

Make it Burn? Wildfires, Disaster Aid and Presidential Approval

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For governments, the occurrence of natural disasters creates the opportunity to demonstrate their willingness and competence in providing prompt and efficient disaster aid. A number of studies has investigated the political consequences of providing disaster aid by analyzing the effects of such aid on subsequent election results. However, the findings of these studies have not yielded a coherent picture. This paper makes a contribution to the existing literature by employing high-frequency survey data on presidential approval. The combination of this data with wildfire data and information on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) aid approvals and denials reveals that Barack Obama gained in support among (potential) voters for whom FEMA aid was approved by the president, while he was not punished for denials of FEMA assistance. We show that this effect is exclusively driven by voters without party affiliation and the that the effect is temporary.