

EXPLOITING EMERGENCIES: GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION AND REPRESSION IN POST-DISASTER SOCIETIES

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Background

Natural disasters are one of the most devastating events a state can experience. They are almost impossible to predict, expensive to prepare for, and difficult to mitigate. Their destruction exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities and can ruin millions of lives. Disasters also provide state governments opportunities to respond either extremely well, or to exploit the catastrophe. It is for these reasons that political scientists have an interest in studying government behavior in post-disaster societies.

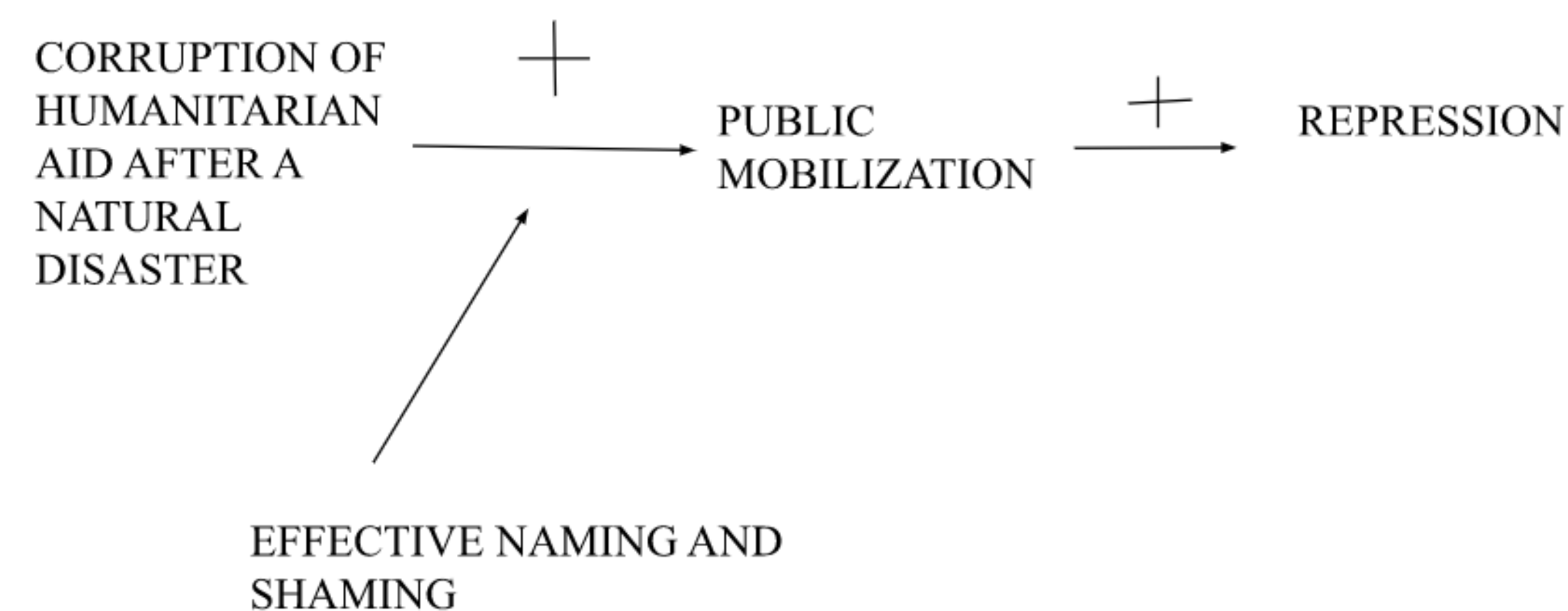
State Repression

A few causal explanations for the link between natural disasters and an increase in state repression are proposed, such as previous grievances held by the population being exacerbated or new or existing inequalities being exposed by the disaster, leading to dissent from the population, which pushes the state towards repression.

Government Corruption

Huge influxes of foreign aid from a variety of sources, like the ones that occur after natural disasters, create windows of opportunity for government corruption. The chaos following a disaster event also make it difficult to track flows of money, allowing for corruption to take place more easily.

Hypothesis & Theory



H1: If corruption of humanitarian aid after a natural disaster is discovered by the public, there will be public mobilization that the state will respond to with repressive measures.

Comparative Case Study

I conducted a Method of Difference case study in which I found two cases that were comparable across most control variables, so that potential variation in the independent variable could be isolated as the cause of any potential variation in the dependent variable.

Case	Disaster type	Severity	Deaths	Aid received	CPI rating
Chile 2010	Earthquake & tsunami	8 Richter	525	\$68,705,000	21/179
Peru 2007	Earthquake & tsunami	9 Richter	519	\$52,191,000	71/179

Analysis

There is evidence for some corruption and politicization of humanitarian aid in Peru. While there were protests in response to the unmet needs of the populous, the protests were not in response to the politicization of aid. In Chile, no corruption (or no known corruption) of humanitarian aid was observed. Unlike in Peru, there was no evidence of organized protests in Chile, but rather an immediate, unorganized criticism of Chile's overall response.

Conclusion

The largest limitation of this project comes in the difficulties in measuring corruption, and the phenomenon of corruption of humanitarian aid specifically. Corruption is inherently hidden, and thus difficult to accurately measure. As such, results are presented with a caveat, as I cannot be absolutely sure that no corruption was present, just that, to the best of my knowledge and abilities, there was no evidence of corruption. Policy Prescription: there needs to be a better system within humanitarian NGOs for reporting and tracing the flow and use of the aid they provide. It would benefit both the aid recipients and the donors to increase transparency about where the money is going. .