The Politics of Disaster Relief

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Introduction
• Previous authors have studied the political influences behind government transfers (Asher and Nocera 2017; Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010; Brooks and Naar-McCraney, 2012).
• In the United States, the president decides which requests for federal disaster relief are granted, a process reinforced by the Stafford Act in 1988.
• Disaster relief is a highly volatile form of discretionary spending. It has risen sharply since the passing of the Stafford Act and the introduction of emergency declarations*.

Key Findings
1. The president gives more declarations to aligned districts with a strong political base.
   ➢ OLS associates party alignment with a 3% higher likelihood of receiving a declaration two months before the election.
2. In competitive districts, the president gives more declarations to the unaligned party on receiving a disaster declaration 10 months prior to general election.
   ➢ OLS: 3% higher likelihood of receiving at least one disaster declaration 10 months prior to general election.
3. This political behavior arises after the passing of the Stafford Act in 1988
   ➢ Significant heterogeneity found in analyses with interaction and split samples.

Future Work
• Study the effects of major weather events and disaster declarations on election results; compare effects on congressional, presidential, and gubernatorial results to see who voters blame and/or reward Congressmembers’ roll call votes are in line with the President’s position on receiving a disaster declaration.

Outliers at smallest bandwidths either driven by outliers near threshold or heterogeneous effects in razor close elections.
OLS estimates suggest the forms of the hypothesis.

Geographic Distribution of Declarations

Within district frequency of declarations six months before election (2004 – 2010)

RD: Bandwidth Sensitivity

Estimate Eq (2) for post Stafford period across several bandwidths

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