INTRODUCTION TO THE DELTA RURAL POLL

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and
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Center for Community and Economic Development
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 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.
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<td>AGE</td>
<td>18 – 29</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma or Less</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
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<td>30 – 44</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
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<td>Some College/Assoc. Deg</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>45 – 59</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
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<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.3</td>
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<td>60 – 74</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
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<td>75+</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>55.8</td>
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<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>44.2</td>
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<td>More Than $60,000</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<td>$30,000 to $60,000</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
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<td>Less Than $30,000</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>64.0</td>
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<td>ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME</td>
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<td></td>
<td>More Than 50 Years</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Between 20 and 50 Years</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>40.5</td>
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<td>Between 5 and 20 Years</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>26.8</td>
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<td>Less Than 5 Years</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<td>LENGTH OF TIME LIVING IN THE SAME COMMUNITY</td>
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<td>Within City Limits</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>70.1</td>
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<td>Outside City, On a Farm</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<td>Outside City, Not on a Farm</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
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<td>TYPE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE</td>
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<td>Source: 2003/2005/2007 Delta Rural Poll Survey</td>
<td>Results are percent of all valid respondents</td>
<td>2003 N = 801; 2005 N = 1,002; 2007 N = 994</td>
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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:**


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:**


**Research Papers:**


**Policy Papers:**


Introduction to the Delta Rural Poll


**Policy Briefs:**


**Conference Presentations:**


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.


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.


Posters


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, "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.

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