

Recreancy

Recreancy is defined as the failure of institutional actors to fulfill their responsibilities to the extent that earns them societal trust (Freudenburg 1992, 1993). The potential for recreancy increases as social interdependency grows. Perceptions of recreancy refers to attitudes regarding specialized organizations. All relevant institutions must competently fulfill their responsibilities to protect the interests of the collective society. Most recreancy literature operationalizes recreancy with the dimension of trust.

Winter Storm Uri

Winter Storm Uri devastated parts of the United States, Mexico, and Canada in February 2021. The storm generated blackouts for nearly ten million people and is notably considered the cause of the 2021 Texas power crisis. ERCoT, the state's foremost power supplier, was drastically unprepared for the severity of the storm, despite being made aware of flaws within the power grid system after experiencing similar storms (Hamilton Forthcoming).



Objective and Research Questions

We asked two research questions: 1) Are some dimensions of recreancy more salient than others? and 2) Are perceptions of recreancy related to avoidance behaviors and experiences with loss of access to utilities, communication, and basic services? This research aims to identify attitudes about the role of recreancy in the context of Winter Storm Uri.

Methods

Utilizing survey data collected in Texas in April and May of 2022, we examine eight dimensions of recreancy related to ERCoT's failure: blame; responsibility for storm preparedness; fiduciary responsibility for storm-related losses; trust; competence in effectiveness of responding to the storm; confidence in ability to prevent future failures; willingness to prevent future failures; and capability of preventing a similar power grid failure in the future (Ritchie Forthcoming [a & b]; Ritchie, Gill, and Hamilton 2022).

Findings

| Dimension of ERCoT Recreancy & Indicator | Mean | S.D. |
|---|------|------|
| Blame —"How much <i>responsibility for impacts of the storm and subsequent power grid failure do you attribute to ERCoT?</i> " | 1.73 | .99 |
| Preparedness —"How much <i>responsibility for storm preparedness did ERCoT have?</i> " | 1.97 | 1.19 |
| Fiduciary —"How much <i>responsibility, if any does ERCoT have for compensating for storm-related losses?</i> " | 2.03 | 1.23 |
| Trust —"Based on your experiences with the storm, how much do you <i>trust or distrust ERCoT?</i> " | 2.23 | 1.27 |
| Competence —"How effective or ineffective was <i>ERCoT in responding to the storm?</i> " | 2.43 | 1.41 |
| Confidence —"To what extent do you have <i>confidence that ERCoT will prevent a similar power grid failure in the future?</i> " | 2.67 | 1.44 |
| Willingness —"How willing or unwilling do you <i>think ERCoT is to make changes to prevent a similar power grid failure in the future?</i> " | 3.07 | 1.43 |
| Capability —"To what extent, if any is <i>ERCoT capable of preventing a similar power grid failure in the future?</i> " | 3.73 | 1.43 |

Preliminary Conclusions

- Three dimensions of recreancy, ERCoT Trust, ERCoT Competence, and ERCoT Confidence significantly correlated with the Avoidance Subscale, Loss of Utility Access, Loss of Communication, and Loss of Services in the context of Winter Storm Uri.
- Higher Avoidance subscale scores were correlated with less trust in ERCoT, perceptions of ineffective responses by ERCoT, and less confidence that ERCoT will prevent future power grid failures.
- Longer periods of loss of Utilities, Communication, and Services were correlated with less trust in ERCoT, perceptions of ineffective responses by ERCoT, and less confidence that ERCoT will prevent future power grid failures.



References

- Freudenburg, William. 1992. "Nothing Recedes Like Success - Risk Analysis and the Organizational Amplification of Risks." *RISK: Health, Safety & Environment (1990-2002)* 3(1).
- Freudenburg, William R. 1993. "Risk and Recreancy: Weber, the Division of Labor, and the Rationality of Risk Perceptions." *Social Forces* 71(4):909-32. doi: 10.2307/2580124.
- Hamilton, Kathryn. Forthcoming. "Winter Storm Uri and the Texas Energy Failure." In *Encyclopedia of Technological Hazards and Disasters in the Social Sciences*, edited by D.A. Gill, L.A. Ritchie, and N. Campbell. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ritchie, Liesel A. Forthcoming [a]. "Recreancy in Technological Hazards and Disasters." In *Encyclopedia of Technological Hazards and Disasters in the Social Sciences*, edited by D.A. Gill, L.A. Ritchie, and N. Campbell. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ritchie, Liesel A. Forthcoming [b]. "Recreancy." In *Encyclopedia of Environmental Sociology*, edited by C. Overdevest. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ritchie, Liesel A., Duane A. Gill, and Kathryn Hamilton. 2022. "Winter Storm Uri: Resource Loss and Psychosocial Outcomes of Critical Infrastructure Failure in Texas." *Journal of Critical Infrastructure Policy* 3(1).