

Essay on midterm: political science

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Flawed Decisions on Katrina

Hurricane Katrina was, without a doubt, one of the most destructive natural disasters that the United States has felt in the past few decades. The hurricane hit the Louisiana coast with some warning, but no one foresaw the incredible amounts of long-term damage the storm would do to the state and to the reputation of the federal government. Many people agree that much of the death and destruction that took place during the storm could have been avoided, but how is that so? The storm was a natural disaster, and was by definition unavoidable for humanity. However, there were a number of decisions made by people in power that caused the damage and the aftermath of the storm to be much worse than it should have been.

Policy analysts like to look at decision-making and decision-makers as those who utilize root decision making or branch decision making processes. Those who use branch decision making processes are often referred to as people who are merely “muddling through” the process of decision making; that is, they handle problems as they can see them, dealing with them as they would the branches of a tree. On the other hand, those who use root decision making processes dig deeper to find solutions to the issues at hand.

Those who were responsible for handling the issues that Hurricane Katrina caused in Louisiana, particularly in New Orleans, were operating by using branch decision making processes. These people were slow to act, and rather than seeking out the causes of the potential problems in New Orleans, they tried to treat the symptoms of the hurricane, a tactic that was as insulting to the victims as it was ineffective. The solutions offered to the Katrina problem were short-term-- there was no thought given to the

massive amounts of rebuilding that would have to happen in the wake of the storm.

Indeed, the levees in New Orleans are an ideal example of this branch mentality: everyone from the federal government down to the city supervisors knew that the levees in New Orleans could not withstand a Category Five hurricane, and yet, nothing was done to reinforce the levees or prevent New Orleans from being swamped by the storm. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the federal government of the United States failed to send in adequate help for the coastal areas of Mississippi and Louisiana, leading to the resignation of then-director of FEMA, Michael Brown.

Rather than address the issue of rebuilding the cities and coastal areas of Louisiana and Mississippi, the officials involved in the process made attempts to “patch up” the problems that were facing the areas, leading to the deaths of many people as they lacked access to clean water, fresh food, and other basic human amenities. Overall, the branch mentality led to a serious mismanagement of resources for the area, and may have contributed to the violence and looting that went on in the wake of the storm.

Columbine and Communication Problems

The massacre at Columbine High School was one of the first of its kind, although it was unfortunately not the last. However, because it was a completely unique threat that many law-enforcement officials had never seen before, there were some problems with communication and the handling of the situation as it unfolded. Before the massacre at Columbine happened, it was nearly unthinkable that a pair of teenagers would take guns to school and massacre their classmates; however, in the aftermath of

Columbine, the reality of school shootings in America became all too familiar for American parents and students alike.

After the dust cleared from the scene, there were many young people dead or wounded, and the public wanted to know why the police and law enforcement personnel had not done more to stop the shooters before they were able to kill or maim so many of their peers. A lot of blame for the incident was placed on law enforcement personnel; whether this blame is fair or unfair is an interesting question that must be examined carefully. It is true that law enforcement, prior to this incident, had had little training on the subject of school shootings or assailants in schools. However, as it had never been an issue in the past, the amount of blame that can be put on law enforcement for not having specific procedures in place for this eventuality is minimal.

There are communication errors that were made by law enforcement personnel that can and should be addressed, however. For instance, because so many different state and federal agencies, including EMS, fire, and law enforcement showed up at the scene, there were technical issues with communication that should not have happened, particularly with the fact that the radios from some of the agencies were incompatible with the radios from other agencies.

Because of the scattered information coming out of the incident, there was a delay when it came time for the SWAT teams to enter the building, while the incident command personnel decided the best course of action for the SWAT teams and their supportive personnel. Incident command personnel had no way of obtaining information from inside the school, and the confused mass

of information that was coming from the students that had escaped the school was confusing the situation more than helping it.

Although Columbine High School did have an emergency plan, the plan focused mainly on natural disasters, and had no information for students and staff regarding what they should do if violence or terrorism broke out during lunch hour. The lack of communication between law enforcement agencies and the individuals within the school cost the SWAT team and other important law enforcement personnel valuable time; with better and clearer communication, the school could have been cleared of danger more quickly and the students and staff in need of medical attention could have been cared for more readily.

The aftermath of Columbine was a long and difficult road as people tried to address the difficulties presented by situations like school shootings. Today, most schools have procedures in place for communication with law enforcement officials, but also to recognize children who are in need of help before they are pushed to the point of violence.

Works cited

Stillman, Richard Joseph. Public administration. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010.