Political Disaster: Unilateral Powers, Electoral Incentives, and Presidential Disaster Declarations[1]

Andrew Reeves Boston University

I argue that presidents use unilateral powers for particularistic aims to gain electoral support. Specifically, I examine presidential disaster declarations, which allow presidents to unilaterally authorize potentially billions of dollars to specific constituencies. In an analysis extending from 1981 to 2004, I find that a state's electoral competitiveness influences whether they receive a disaster declaration from the president. A highly competitive state can expect to receive twice as many presidential disaster declarations as an uncompetitive state. This relationship has existed since the passage of the 1988 Stafford Act, which expanded the disaster declaration powers of the president. Additionally, I find that these decisions have the intended electoral benefits—voters react and reward presidents for presidential disaster declarations. A president can expect over a one point increase in a statewide contest in return for a single presidential disaster declaration.

At President George W. Bush's final White House Press Conference, he was asked about mistakes he made. Among his regrets was the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. Although he never campaigned on his abilities to confront natural disasters, this hurricane has, as the President was well aware, become part of his legacy. To an affected voter, disaster policy is potentially even more important than decisions about war, education, or the economy. While critics of President Bush point to the failure of the federal government to deliver relief, I systematically examine presidential disaster declarations, the initial decisions by presidents to direct federal resources to states in the aftermath of a natural disaster. In an analysis from 1981 through 2004, I show that after Congress expanded the capacity of the president to act in 1988, electoral considerations influenced disaster response. Prior to 1988, there is no such relationship. I also find that presidents have reason to reward states with disaster declarations, actions that clear the way for potentially billions of dollars in aid. In an analysis of statewide presidential election contests, I find that these decisions have electoral benefits. Voters reward presidents for disaster declarations to the tune of over 1% at the ballot box. While presidents pursue universalistic policy goals, they also use their arsenal of unilateral powers to respond to specific constituencies important for reelection. We misunderstand the presidency if we do not consider his unilateral powers along with his reelection incentives.

Presidents and the Use of Disaster Declarations

Many studies have developed theories and presented evidence of a strong institutional presidency (e.g., Howell, 2003; Mayer, 1999; Moe, 1990; Moe and Howell, 1999). These studies identify and expound upon the president's numerous and substantial institutional powers.[2] Studies in this tradition examine such tools as executive orders (Howell 2003; Krause and Cohen 2000; Mayer 1999), the creation of administrative agencies (Howell and Lewis 2002), executive proclamations (Rottinghaus and Maier 2007), executive agreements (Martin 2005), and signing statements

[1]An online appendix containing supplemental information and materials for replication are located at www.journals.cambridge.org/jop/ and http://people.bu.edu/areeves.

[2]Much of the research on the institutional powers of the president is in response to the argument put forth in Neustadt (1990) that presidential power is informal and mostly exists as "the power to persuade."

The Journal of Politics, Vol. 73, No. 4, October 2011, Pp. 1142–1151 doi:10.1017/S0022381611000843

ISSN 0022-3816

(Cooper 2005). One aim of these studies is to examine when the president utilizes institutional authority. With differing conclusions, studies have examined such factors as the role of presidential approval (Howell 2003; Mayer 1999), party control of Congress (Howell 2003; Krause and Cohen 2000; Martin 2005; Mayer 1999), timing in the term of the administration, war (Howell 2003; Mayer 1999), and the state of the economy (Howell 2003; Krause and Cohen 2000). In the study here, I examine both when presidents use a specific unilateral power and also how they target the resources associated with the power.

The unilateral power studied here is the presidential disaster declaration, a power that belongs to the president alone. By statute, he does not require the approval of Congress, nor does he need to explain or justify his decision. Typically (but not necessarily) a governor must first request a declaration, and the president may grant or deny the request without explanation. Under a presidential disaster declaration, individuals are eligible for cash grants, low-interest loans, tax exemptions, unemployment benefits, crisis counseling, and legal advice from FEMA (*FEMA* 2005) as well as loans from the Small Business Administration.[3] These benefits are ideal for presidential "credit-claiming" and "advertising"—the same reelection activities in which Members of Congress engage (Mayhew 1974). For instance, the president may court voters in electorally important states by distributing funds directly to voters. Many more voters may witness the leadership of the president as he tours ravaged areas and comforts vulnerable victims. Disasters represent major news events that attract viewers who are both inherently interested in the news story and in need of information (Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers 1987).

I examine how presidents are influenced by particularistic electoral forces when they issue disaster declarations. These forces are well-defined by the electoral pressures that the president faces. The winner-take-all allocation of electoral votes focuses attention on battleground states, states that are competitive and therefore significant to an electoral college victory. In all but two states,[4] the winner of a plurality of the statewide popular vote receives all of the state's electoral votes. The same forces that draw campaign resources to battleground states (Bartels 1985; Polsby and Wildavsky 1968; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1986) may also draw federal resources controlled by the president. Presidents are driven to invest resources into states where the anticipated margin of victory will be narrow.

I argue that presidents target resources toward electorally important constituents. This contrasts with a universalistic conception of the president's actions that other research posits. For instance, Moe states that "presidents are not driven by reelection" (1990, 237). Presidents represent the nation, a "large, heterogeneous, competitive constituency" (236). As a result, the president will "think in grander terms about social problems and interests" and will "resist specialized appeals" (237). Presidents are "less susceptible to pressure from special interest groups" because they "are concerned about their historical legacies as strong national leaders" (Moe and Howell 1999, 142). Accordingly, presidents may be seen as something akin to a national median voter (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 115).[5] While the president undoubtedly dispatches unilateral authority to further broad policy interests, I present evidence here of one case where the president targets resources in response to electoral stimuli.

Other studies have examined the political determinants of presidential disaster declarations. In an analysis of disaster declarations from 1991 to 1999, Garrett and Sobel finds that "half of all disaster relief is motivated politically rather than by need" (2003, 496). Sylves and Búzás examines disaster declarations from 1953 to 2003 and finds "that variables related to the partisanship of a requesting state do not significantly affect chances of presidential approval or turndown decisions" (2007, 13). Salkowe and Chakraborty (2009) examines disaster declarations from 1989 to 2005, but does not includes a measure of a state's presidential election competitiveness. While Sylves and Búzás (2007) and Salkowe and Chakraborty (2009) provide no objective measure of the effect of a disaster, I include estimates of damage generated for insurance purposes. I also test multiple measures and formulations of electoral competitiveness, which are included here and in the Supplemental Materials.

In an analysis of 23 years, I clarify two crucial questions: when and why did the disaster declaration process became politicized? While I find that a state's electoral competitiveness influences declarations from 1989 through 2004, I find no such effect for

[3]FEMA also provides public assistance for rebuilding community infrastructure and hazard mitigation.

[4]Nebraska and Maine allocate their votes in a district system.

[5]For other examples of this assumption, see Lohmann and O'Halloran (1994) and Hansen (1998), but see McCarty (2000) for an example where this assumption is challenged.

1981 through 1988. I identify several possible mechanisms of change. I argue that the transformation is at least partly caused by the passage of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (PL 100-707 and hereafter referred to as the Stafford Act) on November 23, 1988. The Stafford Act increased the resources that states could potentially receive and also expanded the discretion that the president had in granting a disaster declaration. Phil Kuntz of *Congressional Quarterly* characterized the effect of the Stafford Act as follows: "In a single sentence, the [Stafford Act] gives [the President] more power than he's ever likely to use. 'In any major disaster,' the law says, 'the president may direct any federal agency, with or without reimbursement, to utilize the resources granted to it under federal law . . . in support of state and local assistance efforts' " (1989, 2854). In expanding the power of the president to issue disaster declarations, Members of Congress allow the president to act swiftly to respond to exogenous events that require quick and sizable governmental action. Although Members of Congress did not need to expend their own political capital to procure resources, they gave the president leverage to distribute resources without legislative constraint. While the Stafford Act provides an expansion of the presidential prerogative, other forces may have shaped this change. For instance, the act coincides with the end of the Reagan presidency and so the politicization could also reflect governing differences between Reagan and his successors.[6] While evidence suggests that the Stafford Act played a role in the political transformation of disaster declarations, we cannot rule out other concurrent events. But there is a substantial politicization of the process following the passage of the 1988 Stafford Act.

I also expand previous analyses by examining whether these actions have the intended effect. Do voters reward presidential disaster declarations come election time? In an analysis of registered voters in the city of Houston in the aftermath of a major flood, Arceneaux and Stein finds that voters who attributed disaster preparation to local government are "10% less likely to prefer [the incumbent mayor]" (2006, 48). Achen and Bartels (2004) focuses on several elections coinciding with drought, flu, and shark attacks and reaches similar conclusions—voters often hold incumbents responsible for acts well beyond their control. While other studies find negative consequences for incumbents with respect to natural disasters, I find that in response to presidential action, voters reward the president on election day. This finding, on the state level, echos the findings of Gasper and Reeves (2011) on the county level.

As President Clinton put it, "[V]oters don't choose a president based on how he'll handle disasters, but if they're faced with one, it quickly becomes the most important issue of their lives" (2004, 428). When a disaster strikes, the president has discretion to provide federal assistance. To issue a declaration may ultimately require the involvement of Congress, the spending of political capital, and the spending of actual federal dollars. The president must weigh these costs in deciding whether to declare a disaster. In the analysis that follows, I demonstrate that this decision is related to the electoral competitiveness of the state.

Data and Methods

To test the effect of electoral influences on disaster declarations, I examine the nearly 1,000 presidential disasters declared in the 50 states for each year from 1981 to 2004.[7] The unit of analysis is the total number of disaster declarations in each state for each year. The analysis extends 24 years from 1981 to 2004 and includes 1,200 cases (50 states $\times$ 24 years). Table 1 presents evidence of the substantial variation in the number of presidential disaster declarations per state per year. Over the 24 years, Wyoming has the fewest total presidential disaster declarations with three and Texas has the most with 44. Every state has at least one year where they received no presidential disaster declarations. Figures describing the

[6]One hypothesis is that, since Reagan saw two electoral college landslides, he would only target states that were large *and* competitive. While the coefficient for the interaction is positive for the pre-Stafford /Reagan era, it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. This analysis is presented in the Supplemental Materials.

[7]The data include 914 disaster declarations from 1981 to 2004. Both major disaster declarations and emergency disaster declarations are officially authorized by the president and therefore included in the analysis. I do not include fire management assistance declarations because they do not require the action of the president.

Presidential disaster declarations are typically issued for severe weather events, but in rare circumstances a declaration will be issued for a nonweather related event such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001 or the power outages in Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and New York in 2003. In total 14 out of 914 disaster declarations are not directly weather related and are excluded from the analysis. Including these incidents has no substantive impact on my findings. See *Supplemental Materials* for plots of disaster declarations for all years and states.

TABLE 1 Summary Statistics for Variable Included in the Model

	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Presidential Disaster Declarations	0.8	1.0	0	6
Actual Disasters	2.7	2.7	0	17
Electoral Votes	10.7	9.2	3	54
Competitiveness	42.4	4.2	26.5	48.6
Per Captia Personal Income (logged)	10.2	0.2	9.6	10.7
Insurance Dollars (logged)	13.6	7.7	0	23.7
Congressional Delegation Same party as the President	0.5	0.3	0	1
Governor Same Party as the President	0.4	0.5	0	1

Notes: Insurance dollars and per capita personal income are adjusted for inflation. Summary statistics for these variables are from logged values.

distribution of disaster declarations by state and across time are presented in the Supplemental Materials.

Independent variables include measures of disaster damage, indicators of a state's capacity to deal with disasters without the federal government, the electoral importance of a state, and information on the partisanship of the governor and congressional delegation as well as indicator variables for each president and year of administration.

To account for objective damage caused by weather events, I rely on insurance estimates of destruction. The Insurance Services Office (ISO) is a for-profit private company that compiles data on risk for clients who are primarily insurance companies. The Property Claims Service (PCS), a division of ISO, collects data specifically for severe weather events using a comprehensive database containing detailed information on insurable risks in any given ZIP code. Additionally PCS surveys insurance industry personnel as well as public officials to gather damage estimates.[8]

The data provided by PCS contain two measures of damage. First, PCS designates weather events as *catastrophes* when damage causes " $25 million or more in insured property losses and affects a significant number of property and casualty policyholders and insurers," a value that has been adjusted over time for inflation.[9] I refer to catastrophes classified by PCS here as *actual disasters*. Second, for all actual disasters, I include the dollar value of damage. I refer to this variable as *insurance dollars*. These two variables provide information both on the number of disasters to hit each for state each year as well as the severity of the damage caused by the disasters. The data provided by ISO are aggregated to the state level for each year. Because of the proprietary nature of the data, a more granular level of data could not be obtained.[10]

From 1981 to 2004, there are a total of 3,282 actual disasters. Oklahoma has the most with 144, while Alaska had only two (see Table 1 for summary statistics). Actual disasters and presidential disaster declarations are correlated at 0.41.[11] As included in the model, *insurance dollars* are adjusted for inflation and logged. The highest yearly total for a state is for Florida in 1992 when Hurricane Andrew helped push the total disaster damage to over $20 billion (2001 dollars).[12]

A state-level measure of expected competitiveness in the next presidential election is the key component of the electoral importance of a state. This measure quantifies the incumbent president's expectation that a state will be close in the next presidential election. The measure must be an assessment that can be made from the beginning of an administration, since I hypothesize that it influences decision making through the term. To this end, I measure competitiveness as the loser's share (as a percent) of the statewide two-party presidential vote averaged over the previous three elections. This measure is the size of the margin of victory. It produces a scale from 0 to 50, where a score of 0 indicates that one candidate won all votes in the previous three elections, and a score of 50 indicates that the two major party candidates split the votes evenly in the previous three elections.[13] Because any single election may see idiosyncrasies that deviate from the normal vote,

[8]http://www.iso.com/products/2800/prod2803.html and http://www.iso.com/products/2800/prod2803.html, accessed 4 March 2009.

[9]http://www.iso.com/press_releases/1999/01_12_99.html, accessed 1 March 2009.

[10]The data are available but only at considerable cost.

[11]See the Supplemental Materials for additional bivariate analysis.

[12]See Supplemental Materials for a figure displaying the total number of actual disasters and presidential disaster declarations by state across years.

[13]See Shaw (1999) for a similar use in presidential elections. Bartels (1991) uses a similar measure in Congressional elections.

I average over three elections. In the Supplemental Materials, I include additional measures of competitiveness based on the absolute difference between the national average of the candidate's vote percent and the percent received in the state (which I call "uncompetitiveness") as used by Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson (2004). For both uncompetitiveness and loser's share, I average over two and three elections and consider weighted measures. All produce substantively similar results, which I include in the Supplemental Materials.[14]

On the bivariate level, competitiveness and the number of presidential disaster declarations is positively and significantly related. The mean number of disaster declarations for low-competition states (below the median level of competitiveness) is .68 while the mean for high-competition states (above the median) is .84. Comparing the two distributions' medians and means indicate statistically significant differences in disaster declarations for low and high competition states. Further analysis is provided in the Supplemental Materials.[15] I also include the number of electoral votes that the state has. While this value represents the true electoral reward, I am cautious of drawing any strong conclusions from its relationship to disaster declarations. Electoral vote size is obviously correlated with the population of the state, which may be correlated with the magnitude of the disaster and the need for aid.

To account for political characteristics of the state, I include partisan composition of the state's congressional delegation and whether a governor is the same party as the president.[16] The congressional composition of a state is measured as the percent of senators and representatives who are of the same political party as the president. The party affiliation of the congressional delegation and governor may reflect the pressure a president faces from important members of his own party. Since governors formally make the request for a disaster declaration, it is possible that the president may look more favorably upon requests made by governors of their own political party. Personal per capita income is included as a measure of a state's capability to handle destruction from disasters without aid from the federal government. Although the Stafford Act specifically forbids formulas from being used to determine disaster aid, FEMA reported in 1999 that it considered a state's capacity to deal with a disaster when making recommendations to the president to accept or reject a disaster declaration (GAO 2001). Since a wealthy state should be better suited to provide disaster relief than a poor state, we expect a negative relationship between per capita income and presidential disaster declarations. Additionally, the model includes indicator variables for each state, which are not reported in the tables.

Because the presidential disaster declaration process is entirely at the discretion of the president himself, I include indicator variables for each presidential administration. To account for varying electoral circumstances during the first and second terms, I include indicator variables for each term of each administration. Since electoral considerations may be stronger during election years, I also include indicator variables for the year of administration with the expectation that more disaster declarations will be doled out during the second and fourth years of a term.

Empirical Model

Because the dependent variable is count data—the number of presidential disaster declarations in a state in a year—I use a Poisson regression.[17] Table 2 presents these results.[18] In addition to analyzing a pooled model, I split the data into two time periods and model the data from 1981 to 1988 separately from the data from 1989 to 2004. This accounts for potential variable parameter bias. The data cover an expansive time period and one model may not be (and indeed, I find that it is not) appropriate for the whole period. In this case, I argue that the Stafford

[14]Measures based on the single most proximate election, including expert designations of battleground status, generally fail to produce statistically significant effects. This suggests that presidents are influenced by the longer-term trends of states and account for single-election deviations when crafting their governing strategies. See Supplemental Materials for additional information.

[15]Using a Welch two sample t -test, yields a t statistic of 2.86 and p value of 0.004, suggesting that the difference is not a result of chance. Comparing the medians using a Wilcoxian rank sum test yields a test statistic of 195,793 and a p value of 0.004 again suggestion statistically significant differences between the two distributions.

[16]The data from which this measure was formulated were generously provided by Professor James Sndyer.

[17]A key issue here is the heteroscedasticity of the dependent variable, which is count data. I also tested the model using a negative binomial regression as well as using Newey-West estimation of standard errors. These models yield the same substantive results and are included in the Supplemental Materials.

[18]These results are not driven by a single state. Excluding individual states like Texas, Florida, or California lead to the same substantive results.

TABLE 2 Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled Model (Column 1) and Split Sample Model (Columns 2 and 3)

	full	pre-Stafford	post-Stafford
Competitiveness	0.03*	−0.11	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.10)	(0.02)
Actual Disasters	0.13*	0.19*	0.13*
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02*	0.03	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.33	1.52	−0.70
	(1.02)	(2.63)	(1.58)
Electoral Votes	−0.02	−0.11	−0.06
	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.05)
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.48*	0.05
	(0.10)	(0.23)	(0.12)
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.17	0.12
	(0.10)	(0.26)	(0.12)
year 4 of admin	0.26*	0.28	0.37*
	(0.11)	(0.29)	(0.13)
Congressional partisanship	0.04	0.62	0.03
	(0.16)	(1.13)	(0.17)
President / Governor same party	0.00	−0.26	0.03
	(0.07)	(0.22)	(0.08)
Reagan (term 1)	−0.42	−0.15	
	(0.30)	(0.30)	
Reagan (term 2)	−0.58*		
	(0.22)		
GHW Bush	−0.21		−0.46*
	(0.17)		(0.23)
Clinton (term 1)	−0.15		−0.32
	(0.14)		(0.18)
W Bush	0.06		0.13
	(0.11)		(0.12)
Intercept	−15.19	−11.83	5.57
	(10.42)	(26.16)	(16.08)
N	1200	400	800
AIC	2527.50	682.43	1891.80
BIC	3850.92	1656.34	3072.32
log L	−1003.75	−97.21	−693.90

Standard errors in parentheses
* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$
Notes: Pre-Stafford Act Model (column 2), omitted indicators are Year 1 of Administration and Reagan's second term. Post-Stafford Act Model (column 3), omitted indicator variables are Year 1 of Administration and Bill Clinton's second term. Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

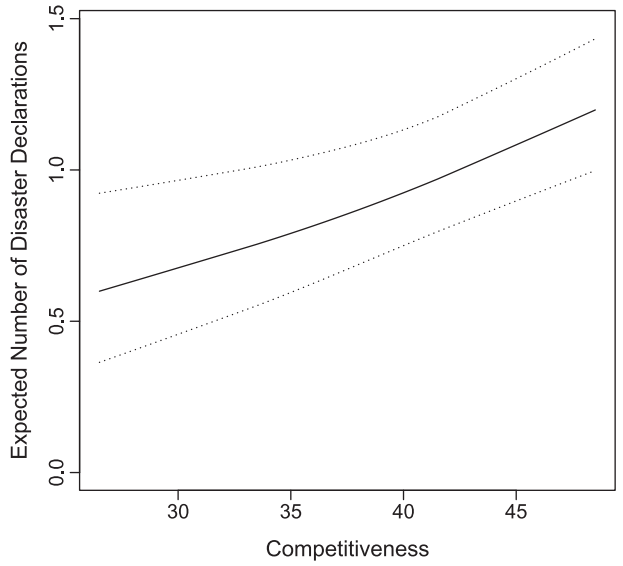
Act changes the nature of presidential disaster declarations. Table 2 present the full model on all cases (column 1), the model for cases occuring before the Stafford Act (column 2), and for cases after the Stafford Act (column 3). The full model in Table 2 shows a positive and statistically significant effect of competitiveness on the number of disaster declarations a state receives. Column 2 shows that prior to 1989, there was a negative (and statistically insignificant) relationship between a state's competitiveness and presidential disaster declarations. From 1989 onward, the effect of competitiveness is both positive and statistically significant.

Suggesting a substantial link between need and response, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between actual disasters and presidential disaster declarations. Insurance spending is positively related to presidential disaster declarations but reaches conventional levels of statistical significance only in the full model. While Reagan was more likely to grant a disaster declaration in his second year, his successors were more likely to grant in year four as the presidential election neared. The relationships between presidential disaster declarations and per capita income and partisanship of the congressional delegation and governor are relatively weak and marked by a high degree of statistical uncertainty in both eras.

To gain more leverage on the coefficients and standard errors presented in the Table 2, I present simulations of predicted values based on manipulations of quantities of interest. I focus on the post-Stafford Act era and generate the analysis from the model in column 3 Table 2. Using the software developed and described in Imai, King, and Lau (2009), Figure 1 displays the effect of changing levels of competition on the number of presidential disaster declarations while holding other variables constant at their mean values or median values where appropriate (see Table 1 for summary statistics). In Figure 1, competitiveness is varied over all observed values from the data set. The results allow us to gauge the effects of increasing or decreasing levels of our quantities of interest on the number of presidential disaster declarations.

Figure 1 presents the effect of competition on the expected number of presidential disaster declarations. The x axis present the range of competition for all observed cases in the data set (26.5 to 48.5). The y axis marks the expected number of presidential disaster declarations for each scenario. One thousand simulations are run for each level of competition in the range by 5-point increments. Figure 1 presents the number of presidential disaster declarations expected from a state identical in all respects except level of competitiveness. A state where the loser receives an average of 26.5% is expected to receive 0.7 disaster

FIGURE 1 Effect of Competitiveness on Number of Disaster Declarations, Post-Stafford Act Only



Notes: Figure presents number of presidential disaster declarations expected given model presented in Table 2 over varying levels of competition for post-Stafford era. Competitiveness is loser's share of two-party vote in previous three presidential elections. Dotted lines present simulated confidence intervals. As evident, as a state becomes increasingly competitive the number of expected presidential disaster declarations increases.

declarations (the lower bound for the 95% interval is 0.4 and the upper bound is 1.1). A state where the loser received an average of 48.5% of the popular vote in the previous three elections is expected to receive 1.4 disaster declarations (the lower bound for the 95% interval is 1.1 and the upper bound is 1.7).

How dramatic was the change before and after Stafford Act in 1988? To answer this question I examine the effect of competitiveness on presidential disaster declarations for each time period. Figure 2 presents two sets of first differences. The top half of the figure displays the number of disaster declarations expected at high and low levels of competition in the pre-Stafford Act era, where all other variables are held at their means or medians where appropriate. Surprisingly, prior to the Stafford Act there is a slight negative (although statistically insignificant) relationship between competition and disaster declarations. This same scenario is presented in the lower half of Figure 2 for the post-Stafford Act era. Here there is a relatively large and statistically significant difference between low competition and high competition states. In the post-Stafford Act era, a competitive state is expected to receive over twice the number of disaster declarations as a noncompetitive state—a competitive state is expected to receive 0.87 declarations with a 95% confidence interval from 0.73 to 1.03, and an uncompetitive state is expected to receive 0.43 declarations with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.29 and 0.64.

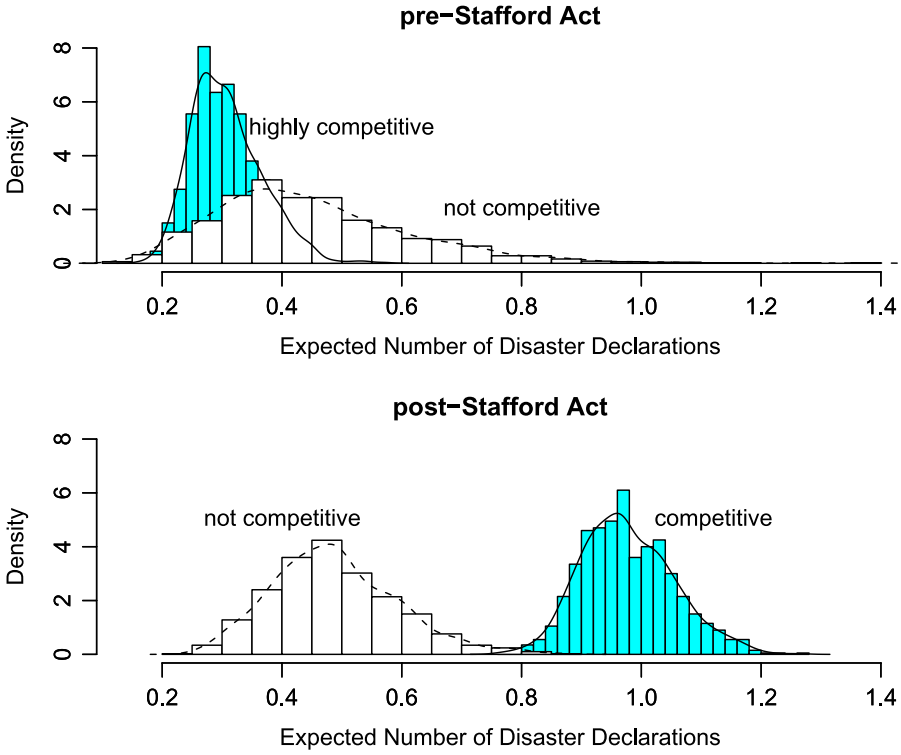
Following the Stafford Act there was a steady increase of disaster declarations. From 1981 through 1988, there were an average of 20.5 (standard deviation = 7.8) annual disaster declarations. This is well less than half of the 46.9 (standard deviation = 16.0) average yearly disaster declarations from 1989 through 2004. In addition to the raw averages increasing, this analysis reveals that before the late 1980s there was no relationship between competitiveness and presidential disaster declarations but since then electoral forces have played a much larger role. As I show in the next section, the president has reason to reward electorally competitive states: he is rewarded in turn.

How Many Votes is a Presidential Disaster Declaration Worth?

In stark contrast to the campaign rally or a campaign television advertisement, disaster declarations provide presidentially authorized dollars to voters and advertise his leadership skills while avoiding much of the partisan and ideological divisiveness that describes many campaign activities. Presidential disaster declarations provide several mechanisms that could potentially increase support among constituents receiving aid. Voters may directly receive funds by virtue of the presidential action, which could lead to increased support. Presidential disaster declarations may be akin to a campaign appearance with the president appearing and comforting affected voters. The effects could also be more indirect and reflect voters watching local news coverage of the president appearing in a leadership role. In the previous section we established evidence that presidents use presidential disaster declarations as tools of reelection. I now turn to the question of whether there are payoffs come election day.

To gain leverage on this question, I analyze the relationship between statewide presidential election outcomes and presidential disaster declarations from 1984 through 2004. The dependent variable here is the president's percent of the two-party statewide vote. The key independent variable is the number of presidential disaster declarations occurring from

FIGURE 2 Effect of Competitiveness on Number of Disaster Declarations, Pre- and Post-Stafford Act



Notes: Figure presents number of presidential disaster declarations expected given models presented in Table 2 between states with the highest and lowest level of competitiveness. Competitiveness is a much stronger predictor of presidential disaster declarations in the post-Stafford Act era.

January 1 to election day of the year of the election.[19] Model 1 of Table 3 includes the raw number of disaster declarations without transformation. Because the relationship between disaster declarations and election outcomes may be curvilinear, in Model 2 of Table 3 I take the square root of this variable (Neter et al. 1996, 126). This transformation allows for the effect of the first disaster declaration to be larger than the effect of the second declaration, the effect of the second larger than the third and so on.

To control for the partisan preferences of the state, I include the two-party statewide vote from the previous election, the party of the governor, and the partisanship of the Congressional delegation. I also include an indicator for whether the candidate is an incumbent. To account for presidential performance I include economic variables measuring personal per capita income of the state as well as the change between the third and fourth quarter during the election year in personal per capita income.[20] I also include indicator variables for each state, which I do not report in the table.

Table 3 present the results from the least squares regressions.[21] Both presidential disaster declarations (in Model 1) as well as the square root transformation (in Model 2) are positively related to presidential vote share. The results from Model 1 show that each disaster declaration is worth approximately 1 percentage point. The results from Model 2 show that a single disaster declaration is worth about 2.2 percentage points in a state election outcomes ($\sqrt{1} \times 2.2 = 2.2$). Because of

[19]If the incumbent is not running (Ronald Reagan in 1988 election and Bill Clinton in the 2000 election) then I include the percent of the two-party vote received by the candidate of the same party in the previous election — for example, Reagan's percent of the statewide vote in 1984 is used to predict Bush's share of the vote in 1988.

[20]Statistics on quarterly personal income were obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (http://www.bea.gov/bea/regional/sqpi/, accessed 4 March 2009.).

[21]I also run the analysis using a two-stage least squares regression framework, but, based on the Hausman test, the least squares results are preferable (and substantively similar). See Supplemental Materials for further discussion.

TABLE 3 Model of State-Wide Presidential Election Outcomes

	Model 1	Model 2
Presidential Disaster Declarations	1.29*	
	(0.35)	
Presidential Disaster Declarations (sqrt)		2.17*
		(0.55)
Previous Vote Share	0.75*	0.75*
	(0.05)	(0.05)
Personal Per Capita Income (logged)	−14.18*	−14.35*
	(3.43)	(3.42)
Change in Per Capita Income	0.67*	0.70*
	(0.25)	(0.25)
Congressional Partisanship	6.30*	6.16*
	(1.55)	(1.54)
Governor's Partisanship	−0.45	−0.31
	(0.86)	(0.85)
Competitiveness	−0.25*	−0.26*
	(0.13)	(0.13)
Electoral Votes	0.03	−0.01
	(0.31)	(0.31)
Incumbent	0.47	0.31
	(0.67)	(0.67)
Intercept	162.23*	163.62*
	(33.87)	(33.73)
N	300	300
R^2	0.70	0.70
adj. R^2	0.63	0.63
Resid. sd	5.22	5.20

Standard errors in parentheses
*indicates significance at $p < 0.05$
Notes: Results from least squares (LS) with two different specifications of disaster declarations. Model 1 includes presidential disaster declarations and Model 2 includes the square root transformation. State indicator variables are included in the models but not presented in the table.

the square-root transformation, each additional disaster declaration has a smaller marginal effect on the election outcome. For instance, the model would predict that two disaster declarations would yield 3.1 percentage points ($\sqrt{2} \times 2.2 = 3.1$). The evidence here suggests that presidents may achieve the electoral reward they seek when they allocate presidential disasters strategically.

Discussion

For disaster policy, the results here suggest that more congressional oversight could reduce the effect of electoral politics on disaster declarations. It is difficult to say whether reforms could have improved the response to Hurricane Katrina. President Bush acted quickly to grant a disaster declaration—that is not in question. The critical failure came when federal, state, and local executives and bureaucracies could not deliver the relief. Further research should examine other ways in which electoral politics influence the distributive and policy decisions of the president. Was the underinvestment by the federal government in the public infrastructure of the gulf region a function of Louisiana's and Mississippi's electoral uncompetitiveness? Presidents can target geographically, but they can also direct the agenda and shape policy. How are issues such as health care, education, and the economy influenced by the preferences of the president's reelection constituency? These questions remain.

When the inauguration confetti is done falling, the campaign is over and the job of governing begins. But the campaign will come again. In four more years the president or his party designate, must again etch out a coalition of 270 electoral college votes if he wishes to remain (or keep his party) in the White House. The findings here show that the specter of the campaign persists well after the president-elect thanks his opponent for a worthy contest. Electoral incentives may guide policy to the detriment of the public good. To not be sensitive to the electoral incentives of the president is a mistake especially in light of the vastly expanded arsenal of unilateral powers at his command. The legislative process is filled with competing interests that must be reconciled to produce policy. If the president may act unchecked by the interests represented by Congress, he may act in his own electoral interest. Evidence here shows that one incarnation of that self-interest is to act by rewarding constituencies crucial to his reelection. We are in an era that has seen Congress delegate much authority to the president, yet they do so at the peril of their institution and the collective good. The president has electoral incentives too, but when he wields unilateral authority he does not compete with hundreds of other agents carrying out the will of their respective principals: the president acts alone.

References

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M Bartels. 2004. "Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to Drought, Flu, and Shark Attacks." Princeton University. Typescript.

Arceneaux, Kevin, and Robert M. Stein. 2006. "Who Is Held Responsible When Disaster Strikes? The Attribution of

Reponsibility for a Natural Disaster in an Urban Election.'' *Journal of Urban Affairs* 28 (1): 43–53.

Bartels, Larry M. 1985. ''Resource Allocation in a Presidential Campaign.'' *Journal of Politics* 47 (August): 928–36.

Bartels, Larry M. 1991. ''Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Build Up.'' *American Political Science Review* 85 (June): 457–74.

Clinton, William Jefferson. 2004. *My Life*. New York: Knopf.

Cooper, Phillip J. 2005. ''George W. Bush, Edgar Allan Poe, and the Use and Abuse of Presidential Signing Statements.'' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (September): 515–31.

FEMA Individual Assistance Programs. 2005.

Garrett, Thomas A., and Russell S. Sobel. 2003. ''The Political Economy of FEMA Disaster Payments.'' *Economic Inquiry* 41 (3): 496–509.

Gasper, John T., and Andrew Reeves. 2011. ''Make it Rain? Retrospection and the Attentive Electorate in the Context of Natural Disasters.'' *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (2): 340–55.

Hansen, John Mark. 1998. ''Individuals, Institutions, and Public Preferences over Public Finances.'' *American Political Science Review* 92 (September): 513–31.

Howell, William G. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Howell, William G., and David E. Lewis. 2002. ''Agencies by Presidential Design.'' *Journal of Politics* 64 (November): 1095–1114.

Imai, Kosuke, Gary King, and Olivia Lau. 2009. ''Zelig: Everyone's Statistical Software.'' http://GKing.Harvard.Edu/zelig, version 3.4–3.

Johnston, Richard, Michael G. Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2004. *The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Krause, George A, and Jeffrey Cohen. 2000. ''Opportunity, Constraints, and the Development of the Institutional Presidency: The Issuance of Executive Orders, 1939-96.'' *Journal of Politics* 62 (February): 88–114.

Kuntz, Phil. 1989. ''President, Agenices Have Wide Latitude in Providing Aid in Wake of Disasters.'' *CQ Weekly*, 2854–55.

Lohmann, Susanne, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1994. ''Divided Government and U.S. Trade Policy: Theory and Evidence.'' *International Organization* 48 (Autumn): 595–632.

Martin, Lisa. 2005. ''The President and International Commitments: Treaties as Signaling Devices.'' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (September): 440–65.

Mayer, Kenneth. 1999. ''Executive Orders and Presidential Power.'' *The Journal of Politics* 61 (May): 445–66.

Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

McCarty, Nolan M. 2000. ''Presidential Pork: Executive Veto Power and Distributive Politics.'' *American Political Science Review* 94 (March): 117–29.

Moe, Terry M. 1990. ''Political Institutions: The Neglected Side of the Story.'' *Journal of Law. Economics, and Organization* 6 (April): 213–53.

Moe, Terry M., and William G. Howell. 1999. ''The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action.'' *Journal of Law Economics and Organization* 15 (1): 132–79.

Neter, John, Michael H. Kutner, Christopher J. Nachtsheim, and William Wasserman. 1996. *Applied Linear Statistical Models*. 4th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. First Free Press Paperback ed. New York: Free Press.

Polsby, Nelson W., and Aaron B. Wildavsky. 1968. *Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics*. 2nd ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Rabinowitz, George, and Stuart Elaine Macdonald. 1986. ''The Power of States in U.S. Presidential Elections.'' *American Political Science Review* 80 (March): 65–87.

Rottinghaus, Brandon, and Jason Maier. 2007. ''The Power of Decree: Presidential Use of Executive Proclamations, 1977-2005.'' *Political Research Quarterly* 60 (June): 338–43.

Salkowe, Richard S., and Jayajit Chakraborty. 2009. ''Federal Disaster Relief in the U.S.: The Role of Political Partisanship and Preference in Presidential Disaster Declarations and Turndowns.'' *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 6 (1): 1–21.

Shaw, Daron. 1999. ''The Methods behind the Madness: Presidential Electoral College Strategies, 1988-1996.'' *Journal of Politics* 61 (November): 893–913.

Sood, Rahul, Geoffrey Stockdale, and Everett Rogers. 1987. ''How the Media Operate in Natural Disasters.'' *Journal of Communication* 37 (Summer): 27–41.

Sylves, Richard, and Zoltán I Búzás. 2007. ''Presidential Disaster Declaration Decisions, 1953-2003: What Influences Odds of Approval.'' *State & Local Government Review* 39 (1): 3–15.

United States General Accounting Office. 2001. ''Disaster Assistance: Improvement Needed in Disaster Declaration Criteria and Eligibility Assurance Procedures (No. GAO-01-837).'' (August).

Andrew Reeves is assistant professor of political science at Boston University, Boston, MA 02215.

Supplemental Materials for "Political Disaster: Presidential Disaster Declarations and Electoral Politics"

Andrew Reeves[1]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Boston University. (232 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215; http://people.bu.edu/areeves; 617-353-5284, areeves@bu.edu.)

List of Tables

List of Figures

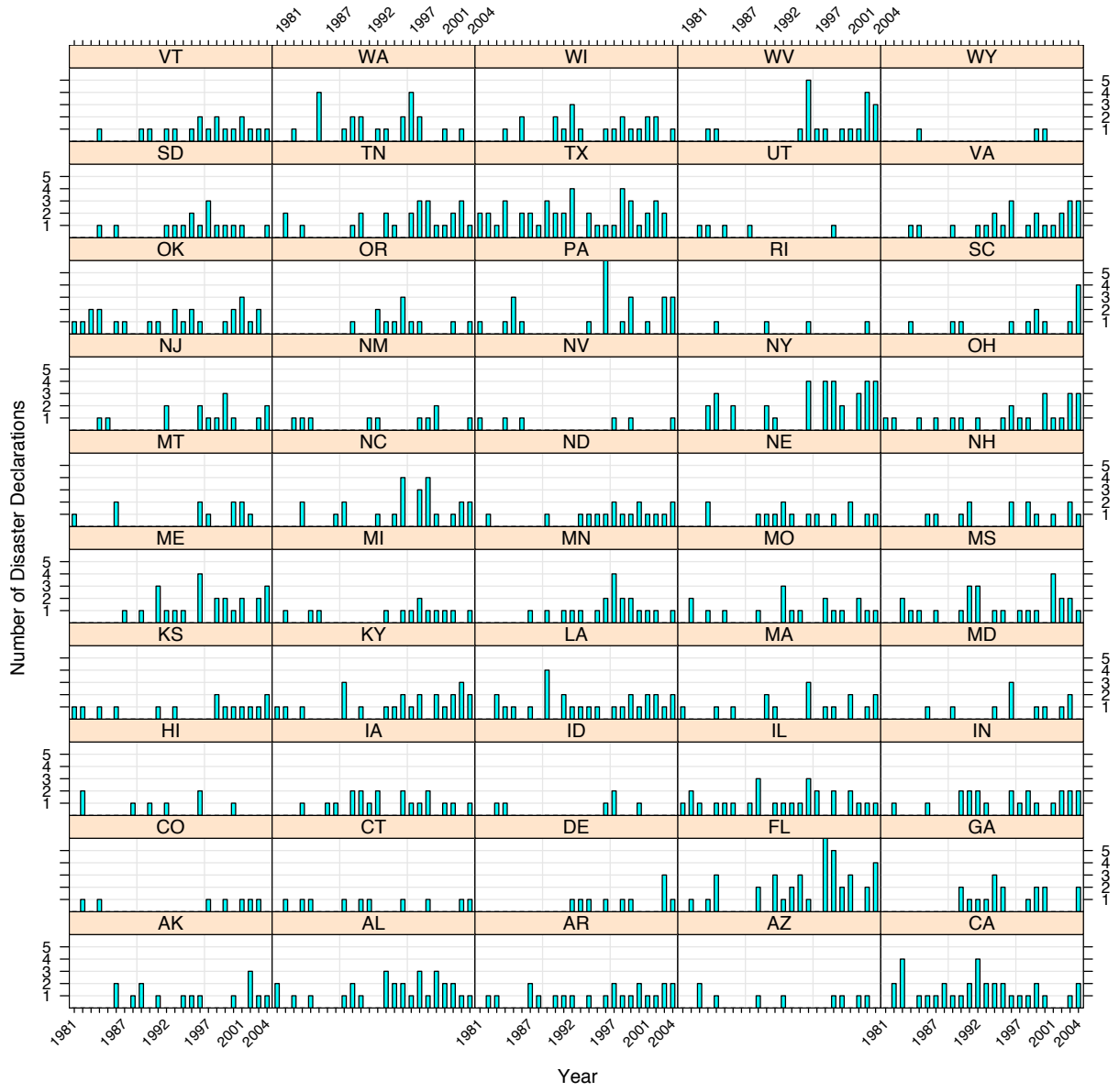


Figure 1: Presidential disaster declarations for 50 U.S. States, 1981 – 2004. There is substantial variation in the number of disaster declarations that states receive. Every state received at least three disaster declarations in the 24 years from 1981 to 2004, and every state experiences at least one year where they receive no presidential disaster declarations.

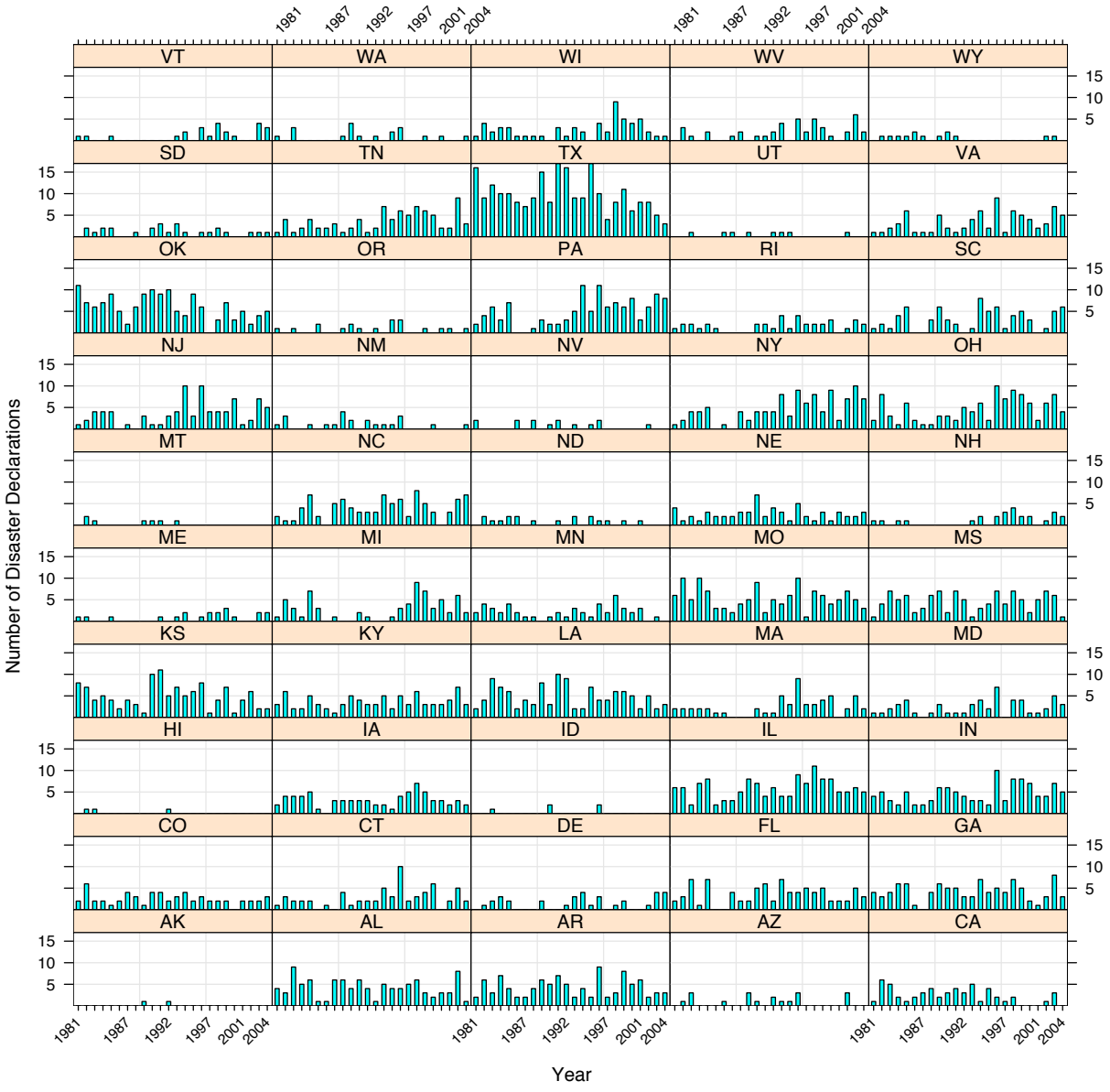


Figure 2: Actual disaster declarations for 50 U.S. States, 1981 – 2004. Actual disaster declarations are designations made by a private for-profit company which provides the data to insurance companies. There is substantial variation in the number of private disaster declarations that states receive. Each state received at least two or as many as 144 declarations in the 24 years from 1981 to 2004.

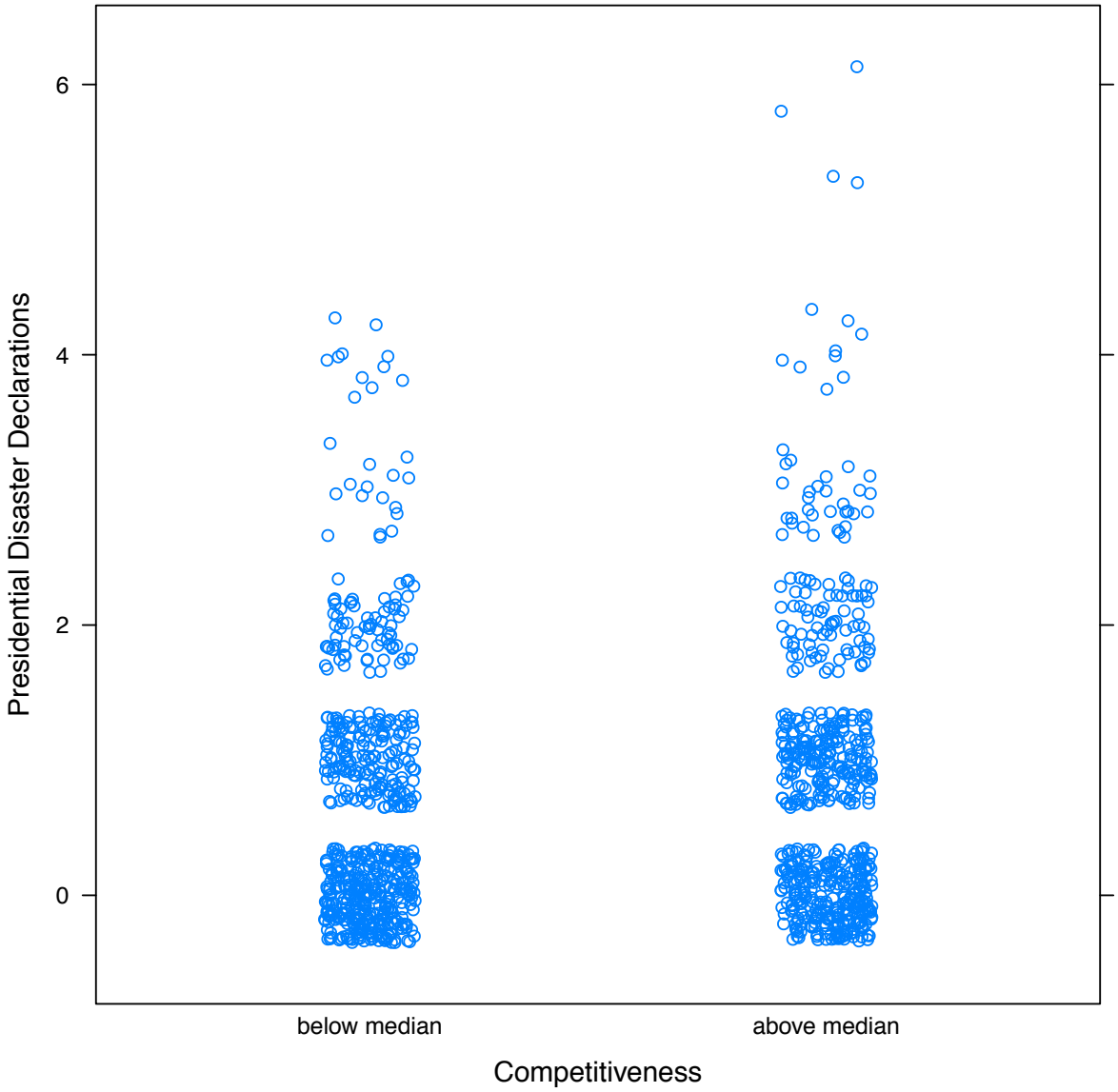


Figure 3: Bivariate relationship between competitiveness (for cases below and above the median) and presidential disaster declarations. The total number of disaster declarations are jittered. Comparing the number of disaster declarations between the upper and lower halves of competitiveness yields statistically significant differences. The mean number of disaster declarations for low-competition states is .68 while the mean for high-competition states is .84. Comparing the two distributions using a Welch two sample t-test, yields a t statistic of 2.86 and p value of 0.004, suggesting that the difference is not a result of chance. Comparing the medians using a Wilcoxian rank sum test yields a test statistic of 195793 and a p value of 0.004 again suggestion statistically significant differences between the two distributions. See Table 1 for a tabular representation of this relationship.

Quintile	Competitiveness Range	Mean Disaster Declarations	Relation to Median	Competitiveness Range	Mean Disaster Declarations
1	[26.5 to 39.2]	.45			
2	(39.2 to 42.8]	.80	below	[26.5 to 43.7]	.68
3	(42.8 to 44.2]	.83			
4	(44.2 to 45.6]	.79	above	(43.7, 48.6]	.84
5	(45.6 to 48.6]	.94			

Table 1: Bivariate relationship between competitiveness and presidential disaster declarations. The left side of the table presents the mean presidential disaster declarations for each quintile of competitiveness in the sample. The right side of the table presents the mean presidential disaster declarations for the states below and above the median level of competitiveness. Comparing the number of disaster declarations between the upper and lower halves of competitiveness yields statistically significant differences. The mean number of disaster declarations for low-competition states is .68 while the mean for high-competition states is .84. Comparing the two distributions using a Welch two sample t-test, yields a t statistic of 2.86 and p value of 0.004, suggesting that the difference is not a result of chance. Comparing the medians using a Wilcoxian rank sum test yields a test statistic of 195793 and a p value of 0.004 again suggestion statistically significant differences between the two distributions. See Figure 3 for a graphical representation of this table.

	No Private Disaster Declarations	1+ Private Disaster Declarations
No Disaster Declaration	196	409
	(16%)	(34%)
1 + Disaster Declarations	91	504
	(8%)	(42%)

Table 2: Relationship between disaster declarations and private disaster declarations. The columns are the number of cases that see no private disaster declarations and cases that see at least one private disaster declarations. The rows are the number of cases that see no disaster declarations and at least one. In the first cell, we see that 196 cases (or 16%) see no catastrophes and no disaster declarations. The 91 cases that see a disaster declaration but no catastrophes are distributed among the following states (with the number of cases in parenthese) as follows: Alaska (10), Montana (7), North Dakota (7), Vermont (7), New Hampshire (5), Washington (5), Arizona (4), Hawaii (4), Maine (4), Nevada (4), New Mexico (4), South Dakota (4), Utah (4), California (3), Idaho (3), Minnesota (3), Oregon (3), West Virginia (3), Wyoming (2), Iowa (1), Massachusetts (1), Michigan (1), Pennsylvania (1), Wisconsin (1). Dropping these 91 cases from the analysis has no affect on the substantive results presented in the manuscript.

Table 3: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled model (column 1) and Split sample model (columns 2 and 3). Pre-Stafford Act Model (column 2), omitted indicators are Year 1 of Administration and Reagan's second term. Post-Stafford Act Model (column 3), omitted indicator variables are Year 1 of Administration and Bill Clinton's second term. Estimates are from a **Negative Binomial** regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	−15.20	−11.83	5.57
	(10.42)	(26.16)	(16.08)
Actual Disasters	0.13*	0.19*	0.13*
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02*	0.03	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.33	1.52	−0.70
	(1.02)	(2.63)	(1.58)
Electoral Votes	−0.02	−0.11	−0.06
	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.05)
Competitiveness	0.03*	−0.11	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.10)	(0.02)
Reagan (term 1)	−0.42	−0.15	
	(0.30)	(0.30)	
Reagan (term 2)	−0.58*		
	(0.22)		
GHW Bush	−0.21		−0.46*
	(0.17)		(0.23)
Clinton (term 1)	−0.15		−0.32
	(0.14)		(0.18)
W Bush	0.06		0.13
	(0.11)		(0.12)
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.48*	0.05
	(0.10)	(0.23)	(0.12)
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.17	0.12
	(0.10)	(0.26)	(0.12)
year 4 of admin	0.26*	0.28	0.37*
	(0.11)	(0.29)	(0.13)
Congressional partisanship	0.04	0.62	0.03
	(0.16)	(1.13)	(0.17)
President / Governor same party	0.00	−0.26	0.03
	(0.07)	(0.22)	(0.08)
θ	7832.03	5326.05	10640.08
	(29084.03)	(40674.70)	(45153.78)
N	1200	400	800
AIC	2529.52	684.43	1893.82
BIC	3873.30	1674.31	3093.08
$\log L$	−1000.76	−94.22	−690.91

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled model with multiple specifications of competitiveness (as measured by loser's share of the vote). Loser's share of the two party creates a potential range of values from 0 (where one major party candidate wins by 100%) to 50 (where the votes were split 50-50). Model 1 presents this measure averaged over the previous three elections, Model 2 presents it over two elections, and Model 3 presents it over the last election. Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	-15.19	-15.35	-14.33
	(10.42)	(10.44)	(10.46)
Actual Disasters	0.13^{***}	0.13^{***}	0.13^{***}
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02^{*}	0.02^{*}	0.02^{*}
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.33	1.37	1.35
	(1.02)	(1.03)	(1.03)
Electoral Votes	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Loser's Share (3 elections)	0.03^{*}		
	(0.02)		
Reagan (term 1)	-0.42	$-0.49^{\dagger}$	-0.48
	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Reagan (term 2)	-0.58^{**}	-0.54^{*}	-0.59^{*}
	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.23)
GHW Bush	-0.21	-0.20	-0.27
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Clinton (term 1)	-0.15	-0.19	-0.19
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
W Bush	0.06	0.06	0.05
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.09	0.09
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.08	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 4 of admin	0.26^{*}	0.26^{*}	0.26^{*}
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Congressional partisanship	0.04	0.11	0.08
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
President / Governor same party	0.00	0.01	0.00
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Loser's Share (2 elections)		$0.02^{\dagger}$	
		(0.01)	
Loser's Share (1 election)			0.01
			(0.01)
N	1200	1200	1200
AIC	2527.50	2527.84	2531.09
BIC	3850.92	3851.26	3854.51
$\log L$	-1003.75	-1003.92	-1005.54

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at $p < .10$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$

Table 5: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled model with multiple specifications of competitiveness (as measured by a *weighted* loser's share of the vote). Loser's share of the two party vote creates a potential range of values from 0 (where one major party candidate wins by 100% of the vote in each election) to 50 (where the votes were split 50-50 between the two major party candidates). Model 1 presents this measure averaged over the previous three elections. The most recent elected is weighted more heavily (the weights, from most recent to most distant are 1, .75, and .25), Model 2 presents it over two elections (the weights assigned are 1 and .75). Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-15.51	-15.38
	(10.45)	(10.45)
Actual Disasters	0.13^{***}	0.13^{***}
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02^{*}	0.02^{*}
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.38	1.39
	(1.03)	(1.03)
Electoral Votes	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Weighted Loser's Share (3 elections)	$0.03^{\dagger}$	
	(0.01)	
Reagan (term 1)	-0.46	$-0.48^{\dagger}$
	(0.29)	(0.29)
Reagan (term 2)	-0.54^{*}	-0.54^{*}
	(0.23)	(0.23)
GHW Bush	-0.21	-0.21
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Clinton (term 1)	-0.18	-0.19
	(0.14)	(0.14)
W Bush	0.06	0.06
	(0.11)	(0.11)
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.09
	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 4 of admin	0.26^{*}	0.26^{*}
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Congressional partisanship	0.09	0.11
	(0.16)	(0.16)
President / Governor same party	0.00	0.01
	(0.07)	(0.07)
Weighted Loser's Share (2 elections)		$0.02^{\dagger}$
		(0.01)
N	1200	1200
AIC	2528.00	2528.43
BIC	3851.42	3851.85
$\log L$	-1004.00	-1004.22

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at $p < .10$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$

Table 6: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled model with multiple specifications of uncompetitiveness. Uncompetitiveness is the absolute difference between the national vote percent and the percent received in the state as used in (Johnston, et al. 2004, p. 68). Model 1 presents this measure averaged over the previous three elections, Model 2 presents it over two elections, and Model 3 presents it over the last election. Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	−14.41	−14.60	−14.16
	(10.39)	(10.41)	(10.40)
Actual Disasters	0.13*	0.13*	0.13*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.40	1.41	1.36
	(1.03)	(1.03)	(1.03)
Electoral Votes	−0.01	−0.02	−0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Uncompetitiveness (3 elections)	−0.03*		
	(0.01)		
Reagan (term 1)	−0.32	−0.46	−0.46
	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.30)
Reagan (term 2)	−0.50*	−0.41	−0.52*
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.24)
GHW Bush	−0.12	−0.09	−0.26
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.17)
Clinton (term 1)	−0.08	−0.18	−0.21
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.14)
W Bush	0.02	0.05	0.03
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.08	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.08	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
year 4 of admin	0.25*	0.25*	0.26*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Congressional partisanship	0.04	0.11	0.11
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
President / Governor same party	−0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Uncompetitiveness (2 elections)		−0.02*	
		(0.01)	
Uncompetitiveness (1 election)			−0.01
			(0.01)
N	1200	1200	1200
AIC	2527.37	2526.76	2530.40
BIC	3850.79	3850.18	3853.82
$\log L$	−1003.69	−1003.38	−1005.20

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 7: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, 1989 to 2004 with indicator for "battleground" status as defined by campaign in the most recent past election. Measures are taken from Shaw (1999) and Shaw (2006). Battleground status as reported by the presidential campaigns is not a predictor of presidential disaster declarations. Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

Intercept	9.50
	(16.08)
Actual Disasters	0.12*
	(0.02)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.01
	(0.01)
Per capita income	−0.95
	(1.59)
Electoral Votes	−0.04
	(0.05)
Campaign battleground	0.09
	(0.11)
GHW Bush	−0.53*
	(0.23)
Clinton (term 1)	−0.39*
	(0.18)
W Bush	0.15
	(0.12)
year 2 of admin	0.06
	(0.12)
year 3 of admin	0.14
	(0.12)
year 4 of admin	0.39*
	(0.13)
Congressional partisanship	0.09
	(0.17)
President / Governor same party	0.02
	(0.08)
N	800
AIC	1895.38
BIC	3075.90
$\log L$	−695.69

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 8: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Split Sample with interaction between competitiveness and electoral votes. There is no interactive effect for the pre-Stafford era, and (surprisingly) a very small negative relationship afterwards. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table. Variables same as presented in the manuscript.

	pre-Stafford	post-Stafford
Intercept	−5.94	4.80
	(26.50)	(3.04)
Actual Disasters	0.19*	0.08*
	(0.05)	(0.01)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.03	0.02*
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Per capita income	1.79	−0.84*
	(2.64)	(0.29)
Electoral Votes	−1.04	0.16*
	(0.66)	(0.06)
Competitiveness	−0.32	0.07*
	(0.18)	(0.02)
Reagan (term 1)	−0.05	
	(0.31)	
year 2 of admin	0.49*	0.08
	(0.24)	(0.11)
year 3 of admin	0.17	0.18
	(0.26)	(0.11)
year 4 of admin	0.27	0.40*
	(0.29)	(0.11)
Congressional partisanship	0.29	0.08
	(1.16)	(0.17)
President / Governor same party	−0.23	0.03
	(0.22)	(0.08)
electoral votes × competitiveness	0.02	−0.003*
	(0.02)	(0.001)
GHW Bush		−0.48*
		(0.12)
Clinton (term 1)		−0.34*
		(0.11)
W Bush		0.09
		(0.10)
N	400	800
AIC	682.39	1895.46
BIC	1672.27	2176.54
$\log L$	−93.19	−887.73

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 9: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Split Sample with interaction between competitiveness and last year and last two years of administration. There is no interactive effect in either the pre-or post-Stafford era. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table. Variables same as presented in the manuscript.

	pre-Stafford	post-Stafford	pre-Stafford	post-Stafford
Intercept	−19.26	6.19*	−26.15	5.56
	(26.39)	(3.03)	(25.22)	(3.05)
Actual Disasters	0.19*	0.09*	0.16*	0.09*
	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.01)
Insurance cost (logged)	0.03	0.02*	0.03	0.02*
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Per capita income	2.18	−0.80*	2.91	−0.73*
	(2.65)	(0.29)	(2.53)	(0.29)
Electoral Votes	−0.10	0.01*	−0.08	0.01*
	(0.10)	(0.00)	(0.10)	(0.00)
Reagan (term 1)	−0.08		0.05	
	(0.30)		(0.29)	
year 2 of admin	0.48*	0.07		
	(0.24)	(0.11)		
year 3 of admin	0.16	0.17		
	(0.26)	(0.11)		
year 4 of admin	3.14	−0.71		
	(1.77)	(1.11)		
competitiveness	−0.09	0.03	−0.09	0.02
	(0.10)	(0.01)	(0.10)	(0.02)
Congressional partisanship	0.65	0.05	0.69	0.05
	(1.13)	(0.17)	(1.13)	(0.17)
President / Governor same party	−0.28	0.04	−0.28	0.04
	(0.23)	(0.08)	(0.23)	(0.08)
year 4 × competitiveness	−0.07	0.03		
	(0.04)	(0.03)		
GHW Bush		−0.48*		−0.47*
		(0.12)		(0.12)
Clinton (term 1)		−0.34*		−0.33*
		(0.11)		(0.11)
W Bush		0.10		0.10
		(0.10)		(0.10)
years 3 and 4 of admin			2.26	−0.39
			(1.70)	(1.00)
years 3 and 4 of admin × competitiveness			−0.06	0.01
			(0.04)	(0.02)
N	400	800	400	800
AIC	681.80	1900.39	682.92	1903.07
BIC	1671.69	2181.47	1640.88	2146.67
$\log L$	−92.90	−890.20	−101.46	−899.53

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 10: Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations, Pooled model and Split sample model. Standard errors based on Newey-West estimates. Pre-Stafford Act Model (column 2), omitted indicators are Year 1 of Administration and Reagan's second term. Post-Stafford Act Model (column 3), omitted indicator variables are Year 1 of Administration and Bill Clinton's second term. Estimates are from a Poisson regression. State indicator variables are included in the model but not presented in the table.

	Estimate	*Std.Error*
	full model	
Intercept -15.19 8.25 Actual Disasters	0.13	0.02
Insurance cost (logged)	0.02	0.01
Per capita income	1.33	0.81
Electoral Votes	−0.02	0.02
Competitiveness	0.03	0.01
Reagan (term 1)	−0.42	0.23
Reagan (term 2)	−0.58	0.16
GHW Bush	−0.21	0.13
Clinton (term 1)	−0.15	0.13
W Bush	0.06	0.09
year 2 of admin	0.09	0.09
year 3 of admin	0.08	0.09
year 4 of admin	0.26	0.08
Congressional partisanship	0.04	0.14
President / Governor same party	0.00	0.07
	pre-Stafford	
Intercept	−3.01	4.61
Actual Disasters	0.17	0.03
Insurance cost (logged)	0.00	0.01
Per capita income	0.17	0.44
Electoral Votes	0.03	0.01
Competitiveness	−0.02	0.02
Reagan (term 1)	−0.05	0.14
year 2 of admin	0.43	0.24
year 3 of admin	0.18	0.25
year 4 of admin	0.26	0.21
Congressional partisanship	0.15	0.40
President / Governor same party	−0.24	0.14
	post-Stafford	
Intercept	5.57	14.90
Actual Disasters	0.13	0.02
Insurance cost (logged)	0.01	0.01
Per capita income	−0.70	1.46
Electoral Votes	−0.06	0.03
Competitiveness	0.04	0.02
GHW Bush	−0.46	0.19
Clinton (term 1)	−0.32	0.18
W Bush	0.13	0.10
year 2 of admin	0.05	0.11
year 3 of admin	0.12	0.11
year 4 of admin	0.37	0.11
Congressional partisanship	0.03	0.16
President / Governor same party	0.03	0.08