

# UNDERSTANDING FEDERAL PREEMINENCE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This project expands on the existing literature concerned with the centralization of America's natural disaster emergency relief and aid. Using Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones' punctuated equilibrium theory to guide the research – my thesis suggests two key findings about this policy area. First, the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, not the better-known Stafford Act of 1988, appears to mark the start of federal preeminence in disaster management. The second is the understanding that the legislative and executive branches became proactive in disaster management at different times.

My findings ultimately contribute to the existing literature by bringing about greater awareness to the exact origins of how U.S. disaster management went from being the responsibility of state and local governments without any general federal framework for well over a century and a half to what it has become currently. And, perhaps more importantly, this project opens up the debate to future researchers, interested in all aspects of disaster relief law, to the important role Congress has played in the development of this policy area, which appears to be overshadowed by the later, more public involvement from presidents.