

No relief: Why do aid-dependent states fail to seek humanitarian aid?

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Abstract

In the wake of disasters, such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, and epidemics, humanitarian aid can provide lifesaving support for people in need, but leaders sometimes prevent their citizens from accessing aid offered by foreign actors. Why do leaders refuse humanitarian aid after disasters? I argue that leaders act strategically, based on the understanding that their response to disasters will influence powerful donor states' perceptions of the regime's competence. These consequences depend on the type of disaster; seeking humanitarian aid conveys incompetence in response to slow-onset events, such as droughts, by revealing that the state failed to prevent extreme suffering. The same action conveys competence after fast-onset events because no intervention could prevent these events. These dynamics create incentives for leaders to conceal slow-onset events, foregoing humanitarian aid to gain access to preferable, fungible aid flows, but to seek humanitarian aid in response to fast-onset events. I test these expectations using new data on government policy decisions in response to 546 fast- and slow-onset disasters from 1989 to 2019. Consistent with my theory, I find that states are more likely to both provide relief and request humanitarian aid in response to fast-onset rather than slow-onset events. I leverage additional cross-national data and qualitative and survey evidence from a single case to assess whether my theoretical framework explains this empirical pattern. This paper contributes to a growing literature on the strategic behavior of weak states by providing evidence that these states forego short-term benefit of humanitarian aid in pursuit of long-term objectives. I show this in the context of disaster response, an issue area where recipient states are often characterized as passive observers.

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The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters is one of the most visible consequences of climate change. Although disasters are increasing everywhere, their adverse consequences disproportionately affect poor countries, with 91 percent of deaths from disasters occurring in countries the U.N. classifies as developing (WMO 2021).¹ For people in the path of these disasters, emergency relief—delivery of food, shelter, medical care and other emergency services—can make the difference between life and death. To fund emergency relief, donor states offer humanitarian aid to recipient countries when they assess that recipients governments' own resources are insufficient to fund emergency relief. In recent years, the volume of humanitarian aid has increased dramatically from \$5 billion in 2005 to over \$25 billion today (OCHA 2020). Rapid delivery of emergency relief can alleviate the suffering caused by disasters, but delaying or preventing the delivery of emergency relief causes unnecessary suffering for the most vulnerable people (Cohen and Werker 2008; Clarke and Dercon 2016).

Despite the availability of donor funding for humanitarian aid, and citizens' demands for relief, leaders do not always provide emergency relief or seek humanitarian aid from donors. My analysis suggests that leaders of lower- and lower-middle income states seek aid in response to fewer than 30% of disasters.² Some leaders even refuse donors' offers of humanitarian aid. Refusals can be explicit, such as when India refused all offers of humanitarian aid after the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, claiming sufficient domestic capacity to provide emergency relief (AFP 2004, 2005). In other instance, refusals are less explicit. Leaders can refuse aid by dragging their feet and minimizing the magnitude of suffering. For example, in 1985 Sudan experienced a famine of similar magnitude to the notorious famine that gripped in Ethiopia that year. Fearing that characterizing the situation as an emergency would reveal the failure of its agricultural policies and undermine its image as a regional breadbasket, the Sudanese government presented conditions as normal, despite severe need for aid on the ground (Kent 1987, p. 75). The government relented and finally requested and received aid after denial became untenable.

Both researchers and policymakers expect state leaders to act strategically when they negotiate access to desirable resources that a small number of powerful states control: concessional lending, development grants, participation in international institutions (Hyde 2011; Stone 2002; Hafner-Burton, Mansfield and Pevehouse 2015). Yet, the research on strategic interactions between recipient states and powerful donor states conventionally excludes the domain of humanitarian aid.³ Scholars study humanitarian aid separately because donors do not condition eligibility for aid on recipients' adoption of specific policies, instead to be eligible for humanitarian aid, donors must simply perceive conditions in the recipient state a humanitarian emergency (Barnett 2009). Consequently, humanitarian aid, presents an opportunity for recipient states to access resources without making costly policy concessions to donor states. By substituting aid for the state's own resources, leaders can reallocate their budget to other priorities. This logic suggests clear incentives for states to seek humanitarian aid when disaster strikes, without significant costs to seeking out these resources.

Nevertheless, leaders do not always seek humanitarian aid in response to disasters, and in some cases

¹I use the term disasters rather than disasters because the consequences of natural hazards are mediated by political decisions (Cohen and Werker 2008).

²I find that leaders request aid in response to 27% of disaster events that affect more than 1% of their population.

³Two important recent exceptions Cheng and Minhas (2021) and Campbell and Spilker (2021) explore donor motivations to allocate aid across multiple sectors, but they do not analyze the strategic behavior of recipient governments.

they actively oppose it. Existing research provides several explanations for such a strategy. Leaders may refuse international humanitarian aid to punish domestic opponents by withholding material support, and this logic likely explains leaders' refusals in conflict settings, in which humanitarian aid can provide advantages to the weaker side in asymmetric conflict (Narang 2015; de Waal 2018). A leader's general preference to avoid international meddling in domestic affairs could explain refusals of humanitarian aid, but this motivation fails to explain why the same leader would refuse humanitarian aid in one instance but accept it in another. Alternatively, leaders may refuse aid after disasters to demonstrate to the international community that they are self-sufficient and can fund emergency relief without donor support (Carnegie and Dolan 2020). This self-sufficiency argument explains refusals when the international community finds such claims plausible, such as India in 2004. However, it does not explain refusals by leaders of states who cannot make a plausible claim to self-sufficiency because they lack the required domestic resources and need humanitarian aid the most.

This paper focuses on the strategic behavior of states that are regularly on the receiving end of multiple forms of international assistance, those for whom claims of self-sufficiency are implausible. When disaster strikes, these states are the *least* likely to possess sufficient domestic capacity to provide emergency relief and therefore the *most* likely to seek international humanitarian aid. Even so, I document significant variation in how these states respond to disasters. Leaders declare emergencies for only 32% of disasters and request aid for only 27% of disasters. States act strategically when deciding whether to seek humanitarian aid because the decision is politically consequential for the state's future access to international resources and, thereby, the incumbent's political survival. In considering whether to seek international support, leaders understand that their decision will affect how they are perceived by donor states after disaster response ends.

Specifically, a recipient state's decision to request humanitarian aid influences how powerful donor states perceive its competence, which in turn shape the types of resources donors are willing to offer after the emergency ends. The consequences of these decisions depend on the type of disaster in question; seeking aid in response to slow-onset events (droughts, epidemics) conveys a lack of competence because it reveals that leaders failed to seize the opportunity to mitigate an emergency, but seeking aid in response to fast-onset events (floods, earthquakes) does not because fast-onset events are seen as exogenous shocks. Consequently I expect leaders to forego the short-term benefit of humanitarian aid in response to slow-onset but not fast-onset events. They forego humanitarian aid to preserve donors' perceptions of their competence, framing slow-onset events not as emergencies but normal conditions, which will enable them to access types of aid that they prefer to humanitarian assistance, i.e development aid.

To test my argument, I use newly-collected data on government responses to 546 fast- and slow-onset disasters in lower-income countries over the 1989-2019 period. I assess the relationship between the type of disaster and leaders' decisions to declare an emergency and to request humanitarian aid from foreign donors. I complement the cross-national analysis with quantitative and qualitative data from a single case. Based on nine months of fieldwork in Niger, these data include interviews with government officials, donor representatives, and humanitarian aid workers, and a survey of 400 government bureaucrats. To probe the plausibility of the theoretical mechanism, I test three key underlying assumptions: 1) I use data on U.S. humanitarian aid allocation to test whether leaders' emergency declarations or aid requests

influence donors' propensity to offer humanitarian aid, 2) I leverage interview and survey data from Niger to evaluate whether concerns about competence influence government officials' decisions 3) I test whether foreign evaluations of the state's competence after disaster response vary by disaster type, using data on political and economic risk ratings.

I find that leaders are more likely to both declare emergencies and request humanitarian aid in response to fast-onset rather than slow-onset events. Experiencing a fast-onset disaster increases leaders' probability of declaring an emergency by 14 percentage points and of requesting aid by 15 percentage points. The additional tests demonstrate that these policy choices are consequential. Data on donor aid allocation shows that donors are more likely to offer humanitarian aid if leaders either declare an emergency or request aid, and leaders' decisions precede donor offers. Evidence from the case of Niger suggests that government officials in recipient states have strong preferences for donors to provide development aid rather than humanitarian aid. These officials see improving donors' perceptions of the state as crucial to accessing the types of resources they prefer, and Nigerien officials invest resources in improving foreign perceptions of their state. Lastly, analysis of political and economic risk ratings suggests that foreign perceptions of competence worsen after leaders declare emergencies and request aid response to slow-onset events but no such penalty occurs after the same action in response to fast-onset events. Leaders' concerns about foreign perceptions of their competence explains the empirical pattern in which leaders are more likely to declare emergencies and seek aid in response to fast-onset events.

This paper makes three main contributions to international relations scholarship. First, I contribute to a growing literature on the multidimensionality of reputation and how states can improve their international reputation short of war (Dafoe, Renshon and Huth 2014; Clary 2020; Jervis, Yarhi-Milo and Casler 2021). I show that leaders value improving donor perceptions of their competence and disaster response provides opportunities to do so. Second, I provide evidence of recipient states acting strategically in an area for which they are often characterized as lacking agency or power: humanitarian responses to disasters. In contrast with existing studies that portray donors as unilateral decision-makers in the allocation of humanitarian aid, I show that recipient states influence donors' decisions to offer humanitarian aid (Drury, Olson and van Belle 2005; Kevlihan, DeRouen and Biglaiser 2014; Dellmuth et al. 2021). Third, I contribute to research on the political economy of disaster responses by demonstrating how different different types of disasters produce different incentives for leaders. Fast- and slow-onset events are often analyzed separately, and studies that include both fast- and slow-onset events rarely investigate the different incentives these disasters produce (Wood and Molfino 2016; Carlin, Love and Zechmeister 2014; Cole, Healy and Werker 2012; Bjørnskov and Voigt 2020). Lastly, I offer a new measurement strategy that includes both leaders decisions to declare emergencies and request aid, and the elapsed time to these outcomes. These data facilitate description and analysis of previously unexplored variation in responses to disasters.

Why forego humanitarian aid?

To understand why leaders would choose to forego humanitarian aid, it important to understand how donors' preferences influence leaders' incentives to act. I first describe the preferences of powerful donor states and how they shape aid allocation. I then turn to describe the resulting incentives for recipient

states. After describing the process through which leaders decide how to respond to disasters, I explain how leaders' incentives lead them to respond differently to fast- and slow-onset disasters.

Donor state preferences

Powerful states control the distribution of resources that less powerful states wish to attract, such as concessional financing and grants, preferential trade agreements, and military support, and they allocate resources to recipient states that demonstrate their preferred characteristics (Hyde 2011; Stone 2004). Western donors direct the majority of these resources, and they prefer both specific policies—democratization, market liberalization—and intangible characteristics associated with “good governance,” such as transparency, accountability, and institutional effectiveness (Clark and Dolan 2021; Dunning 2004; Hafner-Burton 2005).⁴ These preferences influence both donors' selection of the states to whom they will offer aid and their choice of the mechanisms of aid delivery (Bermeo 2017). Western donors increasingly impose on aid deals to ensure effective aid delivery. Donors can choose to condition aid on policy change or to bypass these state structures in favor of NGOs in order to make aid less fungible than other forms of non-tax revenues (Bermeo 2011; Dietrich and Winters 2015).

In addition to the characteristics documented in existing research, I argue that donors value the competence of the recipient state. Competence refers to a government's credibility to follow through on its commitments, and governments develop a reputation for competence through repeated interactions with donors.⁵ When donors perceive a state to be competent, they trust that aid channeled through state structures will be used for its intended purpose. Consequently, donors are more likely to offer leaders of such states aid that is fungible, over which state leaders can exercise greater discretion (Bermeo 2016). The classic example of fungible aid is budgetary support, which is delivered directly to the recipient government as un-earmarked contributions to its budget. When donors see a state as incompetent, they fear that channeling aid through the state structures would result in misuse and corruption. To prevent such an outcome, they offer less fungible forms of aid, imposing policy conditions and/or directing aid through channels that bypass the government (Dietrich 2013; Winters and Martinez 2015). Donors respond to greater uncertainty, such as post-conflict contexts experiencing renewed violence, by allocating more aid through bypass channels (Campbell and Spilker 2021). Donors also offer aid through bypass channels when they prioritize the speed of aid delivery, such as when they provide humanitarian aid after disasters (Fuchs and Siewers N.d.).

Importantly, I conceptualize perceptions of competence as relative; when making allocation decisions, donors do not evaluate potential recipients independently, but rather in comparison with each other.⁶ Although rankings of states' credibility are not explicit or formalized, donors implicitly compare states to each other when making decisions about resource allocation. Relative ranking systems produce social hierarchies with competitive dynamics, in which states at all levels of the hierarchy pay close attention to

⁴China offers an alternative model; it does not condition aid on the recipient's political institutions (Hoeffler and Sterck 2022). However there is little evidence that Chinese development aid crowds out Western aid or undermines the effectiveness of conditionality (Dreher et al. 2016).

⁵A reputation for competence is similar to Jervis (1989) “signaling reputation” or Schelling (1966) “reputation for action.” Such reputations accrue to states beyond the tenure of individual leaders (Renshon, Dafoe and Huth 2018).

⁶I use the terms reputation for competence and perceptions of competence interchangeably. The term reputation for competence refers to donors beliefs about the recipient state's future behavior, which is similar to donors' perceptions of the state's competence.

others actions (Towns and Rumelli 2017, p. 759). I argue that implicit comparisons of states' credibility create similar dynamics. Competition for scarce resources creates pressure for states to improve their reputation relative to their peers.⁷

Recipient state preferences

Leaders seek to improve their reputation abroad for both its intrinsic value and in pursuit of the extrinsic material benefits that result from improved status (Dafoe, Renshon and Huth 2014; Tomz 2007). To improve their reputations, leaders deploy diverse strategies, including genuine policy reforms, cosmetic changes to policy, and misrepresentation of their policies (Carnegie and Samii 2019; Hyde 2011; Gray 2013). Without discounting the intrinsic value of improved reputation, I focus on extrinsic benefits that motivate poor states to improve international reputations. Specifically, I argue that leaders seek to improve their reputation for competence in order to gain access to the fungible forms of aid that they prefer.

Leaders and politicians prefer for the state to directly receive aid flows so they can more easily direct aid resources to pursue their own objectives, whether policy or patronage (Findley et al. 2017). Politicians can use foreign aid to ensure their own political survival, and this is easier with more fungible forms of foreign aid (Ahmed 2012; Licht 2010; Jablonski 2014). Leaders prefer when donors commit foreign aid over longer time horizons i.e. multiple years, rather than offers of short-term support i.e. several months because long-term offers can insulate leaders against volatility in other sources of state revenues. The withdrawal of fungible aid threatens stability because leaders are no longer able to credibly commit to future resource transfers (Nielsen et al. 2011).

To illustrate leaders' preference for fungible aid over non-fungible forms of aid, consider two types of aid often offered to poor countries: humanitarian aid and development aid. Humanitarian aid refers to funding for emergency relief to save lives and alleviate suffering in response to disasters and conflict. Donors channel the majority of humanitarian aid through NGOs that specialize in delivering emergency relief directly to people in need, and they fund humanitarian aid for three to six months at a time (Krause 2014). The only condition states must meet to be eligible to receive humanitarian aid is experiencing an emergency that exceeds the capacity of the state to respond. Development aid refers to funding to address the structural drivers of poverty and inequality; examples include funding to build infrastructure, strengthen health systems, and improve agricultural practices. Compared to humanitarian aid donors channel a greater proportion of development aid to state institutions, and they offer development aid over longer time horizons. Leaders of recipient states thus generally prefer development aid to humanitarian aid.

From the perspective of recipient states fungible aid is both desirable and scarce, and their ability to attract it depends on their ability to convince donors of their competence.⁸ Following through on

⁷To find the most favorable deal, recipients can shop around and solicit aid from diverse donors, as some donors are more likely to offer more fungible forms of aid than others (Dietrich 2016). However, the number of recipients and the volume of demand for fungible aid exceeds donors willingness to supply it. If a donor and recipient are bargaining over aid, the donor has many more attractive alternatives than the recipient does, and thus faces little incentive to offer fungible aid if they doubt the recipient's credibility.

⁸States can cultivate reputations across multiple dimensions, and the degree to which leaders' prioritize their various reputations varies among regimes and individual (Brutger and Kertzer 2018). I do not assert that all states value a

commitments improves a state's reputation for competence whereas failing to do so undermines it. Past research has found that leaders can signal competence by sending costly signals of their commitment to good governance, such as hosting peacekeeping missions, which donors reward with development aid (Maekawa 2024). Private firms in turn interpret donors' allocation of development aid as a signal that "donors trust the government to properly handle the funds," which spurs foreign direct investment (Garriga and Phillips 2014). Leaders strive to create such virtuous cycles, in which donors reward improved perceptions of the state's competence with more fungible resources, which in turn signals the state's competence to other actors. They work to improve donors' perceptions of their competence so that donors will be more likely to offer them the fungible forms of aid they prefer, such as development aid, rather than less fungible forms of aid, such as humanitarian aid.

Recipient state responses to disaster events

I apply the logic of states seeking to improve donors' perceptions of their competence to disaster response. Disasters include natural hazards, such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, or storms that result in material damage that exceeds the affected community's capacity to respond (IFRC 2020). Disasters cause extraordinary suffering: injuries, deaths, displacement, and destruction of public infrastructure and private property. Victims of disasters seek emergency relief to meet their basic needs: food, water, shelter, and healthcare.

State leaders decide what role, if any, the state will play in providing emergency relief and whether they will seek humanitarian aid from the international community to fund relief efforts. When leaders learn of a disaster, they first decide whether to allocate resources to fund relief activities and mobilize state services, including the military, to deliver relief. Leaders publicize these decisions by declaring emergencies.⁹ Declaring an emergency communicates the need for state and private entities to take extraordinary measures to respond to the disaster. Leaders then decide whether to seek humanitarian aid from the international community to fund relief efforts. Leaders request humanitarian aid from bilateral donors and multilateral organizations, specifying the type of support that is most needed. Requesting aid communicates that the government intends to provide emergency relief to affected populations, but they need additional financial and technical capacity to deliver relief. In response to these requests, donors choose whether they will offer aid to leaders, and leaders then decide whether to accept these offers. If leaders and donors disagree over the type of aid, modality of delivery, or intended recipients, they negotiate to find terms that are acceptable to all parties, but such negotiations delay humanitarian aid delivery.

Disaster response reveals information about the government's capacity, competence, and credibility to its domestic constituents (Olson and Gawronski 2010). If leaders deliver emergency relief, fulfilling the social contract when their citizens need help the most, they can win new supporters, but failing to meet citizens' demands for relief risks of increased instability and potential removal from office (Apodaca

reputation for competence, rather than aid dependent states value cultivating a reputation for competence because it helps them access various material benefits. States with few alternative sources of revenue may be particularly likely to prioritize cultivating a reputation for competence because they are more desperate for resources. See Girod (2012).

⁹This includes, but is not limited to declaring a state of emergency. Some governments use state of emergency declarations after disasters to provide the executive with additional authority or to make additional funding available (Bjørnskov and Voigt 2020). However, other disaster declarations do not typically have this legal power.

2017; Fair et al. 2017; Kosec and Mo 2017; Wood and Wright 2016). Leaders are more likely to declare emergencies and provide emergency relief when they are directly accountable to victims of disasters. In democracies, governments are more likely to provide emergency relief when a larger share of the electorate is adversely affected by disasters. Leaders channel emergency relief to their supporters, even when other areas evince greater need (Eichenauer et al. 2020; Francken, Minten and Swinnen 2012). Voters punish governments who fail to provide relief and reward those that deliver (Healy and Malhotra 2009; Cole, Healy and Werker 2012; Gasper and Reeves 2011).¹⁰ Leaders in autocracies face fewer domestic incentives to provide emergency relief because their elite constituents are less likely to be adversely affected by disasters than the general public. Consequently, leaders in autocratic states are less likely to face removal if they fail to provide emergency relief (Plümper and Neumayer 2009; Flores and Smith 2013).¹¹

Strategic logic of disaster response

In addition to these domestic dynamics, disasters present opportunities for leaders to convince donors of their competence and risk exposing incompetence. Donors are more likely to see governments that adopt a policy response they view as appropriate as competent whereas they will see governments that fail to adopt an appropriate policy response as incompetent. The consequences of leaders' decisions for donors' perceptions of their competence vary according to the type of disaster because donors' expectations of government response vary by disaster type. I differentiate between fast-onset and slow-onset events, following the technical literature on disaster management (Ticktin 2014). Donors see preemptive mitigation as the appropriate response to slow-onset disasters and quick provision of emergency relief as the appropriate response to fast-onset disasters.

Fast-onset events refer to disasters that occur with little warning, such as earthquakes, floods, or volcanic eruptions.¹² Most resulting damage occurs within hours or days of event onset. These disasters are often thought of as "acts of god" and the damage they cause is difficult to mitigate in advance. The discrete moment of onset facilitates accurate measurement of the damage they cause. Fast-onset events generate scenes of extraordinary damage, houses submerged by flash floods or towns torn apart by earthquakes, and they receive more news coverage than slow-onset events (Eisensee and Strömberg 2007, p. 723). Media coverage focuses the attention of both domestic and international audiences on these sensational images of human suffering.¹³

By contrast slow-onset events, such as droughts or epidemics, occur gradually, with no singular moment of onset to capture attention (Coppola 2015). Because these events occur slowly, it is easy to imagine how early intervention could mitigate their effects. The challenge of identifying a clear moment of onset impedes accurate measurement of the resulting damage (Hill, Skoufias and Maher 2019). Both the gradual nature of slow-onset events and the poor quality of information collected about them make

¹⁰These incentives also make democratic states more likely to invest in disaster prevention, although prevention provides fewer electoral benefits than relief (Sen 1999; Gailmard and Patty 2019).

¹¹Some scholars argue that the presence or availability of emergency relief further undermines accountability between citizens and the state (de Waal 1997).

¹²These are also referred to as rapid-onset disasters

¹³Although some studies of donor aid allocation to disasters emphasized the role of media coverage in determining disaster response, it is not a focus here because media coverage is mediated by disaster type (Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen 2003; Eisensee and Strömberg 2007).

these disasters less likely to receive media attention.

Although effects of both fast- and slow-onset disasters are mediated by a state's wealth, political institutions, and prior investment in disaster risk reduction (Kahn 2005; Keefer, Neumayer and Plümper 2011), the gradual nature of slow-onset events presents leaders with greater opportunities to intervene to blunt their consequences compared to fast-onset events. Early intervention is more effective; it saves more lives and requires fewer resources to do so (Clarke and Dercon 2016). Donors, who value effectiveness, expect leaders to intervene to mitigate the effects of slow-onset disasters before they reach the status of an emergency. This window of opportunity is much shorter for fast-onset events. Consequently, donors are more likely to see requests for humanitarian aid as appropriate in response to fast-onset events because leaders could not have feasibly taken other action to mitigate their effects. In response to slow-onset events, donors are less likely to see requests for humanitarian aid as appropriate because these actions suggest that mitigation efforts were either not attempted or unsuccessful; government had time to act and could have mitigated the suffering with different policy choices.

However, donors only evaluate whether disaster response is appropriate and judge the competence of the state if they see the event as an emergency.¹⁴ This presents leaders with an opportunity to influence donors' perceptions of disasters. The features that make fast-onset events difficult to mitigate—their sudden nature and the clear change between *ex ante* and *ex post* conditions—make them *easier* to observe and *easier* to interpret as emergencies requiring relief compared to slow-onset events. The features of slow-onset events that make them possible to mitigate also make them more difficult to observe and measure. There is greater ambiguity regarding if and when a slow-onset event becomes an emergency. This ambiguity provides opportunities for leaders to intervene and influence how donors perceive slow-onset events. The gradual nature of these events provides the opportunity for leaders to shape narratives around slow-onset events, to frame them as normal occurrences instead of exceptional deviations. Specifically, leaders can frame slow-onset events as within the range of normal challenges to development the state confronts as a way to justify seeking developmental rather than humanitarian assistance.

I expect these differences between fast- and slow-onset events to inform leaders' responses to disasters. Specifically, I anticipate they will be more likely to declare emergencies and provide emergency relief in response to fast-onset events rather than slow-onset events. By declaring emergencies in response to fast-onset events, leaders convey that they are responding appropriately to events beyond their control. Taking the same action in response to slow-onset events conveys that leaders failed to intervene to stop deaths or damage that they could have prevented. This suggests leaders did not act appropriately and signals incompetence. Because declaring emergencies in response to slow-onset events conveys damaging information about a state's competence, leaders confronting slow-onset events will be less likely to declare emergencies in order to prevent donors from seeing them as emergencies. Such actions include portraying these events as long-term development challenges and under-reporting the magnitude

¹⁴No defined empirical threshold distinguishes events as emergencies; they are instead defined as exceptional deviations from otherwise normal social conditions (Calhoun 2010). Emergencies are often defined as events that require emergency relief, extraordinary mobilization of resources, because they produce exceptional suffering (Everett 2016).

of suffering caused by disaster events.

The importance of such revelations for donors' perceptions of a state's competence depends on donors' prior beliefs about a state's competence. Novel information is more influential than information that confirms prior beliefs, like when a state with a history of defaulting on debt then pays on time (Tomz 2007). Donors are more likely to update their beliefs about a state if, for example, a state donors perceive as incompetent responds to a fast-onset disaster by declaring an emergency and requesting aid, or donors learn that a state they believe to be competent misrepresented the magnitude of a slow-onset disaster that is later revealed. Despite the relevance of donors' prior beliefs about a state's competence for the effect of new information on the state's reputation for competence, I do not expect states' strategies to vary significantly according to their competence because I anticipate that leaders of both competent and incompetent states wish to be perceived as competent. Leaders of the most competent states wish to maintain their reputation for competence, and leaders of even the least competent states wish to improve their reputations for competence. If there is some threshold at which incompetent states abandon the pursuit of competence, I would expect the least competent states to act differently; they would have nothing to gain from concealing slow-onset emergencies.

Hypothesis 1: Leaders are more likely to mobilize their own resources to provide emergency relief (declare emergencies) in response to fast-onset disasters rather than slow-onset disasters.

The decision to seek international humanitarian aid is analytically distinct from but linked to a leader's decision to declare an emergency. In general, I expect leaders who declare emergencies be more likely to request humanitarian aid because they have already conveyed information about their competence by declaring an emergency. If leaders have already declared an emergency, by requesting aid they only reveal that their own domestic resources are insufficient to address the emergency at hand. If leaders have not declared an emergency, the decision to seek humanitarian aid reveals two pieces of information: emergency relief is necessary and the state cannot provide such relief without international support.

The consequences of such an revelations depend on the type of disaster event. For fast-onset events, both declaring an emergency and requesting aid can convey competence because from the perspective of donors, leaders are responding appropriately to a situation they could not prevent. For slow-onset events, however, declaring an emergency, or requesting aid (if leaders have not declared an emergency) conveys incompetence because it reveals that leaders have failed to take appropriate mitigation measures and are now unable to manage the situation without external support. I thus expect leaders to be more likely to seek humanitarian aid in response to fast-onset events and to be less likely to do so in response to slow-onset events.

If leaders choose to frame slow-onset events as normal, not as emergencies, they forego the opportunity to attract humanitarian aid. If leaders later reverse course and request aid, the reputational consequences will be worse the longer they wait. The strategy of under-reporting the magnitude of an event is high risk because there is always a chance that donors will uncover evidence of deception. If donors discover that leaders have attempted to portray slow-onset events that cause mass suffering as normal conditions, this is likely to damage their perceptions of the state's competence to an even greater degree than

declaring an emergency and requesting aid in the first place would have. Why would leaders take this risk? Leaders of competent states may judge the risk to be worthwhile since they have more to lose than less competent states from a novel signal of incompetence. What is more, because donors already see these states as competent, donors may be less likely to suspect them of orchestrating a cover-up, and they are thus less likely to detect concealment.

If leaders of less competent states have less to lose, and they may be more likely to be discovered, why would they pursue this strategy? I argue that leaders of less competent states pursue this strategy because, although they have less to lose from exposure, they have more to gain if they succeed. Recall that leaders of less competent states want to improve donors' perceptions of their competence to convince donors to offer them the types of aid they prefer in the long term. When leaders frame slow-onset events as normal they are willing to forego humanitarian aid in the short term in order to convince donors that they are the type of state to whom donors offer fungible aid to address these long-term challenges. If leaders succeed at convincing donors they face structural developmental challenges, they are more likely to succeed in convincing donors to offer them development aid rather than humanitarian aid. If they fail, the only consequence is that donors will think they are incompetent, which does not differ much from the status quo. When they fail to convince donors that disaster is not an emergency, they can then request humanitarian aid after they are discovered; at this point requesting aid conveys no new information and, they can at least attract some new resources for emergency relief. For leaders of less competent states, the potential benefits of successfully framing a slow-onset disaster as a non-emergency outweigh the costs because being discovered only reinforces the status quo.

Hypothesis 2: Leaders are more likely to seek resources from foreign donors (request humanitarian aid) in response to fast-onset events rather than slow-onset events

Alternative Explanations

Existing research offers alternative explanations, which I describe below, along with their observable implications. Table 1 maps these alternative theories onto the hypotheses and shows how they compare with my competence-based theory.

Self-Sufficiency A nuanced alternative argument contends that when responding to disasters, leaders value how they are perceived by more powerful states, but they are acting to portray themselves as *self-sufficient* in pursuit prestige rather than *competent* in order to attract fungible resources (Carnegie and Dolan 2020).¹⁵ On this basis, they expect incompetent states to mimic competent states by rejecting aid, only when it is plausible that the government has sufficient resources to portray itself as self-sufficient. Consequently, they do not expect poor states to be able to use this strategy of aid rejection because, “low income states are seen as too needy to trick observers,” (p. 6). The assumption that governments will provide relief in response to fast-onset events is consistent with my expectations,

¹⁵Carnegie and Dolan (2020) show that governments refuse humanitarian aid in response to large, fast-onset emergencies in order to demonstrate self-sufficiency to the international community; by rejecting aid governments demonstrate their ability to go it alone. They argue that states value appearing self-sufficient and assert that rejecting aid conveys self-sufficiency. Their analysis focuses specifically on the act of rejecting aid, when a recipient government declines a donor's offer of aid, and they study these rejections in response to fast-onset events which they consider the most exogenous, earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. Among these events they only consider events that kill over 300 individuals (p. 18).

but my expectations diverge when I extend their model to include slow-onset events. Refusing aid in response to slow-onset events is likely to be less credible than refusing aid in response to fast-onset events because slow-onset events cannot reach the magnitude to be considered emergencies unless government policies have failed. Fast-onset events are plausibly exogenous, and donors are more likely to believe that governments have the capacity to respond to them without external intervention. If the goal of aid refusals is to signal self-sufficiency, these refusals should be more common in response to fast-onset events, therefore, leaders should be less likely to request aid in response to fast-onset events and more likely to request aid in response to slow-onset events.

Non-interference Leaders may refuse humanitarian aid because they want to prevent powerful states from meddling in their internal affairs. This appeared to be the motivation of the Burmese government when they initially refused humanitarian aid after a cyclone devastated the Irawaddy delta in 2008 ([Times 2008](#)). If a preference for non-interference drives government responses, disaster type should not directly influence leaders' decisions to either declare emergencies or seek humanitarian aid. Other characteristics, such as the political affiliation of the population affected by the disaster could explain variation; leaders may be more motivated to seek humanitarian aid when their core supporters are adversely affected compared to when disasters disproportionately harm supporters of political opponents. However, this explanation does not generate clear observable implications for disaster type.¹⁶ One could imagine that leaders could invest in mitigating effects of disasters in areas where their political supporters live, while failing to do so in other areas. Such geographical targeting is within the capacity of even very poor states. If leaders engage in such targeting to court constituents, their strategies should not differ by disaster type. Strategies would only differ by disaster type if leaders are concerned about the consequences of external observers discovering their behavior. Behavior motivated by fear of detection is more consistent with concerns about competence than simply preferring noninterference.

Table 1: Mapping hypotheses to competence and alternative explanations

	H1	H2
Competence	Y	Y
Self-sufficiency	Y	N
Non-interference	N	N

Empirical strategy

To test whether governments' responses to disasters are consistent with my argument or with alternative explanations, I use a data on disaster events occurring in lower- and lower-middle-income countries from 1989 to 2019.¹⁷ I selected this sample because I expect the dynamic of seeking to portray one's country as competent in order to gain access to additional material resources to apply to countries that are on

¹⁶If some types of disasters were more likely to harm members of the political opposition than others, I would expect leaders to be less likely to both declare emergencies and request aid in response to the types of disasters that disproportionately affect political opponents, but I have encountered no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

¹⁷Countries are included in the sample if the World Bank classified them as lower or lower-middle income for more than half of the years in the 1989 to 2019 period. The full list of countries and the share of years they were considered lower or lower-middle income can be found in Appendix Figure [A1](#)

the receiving end of aid and concessional lending deals. This sample includes some countries that act as both donors and recipients of foreign aid, notably India and China.¹⁸ Data on disaster events are drawn from the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), in which each observation represents a unique disaster event (Guha-Sapir, Below and Hoyois 2015). To provide the most comparable set of fast and slow onset events, this analysis includes only floods (fast-onset) and droughts (slow-onset). A recent study specifically compared meteorological events in EM-DAT to satellite data of climate-related hazards and found that EM-DAT captured a representative sample of extreme meteorological events (Dellmuth et al. 2021). To ensure I am analyzing the most politically salient events, those for which citizens are most likely to demand a response from their government, I subset these events to disaster events in which at least 1 percent of the population is affected by the disaster.¹⁹

Description of Variables

To assess government responses to disasters, I use new data that measures leaders decisions to 1) mobilize their own domestic resources to provide emergency relief 2) seek resources from foreign donors to fund emergency relief. I collected these data using a qualitative coding protocol that drew on media sources and reports from U.N. agencies, humanitarian organizations, governments, and donors²⁰ The outcome variables of interest are GOVERNMENT DECLARATION and AID REQUEST. GOVERNMENT DECLARATION measures whether a government representative designates an event as an emergency, and it takes a value of 1 if a government official issues a formal statement declaring the event an emergency or stating that the government is allocating extraordinary resources to respond to the event, and a value of 0 otherwise. I use emergency declarations because they represent an extraordinary mobilization of resources. Governments can allocate resources to disaster response without declaring emergencies, but measuring emergency declarations captures instances when leaders decide that ordinary funding mechanisms are insufficient and the government must mobilize resources outside of normal channels to fund urgent relief.

To measure government's aid-seeking behavior, AID REQUEST measures whether a government official seeks humanitarian aid from international actors. AID REQUEST takes a value of 1 if a government official requests funding for emergency response from foreign governments, international organizations, or international NGOs, and 0 otherwise. Because delivering emergency relief is time sensitive, I also measure the elapsed time from the onset of the disaster event to each outcome. This allows me to capture variation in delays.²¹

I expect government policy responses to vary based on the type of disaster event. The independent variable of interest is DISASTER TYPE, a binary variable that takes a value of 0 if the event is slow onset (drought) and 1 if the event is fast onset (flood).

¹⁸Wealthier countries may have different reasons to seek or refuse emergency relief, such as the logic of signaling self sufficiency (Carnegie and Dolan 2020). Including rising powers in this analysis allows for direct comparisons.

¹⁹Analysis of both broader sample of events (all floods and droughts affecting $\geq 0.5\%$ of population) and a more restricted sample (events causing ≥ 300 deaths) are included as a robustness check in Appendix B. See Tables B7 and B8.

²⁰The qualitative coding protocol is described in greater detail in Appendix A.

²¹When there is ambiguity about the start date, I assume the latest plausible start date based on media coverage. The time to each policy outcome is measured by subtracting the start date from the date of the policy outcome: the smallest possible value is 0 days and the largest possible value is 365 days.

I include control variables to account for features of both the disaster event and the government.²² Governments are more likely to respond to events that affect more people because they are likely to face greater domestic pressure to act as the share of the population affected increases. I control for the magnitude of the event using `SHARE OF POPULATION AFFECTED`, which calculates the total number of people adversely affected by the disaster event as a share of the country's total population.²³ I expect leaders of more democratic states to be more likely to declare emergencies and seek international aid because they are more sensitive to demands from a broader share of their populations than more autocratic states (Hyde and Saunders 2020). I use `POLITY`, a normalized version of the country's Polity score to control for regime type. In states with larger political oppositions, opponents may be more likely to be affected by disasters, which might make leaders less likely to intervene on their behalf. I employ `SIZE OF OPPOSITION` from `V-DEM` to control for the size of the country's political opposition, as countries with larger political oppositions may be more likely to demand action by their leaders (Coppedge et al. 2021; Marshall and Gurr 2020). States that are more aligned with Western donor countries may be more likely to seek humanitarian aid as Western donors fund the vast majority of humanitarian aid.²⁴ I control for such geopolitical alignment by including a measure of the country's distance from the U.S. ideal point in U.N. General Assembly votes (Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten 2017). I use the U.S. ideal point because the U.S. is the largest global donor of humanitarian aid, the U.S. and has historically played an agenda-setting role in humanitarian aid allocation, and humanitarian aid allocation suffers from less donor fragmentation than other forms of foreign aid (Kevlihan, DeRouen and Biglaiser 2014; Steinwand 2015).

I control for donors prior perception of the state's competence, since on average less competent states are more likely to need humanitarian aid. Donors' perceptions of a recipient state's competence are difficult to measure, and I use indicators of government performance as a proxy. These indicators capture perceptions of the performance of a state relative to its peers in a given domain (Kelley and Simmons 2019). The idea of competence is closely linked to the idea of corruption; donors perceive states as more competent when they perceive them to be less corrupt. To proxy for perceptions of the state's competence I use the Political Corruption Index from the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al. 2021).²⁵

I expect leaders will be more likely to request humanitarian aid when the effects of a disaster exceed the government's capacity to respond. I use a country's GDP (logged and lagged one year) as a proxy measure for this capacity. Relatedly, I expect governments that are more aid-dependent to be more sensitive to the reputational consequences of both declaring emergencies and requesting aid. I control for this by including `AID DEPENDENCE`, a categorical variable classifies countries' levels of dependence

²²Table A1 presents summary statistics for all variables.

²³Data on number of affected people comes from `EM-DAT` and population totals are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (Bank 2022)

²⁴In 2017 contributions from China comprised approximately 1 of humanitarian aid spending (Kurtzer and Gonzales 2020)

²⁵More popular cross-national measures of perceived corruption (the Corruption Perception Index) and Control of Corruption are only available starting in 1998 and 1996 respectively Bank (2022). As a robustness check I substitute Control of Corruption as a measure of competence for the subset of data for which it is available. Results are presented in Appendix Table B4

as high medium or low.²⁶ Conversely, I anticipate leaders will be less likely to seek humanitarian aid in response to disasters when they are engaged in violent conflict within their own borders because leaders want to prevent opponents from accessing humanitarian aid. I control for this by including two variables that indicate whether the state was actively engaged in conflict during the same calendar year as the disaster, before the disaster event occurred (*CONFLICT*) and whether the state was engaged in conflict during the prior calendar year (*CONFLICT LAG*). Both are based on violent event coding from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) (Sundberg and Melander 2013). To account for trends in disaster response, I include control variables for the cumulative number of drought and flood events in each country.

Estimation

For both outcomes of interest, I estimate the following OLS model with fixed effects for country and year and robust standard errors clustered at the country and year. Models were implemented using the *lfe* package in R.

$$Y_{ict} = \beta \text{Disaster Type}_{ict} + \theta X_{ict} + \alpha_c + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{ict} \quad (1)$$

Each disaster is indexed with i , c indexes the country and t indexes the year. β is the coefficient of interest on disaster type, θ refers to the coefficients on a vector of control variables, α represents the country-level fixed effects and γ represents the year fixed effects, and ϵ is the error term.

Assessing balance across floods and droughts

Given the central role of disaster type to my argument and empirical test, bias in events recorded in EM-DAT correlated with disaster type would threaten the validity of inference. Floods comprise the majority (57%) of events in the data, and if floods differ from droughts in ways that would predispose leaders to either provide relief or seek aid at higher rates, I cannot attribute observed differences between floods and droughts to disaster type. To address such threats to inference, Table 2 tests for balance across drought and flood events for key covariates that predict government responses to both types of events: the magnitude of damage caused by an event, the co-occurrence of conflict with disasters, and the government's capacity to respond.

My argument predicts that leaders will be more likely to declare emergencies and request aid in response to floods, *ceteris paribus*, but if flood events in EM-DAT typically cause greater destruction than drought events in EM-DAT, leaders would be more likely provide relief and request international assistance in response to floods rather than droughts. Even if I observed the expected difference between floods and droughts I could not attribute the difference to disaster type alone. Similarly, if floods are less likely to occur in countries experiencing conflict than droughts, I would expect to observe more declarations and aid requests in response to floods because governments at peace have fewer incentives to withhold humanitarian aid than governments at war. Such a correlation would confound analysis of the relationship between disaster type and the outcomes of interest because I could not differentiate the relationship between conflict and floods from the correlation between conflict and emergency declarations

²⁶This classification is based on a calculation of net Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a share of the country's GDP. This includes ODA from all OECD countries, and this variable is lagged one year so it represents aid dependence in the year prior to the disaster event. Data on ODA is from OECD (N.d.).

or aid requests.

I observe statistically significant imbalance for the magnitude of disaster events (and the missingness of these data), GDP, and conflict status of the country where events occur. On average floods in EM-DAT affect fewer people than droughts, floods occurs in country with higher GDPs than droughts, and floods are more likely to co-occur with conflict events. The direction of the imbalance suggests a *harder* test for my theory. If leaders respond to disasters as a function of their magnitude, un-moderated by disaster type, they should be more, not less, likely to declare emergencies and request aid in response to droughts rather than floods because the average drought affects more people than the average flood. Droughts occur in poorer states with fewer resources, where leaders should be more likely to seek international humanitarian aid. In addition, the rate at which droughts and conflicts co-occur is lower than the rate at which floods and conflict co-occur, which suggests that leaders have fewer incentives to prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid in response to floods. Given these trends, if the results suggest that leaders are more likely to declare emergencies and/or request aid in response to floods rather than droughts, I can be reasonably confident that this relationship is not driven by these alternative observable factors.

Table 2: Balance across diaster types for covariates that predict government response

Disaster type Variable	Drought				Flood				Test
	N	Mean	SD	Median	N	Mean	SD	Median	
Pop. Share Affected	245	0.159	0.195	0.0866	319	0.0473	0.0558	0.0266	F= 94.783***
Total affected	245	6347254	29677605	1100000	319	8419557	27667415	500000	F= 0.73
Total deaths	245	88	1278	0	319	201	449	35	F= 2.135
Total damages (USD)	245	187307	1079263	0	319	819381	3485966	2400	F= 7.5***
Deaths missing	245	0.918	0.274	1	319	0.166	0.373	0	F= 704.367***
Damage missing	205	0.81	0.393	1	284	0.43	0.496	0	F= 82.834***
Enter EMDAT data	245				319				X2= 235.413***
... judged_significant	1	0.004			1	0.003			
... some_declaration	16	0.065			1	0.003			
... total_affected	187	0.763			129	0.404			
... total_deaths	3	0.012			188	0.589			
... unknown	38	0.155			0	0			
GDP (Billions USD)	245	166	880	8.77	319	328	1268	16.5	F= 2.909*
Conflict	245	0.388	0.488	0	319	0.505	0.501	1	F= 7.723***
Conflict (lag)	245	0.351	0.478	0	319	0.439	0.497	0	F= 4.473**

Statistical significance markers:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Cross-national results

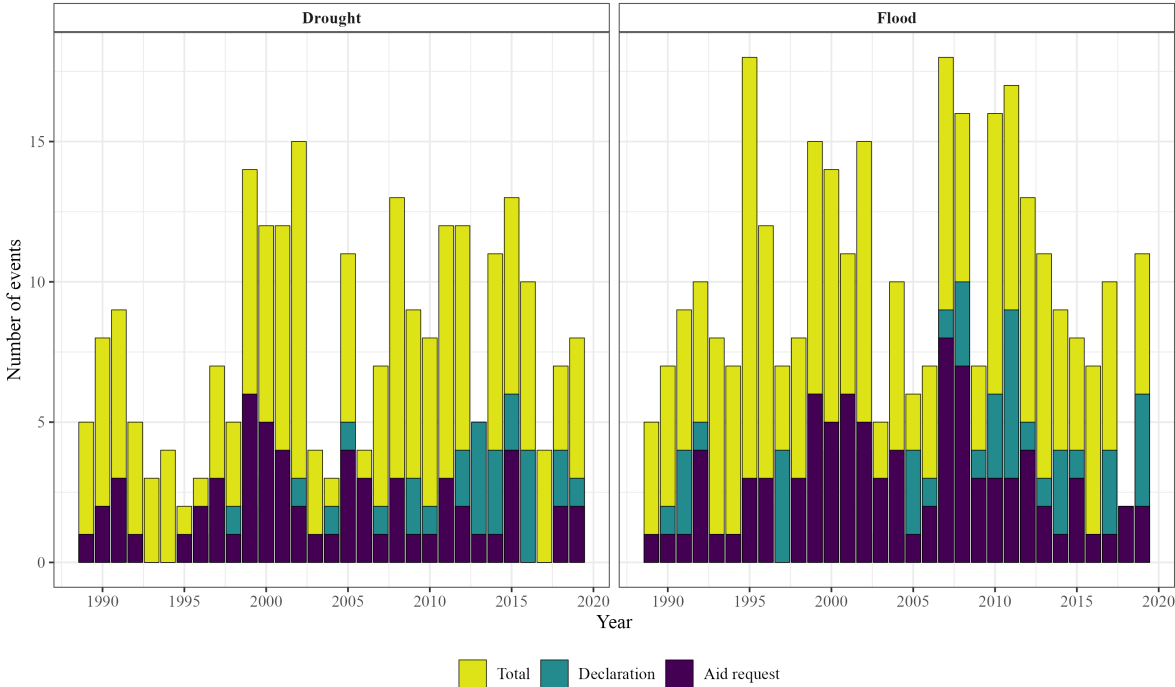
Before presenting the main results, I document variation in the outcomes of interest: emergency declarations and aid requests.²⁷ Strikingly, a lack of response is the most frequent outcome observed in the data. In response to 60% of droughts and 53% of floods governments neither declare an emergency nor request humanitarian aid. Leaders issue declarations for only 32% of events: 35% of floods and 28% of droughts. Governments request aid slightly less often than they declare emergencies; they request aid for 27% of all events: 28% of floods and 25% of droughts.

Turning from whether leaders respond to disasters to the time it takes for them to do so, the data

²⁷Figure A2 plots the total number of disaster events during the study period for all in-sample countries; flood events are most concentrated in Southeast Asia whereas drought events are spread more evenly across countries in the sample.

demonstrate substantial variation. If leaders declare an emergency, it takes them 10 days in response to floods and 15 days in response to droughts.²⁸ Requesting aid takes slightly longer on average than declaring an emergency. When leaders request aid, it takes them 15 days for both floods and droughts.²⁹

Figure 1: Number of drought and flood events by year; share that receive policy responses from government



Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate variation in the outcomes of interest over time and space. Figure 1 plots both the number of disaster events per year and the share of events that receive emergency declarations and aid requests.³⁰ Figure 1 suggests little temporal variation in the share of events receiving disaster declarations or aid requests. Figure 2 presents the share of disaster events to which governments respond by declaring an emergency and Figure 3 presents the share of events to which the government respond by requesting aid from foreign donors for all countries in the sample. These maps demonstrate that a small fraction of states respond to either floods or droughts by consistently declaring an emergency or requesting aid. The median country in that data that declares an emergency in response to approximately 18% of drought events and 27% of floods. The median country requests aid in response to 14% of drought events and 25% of flood events.

Table 3 presents tests of Hypothesis 1, the relationship between disaster type and emergency declarations (columns 1 and 2), and Hypothesis 2, the relationship between disaster type and aid requests (columns

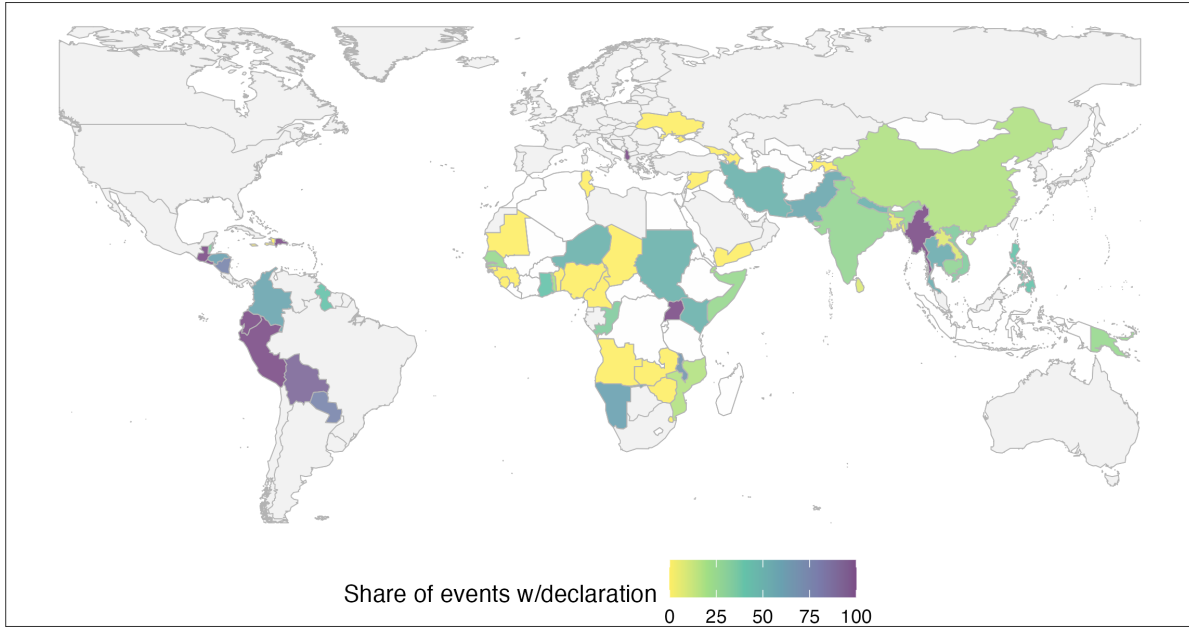
²⁸Median values are presented in the main text as mean values are higher due to the presence of outliers in the data. The mean time to disaster declaration for floods is 19 days, while the mean for droughts is 66 days.

²⁹Median values are reported in the main text due to the presence of outliers in the data, particularly for drought events. The mean time to aid request for floods is 24 days and the mean time to aid request for droughts is 78 days.

³⁰Note that only disaster events that meet the threshold of affecting 1 percent of the population of the country are included in these figures.

Figure 2: Share of all disaster events that receive declarations

(a) Flood events



(b) Drought events

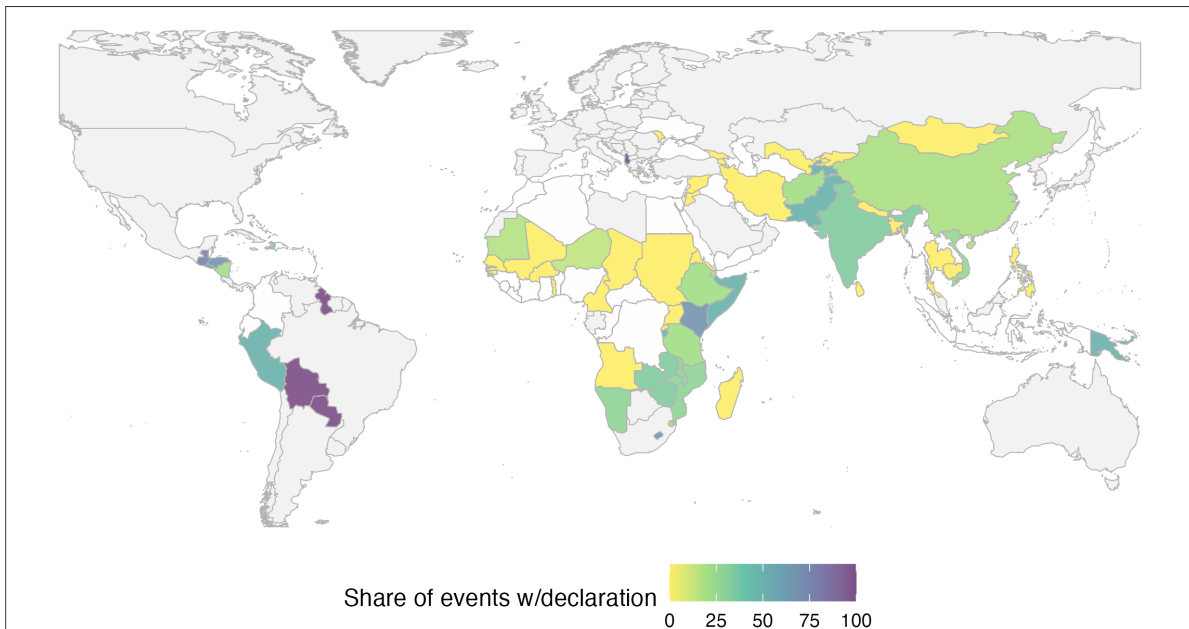
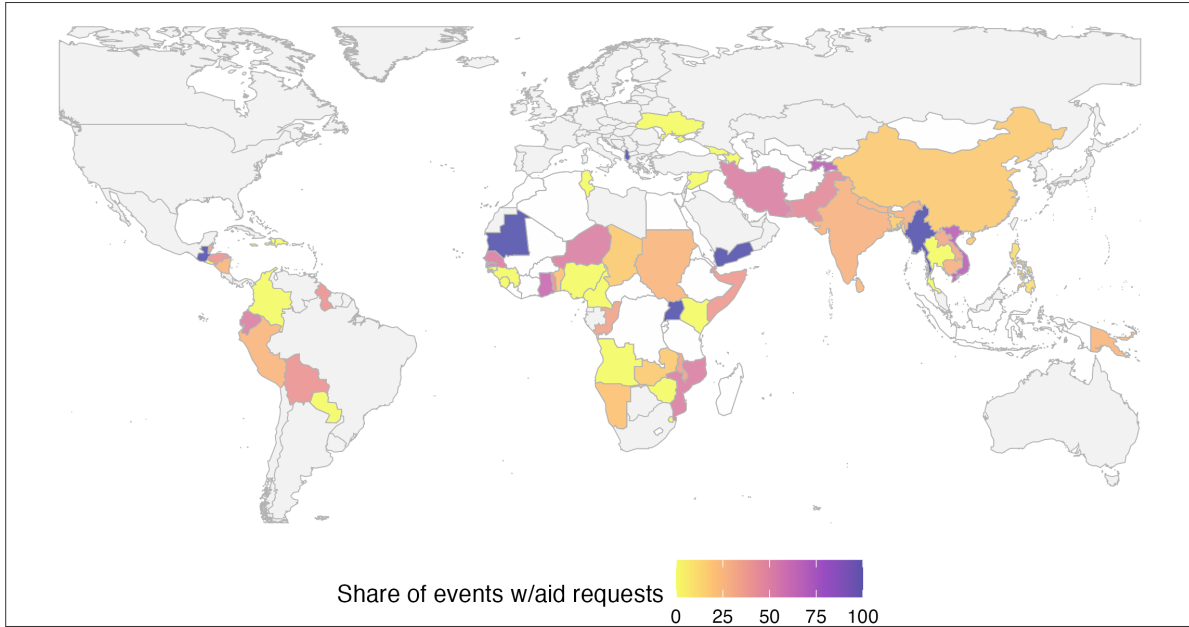
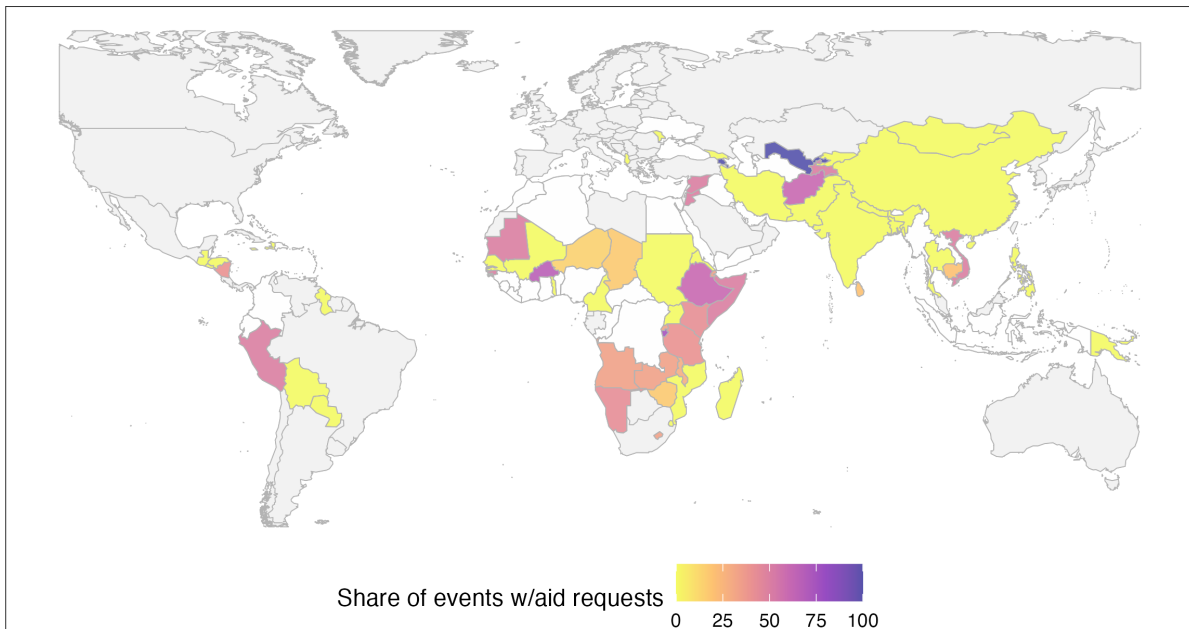


Figure 3: Share of all disaster events receive aid requests

(a) Flood events



(b) Drought events



3 and 4). Columns 1 and 3 present simple models that include only the independent variable of interest (DISASTER TYPE) and fixed effects for country and year. Columns 2 and 4, present models that include control variables for characteristics of the disaster event and the country. In these models, the coefficients on disaster type are both positive (in the expected direction) and attain conventional levels of statistical significance.³¹ If an event is a flood, the probability that leaders declare an emergency increases by 14 percentage points, and the probability that leaders request aid increases by 15 percentage points.

Table 3: Relationship between disaster type, declaration, aid request

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Request aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	0.11 ⁺ (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)	0.12** (0.04)	0.15** (0.04)
Control variables	No	Yes	No	Yes
Country & Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	564	564	564	564
R ²	0.38	0.41	0.25	0.28
Adjusted R ²	0.22	0.23	0.06	0.07
Residual Std. Error	0.41 (df = 447)	0.41 (df = 435)	0.43 (df = 447)	0.43 (df = 435)

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Results are robust to a variety of modeling specifications, which I describe in greater detail in Appendix B. These include omitting fixed effects, adding control variables and alternative operationalization of control variables, substituting logistic regression for OLS, using various thresholds to determine disaster events' inclusion in the data, and omitting influential observations.³²

Descriptive statistics show that leaders take the extraordinary steps of declaring an emergency or requesting humanitarian aid from international donors in response to less than half of disaster events, and tests of hypotheses 1 and 2 show that leaders are more likely to declare emergencies and request humanitarian aid in response to fast-onset rather than slow-onset events. The results are consistent with past research that finds that leaders are sensitive to domestic demand for emergency relief; in all regression specifications leaders are more likely to both declare emergencies and request aid when larger shares of their populations are adversely affected by disasters.

Comparing the expectations generated by my theoretical framework to those based on alternative explanations (Table 1), I find that the results are most consistent with my competence-based explanation rather than explanations centered on either non-interference or self-sufficiency. I expect leaders will be more likely to declare emergencies and request aid in response to fast- rather than slow-onset events because taking such actions in response to slow-onset events highlights the government's failure to mitigate the effects of a disaster (and therefore its incompetence), whereas taking the same actions in response to fast-onset events does not imply incompetence because it is less plausible for government

³¹Table B1 presents the full specifications.

³²Additional variables and alternative operationalizations are included in the appendix when these variables do not cover the full period from 1989-2019.

action to mitigate fast-onset events once they start. In contrast, an argument focused on self-sufficiency implies that leaders should choose not to seek aid when donors will find such an action to be a credible signal of self-sufficiency. Given that requesting aid in response to slow-onset events requires an implicit assumption that a government cannot manage disasters that are preventable, foregoing aid should only be a credible signal of self-sufficiency in response to fast- rather than slow-onset events. Leaders who care about self-sufficiency should be more likely to seek aid in response to slow-onset events rather than fast-onset events, in this case relationship between disaster type and aid request would be negative. Lastly, an argument premised on leaders' preferences for non-interference in their domestic affairs predicts no difference between leaders' propensity to declare emergencies or request aid in response to fast- versus slow-onset events. However, the results suggest consistent differences between fast- and slow-onset events for both emergency declarations and aid requests. Of the three explanations considered here, the results are most consistent with my theory that leaders responses to disasters are conditioned by their concerns about external perceptions of their competence.

Testing three underlying assumptions

In this section I provide additional evidence to support three main assumptions that are necessary for a competence-based argument to explain the empirical results. I define these assumptions and the data I use to test them. First, leaders decisions to declare emergencies and/or request aid influence whether donors offer aid in response to disasters. If humanitarian donors act without regard for leaders' policy choices, it is unlikely that leaders policy choices influence whether or not donors see an event as an emergency, which implies their choices are also unlikely to influence donors' perceptions of leaders' competence. I use data on disaster declarations by the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to test this assumption.

Second, leaders concerns about competence influence their own decision-making; in response to slow-onset events officials are willing to forego humanitarian aid in the short term in order to portray themselves as competent to access more attractive resources in the long term. This also relies on the assumption that leaders prefer long-term aid flows such as development aid to short-term flows such as humanitarian aid. If concerns about competence do not influence leaders' decision-making or if leaders do not prefer the types of aid I assume, it is implausible that they would find such a trade-off worthwhile. To assess these expectations, I use qualitative and survey evidence from the case of Niger.

Third, leaders' policy choices influence external perceptions of competence. The decision to forego humanitarian aid in the short term in response to slow-onset events but not in response to fast-onset is only logically consistent if the consequences for the state's reputation for competence differ by disaster type. I test whether changes in states' reputation for competence after disaster response differ by disaster type, using monthly data on political and economic risk ratings.

Do government decisions influence donors' decisions?

My theoretical framework assumes that policy choices made by leaders of recipient governments influence which disaster events donors perceive as emergencies. Donors are more likely to offer aid in response to a disaster event they perceive to be an emergency, and when governments declare emergencies and/or request aid, donors are more likely to see an event as an emergency that requires urgent humanitarian

assistance. I test this assumption by analyzing the relationship between emergency declarations, aid requests and donor offers of aid. If leaders policy choices do not influence donors' decisions to offer humanitarian aid, I would expect donors to be no more or less likely to offer humanitarian aid in cases where leaders declare emergencies or request aid compared to cases where leaders do not act.

To measure donor offers of aid, I use data on disaster declarations from USAID OFDA for the disaster events included in Table 3. Disaster declarations refer to the decision made by an official at the relevant U.S. Embassy to provide emergency response funding in response to disasters.³³ I focus on decisions made by the U.S. because it is the single largest donor of humanitarian aid, prominent studies on humanitarian aid allocation focus on this case, and find that bandwagoning is common in humanitarian aid allocation (Drury, Olson and van Belle 2005; Fink and Redaelli 2011; Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen 2003).

In Table 4, I analyze the relationship between declarations, aid requests, and donor offers of aid. The outcome of interest, DONOR OFFER is a binary variable that takes a value of 1 if an official issues a disaster declaration for a disaster and 0 otherwise. OFDA issues a disaster declaration in response to 18% of events. Column 1 presents a simple fixed effects model and Column 2 presents the full model with all covariates. In both models the relationship between recipient states' emergency declarations and donors' offers of aid is positive and statistically significant. When leaders declare emergencies, the likelihood of donors offering aid increases by 12 percentage points. Similarly, the relationship between aid requests and donor offers of aid is positive and statistically significant in both models; formal request of aid are associated with an 18 percentage point increase in the probability that donors offer humanitarian aid after leaders. However, the interaction term between declarations and aid requests does not attain statistical significance. This suggests that both declaring emergency and requesting aid does not necessarily send a stronger signal to the donor of the recipient state's openness to aid than either action alone.

This analysis is descriptive, and it is possible that donor offers of aid trigger governments to declare emergencies or request aid. To probe the plausibility of such an argument premised on reverse causality, I leverage original data on the timing of various government and donor decisions. Analyzing the events that eventually receive an OFDA disaster declaration The median number of days to a government emergency declaration is 7, the median number of days to an aid request is 11 and the median number of days until OFDA issues a disaster declaration is 13. This provides suggestive evidence that OFDA declarations follow emergency declarations and aid requests rather than prompting them. These results indicate that donors interpret emergency declarations and aid requests as permission to offer humanitarian aid. This analysis supports the assumption that decisions made by leaders of recipient states influence donors' decisions to offer humanitarian aid, suggesting that recipient states influence donors' perceptions of disasters.

³³Appendix section C provides more detail on the process of disaster declarations and the criteria used to determine eligibility for disaster declarations

Table 4: Association between declarations/requests and donor aid allocation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	OFDA offer	
	(1)	(2)
Disaster type (flood)	0.207*** (0.028)	0.222*** (0.030)
Declare emergency	0.128** (0.045)	0.123* (0.048)
Request aid	0.188*** (0.049)	0.181*** (0.049)
Declare X Request	0.013 (0.089)	0.034 (0.087)
Control variables	No	Yes
Country & Year FEs	Yes	Yes
Observations	564	564
R ²	0.416	0.433
Adjusted R ²	0.260	0.261
Residual Std. Error	0.326 (df = 444)	0.326 (df = 432)
<i>Note:</i>	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001	

Do government officials prioritize competence?

I use qualitative and quantitative data from the case of Niger to substantiate two related claims: 1) leaders prefer long-term aid flows over which they can exercise greater discretion (i.e. development aid) over short-term aid flows over which they exercise minimal control (i.e. humanitarian aid) 2) leaders prioritize improving donors' perceptions of their competence in order to gain access to the types of resources they prefer. I assume that these preferences motivate leaders' divergent responses to fast- and slow-onset disasters. I expect that while leaders responding to fast-onset events are more likely to seek humanitarian aid because this choice will not affect donors perceptions of their competence and thereby their access to development aid, leaders responding to slow-onset disasters will be more likely to minimize their magnitude and claim humanitarian aid is unnecessary in order to protect their reputation for competence and gain access to development aid. If leaders either do not prefer long-term resource flows over which they can exercise discretion or they do not view donors' perceptions of their competence as important to accessing these flows, a competence-based theory cannot explain the empirical pattern of leaders responses to fast- and slow-onset events.

It may seem especially implausible for leaders of incompetent states to forego humanitarian aid in order to attract development aid. Leveraging qualitative and quantitative data from Niger, I show that even when donors have long viewed a state as incompetent, its leaders prefer some types of aid over others, and they act strategically to improve donors perceptions of their competence in order to access the resources they prefer. This does not necessarily mean that leaders succeed at improving donors perceptions of their competence, but it suggests they invest resource's in these strategies. After briefly describing the case of Niger, I present evidence that government officials prefer development aid

to humanitarian aid, and I then present evidence that officials understand donors' perceptions of their competence as influencing their access to the types of resources they prefer.

Niger is a West African country at the heart of the Sahel, which both global performance indicators and donors' patterns of aid allocation suggest donors view as relatively incompetent. By virtue of its geography, Niger is exposed to cyclical droughts and floods, and chronic under-development, poor infrastructure, and weak state response mechanisms exacerbate the effects these disasters on the Nigerien public. Since the year 2000, 10 to 50 percent of the population has been adversely affected by floods or droughts each year.³⁴ In addition to these natural hazards, the country has faced persistent insecurity since 2012, as non-state armed groups have proliferated along its borders with Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso. The Human Development Index (HDI) has ranked Niger last or second to last in the world in its composite measure of life expectancy, income, and education every year since 2018. The type of aid donors offer to Niger reflects declining perceptions of the state's competence. Figure E1 shows how humanitarian aid as a share of ODA has risen steadily since 2010, and correspondingly, the share of ODA channeled through non-state entities has also increased.³⁵

Government officials who I interviewed consistently expressed a desire for donors to work more closely with government and to invest in Niger for the long term. In a statement that was emblematic of the attitudes of many government officials I interviewed, a high-level official argued, "Donors should come to the government, consult with us and respond to needs. The government should orient all assistance." A former governor criticized donors for funding humanitarians to provide short-term assistance instead of investing in capacity of state services. He cited the example of a mapping exercise to identify displaced people, where donors funded NGOs to carry out this work instead of working through the government's technical services, which refer to the local offices of government line ministries.

When actors come for emergencies, we tried to convince them to fund the technical services to build their capacity so technical services would be strong when they left. The technical services should benefit from the resources allocated for this emergency; they should be trained. But all mapping was done by an NGO, not by the technical services. The server where maps were stored wasn't even in Niger. When that NGO leaves, all the knowledge and information will leave too. Why not work with technical services? Donors and the U.N. prefer to intervene through NGOs, and they are more powerful than I am.

His statement reveals frustration with donors' short-term approach to funding humanitarian response. He expresses a clear preference for an approach that would focus on long-term investment in improving the government's own capacity to manage emergencies.

Evidence from a survey of government officials suggests that the rank and file of the Nigerien government share this view. They want donors to provide them with development aid, which is committed for multiple years and more often channeled through state structures, rather than humanitarian aid, which

³⁴ Author's calculations using affected population totals from EM-DAT

³⁵ Although security assistance comprises a substantial share of foreign resource transfer to Niger, I do not discuss security assistance in this paper because both donors strategic incentives to provide security assistance and leaders incentives to accept such assistance operate according to a separate logic. I do not expect government performance in disaster response to influence donors' allocation decisions with regard to security assistance.

is committed for only a few months and is predominantly channeled through NGOs. In the survey I conducted with bureaucrats working for state service-provision agencies, respondents were asked whether they thought donors should offer Niger more development aid or more humanitarian aid. Eighty percent of respondents stated that they would prefer for donors to increase funding for development aid rather than humanitarian aid (Figure E2b, N=374).

In addition to preferring long-term development to short-term emergency response, analysis of survey data supports the claim that government officials see maintaining a reputation for competence with donors as important for Niger's access to resources donors. Over 80% of respondents agreed very strongly that cultivating a positive image abroad is important for Niger (See Figure E2a). Respondents were also asked to rate Niger's international image abroad,³⁶ and to assess the relative ease or difficulty with which Niger could access different types of foreign controlled resources: foreign direct investment, development aid, humanitarian aid for slow-onset events (droughts), and humanitarian aid for fast onset events (floods).³⁷ If competence conditions access to resources like private investment and development aid, I would expect that respondents who evaluate Niger's image highly to also judge it will be easier for Niger to access these types of resources. As access to humanitarian aid does not depend vary with competence, I would expect no relationship between ratings of Niger's image and perceived ease of access to humanitarian aid. Table E1 presents the correlation between perceptions of Niger's international image and perceived ease of access to each type of resource. There is a positive association between perceptions of the state's image and access to private investment ($p < 0.05$) and access to development aid ($p < 0.1$). As expected there is no statistically significant relationship between perceptions of the state's image and humanitarian aid.

Not only do government officials attach great value to foreign perceptions of their competence, interview evidence corroborates that they link the state's performance in emergency response to donors perceptions of the state's competence in other domains. A high-level ministry official expressed his frustration with the existing approach to emergency response stating, "the government and its partners have lost credibility for emergency response. We now see much bigger emergencies when before we only saw smaller crises, like floods." Without any prompting he apparently changed the subject, "Donors do not trust the government, but they don't say anything [to government]. Instead when the government wanted a special fund for the G5-Sahel, donors said no and gave the money instead to a French organization." A special fund refers to donors delivering funds directly to government, and the G5-Sahel refers to a regional cooperation mechanism for development and security cooperation among Niger and four neighboring countries. I interpret this statement as evidence that this official sees the "loss of credibility" for emergency response as connected to donors lack of trust in the government, and due to this lack of trust in government, donors fund foreign organizations rather than state structures.

People working outside of government also characterize leaders of the state as prioritizing external perceptions of the government, sometimes at the expense of addressing persistent problems. An official

³⁶The mean rating of Niger's image on a 7 point scale was 4.9 (N=372), which was surprisingly high. However, as I discuss in Appendix E, many respondents were concerned about the privacy of their responses. I thus expect the responses to be more reflective of the official narrative of government than individuals beliefs.

³⁷Figure E3 shows that officials perceive private investment and development aid as more difficult to access than humanitarian aid for both fast- and slow-onset events.

working for a humanitarian NGO in Niger described the government's stance toward donors as, "want[ing] to show that donors can trust the government." He described the government as trying to show improvement to gain the favor of donors:

[The government] wants to show, internally, progress is being made. They talk all the time about the the Human Development Indicators [HDI], but they are doing little except complaining and trying to manipulate the numbers. They are spending lots of resources dealing with the reporting and not dealing with the problem.

In this statement, this humanitarian draws a link between state leaders' desire to demonstrate competence and their public expressions of dissatisfaction with ranking last in the world in HDI. Ministers responded to Niger's last-place ranking by criticizing the statistics used in the HDI's methodology, claiming that those statistics did not reflect reality in the country, and hiring external consultants to improve Niger's statistics. This humanitarian's comments suggest that he sees the Nigerien government as investing more resources in improving the way Niger is perceived abroad than in addressing underlying development challenges.

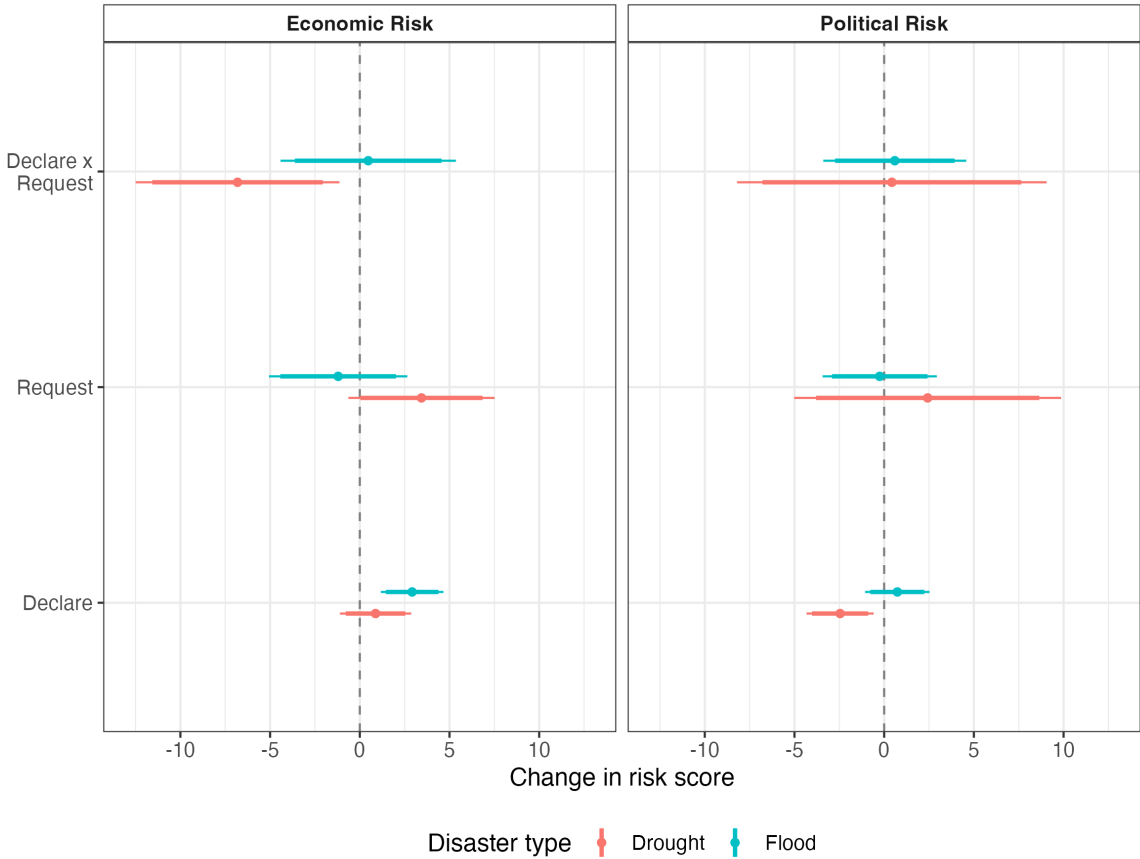
Evidence from both interviews and surveys in Niger corroborate the assumption that government officials prefer for donors to offer them long-term aid delivered through state structures to short-term aid through NGOs. It further suggests that officials place great value on foreign perceptions of their competence, and they see understand that performance in emergency response influences to donor perceptions of their competence. Consequently, both as a part of emergency response and more broadly, government officials invest in improving foreign perceptions of their competence, sometimes at the expense of addressing structural problems.

Do disaster responses affect external perceptions of competence?

Lastly, I test whether external perceptions of the states competence vary by disaster type when leaders declare emergencies and request aid after disasters. If there is no difference between perceptions of the state's competence by disaster type when states declare emergency and/or request aid, it would suggest that leaders' responses to disasters do not have the expected relationship with external perceptions of their competence. If there is no difference between fast- and slow-onset events, it is unlikely that the differences in leaders responses to disasters reported in the main results can be attributed to leaders' concerns about competence.

To probe whether leaders' responses to disasters influence external perceptions of the state's competence, I analyze the relationship between a state's response to disaster and the political and economic risk rating assigned to the state in the month after a disaster. Risk ratings have several advantages as a measure of perceived competence. They are fast-moving indicators, varying from month to month and should be sensitive to short-term changes in government policy, such as responses to disasters. They have the explicit goal of measuring "short term [political] stability" and "economic health" over a two year period. These risk scores approximate how foreign investors assess a country's stability. I use the risk rating for the month following the disaster because most policy responses occur within one month of the disaster, and this is also the time period during which observers pay the most attention to disasters.

Figure 4: Change in political and economic risk ratings after responses to droughts and floods



The outcomes of interest are political and economic risk ratings, and the independent variables of interest are my policy response variables: government declaration and aid request.³⁸ Risk scores are measured on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 denotes the greatest risk and 100 denotes least risk. Both declaration and aid request are binary variables. An interaction term for declaration and aid request is included to account for the possibility that both declaring an emergency and requesting aid send a stronger signal of the state's competence (either positive or negative) than taking either action alone. I estimate the relationship between each independent variable and the political or economic risk score assigned to the country for the month following the disaster event. To address concerns that the relationship between disaster response and subsequent perceptions of competence may be driven by the magnitude of the disaster, I control for the share of the population affected.³⁹ If declaring an emergency and/or requesting aid are associated with a better reputation for competence in response to fast-onset events, I expect coefficients for fast-onset events (floods) to be positive. If taking the same action is associated with a worse reputation for competence, I expect the coefficients for slow-onset events (droughts) to be negative.

Figure 4 presents regression coefficients for declarations, aid requests, and the interaction term. The results demonstrate that declaring an emergency in response to a flood is associated with a 3 point improvement in a country's economic risk rating and declaring an emergency in response to a drought is associated with a 2.5 point decline in a country's political risk ratings. Both declaring and emergency and requesting aid in response to droughts is associated with an almost 7 point decline in a country's economic risk rating. The results suggest no statistically significant relationship between aid requests alone and changes to economic or political risk ratings.

These results suggest that when leaders both declare an emergency and request aid, external observers perceive economic risk to worsen when leaders respond to droughts, but they perceive no change for political risk. Declaring an emergency in response to floods is associated with improvement in a country's economic risk rating and declaring an emergency in response to drought is associated with a worsening political risk rating. Overall, I interpret these results as supporting the expectation that declaring an emergency and requesting aid in response to droughts has negative consequences for external perceptions of the state's competence. In addition there is support for the expectation that declaring an emergency in response to floods is at least neutral for external perceptions of the state's competence and may even be positive.

Conclusion

Leaders of lower- and middle-income states pursue divergent policy responses in response to fast- and slow-onset disasters. Leaders are more likely to declare emergencies, mobilizing the resources of the state to provide emergency relief and seek funding for relief from international donors in response to fast-onset events (floods) rather than slow-onset events (droughts). Additional tests of the mechanism suggest that leaders' concerns about donors' perceptions of their competence are the most likely explanation for these differences. I find that when leaders' declare an emergency or request aid, donors are more likely to

³⁸Appendix D provides more detail on measurement and estimation strategy.

³⁹Figure D2 demonstrates that magnitude of disasters does not predict any change in risk scores. However the number of drought events in the past month is associated with a 1 point increase in risk score $p < 0.1$.

offer humanitarian aid, suggesting that government policy influences how donors perceive and respond to disaster events. Qualitative and survey evidence from Niger shows that government officials hold strong preferences regarding the type of aid they prefer and they understand donors' perceptions of their competence to shape their access to aid. This evidence further suggests that government officials invest heavily in improving external perceptions of their state, sometimes at the expense of helping their people. Lastly, data on risk ratings corroborates that responding to fast- and slow-onset events has different consequences for the state's reputation for competence. Risk ratings worsen after governments declare an emergency and request aid in response to slow-onset events but there is no equivalent relationship after fast-onset events.

This paper identifies consistent trends in the data, and the evidence is most consistent with a competence-based explanation compared to explanations premised on preferences for self-sufficiency or non-interference. Limiting the analysis to lower- and middle-income states prevents me from identifying the thresholds where I expect states to prioritize competence compared to other reputational concerns, such as self-sufficiency. This is a promising avenue for future research. Due to a lack of precise measurement of the geographic locations of disasters, I cannot control for the political affiliation of areas affected by disasters, and it is possible that this omitted variable could explain some of the observed variation. We should also use caution when generalizing the applicability of these findings to other types of disaster events; it is possible that the differences I identify are unique to flood and drought events. Even so, they point to an interesting difference in disaster response that cannot be explained by existing research in this area.

These findings suggest potential additional challenges to international cooperation to mitigate and respond to climate change. If leaders of poor states face incentives to conceal the magnitude of some disasters from the international community, it will be even more difficult for foreign observers to measure the effects of climate change and provide appropriate relief to affected communities. In order for leaders not to see downplaying the effects of slow-onset disasters as their best strategy, they must be persuaded that their reputations will not suffer if their failure to mitigate the effects of slow-onset events is discovered. Can donors change these incentives? Leaders want donors to invest in long-term projects and to fund government directly, but their preferences are in tension with donors' own preferences to control aid flows and ensure aid dollars are spent efficiently. Future research should investigate donors' preferences regarding funding for preventing and mitigating disasters before they strike in order to better identify where the interests of donors and recipient states may align to prevent and mitigate the worst consequences of climate change.

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Appendix

A Description of cross-national disaster events policy response data

Table A1: Summary Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Pctl. 25	Pctl. 50	Pctl. 75	Max
Event characteristics								
Declaration	564	0.317	0.466	0	0	0	1	1
Days to declaration	564	261	157	0	50.5	365	365	366
Aid request	564	0.268	0.443	0	0	0	1	1
Days to aid request	564	280	148	0	208	365	365	599
OFDA declaration	564	0.174	0.379	0	0	0	0	1
Days to OFDA	564	306	129	0	365	365	365	365
Disaster Type	564							
... drought	245	0.434						
... flood	319	0.566						
Pop. Share Affected	564	0.0958	0.146	0.01	0.0194	0.04	0.101	1
State characteristics								
Aid dependence	564							
... low	300	0.532						
... medium	169	0.3						
... high	95	0.168						
GDP (lagged log)	564	22.6	5.11	0	22	23.1	24.7	30
Conflict	564	0.454	0.498	0	0	0	1	1
Conflict lag	564	0.401	0.49	0	0	0	1	1
Polity	564	0.589	0.297	0	0.3	0.7	0.85	1
Corruption	564	0.649	0.212	0	0.513	0.682	0.815	0.961
Ideal point distance	564	3.32	0.633	0	3.08	3.34	3.63	4.77
Size of political opposition	564	2.62	1.31	0	1	3	4	4
Count floods (lag)	564	0.28	0.512	0	0	0	1	3
Count droughts (lag)	564	2.02	2.31	0	1	1	2	20
World Bank Income Class	564							
... L	305	0.541						
... LM	224	0.397						
... None	5	0.009						
... UM	30	0.053						

Inclusion criteria for disaster events

Events are included in EM-DAT if they meet any of the following criteria:

1. Ten (10) or more people reported killed
2. One hundred (100) or more people reported affected
3. Declaration of a state of emergency
4. Call for international assistance

These criteria generate an inclusive list of disaster events (N=3,150).

As criteria 3 and 4 are very similar to the outcomes of interest in this analysis, this naturally raise

concerns about the selection of events into the data. To address this concern, the coding of the outcome variables does not use EM-DAT coding of these outcomes. Outcomes were coded independently and if no evidence was found for EM-DAT coding of either declaration or aid request, the independent coding of that outcome was used. In addition, most events enter the data because they meet the thresholds for total deaths or total affected. Fewer than 1% of floods and fewer than 9% of droughts in the data enter the data because of a declaration or request.

Because I am interested in politically salient disaster events, those that generate demand assistance from both governments and international actors, I impose an additional criterion for inclusion in this analysis:

5. At least one percent of the population is affected

Imposing this criterion produces a dataset of 564 disaster events.

This criterion is less strict than that used by [Carnegie and Dolan 2020](#) to study aid rejections. They limit their analysis of aid rejections to events in which at least 300 people lost their lives; they assert that this threshold is a level at which international attention to a disaster is plausible.

To address concerns that the results are a function of the threshold used to determine inclusion into the sample, I include robustness checks in [Appendix B](#).

Qualitative coding of declarations, requests, and offers of aid

The main outcome variables, government declaration, government request, and donor offer, were collected using a qualitative coding protocol. For each event, searches were conducted using NexisUni, which aggregates news sources, and ReliefWeb, which aggregates reports from U.N. agencies and NGOs.

On the basis of these searches, government declaration was coded as 1 if there was evidence that the government publicly acknowledged the event exceeded its ordinary capacity to respond and some extraordinary effort was required. Declaring an emergency included the following:

- State of emergency
- State of disaster
- State of catastrophe
- Humanitarian emergency
- Red alert (or other color)
- Level IV (or another code/scale) emergency

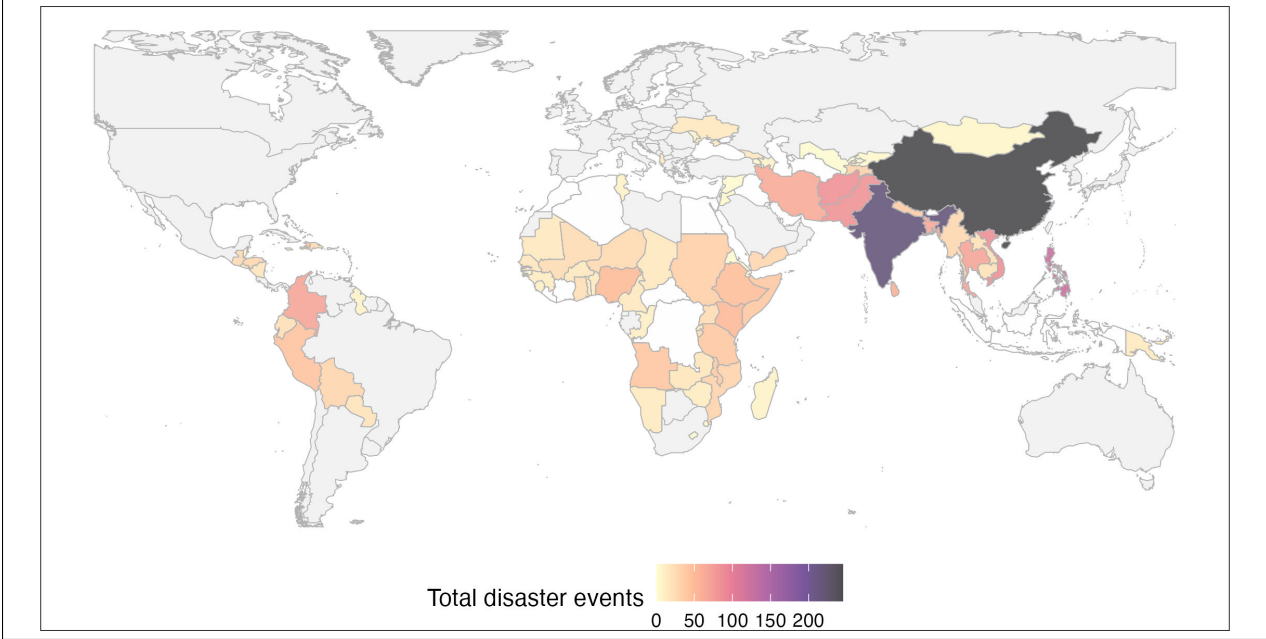
For each disaster event, the sources underlying the coding were saved and verified.

Government request was coded as 1 if there was evidence that the government asked one or more foreign entities for material assistance to support emergency relief. This can include formal appeals for aid in the U.N. consolidated appeals process. Neither request to fund disaster preparedness or prevention or requests from domestic organizations are included.

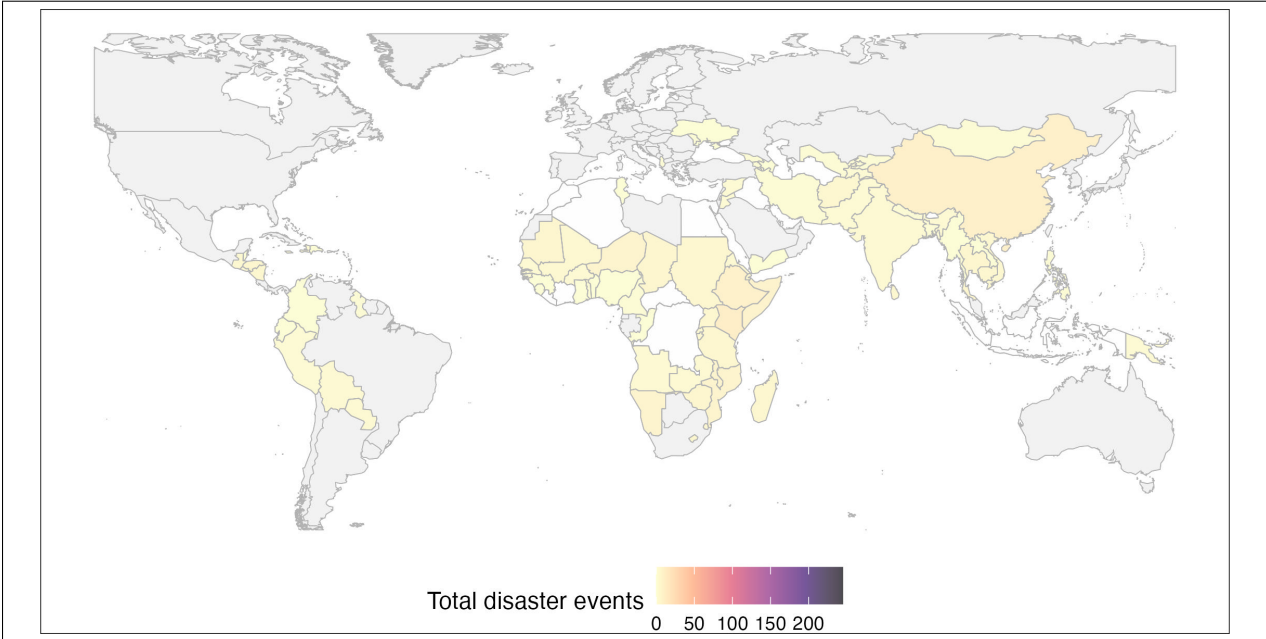
To code donor offers of aid, I relied on annual reports from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which detail grants made by the office during the fiscal year [OFDA \(2021\)](#). The variable takes

Figure A2: Disaster events affecting >1 percent of population for countries included in sample 1989-1989

(a) Total flood events



(b) Total drought events



B Main results: Supplementary analysis and robustness tests

Table B1 present the full regression specifications for the results presented in Table 3.

Table B1: Main results including all control variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Request aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	0.11 ⁺ (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)	0.12** (0.04)	0.15** (0.04)
Pop. Share Affected		0.47* (0.19)		0.44 ⁺ (0.25)
Aid dependence (Med)		-0.02 (0.06)		0.11 ⁺ (0.06)
Aid dependence (High)		0.11 (0.10)		0.15 (0.10)
GDP (log)		0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)
Conflict		-0.02 (0.07)		-0.02 (0.07)
Conflict lag		0.06 (0.05)		-0.04 (0.10)
Polity		0.27* (0.13)		0.04 (0.13)
Corruption		0.22 (0.27)		0.36 (0.25)
Ideal point distance		-0.03 (0.03)		-0.07 (0.05)
Size of political opposition		-0.03 (0.05)		0.01 (0.06)
Count floods (lag)		-0.02** (0.01)		-0.02 ⁺ (0.01)
Count droughts (lag)		0.02 (0.05)		-0.07 (0.04)
Observations	564	564	564	564
R ²	0.38	0.41	0.25	0.28
Adjusted R ²	0.22	0.23	0.06	0.07
Residual Std. Error	0.41 (df = 447)	0.41 (df = 435)	0.43 (df = 447)	0.43 (df = 435)
<i>Note:</i>	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001			

Table B2 assesses whether the results in Table 3 are driven by the inclusion of fixed effects for the country and year. Columns 1 and 4 present pooled specifications for the outcomes of interest. Columns 2 and 5 present specifications with fixed effects for country only, and Columns 3 and 6 present specifications with fixed effects for year only.

Table B3 presents results from logistic regression, including all variables used in the main results (Table B1). The odds ratios are positive and statistically significant, at the $p > 0.05$ level for government declarations and at the $p > 0.10$ level for aid requests. The results are broadly consistent with those presented in B1 and indicate that the results are not simply a function of modeling choices.

Alternative measures of competence

Given the difficulty of operationalizing perceptions of competence, I include two alternative operationalizations here: 1) the World Bank Control of Corruption measure, and 2) political and economic risk ratings.

The World Bank World Development Indicators define their control of Control of Corruption measure as follows: *Control of Corruption captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as 'capture' of the state by*

Table B2: Comparing pooled results, country FEs and year FEs

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Government declaration			Request aid		
	<i>OLS</i> (1)	<i>feim</i> (2) (3)		<i>OLS</i> (4)	<i>feim</i> (5) (6)	
Disaster type (flood)	0.09* (0.04)	0.12* (0.05)	0.13* (0.05)	0.08 ⁺ (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)
Pop. Share Affected	0.34* (0.14)	0.44* (0.18)	0.36* (0.15)	0.15 (0.14)	0.38 ⁺ (0.21)	0.20 (0.14)
Aid dependence (Med)	-0.16*** (0.05)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.14** (0.05)	0.12** (0.04)	0.08 (0.06)	0.14** (0.04)
Aid dependence (High)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.08 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.08)	0.17** (0.06)	0.12 (0.07)	0.18* (0.08)
GDP (log)	0.01 (0.004)	0.01 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)	0.002 (0.004)	0.003 (0.01)	0.005 (0.01)
Conflict	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.06)
Conflict lag	0.02 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.0003 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.07)
Polity	0.31*** (0.07)	0.24* (0.12)	0.30** (0.08)	-0.08 (0.07)	0.06 (0.11)	-0.07 (0.06)
Corruption	0.08 (0.09)	0.12 (0.22)	0.10 (0.10)	0.04 (0.09)	0.41 (0.25)	0.03 (0.10)
Ideal point distance	-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.11** (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)
Size of political opposition	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.02)
Count floods (lag)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.01 ⁺ (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 ⁺ (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Count droughts (lag)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.10** (0.03)
Constant	0.49** (0.16)			0.34* (0.16)		
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Year FEs	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	564	564	564	564	564	564
R ²	0.13	0.35	0.20	0.05	0.23	0.12
Adjusted R ²	0.11	0.21	0.13	0.03	0.07	0.04
Residual Std. Error	0.44 (df = 550)	0.41 (df = 465)	0.43 (df = 520)	0.44 (df = 550)	0.43 (df = 465)	0.43 (df = 520)
F Statistic (df = 13; 550)	6.50***			2.46**		

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table B3: Logistic regression analysis of main results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Request aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	1.39 ⁺ (0.18)	1.66* (0.22)	1.19 (0.19)	1.52 ⁺ (0.22)
Pop. Share Affected		6.18* (0.75)		2.05 (0.73)
Aid dependence (Med)		0.44*** (0.25)		1.88** (0.24)
Aid dependence (High)		0.91 (0.30)		2.39** (0.29)
GDP (log)		1.04 (0.03)		1.01 (0.02)
Conflict		0.62 (0.32)		0.90 (0.32)
Conflict lag		1.14 (0.33)		1.02 (0.32)
Polity		5.17*** (0.37)		0.70 (0.37)
Corruption		1.44 (0.49)		1.24 (0.49)
Ideal point distance		0.54*** (0.16)		0.84 (0.15)
Size of political opposition		0.86 ⁺ (0.08)		0.95 (0.08)
Count floods (lag)		0.86** (0.06)		0.91 (0.06)
Count droughts (lag)		1.04 (0.21)		0.61* (0.23)
Constant	0.38*** (0.14)	0.72 (0.89)	0.33*** (0.15)	0.46 (0.82)
Observations	564	564	564	564
Log Likelihood	-350.83	-312.03	-327.29	-311.43
Akaike Inf. Crit.	705.67	652.07	658.58	650.86

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

elites and private interests. Estimate gives the country's score on the aggregate indicator, in units of a standard normal distribution, i.e. ranging from approximately -2.5 to 2.5. I normalize these values to a 0-1 scale. Table B4 presents the main analysis using a normalized version of the World Bank Control of Corruption measure as an alternative measure of competence. The data are subset to events occurring between 1997 and 2019. Results for the coefficient of interest, disaster type, are of a similar magnitude and direction for both Government Declarations and Aid Requests but only the coefficient for Aid Requests attains conventional levels of statistical significance.

Table B4: Control of corruption as alternative measure of competence

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Government declaration (1)	Request aid (2)
Disaster type (flood)	0.12 (0.07)	0.18** (0.06)
Pop. Share Affected	0.84* (0.32)	0.79+ (0.43)
Aid dependence (Med)	0.02 (0.09)	0.19* (0.09)
Aid dependence (High)	0.04 (0.18)	0.18 (0.16)
GDP (log)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Conflict	0.01 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.08)
Conflict lag	0.01 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.11)
Polity	0.08 (0.25)	0.004 (0.26)
WB Control of Corruption	-0.08 (0.45)	-0.16 (0.41)
Ideal point distance	-0.06+ (0.03)	-0.09 (0.06)
Size of political opposition	-0.06 (0.08)	0.05 (0.06)
Count floods (lag)	-0.03*** (0.004)	-0.01 (0.01)
Count droughts (lag)	0.02 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.05)
Observations	397	397
R ²	0.42	0.35
Adjusted R ²	0.19	0.09
Residual Std. Error (df = 283)	0.43	0.42

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

To better capture the fast-moving nature of changes in perceptions of competence, I include alternative measures that vary monthly: SHORT TERM POLITICAL RISK and SHORT TERM ECONOMIC RISK ratings from Fitch Solutions. These variables are not included in the main analysis because they are only available starting in January 2000.

The variables are defined as follows:

1. SHORT TERM POLITICAL RISK: This measures projects short-term stability, defined as the government's ability to propose, pass, implement and enforce legislation over the next two calendar years. As a measure of political stability, the short-term political index principally considers the direction of trends that are the practical manifestation of characteristics assessed in the long-term political index. The index is broken down into four categories: policymaking process; social stability; security/external threats; and policy continuity (0 = worst, 100 = best).
2. SHORT TERM ECONOMIC RISK: The short-term index (0 = worst, 100 = best) is a gauge of economic health for the next two years based on the forecasts for 5 categories: growth risk; monetary risk; fiscal risk; external risk; and financial risk.

Table B5 presents the main analysis using risk ratings as an alternative measures of competence. The

data are subset to events occurring between 2000 and 2019. Despite this smaller sample size, the results for the coefficient of interest, disaster type, are of similar magnitude and direction for the aid request outcome. However, the coefficient for government declaration, although positive, does not attain statistical significance.

Table B5: Disaster type, declaration, aid request: Risk ratings as measure of competence

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Government declaration			Request aid		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Disaster type (flood)	0.138 (0.088)	0.096 (0.091)	0.048 (0.092)	0.154 ⁺ (0.075)	0.178* (0.069)	0.152* (0.055)
Pop. Share Affected	0.234 (0.446)	0.063 (0.448)	-0.011 (0.331)	0.051 (0.475)	0.075 (0.432)	-0.176 (0.340)
Aid dependence (Med)	-0.035 (0.134)	0.045 (0.140)	0.126 (0.130)	0.249 ⁺ (0.136)	0.257 ⁺ (0.138)	0.203 ⁺ (0.105)
Aid dependence (High)	-0.069 (0.298)	0.050 (0.285)	0.144 (0.309)	0.067 (0.269)	0.134 (0.261)	-0.009 (0.253)
GDP (log)	0.102 (0.165)	0.191 (0.137)	0.189 (0.149)	0.006 (0.181)	0.116 (0.171)	0.122 (0.149)
Conflict	-0.071 (0.119)	-0.070 (0.113)	-0.063 (0.118)	-0.082 (0.120)	-0.073 (0.105)	-0.045 (0.100)
Conflict lag	0.021 (0.106)	0.078 (0.100)	0.131 (0.098)	-0.011 (0.178)	0.020 (0.177)	0.080 (0.187)
Polity	0.206 (0.341)	0.199 (0.319)	0.174 (0.277)	0.040 (0.356)	0.156 (0.366)	0.370 (0.314)
Ideal point distance	0.006 (0.130)	0.047 (0.066)	0.043 (0.066)	-0.150 (0.158)	0.039 (0.125)	0.015 (0.092)
Size of political opposition	0.103 (0.110)	0.072 (0.078)	-0.036 (0.064)	0.049 (0.083)	0.133 (0.103)	0.087 (0.080)
Count floods (lag)	-0.033* (0.013)	-0.029* (0.012)	-0.029 ⁺ (0.014)	-0.007 (0.018)	-0.004 (0.015)	-0.0003 (0.014)
Count droughts (lag)	-0.012 (0.087)	-0.006 (0.090)	0.015 (0.086)	-0.067 (0.060)	-0.085 (0.060)	-0.086 (0.065)
Econ risk (prior month)	0.003 (0.004)			-0.004 (0.004)		
Pol risk (prior month)	0.001 (0.005)			0.002 (0.006)		
Econ risk (6 month lag)		0.004 (0.004)			-0.0004 (0.005)	
Pol risk (6 month lag)		-0.002 (0.004)			-0.00003 (0.005)	
Econ risk (12 month lag)			-0.001 (0.004)			-0.006 (0.005)
Pol risk (12 month lag)			0.004 (0.005)			0.004 (0.005)
Observations	262	259	260	262	259	260
R ²	0.483	0.509	0.519	0.422	0.430	0.466
Adjusted R ²	0.187	0.227	0.245	0.091	0.104	0.162
Residual Std. Error	0.441 (df = 166)	0.431 (df = 164)	0.424 (df = 165)	0.404 (df = 166)	0.402 (df = 164)	0.395 (df = 165)

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Leader tenure

We might expect that learning by leaders would influence their propensity to declare an emergency or request aid. As leaders learn how the system works, perhaps they become more adept at manipulating it to attain their desired outcomes. To address this, Table B6 includes control variables for leader tenure from the Archigos dataset: a leader's number of days in office (log) and a count variable that counts the number of terms the leader has previously held office. This data ends in 2015, so this analysis only includes observations from 1990-2015. The leader tenure variables do not attain statistical significance.

Table B6: Robustness check for leader tenure

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Government declaration (1)	Request aid (2)
Disaster type (flood)	0.19** (0.07)	0.18*** (0.05)
Pop. Share Affected	0.70** (0.21)	0.65* (0.25)
Aid dependence (Med)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.08 (0.06)
Aid dependence (High)	0.13 (0.09)	0.11 (0.10)
GDP (log)	-0.004 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Conflict	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.08)
Conflict lag	0.04 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.11)
Polity	0.32 ⁺ (0.16)	0.07 (0.15)
Corruption	0.12 (0.22)	0.52 ⁺ (0.26)
Ideal point distance	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.08 (0.08)
Size of political opposition	-0.005 (0.06)	0.01 (0.07)
Count floods (lag)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Count droughts (lag)	0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)
Leader days in office (log)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
Leader prev. in office	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)
Observations	489	489
R ²	0.43	0.31
Adjusted R ²	0.25	0.08
Residual Std. Error (df = 367)	0.40	0.43

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Inclusion threshold

To address concerns that the results are driven by the choice of threshold for inclusion into the data, I present analysis for both more inclusive and more exclusive samples. All other aspects of the specification are identical to B1.

First, I decrease the magnitude threshold for inclusion in the data from 1% of the population affected to 0.5% of the population affected. This increases the number of observations from 564 to 766, and results are presented in Table B7. Second, I adopt the threshold used by [Carnegie and Dolan](#), restricting the sample only to events for which at least 300 people died. This restricts the sample to 96 observations, and results are presented in Table B8. For both samples the results remain positive and statistically significant, although the coefficient for aid requests in the more restricted sample only attains statistical significance at the $p < 0.1$ level. Taken together these results suggest that the results presented in the main analysis are not solely a product of the choice of the threshold used for inclusion in the dataset.

Table B7: Sample includes events affecting $\geq 0.5\%$ of pop

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Request aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	0.07 ⁺ (0.03)	0.11* (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.11* (0.04)
Pop. Share Affected		0.49* (0.18)		0.45 ⁺ (0.22)
Aid dependence (Med)		-0.03 (0.06)		0.05 (0.05)
Aid dependence (High)		0.08 (0.09)		0.07 (0.08)
GDP (log)		0.005 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)
Conflict		-0.06 (0.05)		-0.01 (0.06)
Conflict lag		0.09* (0.04)		-0.02 (0.07)
Polity		0.19 ⁺ (0.11)		0.10 (0.11)
Corruption		0.28 (0.23)		0.46 ⁺ (0.23)
Ideal point distance		-0.03 (0.03)		-0.03 (0.04)
Size of political opposition		0.01 (0.05)		0.05 (0.05)
Count floods (lag)		-0.02** (0.005)		-0.01 (0.01)
Count droughts (lag)		0.01 (0.03)		-0.07* (0.03)
Observations	766	766	766	766
R ²	0.32	0.34	0.22	0.24
Adjusted R ²	0.19	0.20	0.07	0.09
Residual Std. Error	0.41 (df = 644)	0.41 (df = 632)	0.41 (df = 644)	0.41 (df = 632)

Note:

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table B8: Sample includes only events with ≥ 300 deaths

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Request aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	0.16 (0.24)	0.75** (0.25)	-0.17*** (0.03)	0.55 ⁺ (0.27)
Pop. Share Affected		-0.42 (0.64)		0.33 (0.51)
Aid dependence (Med)		0.51** (0.17)		0.64* (0.29)
Aid dependence (High)		-2.87 (5.70)		-16.85** (4.56)
GDP (log)		-0.11 (0.23)		-0.66*** (0.17)
Conflict		-0.39* (0.14)		-0.06 (0.19)
Conflict lag		0.30 ⁺ (0.17)		-0.08 (0.36)
Polity		0.19 (0.34)		0.30 (0.19)
Corruption		1.34 (1.19)		0.05 (1.35)
Ideal point distance		0.29** (0.09)		-0.01 (0.11)
Size of political opposition		-0.68** (0.19)		-0.70 (0.44)
Count floods (lag)		-0.02 (0.02)		-0.07* (0.03)
Count droughts (lag)		-0.02 (0.11)		-0.06 (0.12)
Observations	96	96	96	96
R ²	0.76	0.82	0.70	0.83
Adjusted R ²	0.42	0.37	0.28	0.39
Residual Std. Error	0.35 (df = 39)	0.36 (df = 27)	0.40 (df = 39)	0.36 (df = 27)

Note:

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Removal of influential observations

To address concerns that results are driven by countries that experience the highest volume of disasters, I include a specification in which I remove all events from India (N=34) and Sri Lanka (N=30). Together they represent 11% of observations in the sample. Table B9 presents the main results when all disaster observations for Sri Lanka and India are removed. When these observations are removed, the coefficient on disaster type remains positive and statistically significant for both outcomes of interest, although the coefficient for government declarations only attains significance at the $p < 0.1$ level.

Table B9: Main results, removing disasters from India and Sri Lanka

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Government declaration		Aid request	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Disaster type (flood)	0.112 ⁺ (0.063)	0.139 ⁺ (0.069)	0.125* (0.047)	0.144** (0.048)
Pop. Share Affected		0.454* (0.185)		0.451 ⁺ (0.236)
Aid dependence (Med)		-0.034 (0.066)		0.133* (0.055)
Aid dependence (High)		0.088 (0.102)		0.158 (0.098)
GDP (log)		0.010 (0.007)		0.014 (0.010)
Conflict		-0.027 (0.070)		-0.005 (0.087)
Conflict lag		0.067 (0.065)		-0.012 (0.106)
Polity		0.270 ⁺ (0.133)		0.101 (0.129)
Corruption		0.221 (0.297)		0.292 (0.270)
Ideal point distance		-0.009 (0.026)		-0.058 (0.046)
Size of political opposition		-0.023 (0.054)		0.038 (0.062)
Count floods (lag)		-0.025* (0.009)		-0.022 ⁺ (0.012)
Count droughts (lag)		0.022 (0.049)		-0.069 (0.049)
Observations	516	516	516	516
R ²	0.387	0.413	0.269	0.303
Adjusted R ²	0.213	0.222	0.061	0.077
Residual Std. Error	0.419 (df = 401)	0.416 (df = 389)	0.431 (df = 401)	0.427 (df = 389)

Note:

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

C Donor offers of humanitarian aid

I leverage a feature of the bureaucratic process used by OFDA to allocate humanitarian assistance; when OFDA allocates aid, the office issues a disaster declaration, which is a diplomatic cable that provides the legal authority for USAID OFDA to provide emergency humanitarian assistance. A representative of the U.S. government, typically the Ambassador or the Chief of Mission in the recipient country, issues the declaration, which “outlines the extent of the damage and possible needs and may recommend assistance in the form of funding, material, or technical assistance” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2019). It also triggers the immediate release of up to \$50,000, which can be supplemented based on OFDA’s assessment of humanitarian needs.

To provide assistance, OFDA requires three criteria to be met: the disaster must be beyond the ability of the affected country to respond, the host government must ask for or be willing to accept assistance, and responding to the disaster must be in the interest of the US government (OFDA Report FY 2014). These criteria leave much open to interpretation, and although the Ambassador has the legal authority to unilaterally issue a disaster declaration, in practice U.S. embassy personnel typically consult with the host country before issuing a disaster declaration. They solicit the perspective of the host government seeks their input on the type and amount of aid to provide. Evidence for this norm is documented in declassified diplomatic cables and in past scholarship (Glantz 1976).

Table C1: Full results: Association between declarations/requests and donor aid allocation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	OFDA offer	
	(1)	(2)
Disaster type (flood)	0.207*** (0.028)	0.222*** (0.030)
Declare emergency	0.128** (0.045)	0.123* (0.048)
Request aid	0.188*** (0.049)	0.181*** (0.049)
Pop. Share Affected		0.106 (0.161)
Aid dependence (Med)		0.036 (0.057)
Aid dependence (High)		0.065 (0.060)
GDP (log)		-0.004 (0.005)
Conflict		0.045 (0.068)
Conflict lag		-0.122 ⁺ (0.071)
Polity		-0.108 (0.080)
Corruption		-0.455* (0.212)
Ideal point distance		0.012 (0.029)
Size of political opposition		-0.023 (0.044)
Count floods (lag)		-0.007 (0.009)
Count droughts (lag)		0.034 (0.035)
Declare X Request	0.013 (0.089)	0.034 (0.087)
Observations	564	564
R ²	0.416	0.433
Adjusted R ²	0.260	0.261
Residual Std. Error	0.326 (df = 444)	0.326 (df = 432)
<i>Note:</i>	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001	

D Probing consequences for perceptions of competence

To test whether government's responses to natural disasters shape external perceptions of their competence, I analyze the relationship between emergency declarations, aid requests, and political and economic risk ratings. I use the risk ratings for SHORT TERM POLITICAL RISK and SHORT TERM ECONOMIC RISK described in Appendix B

As risk ratings are monthly indicators, I aggregate the natural disaster event data to the level of country-month and include only events after January 2000 in the analysis. Table D1 presents summary statistics for the variables used in this analysis. The dependent variables of interest are SHORT TERM POLITICAL RISK and SHORT TERM ECONOMIC RISK for the month following the natural disaster event. The independent variables of interest are GOVERNMENT DECLARATION, AID REQUEST, and the interaction term GOVERNMENT DECLARATION X AID REQUEST. Both I control for the share of the population affected and include fixed effects for the country and year. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country and year.

Table D1: Summary statistics: Monthly aggregates and risk ratings

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Pctl. 25	Pctl. 75	Max
Number of floods	13383	0.0108	0.104	0	0	0	2
Number of droughts	13383	0.00867	0.0935	0	0	0	2
Pop. share affected (flood)	13383	0.000489	0.00748	0	0	0	0.368
Pop. share affected (drought)	13383	0.00103	0.0165	0	0	0	0.909
Aid request (flood)	13383	0.00299	0.0546	0	0	0	1
Aid request (drought)t	13383	0.00157	0.0396	0	0	0	1
Declaration (flood)	13383	0.00478	0.069	0	0	0	1
Declaration (fdrought)	13383	0.00269	0.0518	0	0	0	1
Short-term economic risk	13300	47.9	13.3	1.25	38.5	55.6	96.9
Lead econ risk (1 month)	13383	47.8	13.3	1.25	38.5	55.4	96.9
Short-term political risk	13111	58.2	12.5	18.8	50	67.5	86.7
Lead pol risk (1 month)	13191	58.2	12.5	18.8	50	67.5	86.7

I estimate a single regression equations that includes both floods and droughts. I use the following equation:

$$Y_{cmy} = \beta_1 \text{Declare flood}_{cmy} + \beta_2 \text{Declare drought}_{cmy} + \beta_3 \text{Request flood}_{cmy} + \beta_4 \text{Request drought}_{cmy} + \beta_5 \text{Declaration} \times \text{Request flood}_{cmy} + \beta_6 \text{Declare} \times \text{Request drought}_{cmy} + \theta X_{cmy} + \alpha_c + \gamma_y + \epsilon_{cmy}$$

Y is the relevant risk rating, c indexes the country β_5 and β_6 are the coefficient of interest on the interaction between declaration and request, θ refers to the coefficients on a vector of control variables, α represents the country-level fixed effects and γ represents the year fixed effects, and ϵ is the error term. A coefficient plot of the results can be found in the main text.

Table D2 demonstrates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the share of the

population affected and subsequent political and economic risk ratings. The number of droughts in the prior month is associated with a 1 point improvement in risk score ($p < 0.1$). Table D3 displays the full results from the regression analysis presented in Figure 4.

Table D2: Correlation between disaster magnitude and risk ratings

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Economic Risk (1)	Political Risk (2)
Count droughts (month)	0.126 (0.714)	1.251 ⁺ (0.655)
Share pop affected (drought)	0.119 (2.911)	2.119 (3.715)
Count floods (month)	1.167 (0.792)	0.767 (0.561)
Share pop affected (flood)	-12.704 (9.228)	-7.785 (7.575)
Observations	13,383	13,325
R ²	0.713	0.705
Adjusted R ²	0.711	0.703
Residual Std. Error	7.160 (df = 13277)	6.835 (df = 13219)
<i>Note:</i>	+ p _i 0.1; * p _i 0.05; ** p _i 0.01; *** p _i 0.001	

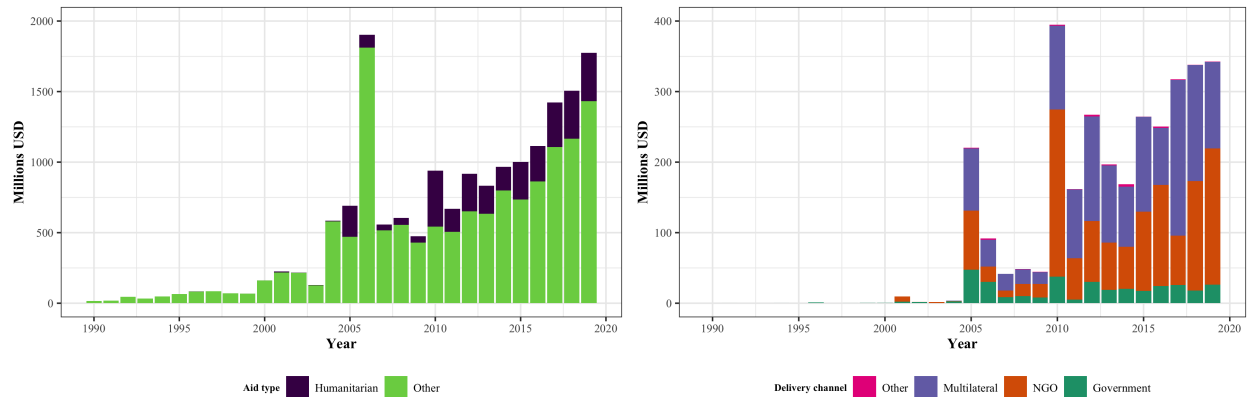
Table D3: Full regression output for relationship between declarations, requests, and risk ratings

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Econ risk (1)	Political risk (2)
Declaration (Drought)	0.88 (0.87)	-2.46* (0.95)
Request (Drought)	3.44 (2.17)	2.42 (2.92)
Declaration (Flood)	2.92** (0.80)	0.74 (0.73)
Request (Flood)	-1.21 (1.02)	-0.25 (1.34)
Pop. share affected (flood)	-7.32 (5.50)	-1.63 (3.31)
Pop. share affected (drought)	-0.62 (2.23)	8.12* (3.55)
Dec x Request (flood)	0.47 (1.78)	0.59 (2.15)
Dec x Request (drought)	-6.81* (2.80)	0.43 (2.69)
Observations	13,383	13,325
R ²	0.66	0.67
Adjusted R ²	0.66	0.67
Residual Std. Error	7.75 (df = 13291)	7.17 (df = 13233)
<i>Note:</i>	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001	

E Niger case

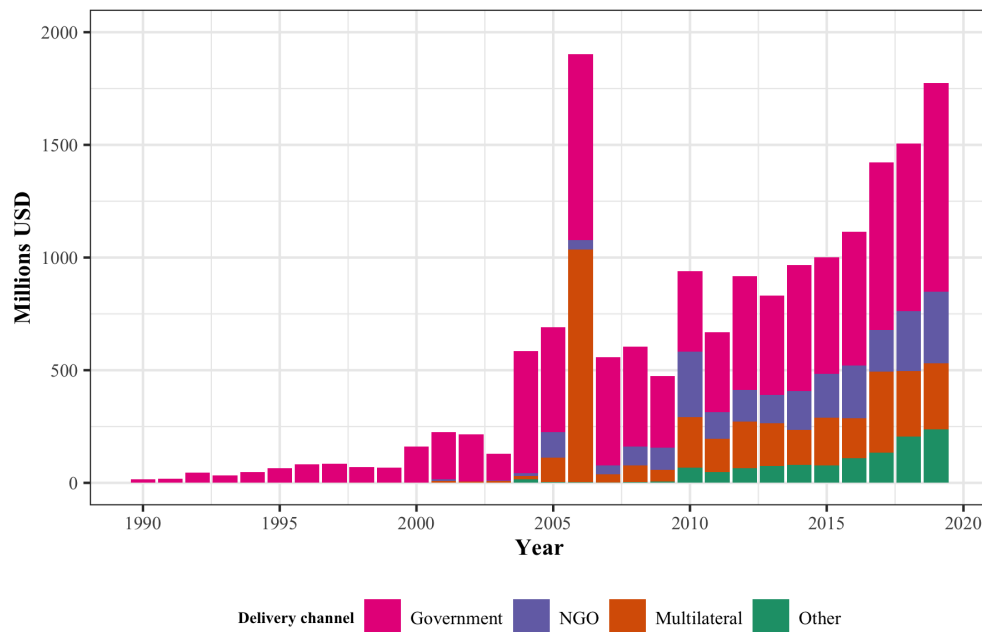
Trends in aid to Niger

Figure E1: Trends in aid to Niger 1990-2019



(a) Humanitarian aid as share of all aid

(b) Implementing organization for humanitarian aid



(c) Delivery channel of all aid

Survey of Nigerien government officials

I use original survey data to probe the plausibility of several assumptions about the preferences of government officials in aid-dependent states. The survey was designed to solicit government officials' preferences toward different types of international resources, perceptions of their effectiveness, and perceptions of their own government's international image. It was conducted with bureaucrats working in the capital Niamey and four of the country's eight regions in 2019 and January 2020.

Sample frame

The population of interest includes bureaucrats working in both the capital, Niamey, and at the regional level in Niger's eight regions. I limited the sample to these two levels because the Nigerien state is highly centralized, and decisions made at lower administrative levels (prefecture and commune) must be validated at the regional level and often the national level. This creates a bottleneck as local government officials spend much of their time waiting for approval from the regional capital and from Niamey. If the objective of the survey is to better understand the way government decision-makers perceive and respond to aid, these are the most relevant individuals to include.

However, due to logistical and budget constraints, it was impractical to conduct a representative survey of all government ministries and agencies, at last count, there are 43 ministries, in addition to executive agencies that report directly to the prime minister's office. After compiling a list of all government offices, they were selected for inclusion on the basis of two criteria: they must have regular interaction with humanitarian organizations or be responsible for direct service provision. These criteria are based on the rationale that these ministries and agencies shape the context humanitarians work in either directly, by defining the rules that govern humanitarian organizations, or indirectly, by providing (or failing to provide) services. Put differently, these agencies either govern humanitarians or humanitarians must work with or substitute for them.

Survey implementation

The survey was implemented in collaboration with Abdoulaye Igodoe, a colleague from the Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey. We recruited enumerators to conduct the survey in Niamey. The enumerators administered the survey in face-to-face interviews with subjects using tablets. The same enumerators were employed for both rounds of the survey. We carried out the survey in two waves. The first wave, in July and August 2019 occurred in the capital, Niamey. The second wave was implemented in December 2019 and January 2020 in Diffa, Tillabery, Zinder and Dosso.

Once relevant offices were identified, enumerators visited each ministry to submit paperwork requesting permission to conduct the survey. One ministry in Niamey declined to participate, but we were able to secure permission from its regional offices to conduct the survey. Several other ministries drew the authorization process out to the point where we were prevented from including their staff. Once enumerators visited each ministry they sought an appointment with the Director of Human Resources or the General Secretary who oriented them toward the relevant departments. For ministries that were difficult to access officially, enumerators asked people they knew socially who worked in these ministries to complete the survey. This approach was used for the Ministry of Interior. Even within agencies where we were given permission to conduct the survey, we had a high non-response and attrition rate. This may bias the survey responses to government bureaucrats who are particularly open to research and friendly toward the United States (enumerators were required to disclose they were working with a researcher from an American university). I anticipate that bureaucrats who are more open to responding to a survey from an American researcher are likely to be those with a more positive opinion of international aid and intervention whereas bureaucrats who refused to participate would be more likely to oppose international aid and intervention and therefore more likely to restrict aid. This implies that the rate of

opposition to aid and intervention documented in the survey is likely an underestimate of the true rate, as I am sampling those who are most likely to welcome such activities.

This recruitment strategy yielded 395 complete survey responses. Given the highly centralized nature of the state and highly partisan bureaucratic recruitment practices, many respondents found many of the survey questions highly politically sensitive. They expressed concerns to enumerators that their responses would be conveyed to the central government and they would face professional consequences. Consequently, many only agreed to answer if they shared no demographic information and chose to skip many questions in the survey. These rates of non-response are informative of the politically charged nature of discussing the politics of aid allocation in Niger. However, this also raises concerns that respondents may not be answering questions honestly; they are likely to repeat the party line. However for my purposes, the tendency for responses to reflect official government policy may be advantageous; the survey responses reflect the shared understanding of these officials, and in the Nigerien context, this shared understanding is very likely to originate at the highest levels of the state.

Descriptive analysis

Respondents were asked which of two statements they agreed with:

1. Cultivating a positive image abroad doesn't give Niger much of an advantage.
2. Cultivating a positive image abroad is important for Niger

They responded on a 7-point scale, 1 indicated they agreed very strongly with the first statement, 7 indicated they agreed very strongly with the second statement. Over 80% of respondents agreed very strongly that cultivating a positive image abroad is important for Niger.

Figure E2: Respondents perceptions of international image and aid preferences

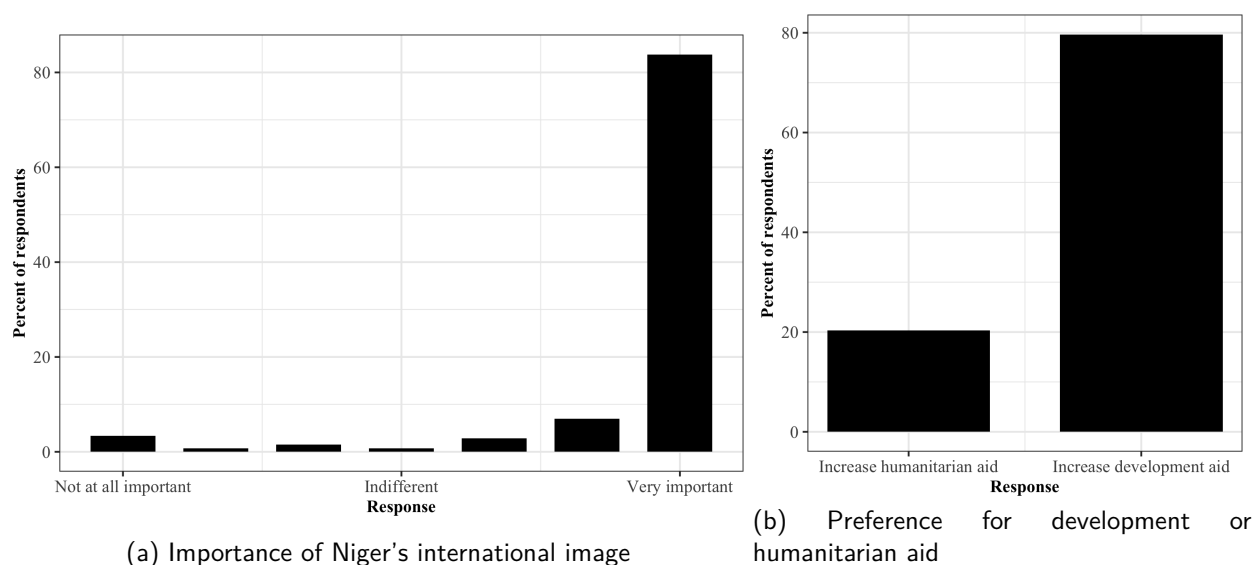


Figure E3: Mean values: relative difficulty or ease for Niger to access revenue

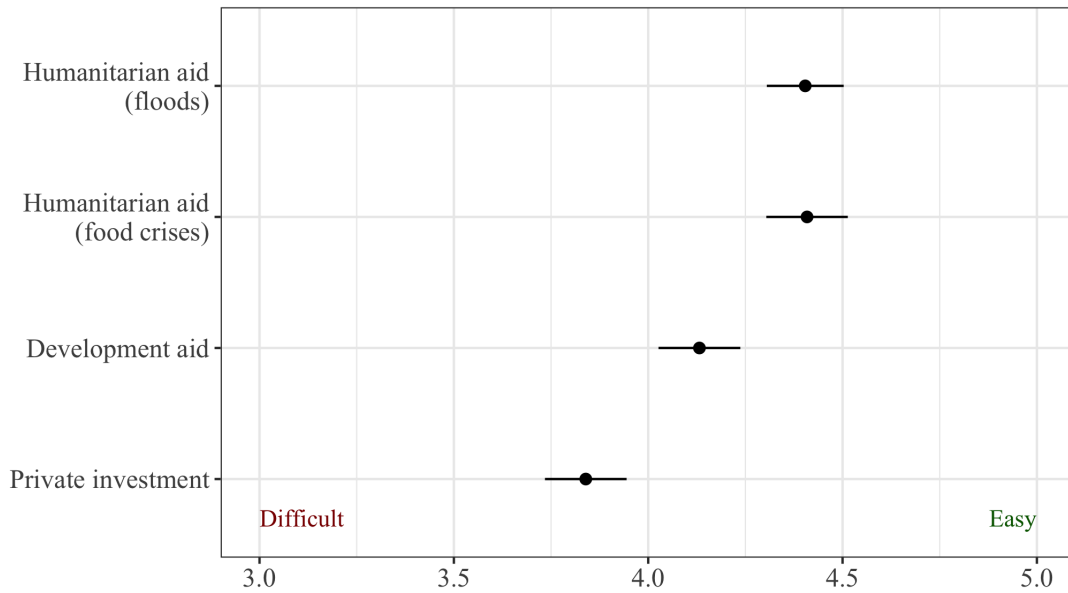


Table E1: Correlation between rating of Niger's international image and perceived ease of access to resources

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Investment (1)	Development aid (2)	Food crisis humanitarian (3)	Flood humanitarian (4)
Image rating	0.076* (0.033)	0.058+ (0.034)	0.028 (0.032)	0.027 (0.033)
Constant	3.467*** (0.175)	3.818*** (0.183)	4.258*** (0.168)	4.276*** (0.174)
Observations	291	283	289	287
R ²	0.018	0.010	0.003	0.002
Adjusted R ²	0.014	0.006	-0.001	-0.001
Residual Std. Error	1.087 (df = 289)	1.083 (df = 281)	1.030 (df = 287)	1.061 (df = 285)

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001