After the Flood: Natural Disasters and Electoral Choices in Chile [*]

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May 10, 2018

Abstract

What candidate characteristics become more important to voters after a natural catastrophe? Even as climate change has increased concerns about the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the effects of these catastrophes on voter behavior is not yet well understood. The extant literature focuses on how voters punish or reward incumbent performance based on a model of (mis)attribution of responsibilities. However, disaster victims might also pay attention to specific candidate characteristics when making electoral choices. To analyze this hypothesis, I use a natural experiment created by the floods that occurred in Chile in 2015 to take advantage of random variation in citizens' exposure to a disaster. I then capture voters' electoral choices using a conjoint survey experiment. The findings show that material damage caused by the flood increased the probability of voters selecting left-wing candidates, who can be associated with social policies that can ameliorate the repercussions of the catastrophe.

Keywords: Political Behavior, Electoral Choices, Natural Disasters, Natural Experiments, Conjoint Experiments.

1 Introduction

Climate change has increased concerns about the frequency and intensity of natural disasters. According to NASA, global warming will increase the likelihood of these events in the future,[1] which could lead to a greater risk of inland flooding and tropical cyclones (Van Aalst, 2006). Disaster victims face a variety of negative effects on their living conditions, such as income reduction, the deterioration of public services, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Consequently, it is not surprising that there is consistent evidence showing that natural catastrophes can affect voters' electoral choices (Oliver and Reeves, 2015).

Despite these known effects, the mechanisms underlying voter behavior after natural disasters are not yet well understood. Why do citizens change their political behavior after natural disasters? Do catastrophes make candidates with certain characteristics more attractive to voters? The extant literature focuses on the evaluation of incumbent performance. In particular, it has mainly explored whether voters punish or reward the ruling candidate after a negative shock: for example, if the disaster increased or decreased support for the candidate or party in power, as measured through the incumbent vote share. Most of these findings have been attributed to voters' (mis)evaluations of past events.

This previous research has failed to consider how the characteristics of the candidates themselves may play a role in electoral decision-making. According to this hypothesis, disaster victims might also pay attention to particular candidates' attributes when making electoral decisions. Thus, affected citizens might not only sanction incumbents but also select candidates based on the new context. For example, are the age, profession, ideology, or experience of the candidates important to voters after a natural catastrophe? We do not have a clear answer to this question.

Trying to understand which candidate characteristics become more important for voters after a natural catastrophe presents multiple methodological challenges. First, even though the origin of natural disasters might be exogenous to incumbents' performances, natural disasters are not

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[1] See: "The Impact of Climate Change on Natural Disasters."

randomized experiments. Indeed, damage incurred by disaster victims can be correlated with a variety of characteristics: for example, poor individuals might be more likely to live in high-risk areas, such as close to a river or near the mountains. Therefore, certain voters might have a greater chance of being exposed to a natural disaster.

Second, previous research designs do not tend to account for the importance of sample homogeneity for drawing more credible inferences. Ideally, an observational study should compare subjects from the same natural blocks, such as students from the same school or patients from the same hospital (Pimentel et al., 2015). By drawing units from the same homogeneous sample, the treated and control groups may have similar distributions of unobserved covariates, which will improve comparability between units and reduce sensitivity to hidden biases (Rosenbaum, 2011; Keele, 2015). Few studies, however, take this point into account: rarely do treated and control units come from homogeneous samples.

The third methodological challenge is that the characteristics of candidates might be endogenous to the disaster. For example, it is possible that parties tend to nominate candidates with certain attributes in districts exposed to catastrophes. As a consequence, it is important to isolate candidates' characteristics from the disaster itself.

My research design addresses each of these concerns, focusing on a particular case of flooding in northern Chile. In March 2015, unseasonably heavy rains in that region of the country triggered flash floods, causing severe damage in numerous cities and towns. Copiapó, the capital city of the Atacama region, was severely affected by this natural disaster. I focus on a district called Paipote, the most affected area of the city of Copiapó. Some parts of Paipote, however, were not exposed to the flood because of haphazard circumstances. This provides an opportunity to compare voters indirectly affected by the flood (those who experienced isolation and a scarcity of supplies for several days but no material damage) with those who were directly affected by the disaster (those who experienced material damage in addition to isolation and scarcity).

This case allows us to address two of the aforementioned methodological challenges. First, the as-if random nature of exposure to the flood allows us to better identify the political conse-

quences of a natural disaster: unexposed people had not sorted or selected their houses based on their expectations of being affected by a disaster since the magnitude and trajectory of the flood were unpredictable. Second, because Paipote is a homogeneous low-middle income town, the comparability between voters and, therefore, our ability to draw credible inferences from the data, increases.

To better understand how candidate characteristics may become more relevant to voters after a natural disaster, I conducted an original survey with an embedded conjoint experiment in the more- and the less-affected areas of the town three months after the disaster. The main goal of the conjoint analysis was to determine how people value different candidate attributes when making electoral decisions. By randomizing candidates' characteristics, the conjoint experiment allows us to identify the effects of each of these attributes in a mayoral race (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). Furthermore, by using hypothetical candidates who were not nominated by political parties but rather randomly generated, this approach helps address the third methodological concern.

I argue that disaster victims are more likely to prefer candidates who can improve their living conditions after a natural catastrophe, a rational calculation about which candidate can enhance their well-being. I expect two kinds of candidates to be rewarded after natural disasters based on victims' attempts to reduce the gap between their standard of living before and after the negative shock: those who are associated with the provision of relief and/or social benefits (i.e., welfare candidates), and those who provide signals that they will competently handle the consequences of the shock (i.e., managerial candidates).

The combination of the conjoint and natural experiments shows that victims reward the first type of candidate described. In particular, having experienced material damage from the flood increases the likelihood that a voter will prefer left-wing candidates over those from the right and center by 12 percentage points. This finding is consistent with the idea that citizens affected by natural disasters seek to improve their living conditions, which leads them to prioritize social policies after the disaster (for example, new housing), and therefore be more likely to vote for

3

the left-wing candidates associated with such measures. Survey evidence from Chile shows that a majority of respondents link the distribution of public housing with left-wing politicians (Visconti, 2018), then this ideological label can work as a meaningful heuristic in this context.

This paper provides four main contributions to the existing literature. First, it helps illuminate a crucial question in any democratic context: do people care more about policy or competence after a negative event? On the one hand, we can imagine disaster victims to be more likely to prefer a politician who can effectively deal with the consequences of the catastrophe. On the other, we can expect affected citizens to reward the candidate who can provide them what they need to improve their living conditions. The findings in this paper can help us better understand voters' choices under adverse circumstances.

Second, this article investigates a previously overlooked research question about which candidate characteristics become more important to voters after natural disasters. Though the selection of a good type of political leader is a critical component of voters' electoral choices (Fearon, 1999), previous research has focused on traditional sanctioning arguments based on incumbent performance. This paper, in contrast, stresses the importance of voters' living conditions, and how disaster victims select candidates who can improve them. This logic is not limited to natural disasters, but rather can be applied to other types of adverse circumstances. Using a similar logic but studying a different negative event, we can imagine that right-wing politicians will more likely benefit during a crime wave because voters might associate them with crime-reduction policies.

Third, the main findings provide novel insight into how disaster victims make electoral choices. Building upon previous research that has shown that good incumbents are not always punished after disasters (Healy and Malhotra, 2010; Gasper and Reeves, 2011), the results indicate that left-wing candidates have a natural advantage after such events. This finding can help us understand what kind of politicians enjoy an electoral advantage after catastrophes. Climate change has increase our concerns about natural catastrophes, and floods are one of the key events that can be connected to global warming. In this context, learning more about how victims react to these events and what they expect from the government is crucial.

4

Fourth, this paper shows that disaster victims are changing their electoral choices but not their beliefs (e.g., ideological position on the left-right spectrum). This shows us that voters can have flexible preferences based on the particular circumstances they are facing.[2] The context is crucial to explaining people's electoral choices: on some occasions, they might be willing to yield ground on their beliefs to get what they need.

The empirical strategy follows a design-based approach to causal inference (i.e., the combination of natural and conjoint experiments), qualitative interviews to illuminate the causal mechanisms at work, the implementation of a behavioral benchmark to compare the findings from the conjoint experiment with the real electoral results after the flood, and the use of survey data from another disaster in a different region in Chile to improve external validity (see Appendix A). The study was registered at Evidence in Governance and Politics prior to the initiation of any research activities (see Appendix B).

2 The Evaluation of Incumbent Performance

Research about how natural disasters affect voters' electoral and political choices has increased in recent years. Most of this literature focuses on voter evaluation of the incumbent based on a process of (mis)attribution of responsibilities (Healy and Malhotra, 2009, 2010; Gasper and Reeves, 2011; Bechtel and Hainmueller, 2011; Remmer, 2014; Lazarev et al., 2014; Achen and Bartels, 2016), or on factors that blur the attribution of responsibility after disasters (Arceneaux and Stein, 2006; Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Maestas et al., 2008; Gomez and Wilson, 2008; Atkeson and Maestas, 2012).[3]

There are two main arguments in the literature about attribution of responsibilities after natural disasters. The first holds that voters are myopic. For instance, Achen and Bartels (2016) argue

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[2] Other negative shocks, such as unemployment, can also affect voters' preferences. See Margalit (2013).

[3] There is also a group of articles that study how natural disasters affect turnout (Gomez, Hansford and Krause, 2007; Sinclair, Hall and Alvarez, 2011; Chen, 2013; Lasala-Blanco, Shapiro and Rivera-Burgos, 2017), political attitudes (Abney and Hill, 1966; Fair et al., 2013; Carlin, Love and Zechmeister, 2014; Kosec and Mo, 2015; Maldonado, Kronmüller and Gutierrez, 2016), and voters' information about the incumbent (Ashworth, Bueno de Mesquita and Friedenberg, 2014).

that voters will punish the government during hard times regardless of its ideological platform or performance. Studying the electoral consequences of floods, droughts, and shark attacks in the United States, the authors find that the electorate holds incumbents responsible even for calamities beyond their control. They hold "that voters simply punish incumbent leaders any time their own well-being falls below 'normal' levels, regardless of whether the incumbents have performed well or badly" (Achen and Bartels, 2016, p.138).

The second argument posits that voters reward or punish incumbents depending on their performance handling the consequences of the disaster. For example, Healy and Malhotra (2010) estimate the effects of exogenous economic losses on electoral outcomes. They find that after tornadoes, voters will punish the incumbent only when no disaster declaration has been made. Therefore, voting behavior in adverse conditions seems to judge competence, rather than being a process of irrational blaming. As Healy and Malhotra (2010, p.195) hold, "observing that incumbents are adversely affected by natural disasters does not necessarily mean that voters are irrational. Even though government cannot be blamed for the adverse natural events themselves, they can be held responsible for mitigation, response, and recovery."

Traditional sanctioning arguments, however, only tell one part of the story of how disaster victims make electoral choices. For instance, when the incumbent poorly handles the disaster, we might expect voters to punish them and select another candidate from among the pool of challengers, but we do not know which candidate will be more likely to be elected. In this case, sanctioning arguments do not allow us to infer which challenger will be selected by disaster victims. In Latin America, where all the countries have multiparty competition (i.e., more than one challenger), this last point is particularly important. Thus, in contrast with previous studies, in this paper I focus on the candidate characteristics that become more important to voters after a natural disaster.

3   The Role of Candidates' Characteristics

What kind of leaders is the electorate looking for after a natural disaster? I argue that affected voters' choices are driven by instrumental motivations generated by the material damage caused by natural disasters. In particular, disaster victims will make rational decisions about which leader will improve their standard of living.

Affected citizens' instrumental decisions are motivated by new concerns after a natural catastrophe. This reordering of personal priorities and goals implies a reassessment of voters' electoral choices. Victims will make political decisions based on the expected benefits they will receive. As a result, when facing adverse conditions, citizens will select candidates they perceive as more qualified to provide them what they need. That association can be done "without requiring the (probably heroic) assumption that voters actively seek out and process policy-relevant information" (Kim and Margalit, 2017, p.6), because citizens can draw on informational cues and heuristics to make simple connections between policy outcomes and candidate characteristics (Hamill, Lodge and Blake, 1985; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001).

This hypothesis aligns with what we know about voter decision-making in adverse circumstances. There is evidence that voters try, in times of anxiety, to collect information in order to decrease their own distress, and then use this new information to make decisions (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen, 2000).[4] In consequence, voters should be able to make rational decisions after a natural disaster.

According to my argument, I expect two different kinds of candidates to be rewarded after natural disasters based on victims' attempts to improve their living conditions. The first profile is the "*Welfare Candidate*," a politician that gives rise to expectations of future distribution of welfare. However, welfare can have both a non-programmatic and a programmatic dimension: for instance, a candidate can provide financial relief (non-programmatic) and/or pass social policies (programmatic). Regarding the non-programmatic dimension, affected voters will prefer candidates who

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[4] These findings have also been used to understand how voters react to terrorist attacks (Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009).

send strong signals about the distribution of financial aid, which can help victims buy food and recover some of their essential belongings. Regarding the second dimension, social policies, such as new housing, become crucial for victims, resulting in their greater likelihood of voting for candidates associated with these policies. The proxy used to identify these types of candidates may be nationally specific: for example, in the case of Chile, left-wing candidates are associated with social policies.

It is important to stress that disaster aid (non-programmatic dimension) is not the same as social policies (programmatic dimension). Financial relief, such as the distribution of food baskets, is commonly delivered after natural disasters by NGOs, private actors, and the government, regardless of its ideological affiliation. Social policies, in contrast, fall mainly under the purview of the state, and can be associated with particular parties or ideologies: usually, left-wing parties or candidates. These policies include, for example, the provision of public housing.

How do victims connect expectations about the distribution of disaster relief and promotion of social policies with particular candidates? These expectations can be explained, first, by credible promises made by candidates during the campaign or by previous interactions with the candidates. In other cases, ideological labels may help link candidates to expected social policies. In contexts in which this informational cue may be irrelevant, party labels can work as alternative heuristics (Popkin, 1991).[5] Regardless of the mechanism used to draw these connections, I hypothesize that candidates who generate expectations about the distribution of financial relief (the non-programmatic dimension of welfare) and social policies[6] (the programmatic dimension of welfare) will be favored after natural disasters.

The second profile is the "*Managerial Candidate*." This is a politician who signals that they will competently handle the negative consequences of a disaster. The strength of this type of candidate is based on the idea that a negative event can modify the salience of certain valence issues for affected citizens. A valence issue is one on which all voters hold the same position (Stokes, 1963):

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[5] In places where ideological and party labels are meaningless, voters can use other candidate characteristics, such as socioeconomic background, to connect them with social policies or disaster relief.

[6] When ideology is a meaningful heuristic.

for instance, that everyone wants more security, growth, and jobs. In the case of natural disasters, one such issue is that everyone wants a leader competent enough to handle the crisis. Also, valence issues can become more or less salient based on the specific context (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008).

The electorate might use specific candidate characteristics as a proxy for competence on particular issues and select the politician who better fits with the newly salient problem. Certain candidate characteristics can provide information about their capacity to mitigate the effects of a natural disaster: for example, age and education can serve as proxies for managerial competence. Thus, I hypothesize that candidates with more education and experience will be rewarded in adverse circumstances. For example, I expect voters to be more inclined to vote for an old engineer than a young gardener because the former can be associated with the skills necessary for managing a crisis.

The main findings provide evidence that victims support "welfare" candidates, but no evidence that they reward "managerial" candidates. This represents novel evidence about how voters modify their electoral choices after natural catastrophes, and what kind of leaders they are looking for to handle the effects of disasters.

It is important to ask whether disaster victims are changing their ideological beliefs or are only making strategic electoral choices. The evidence I provide supports the latter argument. Specifically, there is no difference between the exposed and unexposed groups in their ideological position on the left-right scale. This result shows us that victims are not modifying their ideological beliefs, but only that they are willing to vote for left-wing politicians because of what they can provide them. We would expect that after citizens enhance their living conditions, left-wing politicians might lose their advantage since victims have not changed their ideological beliefs (see Appendix C).

It is also possible that unexposed citizens might modify their political behavior in response to the catastrophe. This spillover effect could be explained by the existence of empathic or altruistic feelings among unexposed citizens, upon witnessing their neighbors' suffering. I find evidence that the voting behavior of unexposed voters supports the idea that these individuals may empathize

toward their victim neighbors. They are highly likely to vote for candidates who generate expectations of disaster relief (the non-programmatic dimension of welfare candidates), and in fact are no different than victims in that regard. Unlike disaster victims, however, they are not more likely to vote for left-wing politicians (the programmatic dimension of welfare candidates). Qualitative evidence from interviews confirms that unexposed citizens feel empathy toward victims.

4   Research Design

4.1   The 2015 Atacama Floods

The Atacama Desert in northern Chile is one of the driest regions in the world. On March 25, 2015, thunderstorms brought the equivalent of 7 years of rain to the desert in only a few hours, which caused massive flooding in several cities in northern Chile. The terrain in this region is "hard and rocky because rainfall is not frequent or abundant enough for either weathering rocks into sand or supporting the kind of ecosystem that would help turn rocks and minerals into soil. Without soil and plant cover to help absorb rainfall, it just runs off instantly as torrents of water."[7] The floods and mudslides left two dozen people dead and more than a hundred missing, and the government estimated the damage as totaling at least \$1.5 billion.[8] More than 30,000 people were affected by the floods, and 3,000 had to live in emergency shelters.[9] As the deputy interior minister declared, this was "the worst rain disaster to fall on the north in 80 years."[10] One of the most devastated areas was Copiapó, the capital city of the Atacama region. Within Copiapó, the most affected area was Paipote, where the mudslides from the mountains entered the city. Even though Paipote was the most damaged locality in Copiapó, some houses were not exposed to the flooding at all.

The floods came from the Andes, following a ravine that was connected downstream with the Copiapó River. However, a small bridge in Paipote stopped the water that was coming from the

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[7] The Associated Press, "Thunderstorms Soak Chile Desert in Years of Rain and Kill at Least 9", The Weather Channel, March 27th, 2015.

[8] Taylor, Alan, "Devastating Floods Hit Northern Chile", The Atlantic, April 8th, 2015.

[9] Ford, Dana, "Chile floods: 25 dead, more than 100 missing", CNN, April 25th, 2015.

[10] Staff and agencies in Santiago,"Floods swamp Chile's Atacama region", The Guardian, March 26th, 2015.

mountains. A mudslide brought debris, garbage, and sediment that blocked the circulation of water under the bridge. As a consequence, the ravine overflowed, generating damage in many (but not all) areas of the city (see pictures of the bridge and the ravine in Appendix D).

The difference between the more and the less affected areas was that in the former the water flooded houses and generated massive material damage. People living in the most affected sectors lost their homes (and had to live in emergency housing) and their belongings. People living in the less affected areas were isolated for a number of days and suffered from a scarcity of food and supplies. In those areas, there was only a small amount of water in the streets, and it did not enter the houses.

Chile provides a meaningful opportunity to learn about the consequences of natural disasters, because these are common negative shocks (Hewitt, 2014). In addition, the country has stable patterns of programmatic political competition (Roberts, 2013).[11] Voters therefore should be able to connect candidate characteristics with simple policy outcomes. The research design attempts to address each of the three problems presented in the introduction. First, I use a natural experiment where the treatment as a haphazard nature. Second, I focus on a homogeneous town to increase comparability between units and reduce sensitivity to hidden biases. Third, I implement a conjoint experiment to rule out the role of parties nominating particular candidates in the affected districts.

4.2   Natural Experiment

A natural experiment is a real-world phenomenon that generates haphazard or as-if random assignment to treatment groups (Rosenbaum, 2010; Dunning, 2012). In other words, a particular and rare circumstance generates a situation where some people are exposed to the treatment but others are not, and none of these individuals can predict their future treatment status. The units cannot self-select themselves into the treatment or control groups; and pretreatment covariates

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[11] The center-left parties are liberal and more pro-state, while the center-right parties are more socially conservative and pro-market. However, the differences on the state-market divide have shrunk over time (Luna, 2014).

should be, in expectation, similar across both groups (Keele and Titiunik, 2016).[12]

In the case of Paipote, the treatment corresponds to the existence of material damage to people's houses. I define as "more affected areas" the sectors where water entered the houses and people therefore suffered material damage due to the flood. I define as "less affected areas" the sectors where the flood did not enter houses and the citizens were only indirectly affected.[13]

The overflow of Paipote's ravine has two main elements that make it possible to define this situation as a natural experiment. First, the magnitude and trajectory of the flood were unpredictable; interviews show that people were not aware of the potential consequences of the rainfall the day before the disaster. Second, people were not aware of the possible negative externalities of the Paipote Bridge, because this was the largest flood in the region in 80 years and a situation like it had never happened before. Therefore, because the disaster and its consequences (due to the bridge) were not anticipated, one would not expect people to have selected their houses based on their expectations of a future natural disaster. This a critical issue because sorting is one of the main threats to any natural experiment.

The interviews help reconstruct the night of the floods, demonstrating that people living in Paipote were not able to predict which areas would be exposed. The story of Carmen, a 21-year-old mother, is a good example of the two points mentioned above.[14] Carmen lived in an unexposed area where the flood did not enter her house. On the night of the flood she heard firefighters in the streets saying that people needed to evacuate because that area would be affected by mudslides. She decided to go with her baby to her grandparents' house located near the bridge. After a few hours her new refuge was completely flooded, and they barely escaped. Her own house, however, was not affected at all since it was located in an area where water did not enter homes. The decision to move from an unexposed to an exposed area reflects the lack of information about the possible

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[12] The natural intervention should produce independence between treatment assignment and potential outcomes (Keele, 2015).

[13] I determined if an area was more or less affected using qualitative evidence from fieldwork. This decision is confirmed by official government images (figure 1), a map marked by the local fire department after the flood (figure 2), and satellite images (Appendix E).

[14] The names of the interviewees have been changed according to the IRB consent form, but the age, gender, and occupation (when reported) have not been modified.

trajectory of the flood (I discuss concerns about spillovers in the next subsection).

Figure 1 shows the more and the less affected areas, the bridge, and the floods coming from the Andes. Figure 2 was created by the local fire department, highlights the flooded areas in red. As expected, the haphazard treatment assignment produced balance in the placebo covariates in the survey, as I show in the results section.
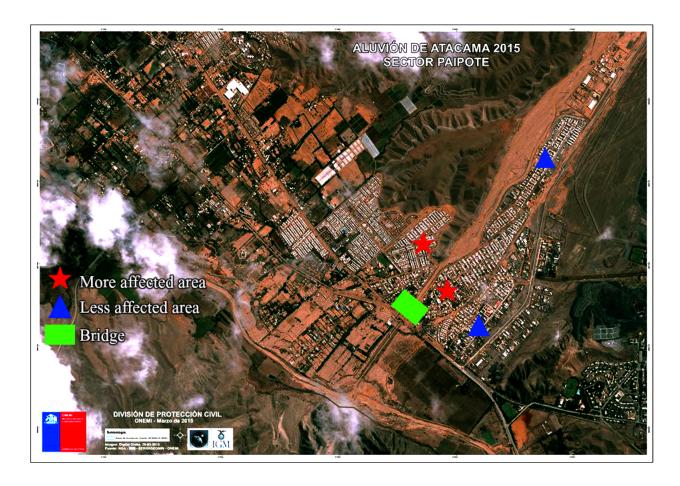
Figure 1: Map of Paipote

Figure 2: Map of the affected areas (in red) marked by the local fire department

4.3 Spillovers

In natural experiments, the identification of causal effects relies on two core (untestable) assumptions. The first is geographic treatment ignorability (Keele and Titiunik, 2016), which means that the distribution of potential outcomes should be the same for the control and exposed areas. The second is non-interference, or in other words, potential outcomes for any subject do not vary with the treatment assigned to other subjects.

However, as described in the theoretical background, unexposed citizens might present empathic feelings, which could be understood as a spillover effect. Non-victims observe how their neighbors were affected, and they might change their preferences based on that experience. Consequently, a finding of no difference between the groups could have two main interpretations: there

are no treatment effects or there are spillover effects. How can we differentiate between a null result and a spillover effect? It is impossible to fully distinguish one from the other, but there are some hints that can help us. For example, it is important to inspect the results within each subgroup and provide qualitative evidence to better understand how exposed and unexposed citizens are modifying their electoral choices.

On the contrary, if we do find a difference between the groups, that can also have two main meanings: exposed citizens are changing their preferences more than unexposed people or the groups are altering preferences in opposite directions. Qualitative evidence helps us rule out the second alternative because non-victims have empathic feelings toward affected citizens (see section 7 for details), and therefore both groups should move toward the same direction. As a consequence, the violation of non-interference assumption should tend to bias the effects towards zero; therefore, any effect can be seen as a conservative estimate (Keele, Titiunik and Zubizarreta, 2015). In other words, any significant result can be seen as strong evidence of a treatment effect because this is a hard case for finding any result at all.

4.4   Reducing Sensitivity to Hidden Biases

Comparing units from the same natural block is desirable in observational studies because unmeasured covariates may be more similar within the block (Pimentel, Kelz, Silber and Rosenbaum, 2015). Paipote is a homogeneous low-middle income town -for example, 90% of the survey respondents do not have any higher education- which makes the more and the less affected citizens comparable because they are drawn from the same "natural block." Any additional data that increases heterogeneity can also increase bias (Keele, 2015). Rosenbaum (2005) shows that reducing unit heterogeneity decreases sensitivity to unmeasured biases. In particular, when there is less unit heterogeneity, there needs to be larger unmeasured biases to explain away a given effect (Sekhon, 2009). This benefit cannot be achieved by merely increasing the sample size. Therefore, having a homogeneous sample will improve the comparability between groups of people, and also reduce the sensitivity to hidden biases. As Keele (2015, p.325) summarizes: "there are reasons for

focusing on small samples where differences across treated and control units are reduced not by statistical means but by the design" (see Appendix F for an extra strategy to reduce sensitivity to hidden biases).

4.5   The Conjoint Experiment

Three months after the floods, I conducted a survey in Paipote with a conjoint experiment embedded in it. The sampling strategy was exactly the same across the more and less affected areas. Streets were selected following a random walk. On a given street, all households were invited to participate in the survey. By the end of the survey, almost the entire town was accounted for.[15] Nine months after the flood, I interviewed 30 individuals from the same area to illuminate the causal mechanisms behind the results.[16] (See Appendix G for more details about the survey implementation.)

I use a conjoint experiment that simultaneously tests the influence of various candidate attributes on respondents' mayoral choices. The survey experiment asked a sample of Paipote residents to decide between two hypothetical candidates running for mayor in the 2016 local elections (see Appendix H for a discussion about why I use local instead of national elections). The respondents saw information about six attributes of these two candidates: ideological position, gender, previous political experience, profession, age, and proposals for affected citizens (e.g., expectations for financial relief). These characteristics randomly varied across pairings. The outcome was the answer to the following question: if you had to vote for one of these two mayoral candidates, which would you choose? Each of the respondents evaluated eight pairs of profiles. In the analysis I cluster the standard errors by respondent.

I conducted 210 surveys, half in the more affected area of Paipote. Since each respondent rated eight pairs of candidates, and each pair provides two outcomes (a 1 for the preferred candidate and a 0 for the non-preferred candidate), this led to 3360 observations. Following Hainmueller

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[15] Only one neighborhood was not included in the design, because it was both partially affected and a relatively new area, it could introduce unwanted heterogeneity.

[16] 17 exposed and 13 unexposed citizens.

and Hopkins (2015), I also randomly assign the order of the attributes to rule out primacy effects for each respondent. Based on the theoretical expectations, affected citizens should reward left-wing candidates and candidates who generate expectations of the distribution of relief (welfare candidates). They should also be more likely to vote for older and more educated candidates (managerial candidates).

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the attributes used to generate profiles, and provide an example of a possible pair of profiles evaluated by a respondent. Attributes in both bold and italic represent the candidate characteristics that should be rewarded in comparison to the benchmark category (the first value for each attribute) according to the theory presented in section **??**. Welfare candidates are represented by ideology (i.e., left-wing politicians) and expectations of financial relief. Managerial candidates are described by age and education. The rest of the attributes help depict a more realistic candidate.

Table 1: Profile of candidates

Attributes	Values
Ideology	Right
	Center
	Independent
	Left
Profession	Gardener
	Teacher
	Engineer
Gender	Male
	Female
Age	30
	40
	50
Previous Political Experience	No experience
	Council Member
	Mayor
Proposal for affected citizens	Will NOT distribute a financial relief
	Will distribute a financial relief

Table 2: Example of experimental design

Attributes	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Ideology	Left	Right
Gender	Female	Male
Previous Political Experience	No experience	Council Member
Profession	Gardener	Engineer
Age	30	50
Proposal for affected citizens	Will NOT distribute a financial relief	Will distribute a financial relief

Given that the attribute values were randomized, the design allows us to identify the effect of each attribute on the probability of being preferred as mayor.[17] This can be estimated by regressing the binary outcome (preferred or non-preferred) on the set of attributes for each profile.[18]

In this paper, I mainly focus on the interactions between candidate attributes and treatment status to identify how the damage produced by the flood affected the way people make electoral decisions. I compare the electoral choices of citizens who suffered material damage from the flood with those of citizens who did not. Equation 1 describes the main quantity of interest:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 Ideology + \beta_2 Profession + \beta_3 Gender + \beta_4 Age + \beta_5 Experience + \beta_6 Expectations + \gamma Treatment + \delta_1 Ideology * Treatment + \delta_2 Profession * Treatment + \delta_3 Gender * Treatment + \delta_4 Age * Treatment + \delta_5 Experience * Treatment + \delta_6 Expectations * Treatment + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

Y represents the candidate selected by the respondents. The coefficients β and δ are vectors, because each attribute contains different values. For example, ideology has four values, but the β vector provides only three coefficients because right-wing candidates are the reference category. The coefficient vectors β_1, β_2, β_3, β_4, β_5 and β_6 describe the effect of the candidates' attributes on the control group. Consequently, the vectors of interest are δ_1, δ_2, δ_3, δ_4, δ_5 and δ_6, because they

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[17] I follow the approach developed by Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) to estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE). This represents the average difference in the probability of being preferred as mayor when comparing two different attribute values: for example, a "female" candidate versus a "male" candidate. And due to the random assignment of attributes, the "female" and "male" profiles will have, on average, the same distribution for all the other attributes (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015).

[18] The estimator for the AMCE is nonparametric and does not require a functional form assumption (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014).

describe the change in effect of the candidates' attributes between control and exposed conditions.

4.6   Defining the Treatment

Half of the surveys and conjoint experiments were conducted in the more affected areas of Paipote. However, some flood victims moved to houses located in the less affected areas to live temporarily with relatives or friends. In particular, seven survey respondents in a less affected area were actually flood victims who lived in a more affected area the night of the disaster. Therefore, 112 respondents lived in the more affected area during the natural disaster, and 98 in the less affected one.

The haphazard nature of the flood generated two different sectors: one where people suffered extensive material damage due to the flood, and another where the mudslides did not enter homes. Table 3 reports the number of people from these two areas that reported material damage after the flood.[19]

Table 3: Exposed and unexposed respondents

	More affected area	Less affected area	Total
Material damage reported	109	4	113
No material damage reported	3	94	97
Total	112	98	210

Material damage status is almost perfectly correlated with the area where the subjects were living. In the analysis the treatment status is equal to 1 if the respondent reported material damage, and 0 if he or she reported indirect or no damage.[20] The results are the same when using the area as the treatment (see Appendix I). The subjects who received the treatment will be referred

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[19] The survey included the following question: How affected were you by the floods? The answers were categorized as follow: 1 when respondents said "nothing happened," 2 when they reported indirect consequences such as isolation, 3 when they reported partial material damage, and 4 when they reported complete material damage. The first and second categories generate the "no material damage" status, and the third and fourth the "material damage" status.

[20] It is possible to imagine that this natural experiment involves assignment to treatment into "hypothetical clusters." However, it is not clear what such a cluster would consist of with this design (a street, a group of streets, a block, a group of blocks, etc.). Additionally, because Paipote is an homogeneous town, I expect the citizens within each "hypothetical cluster" to be no more similar than citizens in other "hypothetical clusters."

to, from now on, as the "exposed group," and those that did not report material damage as the "unexposed or control group." Five percent of the survey respondents did not want to participate in the conjoint experiment or quit before finishing it: three in the less affected area and seven in the more affected area. I found no evidence to support the idea that the treatment affected the probability of completing the conjoint experiment (p-value: 0.30).[21] These 10 respondents are excluded from further analysis. Therefore, there are 106 individuals in the exposed group and 94 in the unexposed group, which leads to a total of 3200 observations (16 candidate-pairs evaluated by respondent.)

5   Results: Natural and Conjoint Experiment

5.1   Covariate Balance

The exposed and unexposed citizens should have similar distributions of observed and unobserved covariates. Although there are no pretreatment covariates available in this study, a number of the variables captured in the survey should not be affected by the treatment (placebo covariates), such as gender,[22] age, and education.[23] Table 4 reports the means and the standardized differences for the three placebo covariates.

Table 4: Balance of placebo covariates

Covariate	Mean exposed	Mean control	Standardized difference
Gender	1.72	1.77	0.11
Age	46.21	43.41	0.19
Education	3.20	3.01	0.14

Both groups are comparable because their standardized differences are below 0.2. One-fifth

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[21] I tested this by regressing a binary indicator of a failed conjoint experiment on the treatment.

[22] Male:1, Female:2.

[23] 1: Primary Education Incomplete, 2: Primary Education Complete, 3: Secondary Education Incomplete, 4: Secondary Education Complete, 5: College Education Incomplete, 6: College Education Complete, 7: Graduate Studies.

of a standard deviation is the usual rule of thumb for checking if covariate balance was achieved (Silber et al., 2013). It is also possible, however, to improve balance by constraining the standardized differences to be lower than 0.05 using optimal multivariate matching (see Appendix I). This statistical method helps reduce overt biases. Though hidden biases are still a threat in any observational study, the particularities of Paipote (specifically its being a homogeneous residential town) and the haphazard nature of the treatment assignment makes the comparison between these groups more credible.

5.2 Voters' Electoral Choices

Figure 3 provides a graphical comparison of the electoral choices of exposed and unexposed respondents. Based on the theoretical expectations, affected citizens should be more likely to vote for welfare and managerial candidates.

The plots on the left provide the β coefficient vectors for each subgroup of citizens. The plot on the right displays the interaction results from equation 1 or, in other words, the differences between the control and exposed groups (δ coefficient vectors). These results are interpreted as the effects of the flood on the attributes that explain the probability of being preferred as mayor. The dots indicate point estimates, and the lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. The reference categories are the dots without confidence intervals (the first category for each attribute).
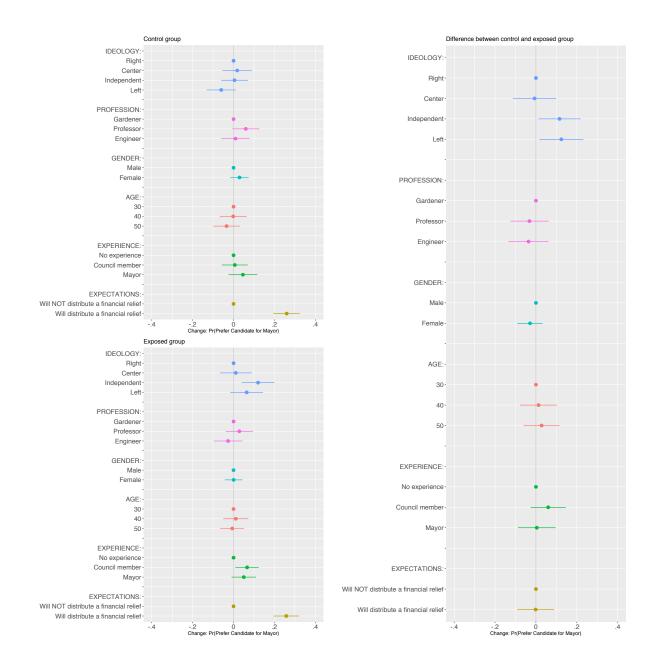
Figure 3: Effects of candidates' attributes on probability of being voted for mayor

Affected and unaffected citizens do have different ideological choices. Independent and left-wing candidates become more attractive for disaster victims. The difference plot shows that flood exposure increases the chances of preferring a left-wing candidate over a right-wing candidate by 12 percentage points. Material damage due to the flood also increases the probability of preferring a left-wing over a centrist candidate by 12 percentage points (the full regression with the β coefficients is displayed in Appendix J).

Why are disaster victims more likely to vote for left-wing candidates? There are multiple answers to this question, and the conjoint experiment is not enough to understand the mechanisms involved. One response is that voters associate left-wing candidates with the mayor or the opposition and they are rewarding/punishing real politicians by using ideology as a proxy. A second option is that they prefer left-wing politicians for the policies they can implement. I conducted interviews and provide extra survey evidence to support this former point (I discuss the first option, and more alternative hypotheses, in Appendix C).

Independent candidates also have an electoral advantage in exposed areas, although not over left-wing candidates (see Appendix K). Natural disasters might also modify victims' political attitudes (Fair et al., 2013; Carlin, Love and Zechmeister, 2014). Consequently, the advantage of independent candidates versus right-wing or centrist ones can be an expression of voters' new attitudes toward the political system. There are similar findings in the economic voting literature in Latin America, where negative economic conditions have been associated with the deterioration of traditional parties' vote share (Carreras, 2012; Lupu, 2014; Murillo and Visconti, 2017). Therefore, natural disasters might have a similar effect on affected voters, making them more likely to support independent candidates. Is it possible that independent candidates also provide signals of distribution of social policies? Two years before the floods, in the 2013 presidential elections, Franco Parisi, a candidate who ran using a platform that reinforced his independence from traditional politicians, was able to obtain 10 percent of the vote share. His strategy was to not be considered left or right-wing and to strongly criticizes the party system configured after the transition to democracy in 1990. When respondents evaluate an independent candidate, I expect that they may picture someone similar to Parisi: a candidate who cannot be attached to any clear ideological group or traditional political party. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the independent label functions as a proxy for the distribution of social benefits such as housing. Independent candidates do not generate clear policy expectations in Chile.

The results also provide evidence of voters' empathic feelings in their electoral decisions. Both exposed and unexposed citizens are highly likely to prefer candidates who want to distribute finan-

cial relief to disaster victims, even though unexposed respondents were not affected.[24] Why would victims and non-victims have similar preferences regarding the distribution of short-term benefits? This is not a pure null result because this characteristic is the most important factor explaining voters' decisions in each subgroup, but there is no difference between the exposed group and the control. This is congruent with a spillover hypothesis. Non-victims display empathic feelings towards their neighbors because they are seeing them suffer. Qualitative evidence supports this argument. There are no reasons to believe that the other attributes that report null results within each subgroup and between the subgroups (e.g., gender) are evidence of spillover effects.

Finally, there is no evidence that managerial characteristics are important to voters. They are not more likely to vote for older or more educated candidates, and there are no differences between the groups. The interviews are a useful tool for understanding these null effects. Victims strongly focus on the distribution of welfare and relief, which overcomes the importance of other factors that might also be important for citizens, such as selecting politicians with more experience or expertise.

6 Behavioral Benchmark

The most relevant critique of conjoint experiments is that participants are evaluating hypothetical choices; in real life they might be making different decisions. Following Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto (2015) approach, one method of validating the conjoint analysis is to compare it with actual voting behavior: citizens' response to the 2015 flood in the 2016 local elections.

In this behavioral benchmark, the outcome is not the incumbent vote share, as it would be in the case of traditional research studying retrospective voting. First, I analyze the impact of the flood on voting for leftist, rightist, centrist, and independent candidates (welfare candidate hypothesis).[25]

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[24] An alternative option is that both groups had the same preference regarding the distribution of short-term benefits before the natural disaster, and material damage due to the flood did not change those preferences. That option seems very unlikely based on the magnitude of the catastrophe.

[25] It is not possible to test the role of the expectations about distribution of disaster relief in a behavioral benchmark.

Second, I analyze the effect of the flood on voting for older and more educated candidates.[26]

How can I compare affected and unaffected areas? The government declared a state of constitutional exception due to the catastrophe in 11 counties, therefore those municipalities are defined as the exposed units. One empirical strategy is to select 11 unaffected counties that are similar to the exposed municipalities. Ideally, the control group should be similar in terms of (i) unobserved and (ii) observed covariates.

Regarding point (i), I restrict the group of eligible control units to counties located north of Santiago, the capital city. The idea is to have a natural block of eligible counties from the center-north of Chile, and exclude all the municipalities located in the capital and the south of the country because they might have multiple unobserved characteristics if compared to places in northern Chile.

Regarding point (ii), I select from the sample of eligible units 11 control counties that are similar to the affected municipalities in terms of observed characteristics. I use the following pretreatment covariates to make more credible comparisons: the right, center, left, and independent candidates vote share in the 2012 local election, total population, percentage of rural population, human development index, and poverty levels. These covariates are included because they have been studied as factors explaining voters' behavior in Chile (González, 1999; Altman, 2004; López, 2004; Navia, Izquierdo and Morales, 2008; Luna, 2010; Calvo and Murillo, 2012).[27]

The control units are obtained using recent advances in mathematical programming (Zubizarreta, Paredes and Rosenbaum, 2014; Zubizarreta and Kilcioglu, 2016). I use cardinality matching to obtain 11 control units that are similar to the 11 exposed counties. In particular, the goal was to achieve the largest matched sample that reduces the standardized differences in means between the groups (see Appendix L for more details about the covariates and the selection of units).

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[26] This empirical strategy cannot rule out the role of retrospective accountability. However, it is studying the political consequences of disasters by a different dimension since it focuses on the candidates' characteristics rather than the incumbent vote share.

[27] It is important to note that the nature of the control and exposed groups are different when comparing the natural experiment with the behavioral benchmark. However, both control groups share a crucial commonality: they include citizens who did not suffer material damage due to the flood. The exposed group in the behavioral benchmark might include people who did not experience damage since the treatment was assigned at the county level. Therefore, any effect can be seen as a conservative estimate.

Table 5 shows that covariate balance was achieved for all the pretreatment county characteristics. The algorithm kept the 11 affected counties, and optimally selected 11 other municipalities to reduce the standardized differences between both groups. The standardized differences are below the traditional requirements for illustrating balance, one-fifth of a standard deviation (Silber et al., 2013).

Table 5: Balance of pretreatment covariates

Covariate	Mean exposed	Mean control	Standardized difference
Left-wing candidates	0.60	0.59	0.05
Right-wing candidates	0.18	0.21	0.18
Centrist candidates	0.07	0.07	0.02
Independent candidates	0.15	0.13	0.11
Total population	53,808	47,016	0.08
Percentage of rural population	0.21	0.23	0.07
Human Development Index	0.72	0.72	0.03
Poverty	0.14	0.13	0.15

I use equation 2 to estimate the effect of the flood (disaster declaration) at the county level. The matched sample used for this estimation is not just balanced in terms of observed covariates, but was constructed while attempting to reduce sensitivity to hidden biases by focusing on a natural block to generate credible comparisons (cities to the north of Santiago).

$$Y_c = \alpha + \beta_1 T_c + \sigma_n + \varepsilon_c \qquad (2)$$

Y represents the outcome of interest for the 2016 election (vote share of left, right, centrist, independent, more educated,[28] and older candidates.[29] T depicts the treatment (declaration of emergency). σ_n represents region fixed effects. I expect to find results that go in the same direction as the conjoint experiment, but because of power issues they might not be significant (n=22). Tables 6 and 7 summarize the results.

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[28] 0: High school or less, 1: More than high school. Source: public declaration of patrimony.
[29] 0: less than 50 years old, 1: more than 50 years old.

Table 6: Regression results

| | Behavioral Benchmark: Welfare Candidates | | | |
| | Left | Right | Center | Independent |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Flood	0.097	−0.360*	−0.063*	0.327
	(0.203)	(0.175)	(0.036)	(0.286)
Region fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	22	22	22	22

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

Table 7: Regression results

| | Behavioral Benchmark: Managerial Candidates | |
| | Age | Education |
	(1)	(2)
Flood	−0.035	0.086
	(0.279)	(0.323)
Region fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	22	22

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

It is important to remember that we cannot directly compare the coefficients of the conjoint experiment with the behavioral benchmarks because the estimates of the former are obtained using a reference category. However, we should pay attention to the size and direction of the estimates. The results show that right-wing and centrist candidates were punished in the affected counties; meanwhile, the estimates for left-wing and independent candidates show a positive but non-significant effect. The large standard errors are probably explained by the small sample size. However, the direction of the coefficients for the welfare candidate perfectly matches the conjoint

experiment. There is a positive correlation between disasters and voting for left-wing and independent candidates, and a negative one between disasters and voting for right-wing and centrist ones. The findings are also congruent for the managerial candidates' characteristics. Citizens do not seem particularly focused on selecting more experienced and educated candidates.

All these results provide more robust evidence about how disaster victims evaluate candidates' ideological labels and increase the external validity of the conjoint analysis. Voters are more likely to vote for candidates associated with social policies (or punish candidates not associated with them), and these preferences seem to overcome any focus on managerial attributes.

7   Causal Mechanisms

I interviewed 30 affected and unaffected residents of Paipote to understand the logic behind their electoral choices after the flood (see Appendix M for interviews in Spanish). This supplements the data from the combined conjoined and natural experiment, which though particularly useful for studying the effect of the natural disaster, does not help us understand the causal mechanisms at work. I use direct content analysis to interpret the interviews, an approach based on the use of relevant research findings as guidelines when analyzing the data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The main goal was to provide answers to two questions derived from the conjoint experiment. First, why do left-wing candidates become more attractive to victims? Second, why are both victims and unexposed citizens likely to vote for candidates who want to provide financial benefits to the victims?

Regarding the first question, interview responses reveal victim concern about the material damage inflicted by the flood. Most of them lost their homes or all their belongings. Daniela is a 31-year-old housewife who provides the following account of how the flood changed her life: "I had to change all the projects I had. I had to move backward. A lot of them got cut, and I had to replace them with others. [For example,] fixing my house, because we have not had any help [...]. The priority right now is the house – the other things were pushed to the background." Rosa

28

is a 44-year-old housewife who was emotionally and materially affected by the disaster: "After the floods everything changed [...]. I had aspirations, I had dreams, and I had to put them on hold [...]. For me it's been hard. My son had to drop out of college, and that has been tough for me too [...]. On March 26th I saw my house full of mud, and I did not know where I would sleep that night. [I thought], tomorrow I'll wake up and everything will be fine, because this was only a dream." These two testimonies illustrate how victims had to focus on new concerns, and how their most critical need was to improve their living conditions by fixing, cleaning, and repairing their houses. The role of the state is crucial in this context: it is the only actor that can shrink the gap between how victims are currently living and how they lived before the disaster.

Affected citizens' new priorities have direct consequences on the policies they most care about. Pedro is a 39-year-old farmer, and he said the following: "It is not just financial relief; we also need more material support. As my brother says, we need fences, houses, a permanent home [...]. The best help would be a house, but we are not asking for a huge house, but something that we can keep improving." Daniela provides more insight into victims' policy preferences: "[We need] solutions to our problems and not stopgap measures [...]. [The government] should focus on the key things and give priority to the issues that have real relevance [. . .]. It is more important to fix a house where a child needs a home to live than a bus stop." These interviews show how victims focus on multidimensional social policies–in particular, on housing–and not on just short-term relief.

These new policy preferences (i.e, focus on housing) will affect victims' electoral choices. Manuel is a 30-year-old miner. When he was asked about what kind of candidate he would prefer for the locality, he responded: "I think that when one chooses someone, it is not because of the distribution of short-term benefits, but because of a more general commitment to the community [...]. Who benefited from a two or three *luca*[30] handout? No one in the long run. We need something concrete because if I provide short-term aid, nothing will improve for the people. We need permanent, and not temporary, solutions." Claudia, a 23-year-old teacher, has a similar opinion about the ideal candidate for Copiapó: "I would like the next mayor to focus on people's quality of life

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[30] Two *lucas* are two thousand pesos or three US dollars.

[...], in every aspect, not just in that they give me a food basket, but in other ways too." Therefore, it is possible to expect that candidates associated with social policies should be rewarded in this specific context.

Regarding the second question about why both groups have similar preferences about candidates that will distribute disaster aid, the interviews show that unexposed citizens are motivated in part by empathy toward victims. Throughout our conversations, unexposed citizens constantly cited examples of their neighbors' suffering, indicating their empathy towards them. For example, Ana is a 33-year-old housewife who was not exposed to the flood. She mentions how difficult it was for her "to hear the testimony of the people, to hear how they survived, how [some of them] had to tie themselves to a fence so the water did not sweep them away [...] and how some kids lost everything." Tania is a 40-year-old housewife and also a non-victim. She provides the following anecdote: "I remember that when I was on the bus, I met a couple of grandparents who were going to the store. I helped them to walk back to their house, and the grandmother told me she'd lost everything, and her daughter lives with them, but only the daughter got relief benefits. What do you think about that – if they are two families, they should get two benefits, but got only one?" These interviews provide evidence about how non-victims have empathic feelings towards the victims. This finding can help us to understand why both group of citizens are equally likely to prefer candidates that will distribute disaster aid (non-programmatic benefits). However, those empathic feelings have a limit since victims are more likely to vote for left-wing and independent candidates.

There is a third question critical for understanding the causal mechanisms behind voter preferences. The conjoint experiment shows that affected citizens are more likely than non-affected voters to prefer left-wing candidates. However, can Chileans connect ideological labels with policy ideas? Calvo and Murillo (2012) show that voters have the capacity to locate the main two coalitions on the left-right ideological spectrum. Additionally, Zeichmeister (2015) shows that in Chile and 12 other Latin American countries, left-right self-placement is a significant predictor of the left-right vote. The argument of this paper can also be applied to countries where ideology is

not as relevant as in Chile. Voters only need a very basic understanding of the political system to be able to link simple policy ideas (or outcomes) with party labels or other candidate characteristics.

The evidence from this paper shows that voters can rely on candidates' ideological labels when voting. It is important to stress that this is not the same as traditional ideological voting. The latter assumes that voters are able to place themselves and candidates on an ideological scale and then minimize the distance between their own position and the favored candidate's position on the spectrum. On the contrary, I assume that voters can use the information contained in candidates' ideological labels to make electoral decisions, not that they are always minimizing distances. Affected voters are more likely to select left-wing candidates because of what those candidates represent and not because victims moved to the left on the ideological spectrum.

8 Conclusions

Voters living in developing countries are frequently exposed to natural disasters and negative income shocks, where a lack of preparedness and lower state capacity make them very vulnerable to negative events. These voters may be even more exposed to catastrophes as global warming intensifies. Climate scientists are increasingly concerned that rising temperatures will step up the intensity and frequency of natural disasters. As the general increase in temperature has resulted in a rise in the number of hot days, warmer air fosters the evaporation of water, which may cause more intense rainfalls and snow events, which can contribute to an increasing risk of certain types of natural disasters (Lippsett, 2012; Zseleczky and Yosef, 2014). These events, in turn, may contribute to a greater saliency of the politics of natural disaster.

This research provides a novel finding about voter reactions to natural disasters: victims are more likely to focus on the distribution of social benefits such as new housing, and as a consequence are more likely to vote for candidates associated with those policies (left-wing politicians in the case of Chile). Though external validity could be a concern because the primary evidence comes from one particular place, respondent characteristics (i.e., low-middle income and educa-

31

tional levels) accurately represent the median voter in Latin America, and experimental results are paired with real electoral outcomes. In addition, evidence from a different natural disaster in a different region of Chile points in the same direction (see Appendix A).

An important challenge to address is that even though natural disasters might affect an area without deliberately targeting it, they are not randomized experiments. Nevertheless, natural experiments within natural blocks provide an opportunity to address this issue because treatment assignment has an as-if random nature due to certain unusual circumstances and homogeneous units should have more similar unmeasured covariates. I exploit the haphazard nature of the 2015 floods in Paipote, and the town's high level of homogeneity, to understand how adverse conditions affect voters' ideological choices.

The conjoint experiment shows that the treatment (material damage due to the flood) increases the probability of preferring left-wing candidates. Qualitative interviews help us understand that victims focus on multidimensional solutions to improve their living conditions and consider social policies to be the most important path toward recovery from the disaster. Therefore, left-wing candidates should have a natural advantage over right-wing politicians because the former can be linked to the policies victims would like to see implemented. In addition, unaffected voters exhibit empathy toward victims when making electoral decisions. This finding should be taken into account when studying the consequences of natural disasters.

The argument of this paper can also be applied in countries where ideology does not explain voter behavior, such as Brazil. In that particular case, however, I would expect voters to link the distribution of social policies with the PT (Workers' Party). In consequence, that party should hold an advantage over other political parties after natural disasters.

The floods in northern Chile help us learn about how disaster victims tend to reward candidates with certain characteristics. This argument, however, can be extended beyond natural catastrophes to include other types of negative shocks. As mentioned before, crime victimization might make right-wing candidates more attractive to voters because they may be more likely to implement victims' new priority policies, such as iron-fist crime-reduction policies. Disaster or crime victims

32

will not only focus on the incumbent's performance, as most of the previous research has argued, but will also select a political leader who they think will be able to enhance their living conditions after the negative event.

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