**Memo**: Natural Disasters Favor Incumbents, Man-Made Disasters Don’t: Evidence from

U.S. Presidential Elections

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The question being presented by this paper is clear and straightforward: How do certain events affect support for incumbent parties in U.S. presidential elections? The three types of events that are examined are mass shootings, natural disasters, and the arson of Black churches. From the abstract, the argument appears to be that support for incumbents change based on the type of the attack and the partisan dynamics, where incumbents perform worse after Black church arson attacks, with other events not having a large effect on incumbent performance. They key concept that comes from this argument is *accountability* or *retrospective voting*, which is an argument that seems very similar to the work presented by Achen and Bartels. To distinguish the findings in this paper from previous work, I think the authors should really lean into the dynamics of the traumatic events and what makes the different types of events have different effects. One potential way to approach this is to separate all three of these effects into their own mini-research question. So, a paper may be outlined like this:

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical Framework on Partisanship and Retrospective Voting
3. Natural Disasters
   1. Hypothesis
   2. Methods
   3. Results
4. Mass Shootings
5. Arson

Additionally, this paper would really benefit from clearly stated hypotheses. Based on the literature and the data you have, what do you think the effect of natural disasters would have on incumbent support? What about the effect of mass shootings or racially motivated attacks? The authors have already alluded to what they believe the mechanisms would be, but I would strongly encourage clear hypotheses, especially in the context of the data that they are using. Explicitly identify the dependent variable (in this case turnout or incumbent support), the independent variable (frequency of mass shootings (continuous?), if there ever was a mass shooting (dummy?), etc.), and then state what you believe the relationship should be (more mass shootings 🡪 less support for incumbent president for example). Perhaps y’all could create a DAG or formalize your model to make it clearer on what you believe the relationship to be.

Clearly stating your hypotheses and your variables of interest will also aid in other aspects of your paper. First, it will help you distinguish between natural disasters, arson, and mass shootings. While they are all different events, distinguishing between the three types of events will allow you to clearly identify different mechanisms for each event. With clearly identified mechanisms, you’ll be able to run supported models for each event (if you choose to go down that route) and be able to check the robustness of your results with the appropriate covariates.

Second, it will help with your analysis. You have done a lot of different types of models and methods in your analysis but I’m unsure why and what your thought process is (I also acknowledge that you didn’t need to provide that at this stage). After clearly defining your hypotheses and variables of interest, it will become clearer what the most appropriate model for your research question is. Out of the three tables presented in your paper, which one do you believe is the most important to your theory? I’d say you pick one and then you can run the different versions to test different mechanisms while also being able to justify why you chose to run your main model. This will also help you avoid just running too many regressions by helping you focus your analysis. I also think that matching is a clever technique to use to test the robustness of your results but that you’ll also have to be ready to explain why you believe your covariate balance would be suspect.

As a final note, the replication code worked well for me and using a R markdown file made it easier to digest the analyses that you’re doing. I did experience an error with the scatter plots and was unable to reproduce those. I also recommend clearly indicating which portion of your code reproduces Table 1, 2, and 3 in your paper so others can clearly see what model you are running and how you are presenting your results. Finally, I’d also recommend having the final code for your completed paper in a script instead of a markdown file so others can simply run the script and see the completed figures and tables in other files. Also, I personally believe it is more convenient and it will be easier to read once you focus your analysis.