Memo on Replication Review - David, Nidhi, Nicolas

Hi David, Nidhi, and Nicolas,

First of all, it was great to review your draft. You are working on an extremely relevant topic (impact of disasters on incumbent support), which is relevant to different subfields and could contribute to understanding varied episodes in time and other regions of the world. Particularly, exploring variance in disaster agency and incumbency partisanship sounds like promising ways of approaching the topic.

Secondly, I confirm I could replicate your tables and analysis using the link in the draft's footnote combined with the datasets available on the replication folder materials.

In this memo, I list some thoughts and suggestions from reading the tables and running the code.

1) **Substantive suggestions**:
   a) I encourage you to think further about the reasoning/theory you want to test here: what do we expect to see as effects of disasters on incumbency? What have others found on that? Should one expect incumbents to be punished for disasters, or does it depend on whether they act (and how) once it happens?
   b) Related to the previous item, it was unclear to me why analyzing such types of disasters and not others. I would encourage you to further think about it and justify the choice in the paper.
      i) You say "We specifically investigate the impact of three types of traumatic events: Black church arson attacks, mass shootings, and natural disasters." Looking at the original paper you replicated, they justify why they picked these 3 cases. Do you agree with such a reasoning? For your extension, does it make sense to keep these 3 types?
      ii) I understand and am convinced about the main division between natural and 'agent-based' disasters. However, could that be others beyond the 3 you are studying? It may be the case that expanding to other types of disasters could help to understand the differential effects you found
   c) Theoretically, there are some variables I would suggest you consider as relevant for the reasoning of the argument here:
      i) What is the impact of such a disaster on people's lives? In other words, instead of a binary variable of yes/no, it could be promising to get data on how the impact of such disasters varies across counties. That could explain why some counties punish the incumbent more than others.
      ii) What did incumbents do to account for the disaster's impact on the population's lives? If the incumbent employed public resources to help

mitigate such effects, and it is reasonable to expect that we will observe a positive effect on votes for the incumbent. On the contrary, if the incumbent was not a supportive ruler upon the disaster effects, one would expect the population to punish them. So, I would suggest you incorporate incumbents' role of action into your framework of analysis. You could collect data on public spending with disasters in such locations and see whether it has an effect, controlling for it or interacting with the type of disaster.

iii) Another set of variables that may be relevant here are media and public opinion. How is the ruler's responsibility depicted in public opinion? How much attention did the disaster per se receive in the media? On the first, you could add some evidence on how the disaster connection with the government was framed in the media, such as collecting data from newspapers. On the second, even Google Trends could help to give you a sense, at least for control purposes, of how salient the disaster was.

iv) Regarding the outcome of interest, it was unclear why you are looking to presidential elections and not to local ones. If the disaster is coded at the county level, why should one expect its effects to be at the national level?

2) Data analysis and reporting suggestions:

a) On reporting descriptives and regression results:

i) Your tables do not specify there are fixed effects for county and year in the models. I only saw this when running the code on R. For future versions, it would be good if your tables contain all the information needed for the reader to be able to interpret it as directly as possible. Besides that, Tables 2 and 3 miss the model general information at the bottom (number of observations, R^2, p-values.

ii) I know this is just an early draft, but it would have been nice to see the results into figures, ideally comparing the different models you ran (with and without control for the incumbent party, with and without interactions between the party and the type of natural disaster)

iii) Could you include some descriptives of the types of disasters more broadly? What is the source of the county-level electoral data you are using?

iv) How many units from all the counties experienced one of the types of disaster you are measuring? And how many of them are governed by Democrats? It would be cool to see whether some counties mainly drive the results and which are them.

b) On model specification and potential future tests:
  i) Regarding the regression model specification, I do not quite understand why you have three separate models for each type of disaster. Why not have a categorical variable with four values: "Black Arson", "Mass Shootings", "Natural Disasters", and "No disaster"? This could help to understand how different types of disasters compare.
  ii) How is the disaster variable coded?
    (1) Could some of these counties have faced more than one disaster? It would be good to add data on how often a county faced such a disaster. I wonder whether repeating disasters in the same place increases the chances that its population will be more willing to punish the incumbent.
    (2) Related to this variable are my theoretical suggestions on the disaster's impact on people's lives. Adding a measure for that could be a great contribution.
  iii) Although you are controlling for income and population, exploring some analysis for different population ranges and HH income could also be interesting. One could wonder whether such effects are heterogeneous across different types of counties (e.g., for small and poor counties, it may be the case that the disasters have a greater effect than for others).

3) **Text and framing:**

a) On the abstract: The research question "How do psychologically traumatic events—such as natural disasters, mass shootings, and Black church arson attacks—affect voter support for incumbent parties in U.S. presidential elections?" seems like a great balance between broadness and specificity. It contains all the relevant information. You could either make it more broadly, remove the part of the US presidential elections (then specify this is the test you conduct after), or keep it as it is. However, the abstract could be written more compellingly, focusing on the findings and how it adds a new take to the literature. I do not know this literature, but the greatest contribution seems to follow the contrast depicted in the title.
b) In the paper, I suggest you repeat the research question and discuss the inputs of the literature on electoral accountability, voting behavior, and disaster effects.
c) Right now, your draft does not make it explicit what data/takeaways from the original paper you are absorbing and what ones you are extending on/changing. I encourage you to discuss this (briefly) so that it is clear that you are using their data, but positing new questions. From what I understood, the original paper

focused on turnout, and you focus on incumbency vote shares. This seems to be a nice way of extension and has the potential to embrace a lot of other potentially relevant variables in the study of incumbency advantage.

d) It would have been helpful to have more information on which choices did you make so far and what are the next steps you aim to pursue so that I could also try to provide some kind of feedback on that.

Overall, your topic is super relevant, the results suggesting interactive effects of party and type of disaster seem puzzling, and the idea of testing disaster effects on electoral accountability has great potential to contribute to Political Science.

Good luck with the next steps, and feel free to reach out to me regarding any of the above or if I could be of further help!

Best,
Gabriela