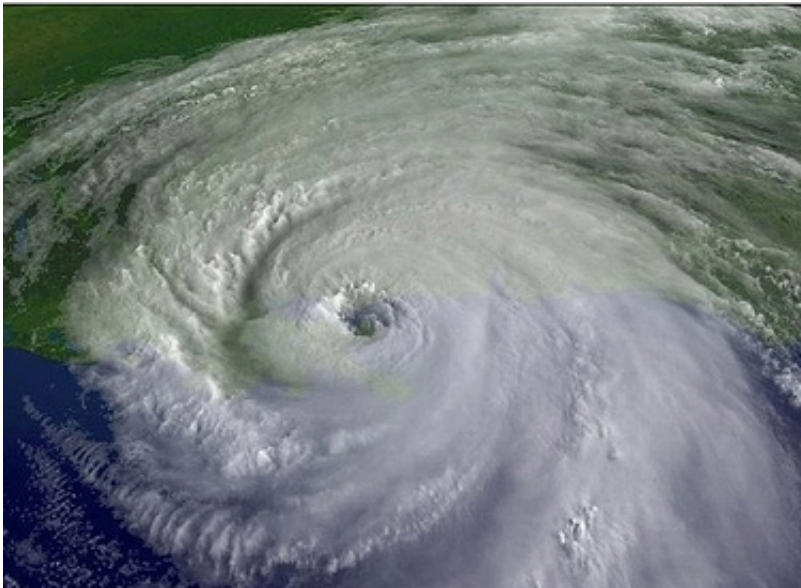


# Social factors trump resources for food security following disasters

March 5 2014

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Credit: Flickr/twdbth

Following a natural disaster, vulnerability to food shortage appears to depend more on a group's ability to migrate and its positive relationships with other groups than on resource factors. That's according to a research team led by Arizona State University archaeologist Margaret Nelson.

Last month, Nelson presented the group's findings at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago.

The National Association of Science Writers recently posted an article on their site outlining the research.

Nelson's team studied populations in the U.S. Southwest and the North Atlantic islands, using archaeological data going back to 600 A.D. They looked at risk factors contributing to a population's vulnerability to [natural disasters](#), like periods of severe cold or drought.

They found that extreme climate conditions led to major social collapse and reduced populations in some cases but not others.

Studied factors were divided into two categories: resource factors, including the size and diversity of a group's food supply; and [social factors](#), like a group's ability to migrate, and the strength of its relationships with other groups in the area.

"Population resource balance seems to contribute very little to vulnerability to [food shortage](#)," said Nelson, a President's Professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. "That was surprising to us."

Nelson believes that her team's findings can be used to improve approaches to risk management and disaster preparedness.

Provided by Arizona State University

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