

News and Current Events :: Acts of God, are they really?

Acts of God, are they really?, on: 2005/10/2 23:00

(Oct. 2) - Most Americans rule out either a deliberate act of God or the effect of global warming as direct causes of the recent Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Just under a quarter in this ABC News/Washington Post poll see the hurricanes as "a deliberate act" of God; two-thirds instead see them as an occurrence on God's Earth, but not a deliberate act on God's part. (The rest have no opinion, or don't believe in God.)

Separately, 54 percent think that the severity of recent hurricanes mainly reflects "severe weather events that happen from time to time," rather than the effects of global climate change. Just under four in 10 think climate change is mainly to blame.

That's not to say most people doubt global warming; 56 percent are convinced it's under way. It's just that fewer are persuaded that it has increased hurricane severity.

Religion

Broad majorities across demographic groups don't think the hurricanes are a deliberate act of God. But one in three evangelical Protestants think they are, compared with 13 percent of non-evangelical Protestants, 15 percent of Catholics and 17 percent of non-religious people.

Young, low-income and less-educated Americans also are more likely than others to think these hurricanes are a deliberate act of God.

Punishment?

Alabama State Sen. Hank Erwin, R-Montevallo, recently called Hurricane Katrina a punishment from God, saying New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast "have always been known for gambling, sin and wickedness. It is the kind of behavior that ultimately brings the judgment of God."

In this survey, though, among people who think the hurricanes are a deliberate act of God, just eight percent see it as a punishment. About half instead see it as a warning sign, just over a quarter say it's for a reason we cannot understand and 14 percent say it's a test of faith.

Global Warming

Blame on climate change, naturally, peaks among people who are convinced that global warming is under way. Fifty-eight percent in this group think climate change is mainly responsible for recent hurricane severity, rising to two-thirds among those who are completely convinced that global warming is happening.

Are the recent hurricanes a deliberate act of God? Yes No

All Respondents: 23% 67%

Evangelical Protestants: 33 61

Non-Evangelical Protestants: 13 76

Non-Religious: 17 65

Catholics: 15 78

18 to 34: 32 60

35 and Older: 19 71

Earns \$25K or Less: 34 57

Earns \$75K or More: 21 70

High School Grad or Less: 31 61

College Degree or More: 11 79

Source: ABC News/Washington Post poll

Among people who aren't at least somewhat convinced that global warming is occurring, by contrast, eight in 10 people don't blame it for hurricane severity.

Similarly, people who see global warming as an urgent problem requiring immediate government action (41 percent) are 30 points more likely than others to think it's a main cause of hurricane severity.

Among groups, younger Americans are more likely than their elders to blame global warming for hurricane severity. Democrats split, while seven in 10 Republicans think instead that they represent occasional severe weather events.

The number of adults who call global warming an urgent problem that needs immediate government action is about the same now as in June (41 percent versus 38 percent). Fewer call it a longer-term problem that needs more study — 47 percent, compared with 58 percent in June; that's partly because more in this survey express no opinion.

Methodology

This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Sept. 23-27, 2005, among a random national sample of 1,019 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

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