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Natural disasters and clientelism: The case of floods and landslides in Colombia

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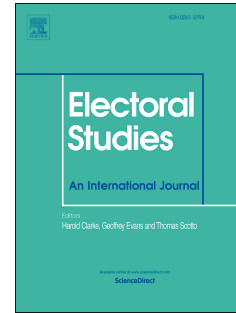
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Abstract

What are the effects of natural disasters on electoral results? Some authors claim that catastrophes have a negative effect on the survival of leaders in a democracy because voters have a propensity to punish politicians for not preventing or poorly handling a crisis. In contrast, this paper finds that these events might favor incumbents. Disasters are linked to leader survival through clientelism: they generate an in-flow of resources in the form of aid, which increases money for buying votes. Analyzing the rainy season of 2010-2011 in Colombia, considered its worst disaster in history, I use a difference-in-differences strategy to show that in the local election incumbent parties benefited from the disaster. The result is robust in regard to different specifications and alternative explanations. Moreover, I present evidence that goes against other common explanations found in the literature and that goes in line with the clientelism mechanism.

Keywords— Natural Disasters, Incumbency Advantage, Clientelism

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