

DELTA RURAL POLL

INTRODUCTION TO THE DELTA RURAL POLL

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Introduction

The Delta Rural Poll, a project of the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) at Delta State University (DSU), coordinates the collection of social and demographic data on residents of the Mississippi Delta to be used in research, policy, and in strategic planning by the CCED. The Delta Rural Poll also strengthens ties between DSU and communities in the Mississippi Delta, and provides DSU students and Delta residents with opportunities to learn about research techniques through experience. Finally, the Delta Rural Poll aims to collaborate with other universities and researchers carrying out similar projects to develop a broad, comparable data-base on social and demographic characteristics of rural dwellers.

The Delta Rural Poll is unique in that it combines quantitative and qualitative data collection. Currently, the Delta Rural Poll administers a survey every two years, using a series of core questions on demographic characteristics, quality of life, and employment that appear on each iteration and a series of topical questions that vary with each survey. In between surveys, the Delta Rural Poll sponsors qualitative data collection, generally based on the topical issues from previous surveys.

History of the Delta Rural Poll

The Delta Rural Poll was initiated in 2003, inspired by similar surveys conducted in at the University of Nebraska and Iowa State University. The director of the Nebraska Rural Poll, Dr. John Allen, was instrumental in assisting the CCED to establish the Delta Rural Poll. A committee of CCED faculty associates was formed to administer the project, and after careful consideration, the committee opted for a telephone survey, directed at eleven counties in northwestern Mississippi. These counties were selected as they represent the distinctive characteristics of the Delta region. The eleven counties are: Bolivar, Coahoma, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica and Washington.



The eleven counties where the Delta Rural Poll operates.

The first survey was conducted in October and November, 2003. The faculty committee developed the first questionnaire, borrowing core questions on quality of life, employment and demographics from the Nebraska Rural Poll and developing topical questions on local schools, health care, and technology use. Through telephone interviews, a total of 809 randomly selected respondents completed the survey questionnaire. Follow up qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted during 2004, focusing on education in the Delta region.

The second Delta Rural Poll survey was conducted in January and February, 2005. The questionnaire repeated demographic, quality of life, employment and a few health care question from the 2003 survey, and

included topical questions on heritage tourism and workforce development. A randomly selected sample of 1,009 respondents answered the 2005 questionnaire. Qualitative interviews on heritage tourism were carried out by community development graduate students in the Spring and Summer of 2006.

The third biennial survey was conducted in January, 2007. In addition to questions on demography, quality of life, employment and health, this survey added questions on community trust and social capital. Topical questions were generated at a community meeting held in October, 2006. DSU faculty and representatives from community organizations attended the meeting. This group expressed strong support for repeating health care questions, and proposed questions on social problems to support the work of the DSU Social Work Department. Questions on youth after-school programs and early childhood programs in the Delta region were also asked to assist specific CCED projects. A total of 1,005 respondents completed the 2007 survey.

The questions for each survey are developed by the faculty committee in collaboration with community and campus groups. Data collection is then carried out by the Survey Research Unit at Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center (SSRC). The Survey Research Unit has substantial experience and state-of-the-art technology for carrying out surveys of this type, and have done an excellent job with each of our surveys. Data are returned to DSU and are available to faculty and graduate students for research purposes. Qualitative studies based on the surveys are conducted by individual faculty and graduate students, according to their own research interests.

The next survey is scheduled for January, 2009.

Collaboration with Other Rural Polls

The success of rural polls in Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio and the Mississippi Delta has spurred interest in similar surveys elsewhere. The Delta Rural Poll has spearheaded efforts to form a national alliance of universities that conduct such research, and has organized and participated actively in sessions at national meetings, such as the annual meetings of the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals and the Rural Sociological Society. Researchers at universities such as Purdue, Clemson, Kentucky, Michigan State and Ohio State have attended these sessions to discuss their own projects or to initiate surveys of rural regions in their states. The Delta Rural Poll will continue to be active in these efforts.

Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics of respondents to the 2003, 2005 and 2007 surveys are displayed in Table 1. A comparison of these characteristics with results from the 2000 Census shows a reasonably close match on most variables. Each survey provides an interesting snapshot of conditions, attitudes and perceptions at one period in time, but over time the surveys will also identify trends in the population of the Mississippi Delta.

**TABLE 1:
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS FROM THE 2003 AND 2005 DELTA RURAL POLLS**

Variable	Category	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey	Variable	Category	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey
AGE	18 – 29	17.5	15.0	10.9	EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	H.S. Diploma or Less	50.5	48.2	53.2
	30 – 44	27.7	23.0	20.1		Some College/ Assoc. Deg	25.3	25.6	23.3
	45 – 59	29.4	31.9	32.9		Bachelors Degree	16.2	17.3	15.3
	60 – 74	16.5	20.3	22.4		Graduate Degree	7.9	8.9	8.3
	75+	8.9	9.7	13.7	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Employed	62.1	61.6	55.8
GENDER	Female	53.7	55.2	53.8		Not Employed	37.9	38.4	44.2
	Male	46.2	44.8	46.2	ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	More Than \$60,000	15.6	13.5	15.1
RACE	Black	62.8	62.5	62.7		\$30,000 to \$60,000	21.8	27.7	20.9
	White	36.6	36.4	36.6		Less Than \$30,000	62.5	58.8	64.0
	Other	0.6	1.1	0.7	LENGTH OF TIME LIVING IN THE SAME COMMUNITY	More Than 50 Years	15.1	14.6	19.9
MARITAL STATUS	Married/Couple	46.1	44.2	46.9		Between 20 and 50 Years	43.7	42.8	40.5
	Single/Previously Married	25.6	27.8	27.6		Between 5 and 20 Years	28.3	27.1	26.8
	Single/Never Married	28.3	28.1	25.5		Less Than 5 Years	12.9	15.5	12.7
SIZE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE	More Than 10,000	39.0	40.7	43.2	TYPE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE	Within City Limits	69.5	69.5	70.1
	1,000 to 10,000	34.9	32.7	34.3		Outside City, On a Farm	10.1	9.0	8.3
	Less Than 1,000	26.1	26.6	22.5		Outside City, Not on a Farm	20.4	21.6	21.6

Source: 2003/2005/2007 Delta Rural Poll Survey Results are percent of all valid respondents 2003 N = 801; 2005 N = 1,002; 2007 N = 994

While some of the difference between years is attributable to random error, already some interesting trends are emerging, such as the steady decline in respondents who live on farms, the substantial decline in the percent of respondents in younger age categories and concurrent rise in older respondents, and the increase in respondents who are not employed.

Distribution of Results

The Delta Rural Poll disseminates results in a variety of ways. The most up-to-date products from the Delta Rural Poll are always available on our website: <http://www.deltastate.edu/pages/536.asp>.

The Delta Rural Poll home page includes links to pages that display tables and figures that summarize results on specific topics. The home page also includes links to reports prepared by researchers working with the Delta Rural Poll. The Delta Rural Poll currently sponsors three types of reports. The Policy Papers series includes in-depth papers on topical policy issues, which present substantial data with analysis, interpretation and recommendations. The Policy Briefs series provides an overview of a topical issue, with summary statistics, a short background, and policy recommendations. Research Papers are in-depth, research oriented reports that utilize data from the Delta Rural Poll to analyze a theoretical or methodological issue. Finally, Delta Rural Poll faculty prepare a number of other reports, slideshows, and materials to distribute results, including journal articles and presentations at conferences and workshops.

Several faculty members have used Delta Rural Poll data in their courses, and a summary of Delta Rural Poll data is included in the textbook used at DSU for the Introductory Sociology course. Delta Rural Poll data have also formed the basis for research projects in graduate-level courses in community development. Data are also available for use in scholarly or policy-oriented papers and presentations. In addition, graduate students have access to the data to use in M.S. theses and practical projects, as well as course papers. On an as-needed basis, data are also available to CCED staff and other community organizations.

Products of the Delta Rural Poll

The following is a list of articles, reports, briefs and public presentations that have utilized quantitative and/or qualitative data from the Delta Rural Poll.

M.S. Theses:

Rice, Catherine. *Perceptions of Education in the Mississippi Delta*. M.S. Thesis, Community Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. 2005.

Williams, Roshun N. *Access to Communication Technology Among Residents of the Mississippi Delta*. M.S. Thesis, Community Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. 2004.

Journal Articles:

Green, John J., Katie Kerstetter and Albert B. Nylander III. "Socioeconomic Resources and Self-Rated Health: A Study in the Mississippi Delta." *Sociological Spectrum* (Forthcoming).

Book Chapters:

Macionis, John J. *Society: The Basics* (Custom Edition for Delta State University). Pearson Custom Publishing, Upper Saddle River, NJ. 2007.

Research Papers:

Barton, Alan W. *The 2007 Delta Rural Poll: Methods and Characteristics of the Sample*. Research Paper No. 07-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. September, 2007 (In Progress).

Barton, Alan W. *The 2005 Delta Rural Poll: Methods and Characteristics of the Sample*. Research Paper No. 05-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. August, 2005.

Barton, Alan W. *The 2003 Delta Rural Poll: History, Methods and Characteristics of the Sample*. Research Paper No. 04-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. August, 2004.

Policy Papers:

Green, John J. and Katie Kerstetter. *Programs for Youth: An Assessment of Public Perceptions from the 2007 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 08-01, Center for Community and Economic Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. 2008 (In Progress).

Green, John J. and Katie Kerstetter. *Perceptions of Employment Opportunities and Job Satisfaction: A Summary Report from the 2005 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 07-01, Center for Community and Economic Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. 2007 (In Progress).

Barton, Alan W. *Attitudes About Heritage Tourism in the Mississippi Delta: A Policy Report from the 2005 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 05-02, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. December, 2005.

Barton, Alan W. and Roshun N. Williams. *Technology Use in the Mississippi Delta: A Summary Report from the 2003 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 05-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. July, 2005.

Barton, Alan W. *Employment and Quality of Life in the Mississippi Delta: A Summary Report from the 2003 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 04-02, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. September, 2004.

Green, John J. *Access to Health Care in the Mississippi Delta: A Summary Report from the 2003 Delta Rural Poll*. Policy Paper No. 04-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. August, 2004.

Policy Briefs:

Barton, Alan W. *Attitudes About Smoking Bans in the Mississippi Delta*. Policy Brief No. 07-02, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. August, 2007.

Barton, Alan W. *Visitation to Heritage Tourism Sites by Residents of the Mississippi Delta*. Policy Brief No. 07-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. March, 2007.

Barton, Alan W. *Attitudes and Perceptions of Heritage Tourism in the Mississippi Delta*. Policy Brief No. 06-01, Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State University, Cleveland, MS. March, 2006.

Conference Presentations:

Alan W. Barton and Eric Atchison. "Heritage Tourism in the Mississippi Delta: The Potential for Uneven Community Development." Accepted for presentation at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association, Mobile, AL, October 24–27, 2007.

Alan W. Barton and Eric Atchison. "Ecotourism as a Community Development Strategy in the Mississippi Delta: Insights from Land Managers." Presented at the *Tourism and Amenity Issues in Rural Areas* session at the 70th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Santa Clara, CA, August 2–5, 2007.

Alan W. Barton and Eric Atchison. "Ecotourism in the Mississippi Delta: Insights from Land and Tourism Managers." Presented at the 3rd Annual Faculty Research and Scholarship Symposium, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, April 11–12, 2007.

John J. Green and Katie Kerstetter, "Quality of Life and Employment Opportunities: A Summary Report from the 2005 Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, Montgomery, AL, February 22–23, 2007.

John J. Green, Albert B. Nylander and Katie Kerstetter, "Socioeconomic Status, Access to Care and Perceived Health: A Multi-Year Study from the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Medical Sociology* session at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association, Lafayette, LA, October 25–28, 2006.

Monica A. Rosas Gutierrez, Mary Kathryn Reid Wooten, Juanita Sims and Alan W. Barton, "Defining Delta Heritage: Local Perceptions of Juke Joints as Blues Tourism Sites," Presented at the *Culture and Community* session at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Louisville, KY, August 10–13, 2006.

Brent Hales and Alan W. Barton, "Technologies of Repression: Assessing Internet Usage in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at *Technology Adoption as a Means to Economic Development* session at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Louisville, KY, August 10–13, 2006.

Alan W. Barton, "Engaging Students Through Community-Based Research," Presented at the *Community-Based Research as Teaching Pedagogy* panel at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Louisville, KY, August 10–13, 2006.

Catherine Cannatella, "Cultivating Blues Heritage in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Culture and Community* session at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Louisville, KY, August 10–13, 2006.

Alan W. Barton and Brent Hales, "The Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the *Evaluating Rural Polls: Strategies for Sustainability* panel at the 69th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Louisville, KY, August 10–13, 2006.

Alan W. Barton, "Conducting Focus Groups on Cultural Heritage Tourism: A Pathway to Student Engagement," Presented at the *Use of Community Surveys and Focus Groups to Inform Development Programs and Engage Students in Hands-On Learning* panel at the 2006 Community Development Society Annual International Conference, St. Louis, MO, June 25-28, 2006.

Brent Hales, "The Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the *Use of Community Surveys and Focus Groups to Inform Development Programs and Engage Students in Hands-On Learning* panel at the 2006 Community Development Society Annual International Conference, St. Louis, MO, June 25-28, 2006.

Alan W. Barton and Jolana Gibbs, "Authenticity is in the Eye of the Stakeholder: Using Local Perceptions to Plan for Natural Heritage Tourism in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Tourism and Local Residents* session at the 12th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Vancouver, BC, Canada, June 4-8, 2006.

Brent D. Hales and Alan W. Barton, "Assessing the Digital Divide in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the 37th Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, Oxford, MS, February 23-24, 2006.

Alan W. Barton, "Documenting Attitudes and Perceptions of Residents of the Mississippi Delta: The Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the *How Rural Polls Can Guide Extension Programming, Community Dialogue and Policymaking: Examples from Three States* panel at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals, San Antonio, TX, February 13-16, 2006.

Alan W. Barton, "Community Stability, Intent to Migrate and Sustainable Development in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Demography in the American South* session at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Southern Demographic Association, Oxford, MS, November 3-5, 2005.

Catherine Cannatella, "Brain Drain Distressing the Delta Dollar," Presented at the *Poverty and Inequality* session at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Southern Demographic Association, Oxford, MS, November 3-5, 2005.

Alan W. Barton and Jolana Gibbs, "Local Attitudes and Perceptions of Heritage Tourism in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Culture, Religion and Ethnicity in the American South* session at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA, October 26-29, 2005.

John J. Green and Albert B. Nylander III, "Access to Care and Perceived Health Status: A Multi-Method Study from the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Medical Sociology* session at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA, October 26-29, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "Class, Race and Technology Use in the Mississippi Delta: Characteristics and Policy Implications," Presented at the *New Economies and Old Problems: Economic Opportunity and Community Integration in a Changing World Economy* session at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Tampa, FL, August 8-12, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "The Delta Rural Poll: Collecting Data in the Delta," Presented at the *Applied Research in the Mississippi Delta II* panel at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, Tuscaloosa, AL, February 24-25, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "Race and Expectations for Public Schools in the Mississippi Delta: Evidence from the Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the *Social Institutions and Change: Education, Health Care and Religion* session at the 30th Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association, Biloxi, MS, October 20-23, 2004.

Alan W. Barton, "Work and Well-Being in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Rural People and Rural Policy: Comparing Results from Rural Polls* panel at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA, August 12-15, 2004.

Brent Hales, "Delta Rural Poll: Methods for Successful Polling in Rural Areas," Presented at the *Methodologies of Polling in Rural Areas* panel at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA, August 12-15, 2004.

John J. Green, "Underemployment, Poverty and Access to Health Care in the Mississippi Delta: A Community-Based Approach to Understanding Problems and Exploring Alternatives," Presented at the *In the Shadows of Poverty: Strengthening the Rural Poverty Research Capacity of the South Conference*, Memphis, TN, July 21-23, 2004.

Posters

Alan W. Barton. "Perceptions of Social Problems in the Mississippi Delta." Poster submitted for presentation at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, Starkville, MS, February 21-22, 2008.

Alan W. Barton. "Support Among Residents of the Mississippi Delta for Municipal Ordinances Prohibiting Smoking." Poster presented at the 3rd Annual Faculty Research and Scholarship Symposium, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, April 11-12, 2007.

Alan W. Barton. "Delta Rural Poll: Social Science Research In and With Mississippi Delta Communities." Poster presented at the 3rd Annual Faculty Research and Scholarship Symposium, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, April 11-12, 2007.

Workshops, Brown Bags and Other Presentations:

Alan W. Barton, "The Delta Rural Poll: A Service to Delta Communities," Mayor's Open House, Center for Community and Economic Development, Cleveland, MS, March 1, 2006.

Catherine Cannatella, "Brain Drain Distressing the Delta Dollar," Presented at the Delta in Global Context Workshop, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, May 27-28, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "Access to and Use of Technology in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the Madison Center Brown Bag Series, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, May 4, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "An Overview of Changing Conditions in the Mississippi Delta," Presented to the *Third World on the Mississippi: An Exploration of Sustainable Development Strategies in the Lower Mississippi Delta Region* course study tour from Brandeis University, Center for Community and Economic Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, February 20, 2005.

Alan W. Barton, "The Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the *Workshop on Community-Based Research in the Mississippi Delta*, Institute for Community-Based Research, Center for Community and Economic Development, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, October 15, 2004.

Roshun N. Williams, "Access to Communication Technology in the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Community Development in the Mississippi Delta* session at the Sustainable International Development Program Capstone Week, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, May 3-7, 2004.

Roshun N. Williams, "Access to Communication Technology Among Residents of the Mississippi Delta," Presented at the *Diversity in Community Development Symposium*, Community Development Student Organization, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, April 16-17, 2004.

Alan W. Barton, "The Delta Rural Poll," Presented at the Madison Center Brown Bag Series, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS, March 11, 2004.

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