



RESEARCH ARTICLE

POLITICAL IMPACT ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes three broad types of political implications of emergency management since historically emergency management was considered only a function of law enforcement and fire departments, with the support in the event of a major catastrophe from public health and civil defense organizations. The issue is not whether governments will be required to respond to emergencies, but the concern is when and how frequently response will occur. The time to think about emergencies is before they occur. Despite some significant weakness in the overall approach, political implications offer many benefits and provide various options for community development corporations (CDCs) to get involved in disaster/emergency response and recovery. Based on a generally positive evaluation, the paper concludes that emergency management must become a central activity, whether at the federal, state, or local or as an intergovernmental activity. As both natural and man-made disaster escalate, governments are putting more policies in place to enhance community preparation and expedite response and recovery efforts of responders. The government should be ready to take on any disaster if and when it occurs with the following policies and procedures that are in place.

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INTRODUCTION

In an average year in the United States, floods will cause \$2 billion to \$3 billion in damage. Tornadoes will leave over 100 people dead. Fires will kill more than 6,000. These emergencies occur regularly and others are waiting to happen. There are 9,000 high hazard dams in the country. Four billion tons of hazardous materials move through transportation systems each year. Thirty-nine states are at risk from earthquakes and 22 metropolitan areas from hurricanes. The issue is not whether governments will be required to respond to emergencies but rather when and how frequently. The time to think about emergencies is before they happen (McLoughlin, 1985). One of the most difficult concepts in literature is to arrive at a basic definition of a disaster. There have been many attempts to define disasters, but all run into the problem of either being too broad or too narrow. Having a definition of a disaster is extremely important in identifying which events to include or exclude from the definition. In general, most disaster events are defined by the need for external assistance. Perhaps, one reason for this observation is that the disaster relief agencies are often the only organizations with comprehensive and systematic data. There should be some caution applied to data defined in this circumstance.

Notably, the decision on which situations require external assistance may differ by country or region. In some situations, it may be a political decision as well. According to Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola disaster is defined as an event that demands substantial crisis response requiring the use of government powers and resources beyond the scope of one line agency or service. A disaster can also be described as the tragedy of a natural or human-made hazard (a hazard is a situation which poses a level of threat to life, health, property, or environment) that negatively affects society or environment. However, Webster's Dictionary provides a conclusive disaster definition being a "sudden or great misfortune or failure" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disaster>).

Since some disasters can be natural or human-made hazards and is also named after the emergency/disaster that could be so precipitated then this is how emergency management came into play. Emergency management is the discipline dealing with risk and risk avoidance. Emergency management has become an essential role in government today. Based on this strong foundation, the validity of emergency management as a government function has never been in question. Entities and organizations fulfilling the emergency management function existed at the state and local level long before the federal government became involved. But, as events occurred, as

political philosophies changed, and as the nation developed, the federal role in emergency management steadily increased (Haddow, 2008). This paper will examine the political implications of emergency management, since historically emergency management was considered only a function of law enforcement and fire departments, with the support in the event of a major catastrophe from public health and civil defense organizations.

Major Themes of Disaster Policy and Politics: For one to have a clear understanding about disaster policy and politics there are four major themes, which emerge in different ways and in different types to give a detail explanation on how these relate to disaster policy and politics. The first theme concerns emergency management in the United States. Most people associate disaster policy with first responders such as the fire, police, and emergency medical personnel. Public emergency management continues to rely on the support of first responders, but emergency management both includes and extends well beyond the first responders. Emergency management appears now to have become the application side of disaster policy, even though it is said to be true, emergency managers also help in problem identification and policy formulation. A second theme proposes that disaster policy and politics constitute a worthy field of academic study. Even though disaster research has never been in the forefront it has become a part of many academic disciplines. Disaster research has become a force in shaping disaster policy and how disaster researchers have become a part of the politics of disaster in the United States. Disaster researchers still continue to make major contributions to the understanding of disasters as political, social, and economic phenomena.

These researchers as well as scientists and engineers, have also advanced knowledge and understanding of natural and or human-made disaster forces. These disciplines have helped to prevent or mitigate the effects of forces capable of producing disasters and they have used science and technology to forecast, monitor, track, and measure natural forces so that people around the world would have advanced warning of any disaster threat. Emergency management has evolved into a profession over the years, and anyone seeking to learn the profession are pressed to master it through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary education. The third theme involves management again, but at the level of elected officials. The major players in time of a disaster and or emergency will be the President of the United States, governors, mayors, county executives, and city managers. Intergovernmental relations past or present are examined and assessed from a vantage point. Presidents and the presidency itself occupy a central position in U.S. disaster policy and politics. How the president leads, manage federal officials, cope with the news media, address federal-state relations, act on governors' requests for disaster and emergency assistance, define policy agendas, and choose political appointees for responsible posts all contribute to the ability to address the demands imposed by disasters and catastrophes. In many respects political, policy, and managerial decisions made by the presidents and their administrations before a disaster significantly affects the ability of federal, state, and local governments to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to disasters and emergencies.

The fourth theme involves civil-military relations and homeland security. In the United States, the military serves as an instrument of federal and state governments and has played

a significant role in disaster management, usually in the emergency preparedness and response phases. During the modern-era in 1950, American emergency management got its start, disaster policy and politics have overlapped, been periodically demonstrated by, and paralleled, United States foreign policy and national defense policy. During the 1970s and 1980s, as emergency managers (at all levels) matured in their ability to address natural disasters and as the need for civil defense against nuclear attacks diminished, military dominance of disaster management waned. However, the rise of terrorism internationally, and the possibility that terrorists would strike inside the United States and that they might use weapons of mass destruction, set the stage for homeland security. The terrorists' attacks of September 11, 2001, made at least a part of the envisioned night mare a true reality. Today, once again, the United States disaster policy and politics, as well as American emergency management, cannot be fully understood apart from their relationship with national security and defense policy (Sylves, 2008).

Disasters in the Formulation of Public Policy: The policymakers assume that the policy process ordinarily identifies a problem. If they choose to define this problem then it is called a 'public problem,' then lawmakers begin to process policy formulation in which various solutions to the problem are then put forward and often in the form of different legislative measures. Different political interests establish positions on the measures and a process of building coalitions begins to take place among the legislators. The president and some officials of the executive branch may engage in this policy formulation and policy adoption process by exercising political influence or by contributing to the hearing process. Legislators ultimately vote on proposed measures to address the problem, and once a policy is adopted, often through enactment of a law, institutional resources and spending authority are provided to implement the law. Many federal disaster laws have emerged by the way of this general process over the years.

However, history demonstrates that the president and other policymakers regularly have to decide how to manage different types of disasters and what the subsequent role of the federal government will be. In some new type of disaster or in certain emergencies the legislative determination proves to be too slow, cumbersome, and costly to rely on, presidents are entrusted with deciding whether a national interest exists and if so how the federal government will respond. Presidential executive orders sometimes provide the president and the federal government a high-speed, highly responsive alternative to the conventional policy process. The president's creative use of disaster declaration authority is an important and available tool (Sylves, 2008). The president of the United States often leads policy formulation and legitimation of disaster policy. Presidents are the chief executives and they also have made the decision to press the emergency circumstance and use their executive authority to move the federal government to address new emergencies, disasters, and exigencies. Because the United States is a democratic republic with a national constitution, and because it is composed of three countervailing branches of government, responsibility for protecting the polity from harms posed in emergency circumstances falls largely on government institutions operating in accord with certain laws. The United States Constitution clearly entrusts the president and Congress with the job of providing for the common defense. Preventing

repelling, responding to, and recovering from the effects of attacks on the American homeland perpetrated by other nations or by terrorists who are stateless have always been a cardinal responsibility of the federal government (Sylves, 2008). Throughout history public policy makers have sought to anticipate the unexpected in order to reduce the risk to human life and safety posed by intermittently occurring natural and man-made hazardous events. Their efforts have provided the foundation for the current focus on emergency management as an important function of federal, state, and local governments. Within the context of the various statutes, regulations, and ordinances, emergency management can be defined as the process of developing and implementing policies that are concerned with:

- Mitigation-Deciding what to do where a risk to the health, safety, and welfare of society has been determined to exist; and implementing a risk reduction program;
- Preparedness-Developing a response plan and training first responders to save lives and reduce disaster damage, including the identification of critical resources and the development of necessary agreements among responding agencies, both within the jurisdiction and with other jurisdictions;
- Response-Providing emergency aid and assistance, reducing the probability of secondary damage, and minimizing problems for recovery operations; and
- Recovery-Providing immediate support during the early recovery period necessary to return vital life support systems to minimum operation levels, and continuing to provide support until the community returns to normal (Petak, 1985).

Public policy and public institutions have been slow to respond and meet the new challenges that are posed by a complex technological society, and society has in many respects become a victim in dealing with technology. Immediate economic return has governed the decision-making process while ignoring potential long-range consequences. The results have been an increase in the exposure of people and property to extremely risky situations as exemplified in the increased land development in coastal storm areas, in flood plains, in areas adjacent to hazardous waste landfills, airports, and nuclear power plants, and on unstable hillsides. There has also been a consistent institutional and political lag in identifying and mitigating increasingly hazardous situations (Petak, 1985).

National, State, and Local Programs from Disasters: There have been several programs that have been implemented since disasters have occurred since the 1950s that are on the national, state, and local levels. Some of the programs are Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1950, Disaster Relief Act of 1974, Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, FEMA, National Flood Insurance Program, and National Response Plan. The Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1950 was passed as a limited federal response to the flooding that happened in the Midwest. This new law set forth a framework and process that carried the nation through more than 50 years of experience. This act provided an orderly and continuing means of assistance by the Federal government to States and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities to take away suffering and damage that resulted in major disasters that includes flooding. This new law made federal disaster assistance more accessible, because

it no longer required specific congressional legislations to address each new disaster, but instead to allow the president decides when federal disaster assistance was justified and necessary. The Disaster Relief Act of 1950 put in place a standard that governs states to ask the president to approve federal disaster assistance for their respective states and localities. This set precedents by establishing a federal policy for providing emergency relief, by laying out national governmental responsibility in disasters and by transforming the intergovernmental context of disasters (Sylves, 2008).

In May 1974, President Nixon signed into law the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, for the first time this act created a program that provided direct assistance to individuals and families following a disaster. The Disaster Relief Act of 1974 brought state and local governments into all-hazards preparedness activities and provided matching funds for their emergency management programs, this act also authorized in law emergency declaration category. This law also recognized the need for improved disaster mitigation. This required states and communities that were receiving federal disaster assistance to agree that the natural hazards in the areas in which the proceeds of the grants or loans are to be used shall be evaluated and appropriate action shall be taken to mitigate such hazards. Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 is a law that amended the 1988 Stafford Act and gave FEMA authority to establish a program of technical and financial assistance for enhanced pre-disaster mitigation to state and local governments. This law also helps to make changes to the 1974 requirements for post-disaster mitigation plans by requiring that states prepare a comprehensive state program for pre-disaster emergency and disaster mitigation before they could receive post-disaster declaration mitigation funds from FEMA. The aim of this law was to engage local governments to engage in such mitigation activities as hazard mapping, planning, and development of hazard-sensitive building codes. The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is the largest source of funding for state and local mitigation activities. This program was enacted by Congress in 1988 as a part of the Robert T. Stafford Act, which was a major reworking of federal disaster policy. This grant program allowed states to hire staff to work on mitigation and to require development of a state Hazard Mitigation Plan as a condition of funding. HMGP brought about change in the emergency management community at the state and local levels.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) origins came from the National Governors Association in the 1970s and a working group in 1978 was formed by President Carter. FEMA implemented the National Flood Insurance Program to be utilized under their agency. By May of 1980, FEMA had adopted a fund-matching policy that required state and local governments to agree to pay 25% of the eligible costs of public assistance programs. The nonfederal contribution was subject to negotiation between FEMA and the affected state and local governments. Since the 1950, presidents have remained free to waive part or the entire state-local match for any declaration they issue, despite the 25% funding –match rule (Sylves, 2008). The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has been considered to be one of the most successful mitigation programs ever created. The NFIP was created by Congress in response to damages from multiple, severe hurricanes and inland flooding and the rising costs of disaster assistance after these floods. This program was designed to be a voluntary program and it did not prosper during the early

years, even though flooding still continued. Over the years, the NFIP has created other incentives, such as the Community Rating System. This program rewards different communities that go beyond the minimum floodplain ordinance requirements with reduced insurance premiums. The NFIP represents one of the best public/private partnerships. Today, more than 20,000 communities in the NFIP have programs for mitigation in place. The Department of Homeland Security writes, (From the National Response Plan (NRP) Letter of Agreement) The NRP is an all-discipline, all-hazards plan that establishes a single, comprehensive framework for the management of domestic incidents. It provides the structure and mechanisms for the coordination of Federal support to State, local, and tribal incident managers and for exercising direct Federal authorities and responsibilities. The NRP assists in the important homeland security mission of preventing terrorists' attacks within the United States; reducing the vulnerability to all natural and manmade hazards; and minimizing the damage and assisting in the recovery from any type of incident that occurs (Haddow, 2008). The NRP was designed according to the template of the National Incident Management System-March 2004) this was to ensure that a framework exists for the management of incidents at all jurisdictional levels, regardless of the cause, and size of the incident. The NRP established mechanisms to maximize the integration of incident-related prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities, facilitate federal-to-federal interaction and emergency support, and address linkages to other federal incident management and emergency response plans developed for specific types of incidents or hazards.

Conclusion

As we move through the 21st century, Emergency management must become a central activity, whether at the federal, state, or local level or as an intergovernmental activity. This field is complex as we continue to face new threats and risks, but many approaches can and have been taken into consideration to identify the problem and needs of emergency management.

The United States in an average year will spend \$2 billion to \$3 billion in damages due to floods. Tornadoes will leave over 100 people dead. Fires will kill more than 6,000. These emergencies occur regularly and others are waiting to happen. There are 9,000 high hazard dams in the country. Four billion tons of hazardous materials move through transportation system each year. Thirty-nine states are at risk from earthquakes and 22 metropolitan areas from hurricanes. The issue is not whether governments will be required to respond to emergencies but rather when and how frequently. Since now we do have policy and procedures in place for natural disasters now that can be used when a disaster strikes whether it is natural, technological or man-made. Hopefully, in the near future the government will not have to wait for a disaster to strike for a policy to be developed as this has occurred in some instances. With new perspectives and expertise on hand the government should be ready to take on any disaster if it occurs with the following policies and procedures that are currently in place. It is the responsibility of government and community-at-large to always be prepared to take the necessary measures prior to the inception of a disaster.

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