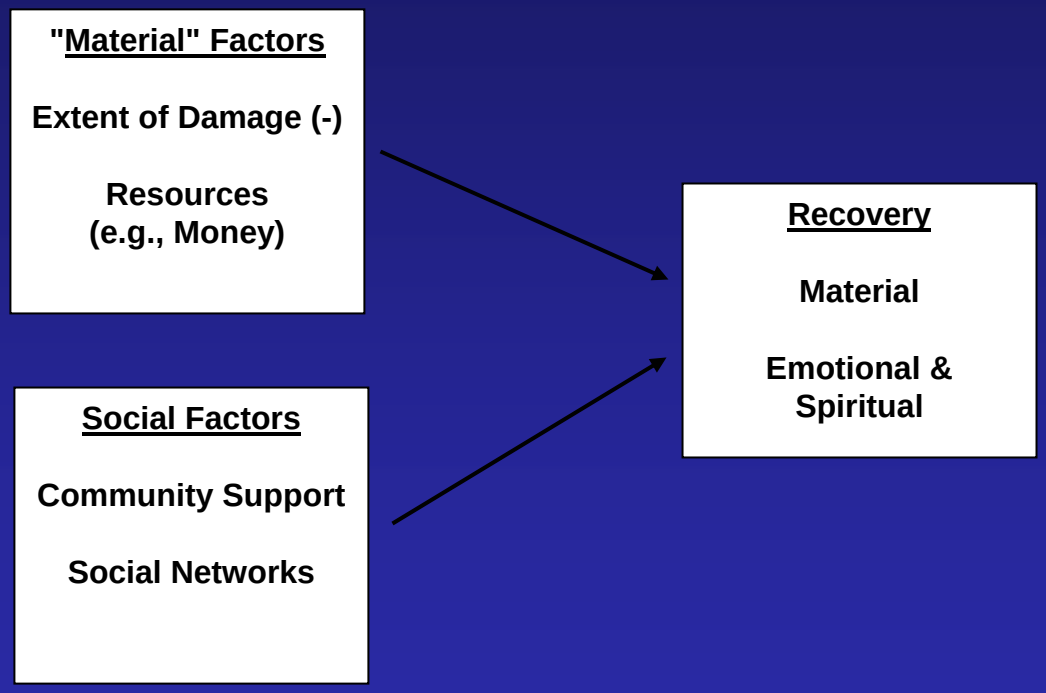
www.lsu.edu/sociology

New Research:
Surveys of N.O. Evacuees & Returnees.

- *Social Factors* affecting recovery, net of physical destruction & economic resources.
- *Psychological & Spiritual Consequences* of the disaster and ways social support can help.
- Samples include:
  - Catholic Archdiocese, Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, & other churches
  - Jewish community
  - Vietnamese community
  - Chalmette; St. Tammany
  - Various N.O. neighborhood associations
  - Evacuees in FEMA trailer villages
  - WWOZ survey of displaced N.O. musicians
  - More

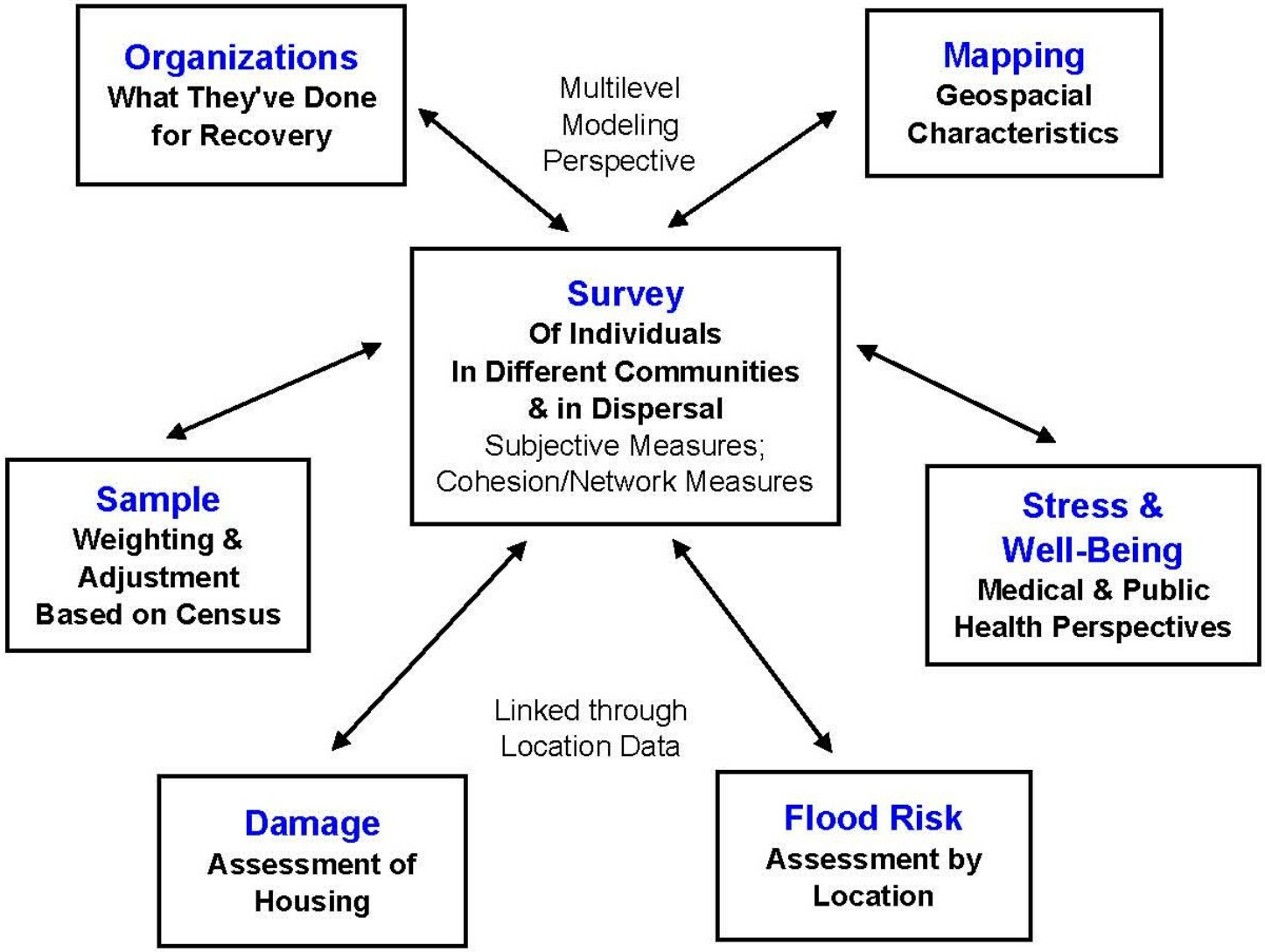
Locations of Some of the Data Collection Sites

Simple Causal Model of Recovery from Disaster: Post-Katrina New Orleans



Reconstituting Community - Diagram of Research Plan

Surveys in Post-Katrina Greater New Orleans



Some *Preliminary* Findings

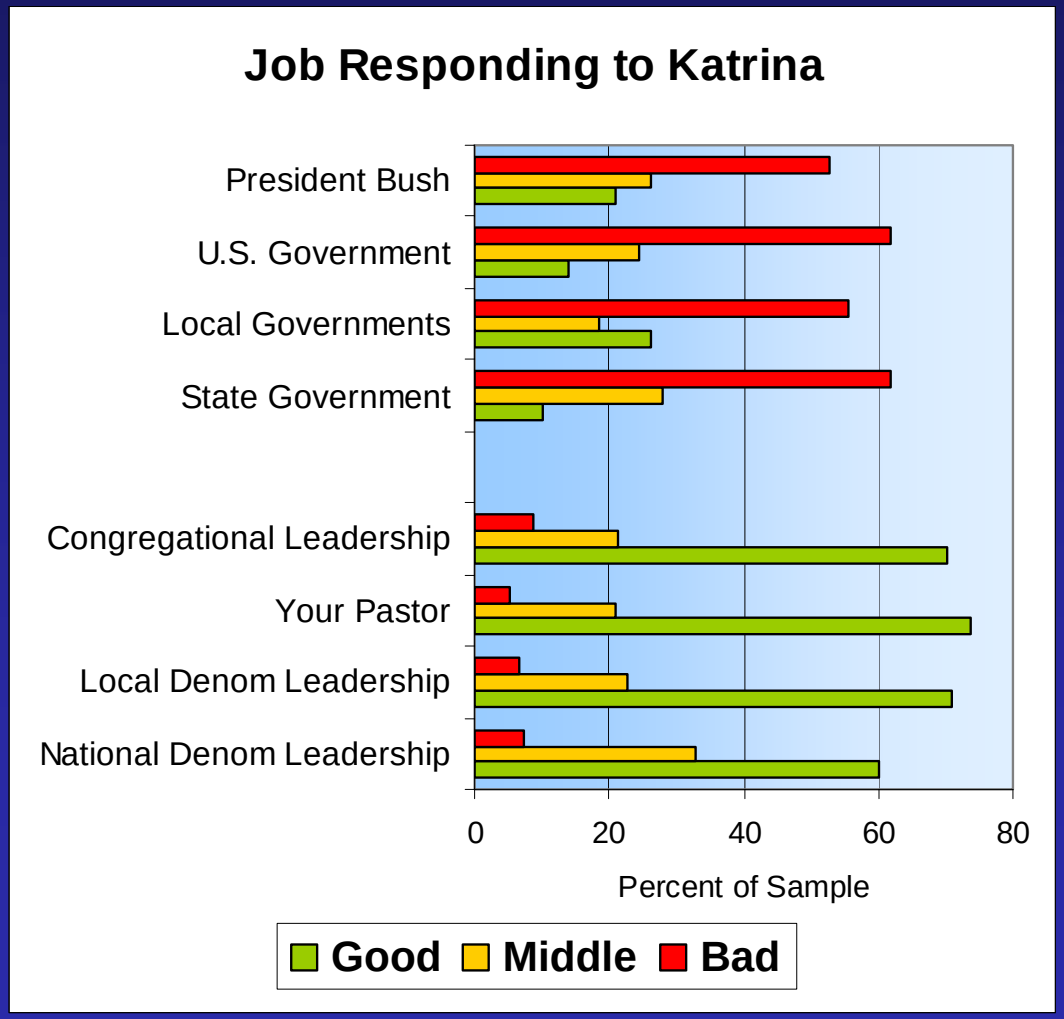
- Non-Jewish samples. N = ca. 300.
  - Orleans Parish, N = ca. 150.
  - St. Bernard Parish (Chalmette), N = ca. 50.
  - St. Tammany Parish, N = ca. 50.

    Caution: *Very preliminary* findings from small, not-yet representative sample, still being collected. Final results may vary from those presented here. Data as of 24 October 2006.

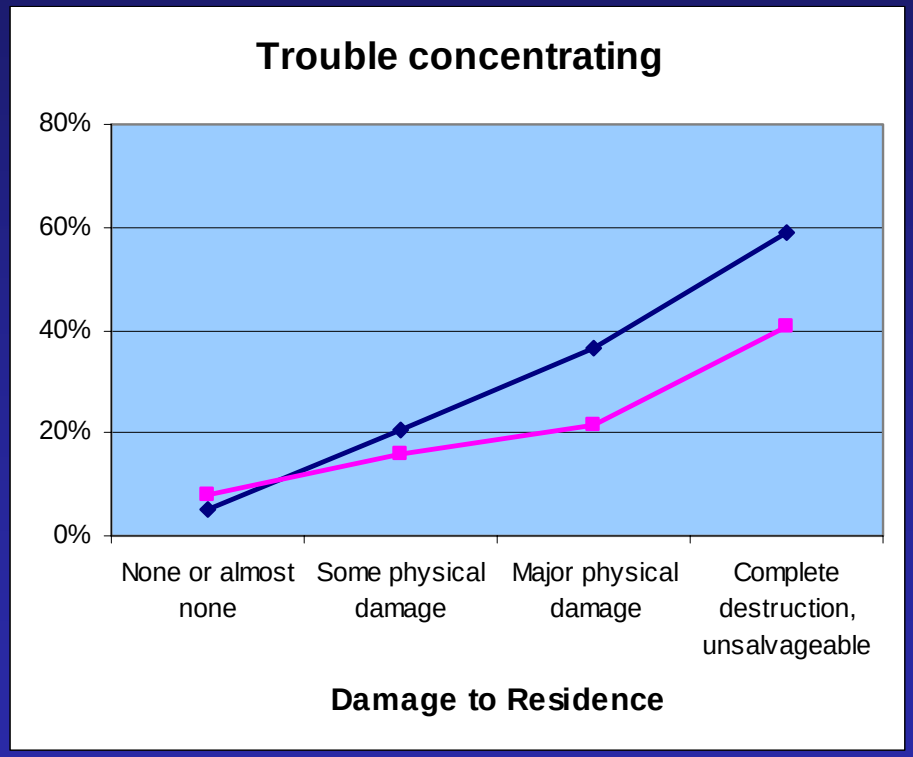
- Jewish sample. N = ca. 700.

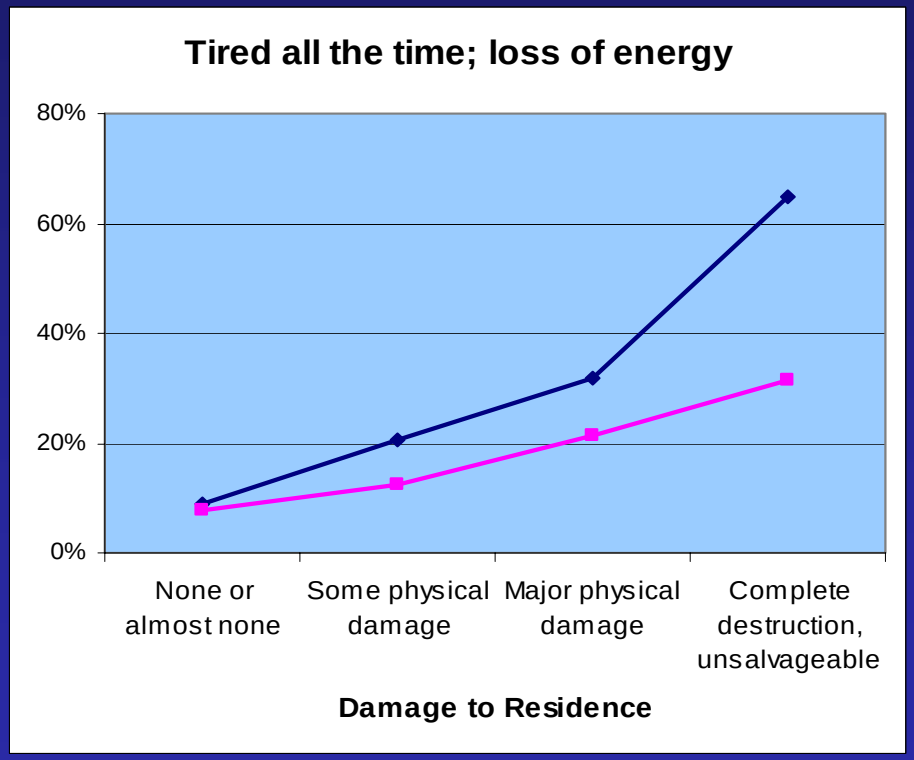
  Jewish sample is more representative.

Respondents felt that all levels of government did a poor job responding to the hurricane and the subsequent flooding; but they felt that their own community leaders (pastors, congregational, regional and national denominational leaders) did an excellent job.(N=ca. 300.)

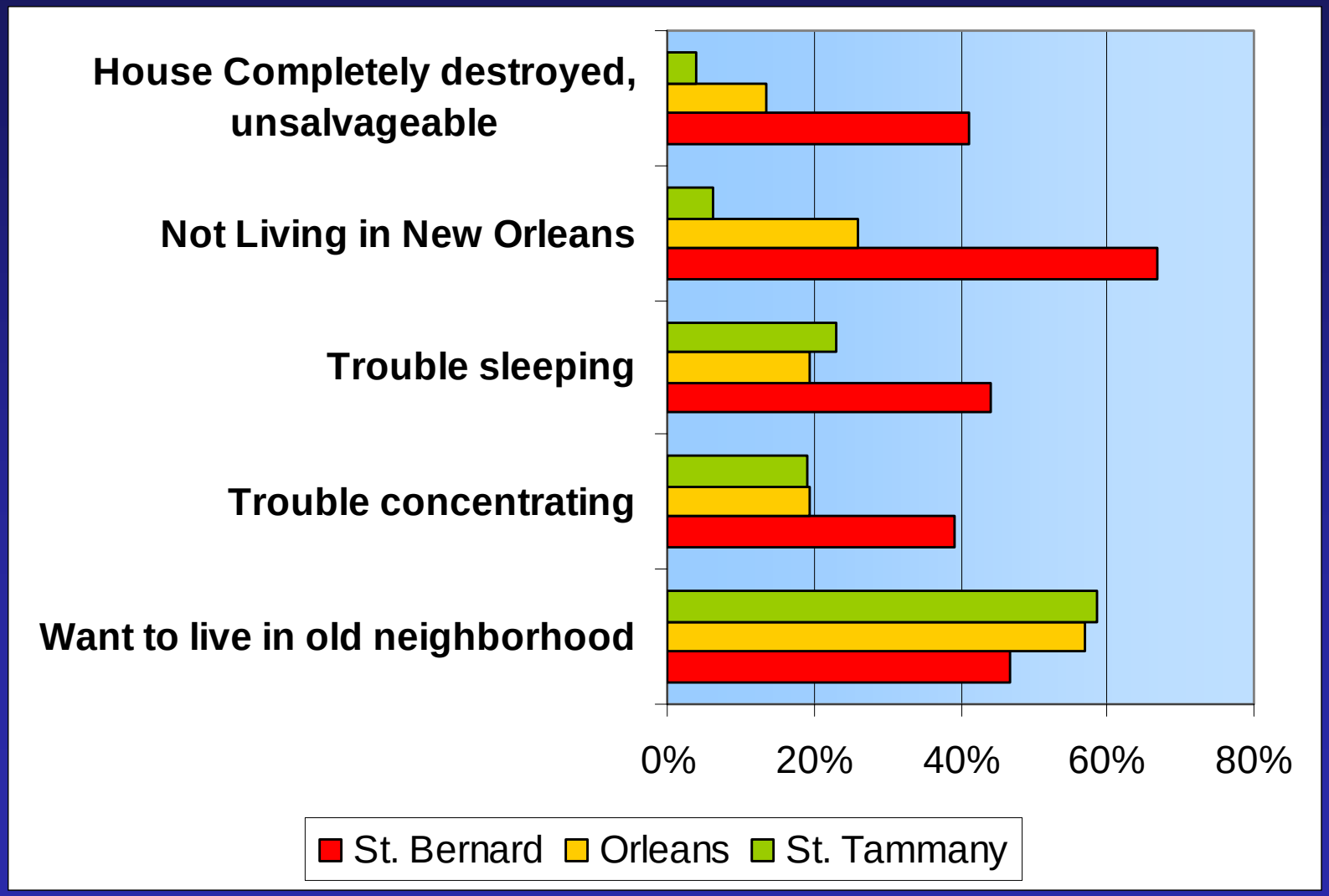


People who suffered greater storm damage experienced higher levels of anger and stress. However, those who attended church more often at least once a week: red lines) were somewhat protected from these negative feelings. (N=ca. 300.)

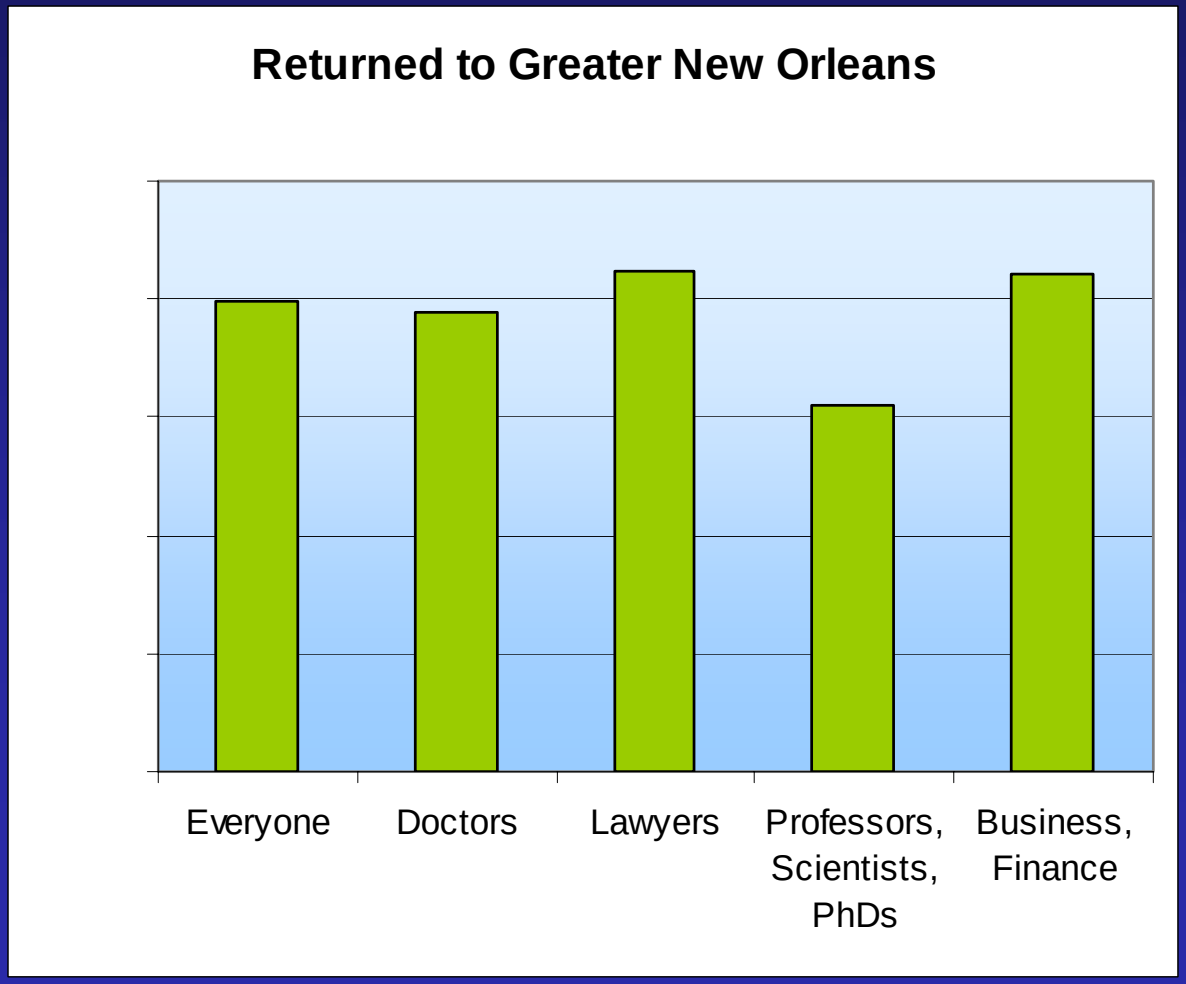




St. Bernard residents were very hard hit by the storm and experienced heavy stress. Still, they wanted to return to their old neighborhoods almost as much as those with less damage. (N=ca. 300.)



Despite alarming press reports, Jewish professionals are *not* leaving New Orleans in higher numbers than other members of the Jewish community. However, Jewish Ph.D.s have left in greater numbers, probably because of the reduction of university jobs. (Sample: Jewish respondents, N=ca. 700)



The Jewish community is optimistic about New Orleans' future—guardedly for the next 12 months; strongly for the next 5 years. (Sample: Jewish respondents, N=ca. 700)

What Helps or Hurts Hurricane Recovery in New Orleans?

Material and Social Factors

Preliminary results from a Survey in Greater New Orleans, 2006 (N = ca. 1,000)

	Storm, Flooding Damage	Resources, Money	Social Support
Return to New Orleans	**Hinders**	**Helps**	**Helps**
Recovery	**Hinders**	**Helps**	**Helps**
***Want to* Return to New Orleans**	mixed evidence	**Helps**	**Helps**
Anxiety & Depression	**Aggravates**	Helps Somewhat	**Mitigates**
Spiritual Strength	Reduces Somewhat	-	**Strengthens**
Feelings of Community	mixed evidence	-	**Strengthens**
Praise Government	-	Helps Somewhat	Helps Somewhat
Praise Community Leadership	-	-	**Helps**

Frederick Weil
Department of Sociology, LSU

www.fweil.com