

The Politics of Disasters

Three Observations from 2017



Sam Houston
State University

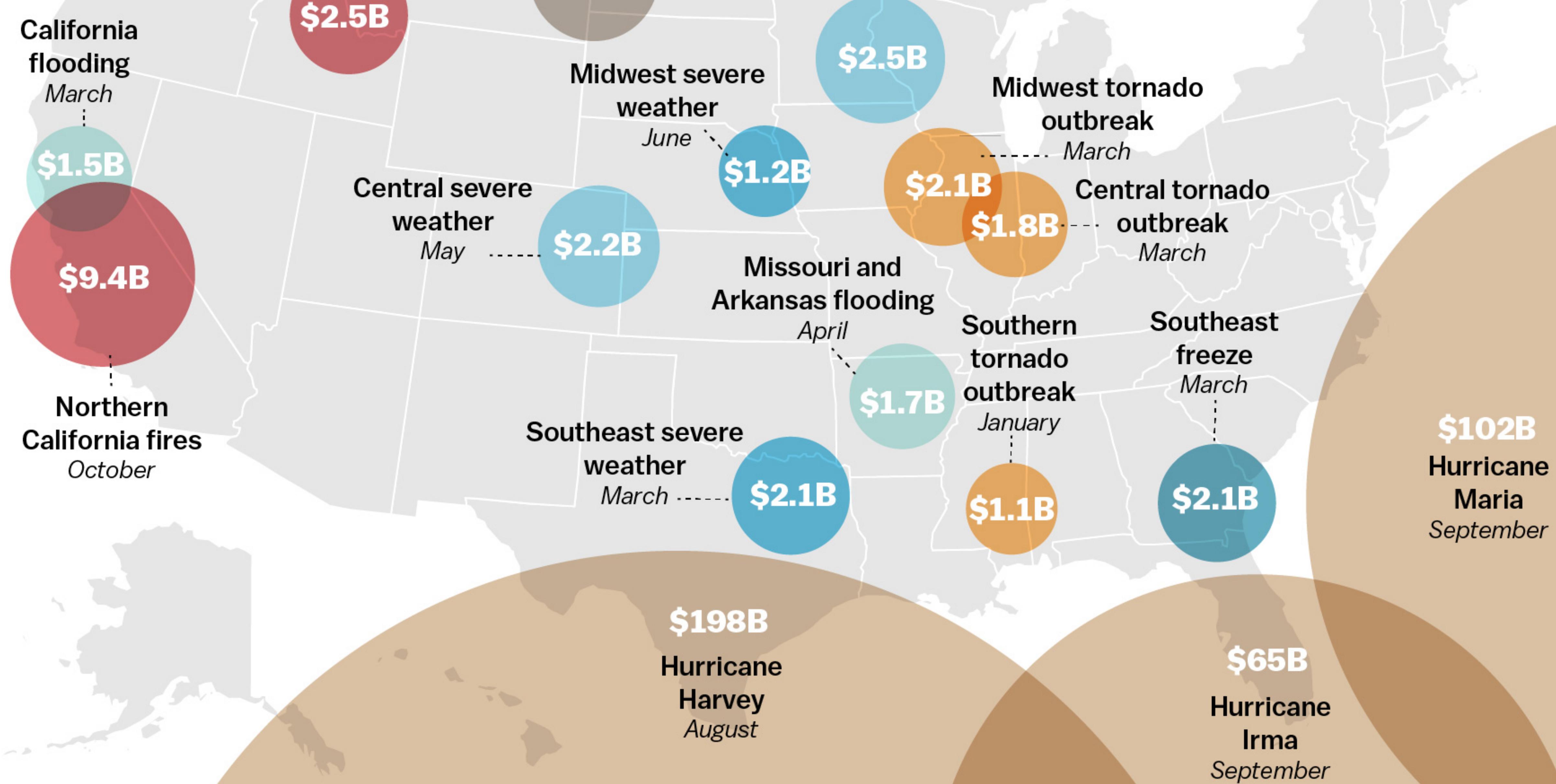


Dr. Jason Enia, Director CDEM
Sam Houston State University



CENTER *for the Study of*
DISASTERS &
EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

Sam Houston State University



Sources: NOAA, Ball State University Center for Business and Economic Research (for Harvey), Reuters (for Maria), and CoreLogic (for Irma)

Vox



HARVEY, AUGUST 2017





IRMA, SEPTEMBER 2017

MARIA, SEPTEMBER 2017



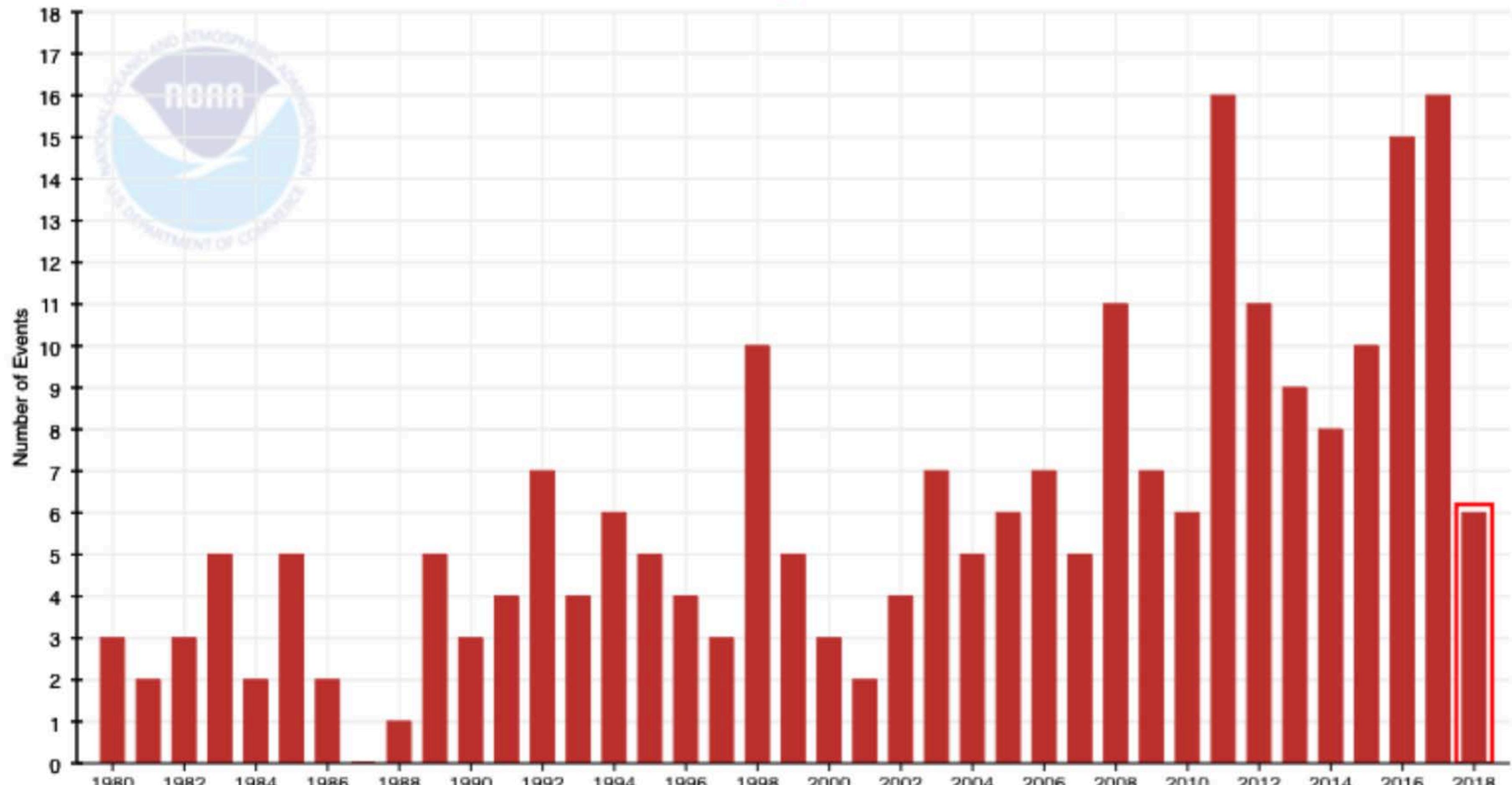


NOAA NATIONAL CENTERS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Billion-Dollar Disaster Event Types by Year (CPI-Adjusted)

All Disasters



Download: [XML](#)

Number of events
as of July 9, 2018

Newsweek

TECH & SCIENCE

TSUNAMIS: WHEN WILL WE LEARN?

BY COSTAS SYNOLAKIS ON 3/13/11 AT 10:00 AM



The devastation left by the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia is a sobering reminder of man's limitations.

PAOLO PELLEGRIN / MAGNUM

TECH & SCIENCE

The malevolent earthquake and tsunami in Japan have jolted our minds back to the 2004 catastrophe in the Indian Ocean, as well as to last year's tsunamis in Chile and Sumatra. Gruesome comparisons are inevitable, as is the fatalism that follows such "acts of God." What can man do in the face of nature's wrath? Not everything, of course—and a natural disaster is always a most sobering reminder of our own limitations. But it is clear—and painfully so—that the international community has not done a fraction of what it had hoped to do in the aftermath of the carnage in 2004, when the devastation in Banda Aceh, Phuket, Sri Lanka, and parts of Africa led to a global resolve to be better prepared for the next time.

WHEN WILL WE LEARN?

**This question is built
on a false premise.**





**This question ignores
the politics of disasters.**

Frustration
Just Ahead



A photograph of a residential street completely submerged in floodwater. The water covers the entire width of the street, reaching up to the bases of large trees lining both sides. In the background, several houses are visible through the dense foliage. A speed limit sign stands partially submerged in the water on the left side. On the right side, a small portion of a road is visible above the water level, showing some markings.

**Bad policies can make
very good politics.**

1



NATIONAL FLOOD
INSURANCE PROGRAM





What is Biggert-Waters?

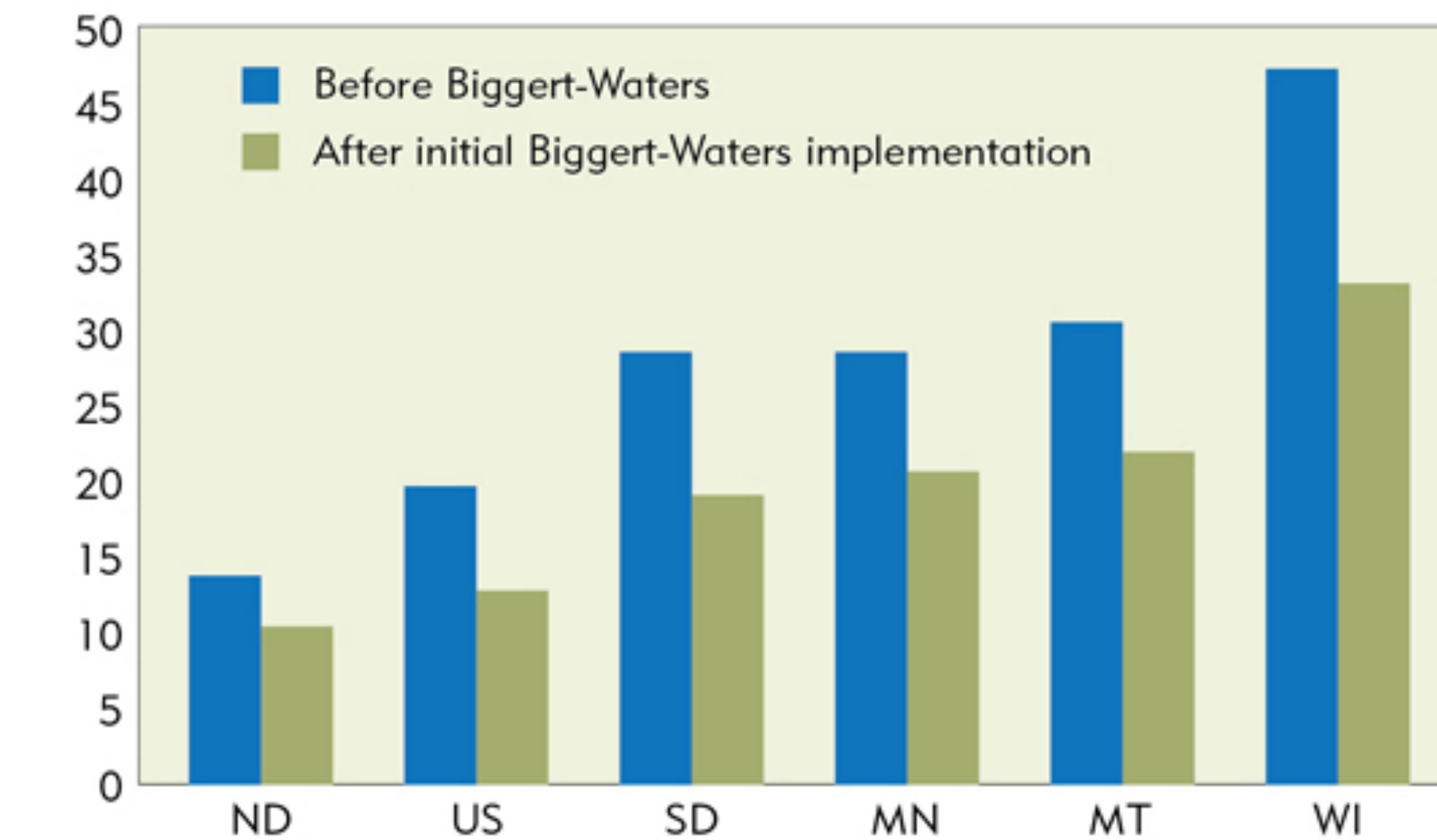
On July 6, 2012, Congress signed the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act.

- Reauthorized the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) for 5 years
- Discontinued ceiling on premium rates
- Mandated that actuaries charge actuarial rates for all properties
- Created a new insurance category for 5%

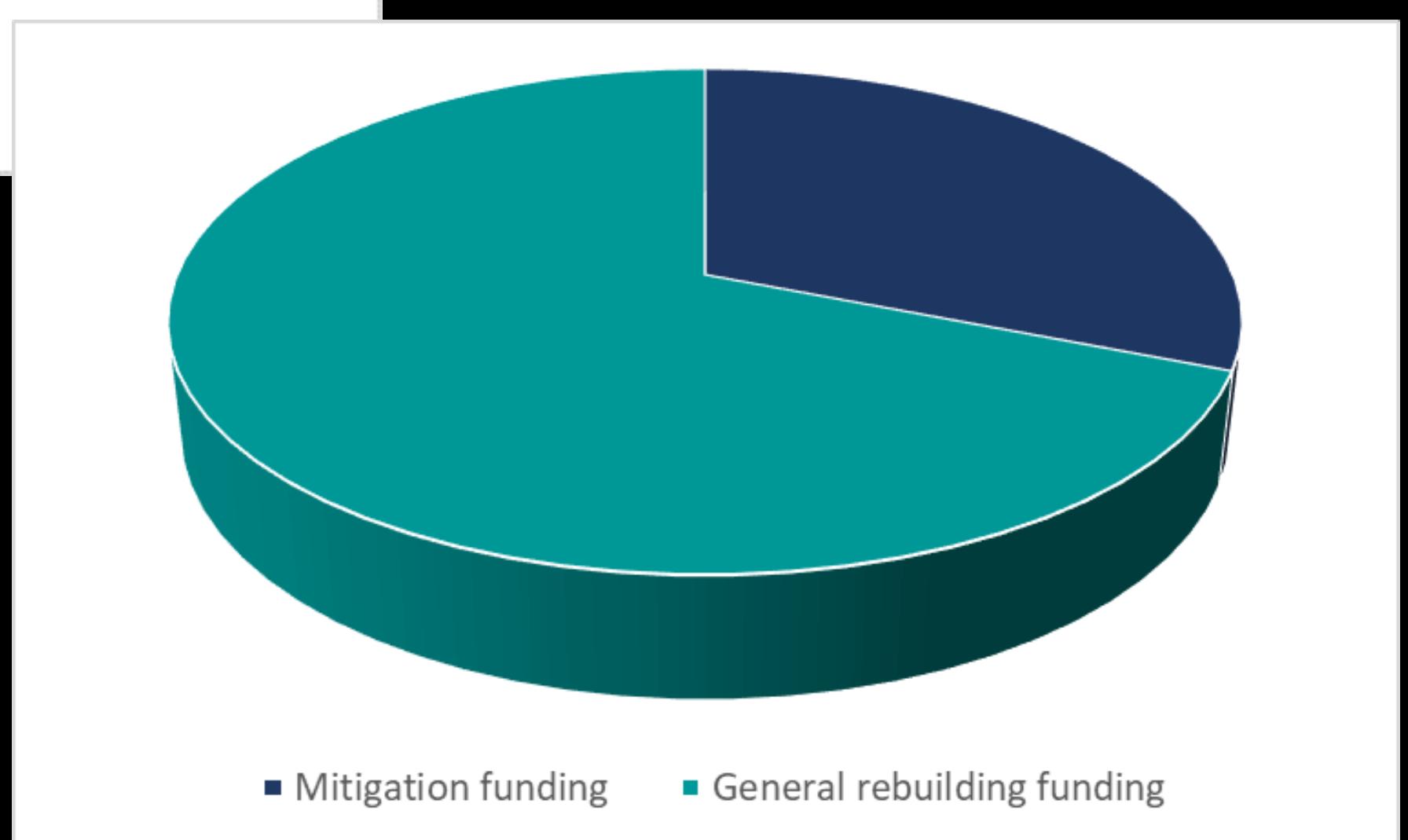
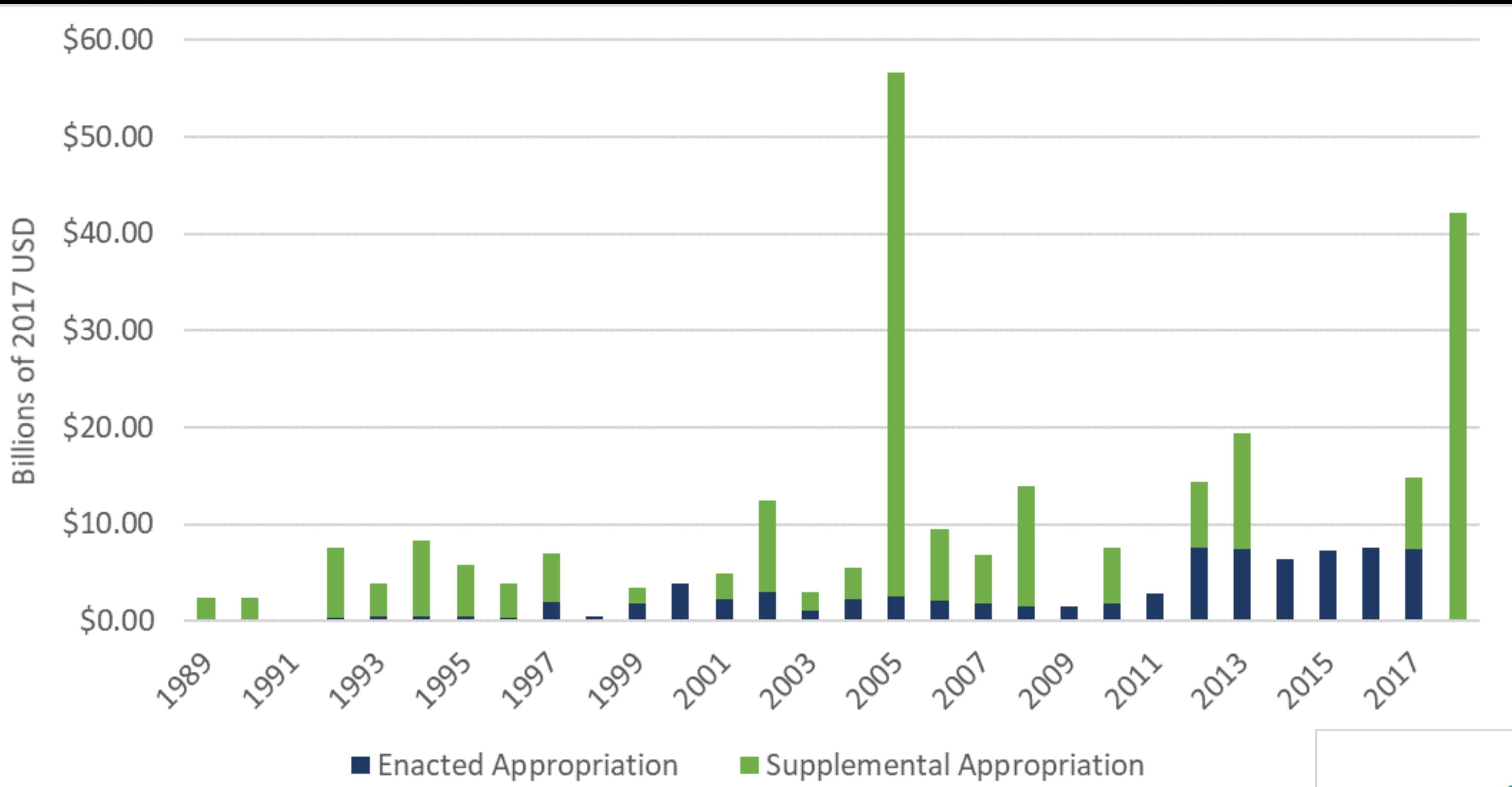
Chart 3

Help from Uncle Sam

% of flood insurance policies with subsidized premiums



Sources: National Flood Insurance Program, Government Accountability Office



Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy

ANDREW HEALY *Loyola Marymount University*
NEIL MALHOTRA *Stanford University*

Do voters effectively hold elected officials accountable for policy decisions? Using data on natural disasters, government spending, and election returns, we show that voters reward the incumbent presidential party for delivering disaster relief spending, but not for investing in disaster preparedness spending. These inconsistencies distort the incentives of public officials, leading the government to underinvest in disaster preparedness, thereby causing substantial public welfare losses. We estimate that \$1 spent on preparedness is worth about \$15 in terms of the future damage it mitigates. By estimating both the determinants of policy decisions and the consequences of those policies, we provide more complete evidence about citizen competence and government accountability.

Do voters effectively hold elected officials accountable for policy decisions? Studies of political behavior are divided on their views of voter competence, not only in the domain of vote choice but also in the domain of attitude formation. On the one hand, The Michigan School conceived of the public as myopic, uninformed (Campbell et al. 1960), and lacking an organized belief system of political attitudes (Converse 1964). Subsequent research showed that voters lack political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), possess misinformation (Kuklinski et al. 2000), and often make seemingly irrational electoral decisions (Bartels 2008; Caplan 2007; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Although not always explicitly demonstrated, these studies suggest that voter incompetence is normatively undesirable because it reduces social welfare.

On the other hand, Key (1966) argued that the electorate is “responsible,” in that citizens often vote to reward or punish the incumbent administration for its stewardship of the country (Fiorina 1981; Kramer 1971). Even if voters are not fully informed, they can rely on information shortcuts such as cues and endorsements to make sensible decisions (Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Popkin 1991; Sniderman et al. 1991). The information market induced by electoral competition incentivizes politicians to provide voters with such information (Wittman 1995). Moving from the individual to the aggregate level, Page and Shapiro (1992) argued that even if individual voters exhibit unsophisticated and unstructured conceptions of politics,

collective preferences are well organized and respond sensibly and swiftly to government action and national events. These studies generally conclude that citizen competence is sufficient to the tasks of electoral accountability.

However, there exist important limitations in the evidence brought to bear by both sides in this debate on democratic competence. For example, studies of individual-level attitudes typically rely on secondary indicators of democratic competence, such as scores on political knowledge tests (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), correlations among survey responses as measures of “constraint” (e.g., Converse 1964), and experimental treatment effects of information cues and heuristics (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Moreover, aggregate-level studies showing that voters respond to macroeconomic conditions at election time (e.g., Kramer 1971) or that mass public opinion is sensitive to changes in events (e.g., Gerber and Green 1998; Page and Shapiro 1992) generally contend that such patterns are evidence of rational response.¹ However, as Achen and Bartels (2004b, 2005) argued, this is not necessarily the case because voters may be reacting in ways that make little sense. Finally, the arguments of both the optimists and the pessimists suggest that levels of information (or lack thereof) among the public have social welfare consequences, but generally do not demonstrate their existence.

More broadly, the extant literature has not provided a full test of government accountability, in the sense that previous studies have not simultaneously examined (1) voters’ responses to government policy, (2) incumbents’ responses to public opinion, and (3) the welfare consequences of elite and mass behavior.

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Voters reward
recovery spending
NOT
mitigation spending

¹ The study of retrospective voting has mainly focused on economic conditions (e.g., Fiorina 1981; Kramer 1971; Lewis-Beck 1988). However, because the state of the national economy is the product of myriad factors, it is generally unclear how to interpret the empirical findings of economic voting in terms of accountability. For example, Alesina, Londregan, and Rosenthal (1993, 26) argued that “the analysis of growth gives no evidence that voters *should* use information about aggregate growth to learn about competence.” Indeed, the fact that macroeconomic conditions are not temporally isolated, combined with the abstruse connections between government policy and the economy, make it difficult to evaluate the actions of both the public and politicians.



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3

Why There Are No Mops to Clean Up Texas

After the rain stopped, my wife visited several stores, hoping to find cleaning supplies. No dice.

Saturday, September 09, 2017





STREET CRED

KEN PAXTON

Texas Attorney
General

Fmr JC Penney in
house counsel



TX AG WARNS OF PRICE GOUGING



CNBC

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Thank you.