Prevention or Relief? Public Attitudes Toward Disaster Policies



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BACKGROUND

- Past research has shown that citizens reward incumbents for relief spending in response to disasters, but not for prevention spending (Gailmard & Patty, 2019; Healy & Malhotra, 2009).
- Prevention spending is more effective than relief spending.
- It is not clear whether this reflects the public's true policy preferences.

PREDICTIONS

- 1. People prefer relief policies over prevention policies.
- 2. People will give more attention to deservingness cues in a relief frame than in the prevention frame.

METHODS

- Data: Amazon Mturk (N = 397)
- Subjects randomly assigned to read a prevention-frame vignette or the relief-frame vignette.
- Half of the participants in each condition assigned to different deservingness framings: "trying" versus "not trying."
- Participants indicate how likely they are to support the hypothetical policy (+2 being "Very likely," -2 being "Very unlikely").

Support

There is no evidence that Voters support relief spending over prevention spending.

Mean level of support for each policy proposal



Figure 2 SURVEY FLOW

Residents are annually threatened during flood seasons. Experts are forecasting that this town will experience increasingly devastating floods. They warn that eventually, the whole town will have to relocate...

Prevention & relief (before)	Relief (after)
This year, the river will rise by more than 6 inches of rain in 72 hours. It will cause at least \$100 million in damages.	This year, the river rose by than 6 inches of rain in 72 f caused \$100 million in dam
Not trying	Trying
The residents are eager to recover, but they vow to defy any evacuation orders. "This is our home. We are not going anywhere" said a resident.	The residents are eager to recover, and they are willi comply with any evacuation orders. "We will do anyth even if it means leaving of homes" said a resident.
Prevention	Relief (before) & relief (aft
As a response, the governor has proposed a disaster prevention tax policy to raise \$80 million. This money will go into building an extra drainage canal the region to prevent damage from flooding.	As a response, the governo proposed a disaster relief to to raise \$80 million. This m will go into restoring the flo community.

If this plan is implemented, each taxpayer should expect to pay approximately \$100, though some taxpayers would pay more and some would pay less, depending on their income.



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RESULTS SUMMARY

- The level of support for the relief policy is lower than the prevention policy. Prediction (1) is not supported. See Figure 1.
- However, this effect seems to be driven solely by those in the "Not Trying" treatment group.
- The effect of deservingness cues is stronger in the relief (after) frame, but not in the prevention frame. Prediction (2) is supported.

IMPLICATIONS

• If voters are given the information and the outcomes very explicitly, voters can be convinced to support prevention.

FUTURE RESEARCH

• Economic game in which real money is at stake. Real people with real "victims."

KEY REFERENCES

- Gailmard, S., & Patty, J. W. (2019). Preventing prevention. American Journal of Political *Science*, 63(2), 342-352.
- Healy, A., & Malhotra, N. (2009). Myopic voters and natural disaster policy. American Political *Science Review,* 103(3), 387-406.

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