

Authority After the Tempest: Hurricane Michael and the 2018 Elections

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Abstract

Hurricane Michael made landfall in the Florida panhandle 27 days before the 2018 elections. In the aftermath the governor issued Executive Order 18-283, allowing election officials in 8 impacted counties to loosen a variety of voting laws and consolidate polling places but providing no emergency funding to maintain the planned number of polling places. We test the efficacy of the order using a novel research design that separates the weather effects of the hurricane on turnout from the administrative effects of how the election was run. We find little evidence that the hurricane itself (as proxied by historically-relative rainfall) reduced turnout, but that the Executive Order likely had large, negative turnout effects thanks to widespread polling place consolidation. Natural disasters need not spell turnout disasters if state and local election officials can avoid reducing the number of polling places.

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