

## ***Keeping Friends Close, But Enemies Closer: Foreign Aid Responses to Natural Disasters***

Cindy Cheng AND Shahryar Minhas \*

If foreign aid is given primarily for strategic reasons, as much of the field finds, how can we explain donor generosity following natural disasters? In this paper, we address this puzzle by building on the literature in three ways. First, we differentiate between three major types of aid: humanitarian, civil society, and development. Next, we show natural disasters act as an exogenous shock to the strategic calculus donor countries undertake when making foreign aid allocation decisions. Specifically, we argue that donor countries use natural disasters as opportunities to exert influence on strategic opponents through the allocation of humanitarian and civil society aid. However, donors still reserve development aid for strategic allies irrespective of the incidence of natural disasters. Lastly, we substantiate our findings using a new measure of strategic interest that accounts for the indirect ties states share and the multiple dimensions upon which they interact.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the early morning hours of December 26, 2003, a massive earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale struck the city of Bam, Iran. Its effects were devastating. Out of Bam's 100,000 residents, approximately 26,000 to 40,000 were killed. Those who survived were left to grapple with the destruction of 70 to 90 percent of the city's housing infrastructure (Montazeri et al., 2005).<sup>1</sup> As part of the international response that followed, more than 44 countries sent aid, including the United States, which contributed eight plane loads of medical and humanitarian supplies as well as several dozen teams of experts to the relief effort.

While the US response to the 2003 Bam earthquake was seemingly analogous to that of any foreign actor offering aid and support, *a priori*, it was not obvious whether the US would send any humanitarian aid at all, to say nothing of whether Iran would accept it. Just the year prior, then-President George W. Bush had famously assigned Iran membership in the “Axis of Evil” (Heradstveit and Bonham, 2007). Meanwhile, at the time of the earthquake US-Iranian relations were particularly delicate as the countries navigated the issue of nuclear weapons in Iran.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, given the broader context of contentious bilateral relations, the process of transferring aid from the US to Iran entailed greater intentionality than normal. To initiate the flow of any aid, President Bush was obliged to institute a special 90-day measure to ease US sanctions on Iran<sup>3</sup> – which had been in place since 1979 and continue to be enforced to this day (Katzman, 2014). For Iran's part, accepting US aid meant allowing US military planes to land on its soil, which they had spent the previous 20 years prohibiting.<sup>4</sup> For a country that had undergone a revolution in part because the

<sup>1</sup>Fathi, Nazila. “Deadly Earthquake Jolts City in Southeast Iran.” *The New York Times*. 26 December 2003. Accessed October 2017: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090620230700/http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/26/international/26CND-QUAKE.html?ex=1225166400&en=c550b50a2ad59dd6&ei=5070>

<sup>2</sup>“Timeline: US-Iran ties.” *BBC News*. 16 January 2009. Accessed October 2017: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3362443.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm)

<sup>3</sup>“US eases Iran sanctions to speed earthquake relief.” *China Daily*. 1 January 2004. Accessed October 2017: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/01/content\\_295063.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/01/content_295063.htm)

<sup>4</sup>“Iran Quake Toll May Hit 50,000.” *China Daily*. 31 December, 2003. Accessed October 2017: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content\\_294833.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content_294833.htm)

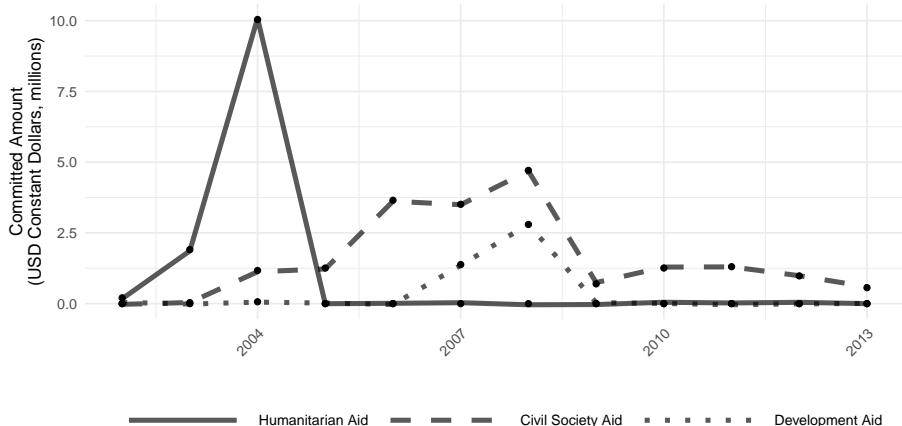


Figure 1: US aid commitments to Iran, 2002 - 2013

US military was perceived to have had too strong a domestic influence, it was far from obvious that such an act would be perceived as benign.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the Bam earthquake led not only to an increase in US humanitarian aid to Iran, albeit temporarily, it was followed by other types of aid as well. Figure 1 shows that after 2004, aid commitments to "strengthen civil society" increased markedly and consistently, reaching its apex with the creation of the 2006 "Iran Democracy Fund" to promote democracy in Iran.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, US aid for a variety of developmental purposes, (i.e. economic and development policy and planning, infectious disease control, social/welfare services) also increased sporadically following 2003. This is particularly noteworthy given that Iran has generally been barred from receiving US foreign aid since the US State Department designated it a "state sponsor of terrorism" in 1984 (Samore, 2015).<sup>7</sup> Why did the US send humanitarian aid to Iran despite objectively hostile extant relations? Was this event *sui generis* or is it possible to observe other dyadic pairs acting in a

<sup>5</sup>"Geopolitical Diary: Tuesday Dec. 30, 2003." *Stratfor*. 31 December 2003. Accessed June 2018: <https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/geopolitical-diary-tuesday-dec-30-2003>

<sup>6</sup>Carpenter, J. Scott. "After the Crackdown: The Iran Democracy Fund." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch 1576*. 8 September 2009. Accessed May 2018: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-the-crackdown-the-iran-democracy-fund>

<sup>7</sup>Available data from AidData and the OECD suggest that the US did not commit any aid to Iran from 1974 to 2001.

similar fashion? If so, does the occurrence of a natural disaster also lead donors to distribute other types of aid to strategic opponents?

Answering these questions has important implications for our understanding of how donors use foreign aid. Furthering such an understanding is especially pressing given that the occurrences of natural disasters are likely to increase with changing climate conditions. Meanwhile, in light of an existing literature that finds that donors are more likely to allocate aid to strategic allies, a more nuanced understanding of what drives foreign aid allocations is necessary to answer these questions. To do this, we begin by first disaggregating foreign aid into three types: humanitarian, civil society, and development aid. Humanitarian aid is meant as a stop-gap measure to help recipient countries return to their status quo, while the latter two types of aid are targeted towards catalyzing long term change. Specifically, civil society aid is often used to improve governance outcomes, which provides donors an avenue through which to wade into the domestic politics of recipient states (Ottaway and Carothers, 2000; Henderson, 2002; Resnick, 2012; Spina and Raymond, 2014). Meanwhile, development aid is primarily focused on promoting economic development.

We show that following a natural disaster donor countries actually give more humanitarian aid to strategic opponents. We argue that this is because donors use natural disasters as an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with countries they have historically shared hostile relations with. Additionally, we find that while natural disasters prompt donors to increase civil society aid to strategic opponents for similar reasons, they conversely push donors to give more development aid to strategic allies. In all, we argue that while donors do use aid to promote their strategic interest, the tactics they employ to do so can depend highly on context. We evaluate these claims using a new measure of strategic interest that: 1) accounts for the indirect ties states share 2) and incorporates a variety of dimensions of strategic interest.

In what follows, we first give a brief overview of the existing literature on natural disasters and foreign aid allocations before outlining our hypotheses. We then introduce our new measure of strategic interest, and present our empirical analysis of how natural disasters condition foreign aid allocation decisions.

## EXTANT MOTIVATIONS FOR FOREIGN AID

Natural disasters can lead to the destruction or impairment of physical and social infrastructure and even more significantly, the devastating loss of human lives. For example, the 1985 Mexico City Earthquake, one of the most catastrophic natural disasters in modern times, killed at least 10,000 people<sup>8</sup> and cost around 9 billion dollars.<sup>9</sup> While the resulting destruction prompted the Mexican government to institute a number of regulatory measures to limit future damage, 32 years later, Mexico City's 2017 earthquake still resulted in the deaths of at least 360<sup>10</sup> and the recovery effort could cost more than 2 billion dollars.<sup>11</sup> Even more devastating was the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake (the fourth largest since the 1900's) and tsunami which led to the deaths of more than 200,000 people across 13 countries, causing around USD 7.5 billion in damage.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the most expensive natural disasters have been in the tens of billions. These range from the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (191 billion)<sup>13</sup> to the Thai floods in 2011 (45 billion).<sup>14</sup>

Few countries are spared the devastation that natural disasters can wreak. Between 1980 and 2004, approximately 7,000 natural disasters led to the deaths of around two million people and further negatively affected the lives of five billion more (Guha-Sapir et al., 2009). The economic

<sup>8</sup>The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Mexico City earthquake of 1985." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 20 September 2017. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mexico-City-earthquake-of-1985>

<sup>9</sup>Williams, Dan. "Mexico Quake Loss put at \$4 Billion: Report by U.N. Panel Includes Damages to Economy." *Los Angeles Times*. 25 October 1985. Accessed September 2017: [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-10-25/news/mn-14160\\_1\\_mexico-city](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-10-25/news/mn-14160_1_mexico-city)

<sup>10</sup>The Associated Press. "Death toll rises to 360 in Mexico earthquake." *The Denver Post*. 21 September 2017. Accessed October 2017: <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/09/30/mexico-earthquake-death-toll-update/>

<sup>11</sup>The Associated Press. "Economic Costs of Mexico's Earthquake Could Surpass \$2B." *Insurance Journal* 29 September 2017.

<sup>12</sup>Pickrell, John. "Facts and Figures: Asian Tsunami Disaster." *New Scientist*. 20 January 2005. Accessed January 2019: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9931-facts-and-figures-asian-tsunami-disaster/>

<sup>13</sup>"Sichuan 2008: A disaster on an immense scale." *BBC News*. 9 May 2013. Accessed January 2019: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-22398684>

<sup>14</sup>Tang, Alisa. "Thailand Cleans Up; Area Remain Flooded." *Time*. 2 December 2011. Accessed April 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120108085747/http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2101273,00.html>

costs are also considerable and rising, with the direct economic damage from natural disasters between 1980-2012 estimated to be \$3.8 trillion (Gitay et al., 2013).

While dealing with both the immediate and long-term damage wrought by natural disasters can seriously drain existing resources for any country, developing countries find it especially difficult to cope. Often, their existing physical infrastructure is grossly unequal to the task of withstanding natural disasters. Meanwhile, their institutional infrastructure often lacks the resilience or capacity necessary to deal with the often long and complex process of rebuilding. In general, when natural disaster strikes, developing countries are likely to experience more serious physical damage and have less state capacity to recover from it. For example, prior to its 2010 earthquake, Haiti had no building codes and many of its buildings were not designed to withstand even a mild earthquake.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the lack of governmental leadership and low state capacity, along with other factors, has meant that even 7 years after the disaster, Haiti has yet to fully recover (Hartberg et al., 2011).<sup>16</sup>

From a purely tactical perspective then, natural disasters represent an opportune time to inflict harm on a strategic adversary, particularly if it is a developing country, as both government officials and public resources are fully engaged with responding to the emergency. Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that strategic adversaries rarely take advantage of this opportunity to overtly initiate hostile actions, at least as far as can be openly observed.<sup>17</sup> Many of the deadliest natural disasters (which should present foreign opponents the best opportunity to inflict harm) do not seem to have been followed up by hostile overtures. For instance, Taiwan did not use the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, believed to be the largest earthquake in the 20th century by death toll, as an opportunity to inflict further harm on China. Similarly the India did not use the occasion of either

<sup>15</sup>Watkins, Tom. "Problems with Haiti building standards outlined." *CNN*. 2010 January 14. Accessed September 2017: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/01/13/haiti.construction/index.html>

<sup>16</sup>Cook, Jesselyn. "7 years after Haiti's Earthquake, millions still need aid." *Huffington Post*. 13 January 2017. Accessed May 2018: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/haiti-earthquake-anniversary\\_us\\_5875108de4b02b5f858b3f9c?guccounter=1](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/haiti-earthquake-anniversary_us_5875108de4b02b5f858b3f9c?guccounter=1)

<sup>17</sup>Note, whether countries take advantage of their strategic opponents using more covert methods during times of natural disaster is a more open question.

the 1970 Bhola cyclone in then East Pakistan (the deadliest tropical cyclone ever recorded)<sup>18</sup> or the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone, to initiate hostile gestures

Context of course matters. There are different rules of engagement depending on whether one has a contentious versus an actively hostile relationship with another country. In the former context, though taking preemptive action against a strategic opponent may lead to short term gains, it could very well lead to long term losses, especially since such an action would be well out of the realm of socially acceptable behavior in response to a natural disaster. But even by this hard-nosed logic, we might expect countries to simply do nothing when tragedy befalls their strategic opponents. Such behavior would fit well with the larger literature that investigates donor motivations for allocating foreign aid. Indeed, scholars have produced a large body of evidence suggesting that donors overwhelmingly prioritize their own self-interest over recipient need when dispensing aid<sup>19</sup> and under certain conditions, have seen such efforts pay off (De Mesquita and Smith, 2009; Carter and Stone, 2015; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2016).

Yet, much anecdotal evidence suggests that rather than jockeying for a more favorable strategic perch or doing nothing, natural disasters encourages the flow of *aid* from strategic opponents. For example, during the famine that ravaged North Korea from 1994 to 1998, the United States, South Korea, Japan and the European Union stepped up as the primary donors of food aid (Noland, 2004). Meanwhile, Taiwan was one of the biggest donors to China in the aftermath of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.<sup>20</sup> Taiwan also actively contributed to the rescue effort,<sup>21</sup> and further offered

<sup>18</sup>Halloran, Richard. “Pakistan Storm Relief a Vast Problem.” *New York Times*. 30 Nov 1970. Accessed January 2019: <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/30/archives/pakistan-storm-relief-a-vast-problem-disaster-in-pakistan-created.html>

<sup>19</sup>For example, see McKinlay and Little (1977, 1978, 1979); Maizels and Nissanke (1984); Schraeder et al. (1998); Alesina and Dollar (2000); Berthélemy (2006); Stone (2006); De Mesquita and Smith (2007, 2009); Bermeo (2008); Fleck and Kilby (2010); Hoeffler and Outram (2011); Dreher et al. (2015); Qian (2015).

<sup>20</sup>“FACTBOX-Earthquake aid for China.” *Reuters*. 14 May 2008. Accessed April 2019: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKPEK29448220080514>

<sup>21</sup>French, Howard and Edward Wong. “In Departure, China Invites Outside Help.” *The New York Times*. 16 May 2008. Accessed September 2017: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/16/world/asia/16china.html>

to share the technical expertise it developed from its own devastating earthquake experience in 1999.<sup>22</sup>

Are these anecdotes of non-strategic behavior indicative of a systemic pattern or one-off exceptions to the rule of strategic self-interest? If the former, what could explain this seemingly humanitarian turn of behavior? Finding an answer to these questions in the current literature is difficult. For one, in evaluating the relative roles that donor interest and recipient need play in foreign aid allocation, what researchers refer to as recipient need may be more precisely understood as “developmental need” and as such, targeted towards addressing chronic poverty. To that end, development need is frequently measured using gross domestic product (GDP) or gross national product (GNP) per capita;<sup>23</sup> or occasionally with more holistic measures of social outcomes such as the Physical Quality of Life Index,<sup>24</sup> the average life expectancy,<sup>25</sup> or the daily caloric intake.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, only a small body of research investigates the degree to which aid is given in response to acute crises, such as natural disasters, which will be referred to here as humanitarian need. Considering that around 11% of official development assistance (ODA) was officially categorized as being given for humanitarian reasons in 2015, the systematic failure to include natural disasters as a potential driver of foreign aid is puzzling.<sup>27</sup> What evidence that does exist suggests a null or small effect of humanitarian aid on foreign aid allocations. For instance, Bermeo (2008) finds no relationship between the number of people affected by disasters and the

<sup>22</sup>Hille, Kathrin. “Taiwan shares quake lessons with Sichuan.” *Financial Times*. 9 June 2008. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.ft.com/content/b0204002-3641-11dd-8bb8-0000779fd2ac>

<sup>23</sup>For example, see McKinlay and Little (1977, 1978, 1979); Maizels and Nissanke (1984); Alesina and Dollar (2000); Berthélemy (2006); Stone (2006); De Mesquita and Smith (2007); Bermeo (2008).

<sup>24</sup>See Maizels and Nissanke (1984).

<sup>25</sup>See Schraeder et al. (1998).

<sup>26</sup>See McKinlay and Little (1979); Schraeder et al. (1998).

<sup>27</sup>Total ODA for DAC countries was 131.6 billion in 2015, 15.6 billion of which was designated as humanitarian assistance <http://www.oecd.org/dac/development-aid-rises-again-in-2015-spending-on-refugees-doubles.htm> <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/humanitarian-assistance.htm>

allocation of bilateral aid for France, Japan, the UK and the US.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, David (2011) finds no statistically significant relationship between development aid flows and climatic or human disasters. David does find evidence for increased development aid following geological disasters, but the effect is only found with a 2 year lag and substantively small.<sup>29</sup> Yang (2008) also finds that ODA increases after a hurricane, but only with a lag of 2 years.<sup>30</sup> In this paper, we not only seek to investigate whether donors give more aid in response to natural disasters, but to explain why they might do so

#### HOW NATURAL DISASTERS AFFECT FOREIGN AID ALLOCATIONS

Only in the twentieth century has expending public resources to relieve the human suffering of foreigners shifted from being virtually inconceivable to relatively commonplace. The devastation wrought by the two world wars was particularly instrumental in bringing about this change. However, such aid was strictly intended to serve as temporary transfers that would facilitate a return to the previous status quo, rather than a long-term commitment to “development” as such. The turn toward promoting development was instead fostered by ongoing Cold War hostilities, which simultaneously promoted the use of aid to further donor’s strategic goals while also building a new norm of rich countries aiding poor countries (Lancaster, 2008).

The role of mitigating disaster and suffering on the one hand and furthering strategic interest on the other are thus baked into the modern conception of foreign aid. This history also suggests that humanitarian aid, even if only initially meant to serve as a temporary expedient, may lead to the establishment of aid with longer-term strategic goals. Whether this pattern exists more generally and if so, whether it is driven primarily by strategic or humanitarian concerns is

<sup>28</sup>Note, Bermeo (2008) also conceptualizes humanitarian aid using measures of the number of refugees and civil war, with mixed effects across countries for both.

<sup>29</sup>David (2011) defines climatic events as: floods, droughts, extreme temperatures and hurricanes; human disasters as: famines and epidemics; geological events as: earthquakes, landslides, volcano eruptions and tidal waves.

<sup>30</sup>Strömborg (2007) does find a positive and significant relationship between aid and natural disasters, but his paper is concerned with emergency aid in particular, not foreign aid. Similarly, Olsen et al. (2003) find that donors are more likely to give aid for strategic reasons, though their analysis is confined to emergency aid.

unclear however. The role of the Cold War in foreign aid's origin story dictated that recipients of humanitarian aid were generally within a particular strategic bloc, making it difficult to untangle strategic from humanitarian drivers.<sup>31</sup>

As such, looking at how natural disasters affect foreign aid allocation is not only interesting in its own right but also provides an exogenous factor with which to identify the role of donor interest and recipient need in explaining patterns of aid commitments. To that end, we develop a set of hypotheses as to how natural disasters affect foreign aid allocations. Further, to better untangle the varying potential drivers, we disaggregate foreign aid into three types: humanitarian, civil society, and development aid. In doing so, we seek to offer a more nuanced understanding of the principle drivers of foreign aid allocations.

### *Short-term Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters*

Responding to natural disasters quickly and efficiently is often crucial to saving lives and alleviating human suffering as services like electricity, gas, water, and telecommunications may all be disrupted in the immediate period following a natural disaster. The timely deployment of humanitarian aid is the first response that donors can extend to countries struck by natural disaster. In what follows, we develop three hypotheses as to how the interaction between strategic interests and natural disaster severity can affect humanitarian aid allocation.

We draw first from recent research in behavioral economics, which underscores the idea that different social contexts lead to varying behavior in identical situations (Kahneman, 2003; Do, 2011).<sup>31</sup> Natural disasters may reorient the social context of a dyadic relationship to encourage donors to increase aid to their strategic opponents. That is, the loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure, which natural disasters provoke, can temporarily serve to emphasize the human aspect of the bilateral relationship as opposed to the political, economic, and military aspects that generally define foreign relations between two countries.

<sup>31</sup>While there is evidence that non-governmental organizations are driven by the norms of humanitarian discourse when allocating aid (Büthe et al., 2012), evidence for similar behavior in governments has been mixed at best.

Moreover, if natural disasters do have a humanizing effect, then we might expect strategic opponents to be particularly sensitive to it. That is is, given that strategic opponents are more likely to “otherize” each other, then dyadic opponents must traverse a greater gap to humanize the other compared to dyadic allies (de Buitrago, 2012). On balance then, we would expect that donors do not discriminate between strategic opponents or strategic allies when dispensing aid. For example, historically hostile relations between the US and Cuba may mean that the baseline extent to which they “otherize” each other is much greater than in the US-Japan relationship, increasing the potential for Cubans to be humanized in American eyes. As such, we might expect American aid to Cuba rise to the level they would provide to Japan in the event of similar natural disasters.

That is not to say that natural disasters can always bridge the divide among strategic opponents. For example, India and Pakistan have had an uneasy history of accepting aid from each other following natural disasters.<sup>32</sup> In general, we contend only that natural disasters may make it more *likely* that a strategic adversary will contribute aid because the humanitarian disaster temporarily reframes the context of bilateral relations. An understanding of the interaction between natural disasters and strategic interests affects humanitarian aid allocations based on social context thus leads us to the following hypothesis:

**HYPOTHESIS 1A:** Donors who are strategic opponents of the recipient are more likely than strategic allies to be sensitive to the humanizing effect of natural disasters. As such, following natural disasters, donors are likely to send **similar amounts of humanitarian aid to strategic allies and strategic opponents.**

Realist scholars offer an alternative perspective which proclaims that, “foreign aid is today and will remain for some time an instrument of political power” (Liska, 1960). Under this logic, donors commit aid primarily to recipient countries to further their own strategic interests. Extant

<sup>32</sup>Ravishankar, Siddharth. “Cooperation between India and Pakistan after Natural Disasters.” *Stimson Center*. 9 January 2015. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.stimson.org/content/cooperation-between-india-and-pakistan-after-natural-disasters>

literature on the drivers of foreign aid have put forward strong substantive evidence to support this viewpoint (McKinlay and Little, 1979; Maizels and Nissanke, 1984; Schraeder et al., 1998; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Berthélemy, 2006; Stone, 2006; De Mesquita and Smith, 2007; Bermeo, 2008; Dreher et al., 2015). With regards to the interaction between natural disasters and strategic interests, it is in donor's self-interest to commit greater amounts of humanitarian aid to their strategic allies rather than opponents in the event of a natural disaster. A naive reading of the logic of realism would lead to the following hypothesis as to how the interaction between natural disasters and strategic aid affects humanitarian aid allocations:

**HYPOTHESIS 1B: Donors are driven by self-interest and in the event of natural disasters, donors are likely to send less humanitarian aid to their strategic opponents vs their strategic allies**

A more sophisticated realist perspective, however, suggests that natural disasters may present donors with a strategic opportunity to improve relations with strategic opponents. As suggested in H1A, social context does matter, but only to the extent that it limits the acceptable set of responses to natural disasters to the allocation of humanitarian aid (as opposed to, for example, the use of hostile overtures). However, donors may still seek to work within this framework of humanitarian altruism to forward their own interests.

Indeed, disaster-afflicted countries appear to be sensitive to the possibility that accepting humanitarian aid from strategic opponents may come with ulterior motives. In 1999 for example, Venezuela experienced catastrophic flash floods and debris flows in Vargas State, which left as much as 10% of the Vargas population dead (Wieczorek et al., 2001). US troops helped in the relief efforts by running helicopter rescue missions and working to provide clean water. However, consistent with his antagonism toward US hegemony in the region, President Hugo Chavez declined US assistance in rebuilding a critical highway, saying that while, "he would accept American equipment if Venezuelan soldiers operated it...he did not want US troops in his country."<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Iran categorically refused any aid from Israel following the 2003

<sup>33</sup>Brand, Richard. "Chavez assailed on handling of Venezuelan flood disaster." *The Miami Herald*. 5 August 2001. Accessed September 2017: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/venezuela/venezuela-disaster.htm>.

Bam earthquake, though the Israeli government still encouraged its citizens to donate privately.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, even the US first turned down Russian aid for Hurricane Katrina before ultimately accepting it.<sup>35</sup> Most recently, Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro's refused humanitarian aid to alleviate its food crisis under the reasoning that such aid is "merely a pretext for regime change," demonstrating that i) some political actors also suspect that humanitarian aid may be strategically driven and that ii) the use of humanitarian aid for strategic purposes may extend beyond natural disasters (as this particular crisis was largely a function of political missteps).<sup>36</sup>

There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that aid given under such circumstances can serve to humanize and improve public perceptions of donors as well. For example, in the wake of US and South Korean aid for the North Korean famine, one refugee summarized his reaction to the US Institute for Peace this way: "We were taught all these years that the South Koreans and Americans were our enemies. Now we see they are trying to feed us. We are wondering who our real enemies are" (Natsios, 1999, 9). Andrabi and Das (2017) moreover, find that following the inflow of international aid sent to alleviate the damage done during an earthquake in Pakistan 2005, trust in Europeans and Americans was much higher in the affected population. This evidence suggests that, at least in certain contexts, humanitarian aid can serve to improve relations with strategic opponents.

Note that the underlying assumption is that the donor country is ultimately motivated to further its own strategic interests. A priori, the donor country cannot know whether such overtures of humanitarian aid will improve relations with the recipient government, improve perceptions among the recipient population, or both. The incidence of a natural disaster merely provides the donor country a window of opportunity to do so, thus potentially giving it more latitude to further its strategic goals. Improving relations with the recipient government may, on the margin,

<sup>34</sup>Popper, Nathaniel. "Israelis Help Iran Victims Despite Rebuff." *The Forward*. 2 January 2004. Accessed September 2017: <http://forward.com/news/6059/israelis-help-iran-victims-despite-rebuff/>

<sup>35</sup>"U.S. accepts Russian Katrina aid." *UPI*. 2 September 2005. Accessed September 2017. <https://www.upi.com/US-accepts-Russian-Katrina-aid/39221125680989/>.

<sup>36</sup>Taladrid, Stephania. "Venezuela's Food Crisis Reaches A Breaking Point." *The New Yorker*. 22 February 2019. Accessed March 2019: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/venezuelas-food-crisis-reaches-a-breaking-point>

deter recipient governments from taking actions that conflict with donor interests. Meanwhile improving perceptions of the donor country among the recipient population may also limit the extent to which a still hostile recipient government may enact policies that directly counter donor interests. Here, however, we are primarily interested in investigating whether donors are driven by this possibility when allocating aid, leading to our third hypotheses:

**HYPOTHESIS 1C:** Donors see natural disasters as a strategic opportunity to improve their relations with strategic opponents and are thus likely to send **more humanitarian aid to strategic opponents versus allies.**

#### *Long-term Responses to Natural Disasters*

Donor countries may dispense aid that not only serves to immediately address the natural disaster at hand, but also to further longer-term objectives. Here, we make a distinction between civil society aid and development aid. Civil society aid is aimed at supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their programs. The stated purpose of such aid is to empower grass-roots advocacy and improve governance and government accountability. Meanwhile, development aid is targeted toward promoting long-term economic development in a recipient country often through the building of infrastructure like roads and hospitals as well as through the promotion of human capital via technical training and education. In what follows, we develop hypotheses as to how the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters can affect the allocation of these two different types of aid.

*Natural Disasters as Strategic Opportunities.* Donors generally distribute aid to civil society not only for its intrinsic value but also, and arguably primarily, for its perceived instrumental value in either promoting democratization (Robinson, 1995; Ottaway and Carothers, 2000) or economic development (Kral et al., 2013). However, we make the distinction between civil society and development aid because while any given donor may commit civil society aid to promote economic development, lending support to civil society at all is an inherently political act.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Carothers, Thomas and Diane de Gramont. “The Prickly Politics of Aid.” *Foreign Policy*. 12 May 2013. Accessed June 2018: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/21/the-prickly-politics-of-aid/>

From supporting the growth of government watch dogs to increasing the domestic capacity for grass roots advocacy, whether it is their intention or not, donors are able to exert influence over a recipients domestic politics by directing funds to civil society.

Thus if, as following the realist logic, foreign aid is used to promote donor interests, then donor governments should be especially inclined to increase the allocation of civil society aid. With respect to natural disasters, countries may be motivated to give more civil society aid to their strategic opponents because the temporary suspension in the normal dynamics of the relationship represents a unique opportunity to increase civil society aid and initiate a shift in the nature of the bilateral relationship (as in H1C). Donors can seize on a country's inherent vulnerability following a natural disaster to decide to *strategically* increase their civil society aid so as to increase their chances of exerting domestic influence over the recipient countries.

To draw a concrete example, following the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, the US began committing aid to civil society groups in Somalia. Though the initial nominal amount was a drop in the bucket in absolute terms, considering that no aid was given to civil society in Somalia prior to the natural disaster and such aid has been steadily growing over the past decade, this represented a substantial change in US aid commitments to Somalia.<sup>38</sup> Given that the U.S. had closed its embassy in Somalia in 1991 and only re-established diplomatic presence in 2018.<sup>39</sup>, it seems plausible to interpret this as strategic gambit on the US' part to gain a foothold in Somalia, and if so, a successful one. Before jumping to conclusions however, note that the US also increased civil society aid to Indonesia at the same time.<sup>40</sup> Given that Indonesia was affected much more severely by the earthquake than Somalia<sup>41</sup> but had also enjoyed much closer

<sup>38</sup>Data collected from USAID from: "USAID Foreign Aid Explorer". Accessed January 2019: <https://explorer.usaid.gov/>

<sup>39</sup>Watkins, Eli and Jennifer Halsler. "State Department announces re-establishment of 'permanent diplomatic presence' in Somalia." CNN. 4 December 2018. Accessed January 2019: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/12/04/politics/us-somalia-state-department/index.html>

<sup>40</sup>Data collected from USAID from: "USAID Foreign Aid Explorer". Accessed January 2019: <https://explorer.usaid.gov/>

<sup>41</sup>"India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Somalia, Thailand: Earthquake and Tsunami OCHA Situation Report No. 14". ReliefWeb. 7 January 2005. Accessed January 2019: <https://reliefweb.int/report/india/india-indonesia-maldives-myanmar-somalia-thailand-earthquake-and-tsunami-ocha-situation>

ties to the U.S., it would be difficult to substantiate our proposed mechanism based on anecdotal evidence alone. We thus test the following hypothesis through statistical modelling:

HYPOTHESIS 2: Natural disasters present an opportune window for donors to exert influence over recipients who are their strategic opponents and as such, donors are more likely to send additional **civil society aid** to their strategic opponents

If on the contrary, donors are purely driven by the potential intrinsic or instrumental payoffs of supporting civil society, then donors should be no more motivated to support the civil society of their strategic opponents over that of their strategic allies and we should find no support for this hypothesis.

*Natural Disasters and Development Aid.* Whereas humanitarian aid provides stop-gap measures to address the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, the focus of development aid is to build the conditions for long-term, sustainable economic growth. Here we simply expect that donor countries are more likely to give this type of aid to countries that they want to see economically develop and prosper, namely, their strategic allies. This accords with the more simple notion of realism, similar to H1B, that countries will seek to support allies rather than opponents irrespective of the number of natural disasters. This results in the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 3: Donors are more likely to send greater **development aid** to their strategic allies irrespective of the number of natural disasters.

If on the contrary, donors seek only to promote development according to recipient need and without regard to its own potential benefit, then donors should be no more motivated to support the development of their strategic allies over that of their strategic opponents and we should find no support for this hypothesis.

## MEASURING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

One reason for evaluating the *motivations* for aid and not aid *outcomes* is that aid given for strategic reasons may still further development objectives, albeit incidentally, while aid given for humanitarian reasons may also bring unexpected strategic benefits (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984). However, evaluating the motivations for aid is not a straightforward process – any given aid project may work toward providing assistance to a recipient country as well as strategic benefits to a donor country.

Of critical importance to investigating whether strategic considerations (and by extension, the interaction between strategic considerations and humanitarian need) affects foreign aid considerations then is constructing a reliable measure of strategic interest. Unfortunately, we find that Alesina and Dollar (2000, 35)'s observation that, "the measurement of what a 'strategic interest' is varies from study to study and is occasionally tautological," still holds true. Indeed, strategic interest has alternately been operationalized as: trade intensity (Berthélemy and Tichit, 2004; Bermeo, 2008; Hoeffler and Outram, 2011), UN voting scores (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Weder and Alesina, 2002; Hoeffler and Outram, 2011; Dreher and Fuchs, 2015), arms transfers (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984), colonial legacy (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Bermeo, 2008; Berthélemy and Tichit, 2004; Berthélemy, 2006; Carnegie and Marinov, 2017), alliances (Bermeo, 2008; Schraeder et al., 1998), regional dummies (Bermeo, 2008; Berthélemy, 2006; Maizels and Nissanke, 1984), bilateral dummies (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Berthélemy and Tichit, 2004; Berthélemy, 2006)<sup>42</sup> or some combination of the above.<sup>43</sup>

Such inconsistency in the operationalization of strategic interest is not simply a matter of using different variables to measure the same concept but a matter of using different variables to measure different *aspects* of the underlying concept. However, while a dyad's strategic bilateral relationship is quite multifaceted, to date, there has not been a readily available measure of

<sup>42</sup>A US-Egypt or US-Israel dummy seems to be the most common instance of a bilateral dummy.

<sup>43</sup>Meanwhile other papers take a negative approach and argue that any shortfall between what would theoretically be expected from poverty-efficient aid allocation and actual aid allocation (Collier and Dollar, 2002; Nunnenkamp and Thiele, 2006; Thiele et al., 2007), or similarly between a theoretical allocation based on good governance and actual aid allocation (Dollar and Levin, 2006; Neumayer, 2005), is evidence of strategic interest at play.

strategic relationships which captures its various aspects the same way that scholars have done for other complex concepts.<sup>44</sup> To address this problem, we create a new measure of strategic interest that is able to account for varying aspects of strategic interest.

*A new measure of strategic relationships*

To generate a measure of strategic relationships we adopt a latent variable approach that enables us to estimate a relational measure of interest between countries by taking into account the direct and indirect ways in which states are connected across a variety of dimensions. Specifically, we utilize three dimensions of state relations to construct our strategic interest measure: dyadic alliances, UN voting, and joint membership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). We focus on these dimensions because each provides distinct a representation of the strategic relations between countries in the international system and have been commonly employed in the foreign aid literature. Alliances largely capture the strategic and military aspect of the dyadic relationships. In contrast, joint membership in IGOs reflects the dyadic relationship across many diverse issue areas expressed across correspondingly many fora while UN voting is better able to capture this relationship in a centralized forum.

To estimate a measure of strategic interest across these dimensions, we take a network based approach that allows us to leverage both the direct and indirect ways in which states are connected to one another. To do this we employ a latent factor model as described in Hoff (2005). The model is structured as follows:

$$Y = \mathbf{u}_i^T \mathbf{u}_j + \epsilon_{ij}, \text{ where} \quad (1)$$

$$\mathbf{u}_i \in \mathbb{R}^{R=2}, i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$$

$Y$  here is a  $n \times n$  undirected sociomatrix in which  $y_{ij}$  designates whether there exists a link (e.g., an alliance) between  $i$  and  $j$ . The goal of the model is to provide a projection of the

<sup>44</sup>For example, Polity and Freedom House have provided measures of political institutions while the World Bank's World Governance Indicators (WGI) project provides measures for six dimensions of governance

systematic variation in  $Y$  into a two-dimensional social space.<sup>45</sup> More precisely, the types of systematic variation that we are interested in include the concepts of (a) transitivity, (b) balance and (c) clusterability. Formally, a set of three countries  $ijk$  is said to be transitive, if for whenever  $y_{ij} = 1$  and  $y_{jk} = 1$ , we also observe that  $y_{ik} = 1$ . This follows the logic of “a friend of a friend is a friend”. Meanwhile, the relationships between  $ijk$  are said to be balanced if  $y_{ij} \times y_{jk} \times y_{ki} > 0$ . Conceptually, if the relationship between  $i$  and  $j$  is “positive”, then both will relate to another unit  $k$  identically, either both positive or both negative. Finally, relationships between  $ijk$  are said to be clusterable if it is balanced or all the relations are all negative. It is a relaxation of the concept of balance and seeks to capture groups where the measurements are positive within groups and negative between groups.

Third order dependencies suggest that information about the way a pair of actors interact with some third actor, tells us something about their relationship as well even if we cannot directly observe it (Minhas et al., 2019). Such dependences would seem especially relevant for our purposes, as one cannot understand the strategic relationship between two countries without taking into account their respective relationships with other countries. The importance for accounting for these dynamics have long been acknowledged in the foreign aid literature. Trumbull and Wall (1994, 877) for example, note that, “donors do make their decisions with knowledge of what each other are doing, and may actually act cooperatively. Any study that ignores the interrelationship of donor behavior risks problems with simultaneity bias.” However, we find that until now, this critique has largely gone unaddressed by existing analyses.

The main advantage of calculating the latent space of different dyadic variables as opposed to using alternative specifications such as the S Score algorithm<sup>46</sup> is that it allows us to better account for indirect ties that states share. Indirect ties are accounted for within this framework because the latent factor model takes patterns such as transitivity into account. As a result, the relation between two actors can be inferred even if no direct interaction between them is observed.

<sup>45</sup>The latent factor model we utilize here is based on an eigenvalue decomposition that seeks to represent relations between countries as the weighted inner-product of country-specific vectors of latent characteristics. In this application, we project our  $n \times n$  sociomatrix into a  $n \times 2$  matrix of country positions in a latent social space.

<sup>46</sup>Leeds and Savun (2007), for example, measure a states “threat environment” as the set of all states for which ones is contiguous with or which is a major power and with an S score below the population median.

We employ this latent factor model on every year for each of our three measures.<sup>47</sup> In Figure 2, we present a visualization of the resultant latent space we calculated for each variable for the year 2005.

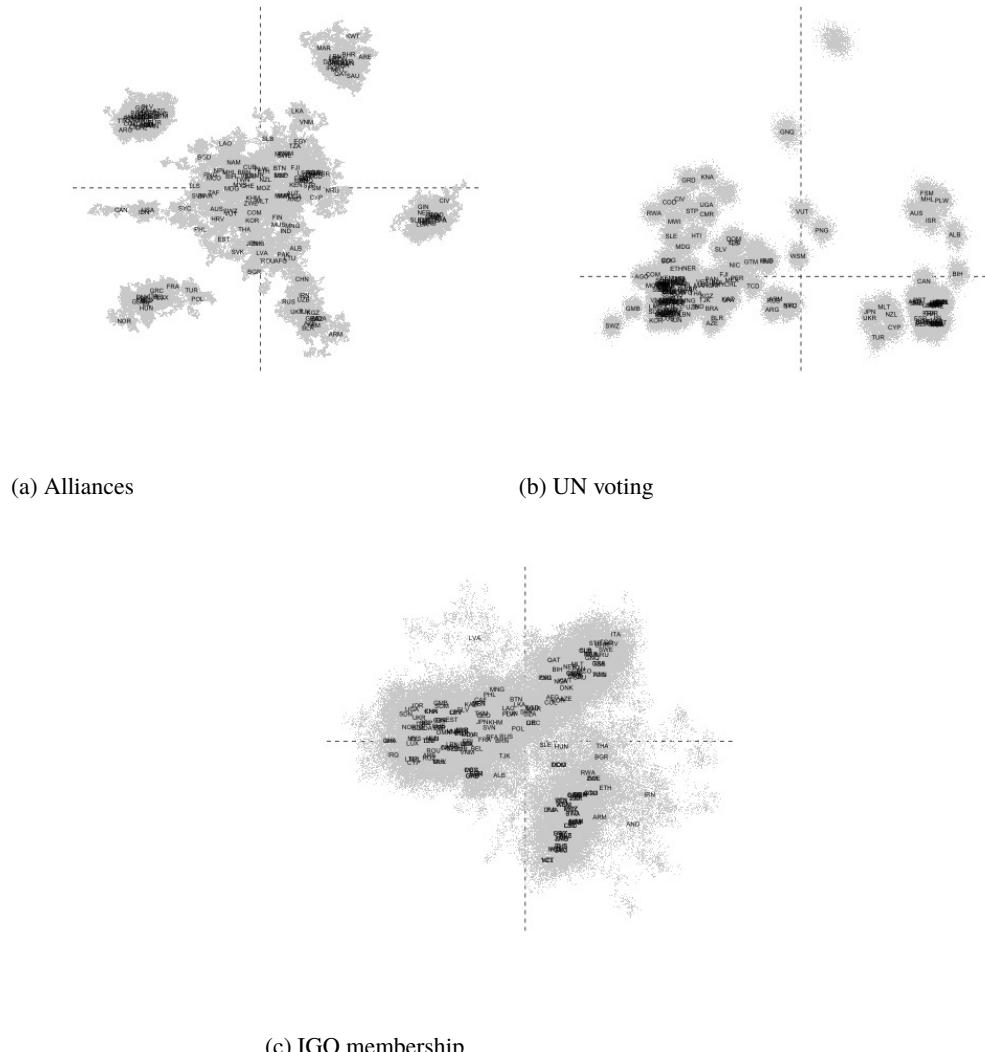


Figure 2: Latent Spaces for components of Strategic Interest Measure during 2005

<sup>47</sup>The models are estimated via Gibbs sampling from the full conditional distributions of  $\mathbf{u}_i^T \mathbf{u}_j$ . For a more detailed discussion of this model, see Hoff (2005).

Countries that cluster together in this two-dimensional latent space are more likely to interact with each other. The plots for alliances, UN voting and IGO membership suggest that there is distinct clustering among countries. Moreover, these clusters are different across the three measures, suggesting that each variable is indeed capturing different aspects of strategic interest.

After estimating the latent spaces for these components, we estimate the distance between each dyadic pair for the three components for each year. We then combine them in a principal components analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality of our measure while retaining as much variance as possible to maximize our explanatory power. We estimate the PCA of these variables for each year separately<sup>48</sup> and use the first principal component for each year as our measure of strategic interest. For more information about how this PCA was conducted, please see the Online Appendix. The end result of this process is a measure of strategic interest that takes into account indirect ties while also accounting for multiple dimensions in which states interact with one another.<sup>49</sup>

## DATA

### *Aid flows*

Our data for foreign aid flows is taken from the AidData project (Tierney et al., 2011). This database includes information on over a million aid activities from the 1940s to the present. We use the country level aggregated version of this database to create a directed-dyadic dataset of total aid dollars committed. In this analysis, we focus specifically on OECD donor countries as they both are the best able and have the best incentive to give foreign aid to advance their strategic interests. In the final tally, our dataset includes the 18 most active senders<sup>50</sup> and 167 receivers of

<sup>48</sup>For each year, we conduct a bootstrap PCA of 1000 subsamples.

<sup>49</sup>With regards to the strategic interest measure, we also estimate a model in which we incorporate the uncertainty in the estimation of our latent variable (see the Online Appendix).

<sup>50</sup>More specifically, the included donor countries are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries were chosen both to maximize comparability with previous work as well as for reasons of data availability. Research on non-DAC donors suggests that like DAC donors, they seem to be primarily driven by

aid flows from 1975 to 2005. Accounting for all possible senders of aid during this time frame is difficult because of the amount of missing data. That being said, issues with missingness in our dataset still exist and we deal with them by employing a multiple imputation method developed by Hoff (2007) and shown to have good performance by Hollenbach et al. (2014).

We use the AidData's Sector coding scheme in order to disaggregate bilateral ODA into humanitarian aid, development aid, and civil society aid.<sup>51</sup> To that end, our measure of humanitarian aid encompasses the sectors of:

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“Emergency response”	“Reconstruction Relief”	“Disaster Prevention and Preparedness”
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Meanwhile, civil society aid is measured as aid to the sectors of:

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“Government and Civil Society”	“Women”	“Support to Non-Governmental Organizations and Governmental Organizations”
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Finally, development aid is defined as aid given to the following sectors:

strategic motivations in distributing aid (Neumayer, 2003; Dreher et al., 2011; Fuchs and Vadlamannati, 2013; Dreher et al., 2015, 2018). Existing evidence suggests that non-DAC donors do seem more likely to give aid following a natural disaster however (Dreher et al., 2011), though they still only account for at most 12% of humanitarian aid in any given year (Harmer et al., 2005). This research suggests that our findings might be even stronger among non-DAC donors. Future work investigating this possibility will become increasingly important the more foreign aid non-DAC donors distribute.

<sup>51</sup>“AidData's Sector Coding Scheme.” [http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/files/aiddata\\_coding\\_scheme\\_0.pdf](http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/files/aiddata_coding_scheme_0.pdf)

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“Education”	“Health”	“Water Sanitation”
“Other Infrastructure and Services”	“Economic Infrastructure and Services”	“Environmental Protection”
“Other Social Infrastructure and Services”	“Agriculture Forestry and Fishing”	“Industry, Mining and Construction”
“Other Development Aid”	“Food Aid”	“Debt Relief”

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We note that bilateral ODA often represents only one channel through which donors may allocate foreign aid and that an increasing number of papers have argued for accounting for the heterogeneity of aid channels donors may use when estimating drivers of foreign aid (Nunnenkamp and Öhler, 2011; Buthe and Cheng, 2013; Dietrich, 2013). Here, we choose to focus solely on bilateral aid in order to maintain greater comparability with previous studies.

### *Strategic Interest*

As previously stated, we created our measure of strategic relationships by conducting a PCA on the latent distances for alliances, UN voting and joint IGO membership. Data for alliances was retrieved from the Correlates of War (COW) Formal Alliance dataset (Gibler, 2009). Following Bueno de Mesquita (1975) and Signorino and Ritter (1999), we distinguish between different types of alliances with the following weighting scheme: 0 = no alliance, 1 = entente, 2 = neutrality or nonaggression pact, 3 = mutual defense pact.<sup>52</sup>

UN voting data was obtained from the United Nations General Assembly Data set (Strezhnev and Voeten, 2012). We calculate the proportion of times two states agree out of the total number of votes they both voted on. Agreement means either both vote yes, both vote no, or both abstain. This measure is similar to the ‘voting similarity index’ readily available from the dataset except the voting similarity index does not account for mutual abstentions.

<sup>52</sup>Note, as for alliances, we had attempted to distinguish between different types of membership but found that very few states were listed as Associate Members or Observers of an IGO for the time period that we are conducting our analysis. Thus we used the simpler coding scheme.

Meanwhile IGO voting data was obtained from the Correlates of War International Governmental Organizations Data Set (Pevehouse et al., 2010). A total of 529 IGOs across a broad swath of topics, including trade, communications, and health and security, are represented in this dataset. Dyads were coded as 1 if they belonged to the same IGO as a full member or an associate member and coded as 0 if one or both of them was an observer, had no membership, was not yet a state or was missing data.<sup>53</sup>

### *Natural Disasters*

Almost all the empirical work on natural disasters relies on the publicly available Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) maintained by the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. EM- DAT defines a disaster as a natural situation or event which overwhelms local capacity and/or necessitates a request for external assistance. For a disaster to be entered into the EM-DAT database, at least one of the following criteria must be met: i) 10 or more people are reported killed; ii) 100 people are reported affected; iii) a state of emergency is declared; or iv) a call for international assistance is issued. We use a count of the number of natural disasters a country has experienced a year as our measure of natural disaster severity.

### *Additional Covariates*

In addition to our dyadic strategic relationship measures, we include a number of covariates to capture characteristics of aid recipients.

For our measure of political institutions, we use Polity IV data available from the Center for Systemic Peace (Gurr et al., 2010). Polity IV captures differences in regime characteristics on a 21 point scale ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy), rescaling it to range from 1 to 21 for greater ease of interpretation. We also controlled for colonial history using the Colonial History Data Set from the Issue Correlates of War Project (Hensel,

<sup>53</sup>Information on the IGOs included in the dataset are available from the Correlates of War website: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/IGOs>

2009). This variable is coded as a one when the receiver in a sender-receiver dyad is a former colony of the sender and zero otherwise.

Meanwhile, for our measures of developmental need, we use (1) Log GDP per capita and (2) life expectancy at birth. Both of these measures are extracted from the World Bank (2013). Finally, we control for the incidence of civil war in a recipient country as it informs the ability for a donor country to dispense aid. We do so with data retrieved from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) Armed Conflict Database. (Gleditsch et al., 2002). We code as civil war any armed conflict which either (a) “Internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) without intervention from other states” or (b) “Internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides.”

## ANALYSIS

### *Estimation Method*

To model aid flows using our directed-dyadic panel dataset, we utilize a hierarchical model. We include random intercepts in our model for every dyad and year. More concretely, we fit the following model:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Log}(Aid)_{sr,t} = & \beta_1(\text{Pol. Strat. Distance}_{sr,t-1}) \\
& + \beta_2(\text{Colony}_{sr,t-1}) + \beta_3(\text{Polity}_{r,t-1}) \\
& + \beta_4 \text{Log}(GDP \text{ per capita}_{r,t-1}) + \beta_5(\text{Life Expect}_{r,t-1}) \\
& + \beta_6(\text{No. Disasters}_{r,t-1}) + \beta_7(\text{Civil War}_{r,t-1}) \\
& + \beta_8(\text{Pol. Strat. Interest}_{sr,t-1} \times \text{No. Disasters}_{r,t-1}) \\
& + \delta_{s,r} + \rho_t
\end{aligned}$$

Where  $\delta_{s,r}$  and  $\rho_t$  are the sender-receiver and year random effects respectively.<sup>54</sup> We use one year lags because while our natural disaster data is pinpointed to the day, we do not have correspondingly fine-grained data on foreign aid distributions. Thus we take a conservative approach and lag by one year to guarantee that the aid is committed after the incidence of a natural disaster.

The results of this analysis are shown below in a coefficient plot in Figure 3. We test Hypotheses 1A, 1B and 1C using “Humanitarian Aid” as the dependent variable. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between the interaction of *Strategic Distance* and the *No. Disasters*. To interpret these results, we turn to Figure 4 (“Humanitarian Aid” panel) where we plot the substantive effect of this interaction term on humanitarian aid over the range of *Strategic Distance* for different levels of natural disaster severity.

<sup>54</sup>In terms of the model, we find that our results hold when we estimating the model with donor and year fixed effects. For more details see the Online Appendix.

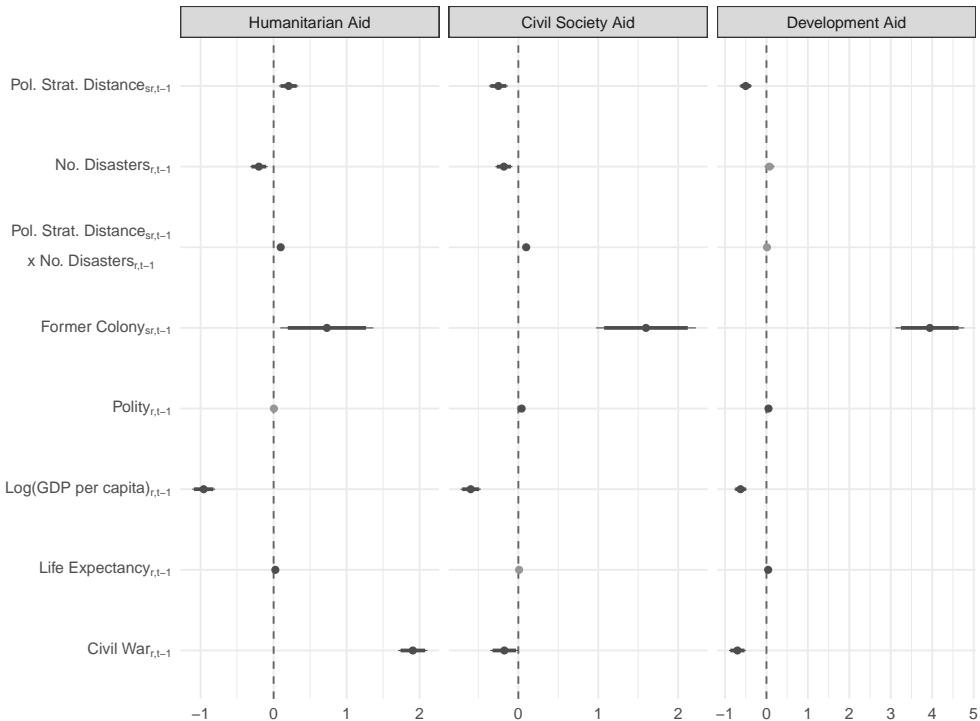


Figure 3: Coefficient plots for the main analyses with interaction terms across each dependent variable (humanitarian aid, civil society aid and development aid).

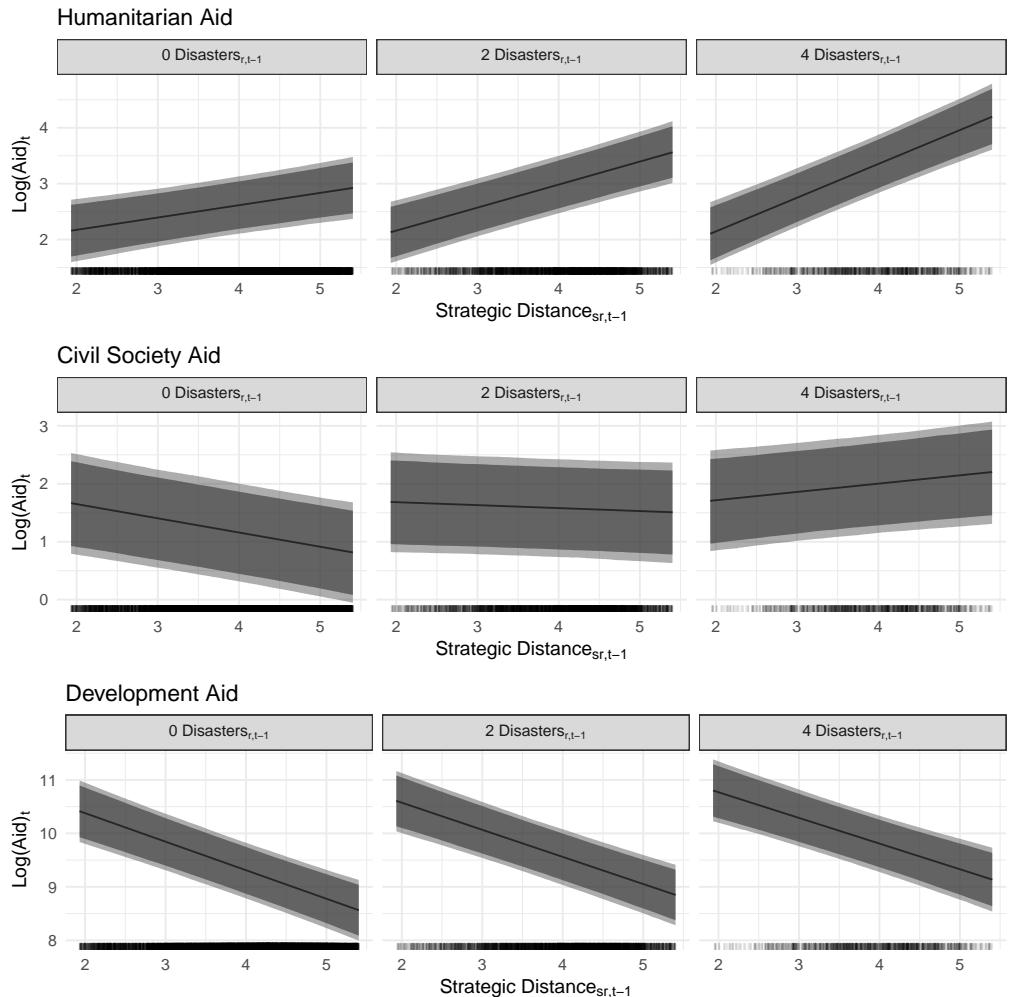


Figure 4: Simulated substantive effect plots for each dependent variable (humanitarian aid, civil society aid, and development aid) for different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure. A rug plot is provided below each panel.

These results suggest that the greater the number of natural disasters a country experiences, the more likely it is to receive humanitarian aid from a strategic adversary. This is apparent in the rising slope between strategic interest and humanitarian aid as the number of natural disasters increases. As such, these results are consistent with H1C, which suggests that donors may be more likely to dispense humanitarian aid to their strategic adversaries because such disasters present unique opportunities to improve bilateral relations. Notably when natural disasters are particularly severe, donors may dispense a great deal more aid to strategic opponents compared to strategic allies to further their strategic interests.

Conversely, support for H1A is missing. In particular, we would have expected there be a downward sloping relationship between strategic interest and humanitarian aid when there are no natural disasters. However, if natural disasters had a humanizing effect on strategic opponents, then we would have expected the slope between strategic interest and humanitarian aid to flatten as the number of natural disasters increased, which we do not find.

Support for H1B is also lacking. To find support for H1B, which hypothesizes that donors are more likely to give to their strategic allies in the wake of a natural disaster to further their own self-interest, we would have expected the parameter estimate for the interaction term between strategic interest and natural disasters to be negative, which it is not. Moreover, we would have expected to observe a downward sloping relationship between strategic interest and humanitarian interest as the number of natural disasters increases. This is clearly not evidenced in the “Humanitarian Aid” panel in Figure 4.

Meanwhile, we test H2 by examining the effect of the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters on civil society aid. In Figure 3, we find a positive and significant relationship between this interaction and civil society aid. The substantive effects plot (in the “Civil Society Aid” panel in Figure 4) meanwhile also suggests that donors are more likely to target aid to civil society in their strategic adversaries the more natural disasters that country experiences, supporting H2. These results provide support for the idea that donors may be acting to take advantage of vulnerable recipients to mold the relationship to their interests.

Finally, we test H3 by analyzing how the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters affects development aid allocation. From, Figure 3, we can see that this coefficient

is not statistically significant. However, examining the substantive significance in Figure 4 (“Development Aid” panel) we can see that the relationship between strategic interest and development aid allocation is consistently downward sloping. This suggests that donors tend to give more development aid to strategic allies rather than strategic opponents, showing strong support for H3. These results indicate that irrespective of natural disaster intensity, development aid is reserved for strategic allies of donor countries and does not alter the strategic calculus donor countries undertake.

Overall, we believe that we have found strong evidence showing how the role of strategic interest can be heavily conditioned by context. That is, we find donors are more likely to give both more humanitarian and civil society aid to strategic opponents in the face of natural disasters. Our findings are consistent with the argument that they do so in order to take advantage of the opportunities natural disasters provide to improve their relationships with strategic opponents. These results are all the more interesting given that, consistent with the existing literature, we also find that donors are more likely to give development aid to strategic allies irrespective of the number of natural disasters a recipient country experiences. This suggests that donor countries strategically use different types of aid to further their interests in different contexts.

#### *Persistence of foreign aid allocation over time*

How persistent are these estimated effects? To answer this question, we re-estimate the original models for different lag lengths of the main interaction and constituent terms<sup>55</sup>. These models are estimated separately for each lag length (lags of 1, 3, and 5 years). The simulation results when using different lags for the interactions and constituent terms are shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7 for the outcome variables humanitarian aid, civil society aid and development aid, respectively.

From Figure 5, we can see that the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters is persistent until approximately five years after a natural disaster. This suggests that donors seek to use natural disasters as a tactic to improve relations with strategic opponents for a number of years after the initial disaster (supporting H1C).

<sup>55</sup>The controls are measured using a one-year lag throughout.

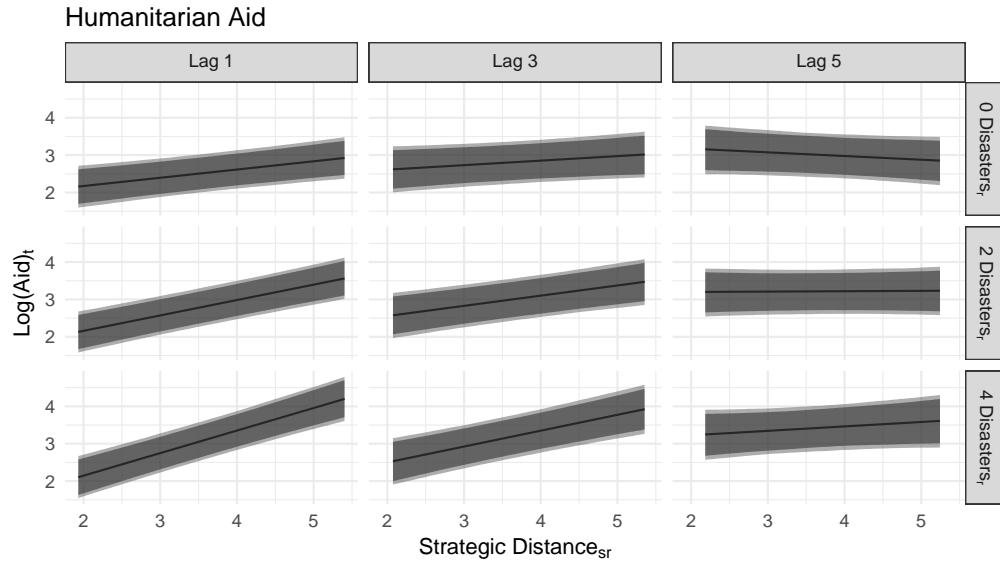


Figure 5: Simulated substantive effect plots for humanitarian aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

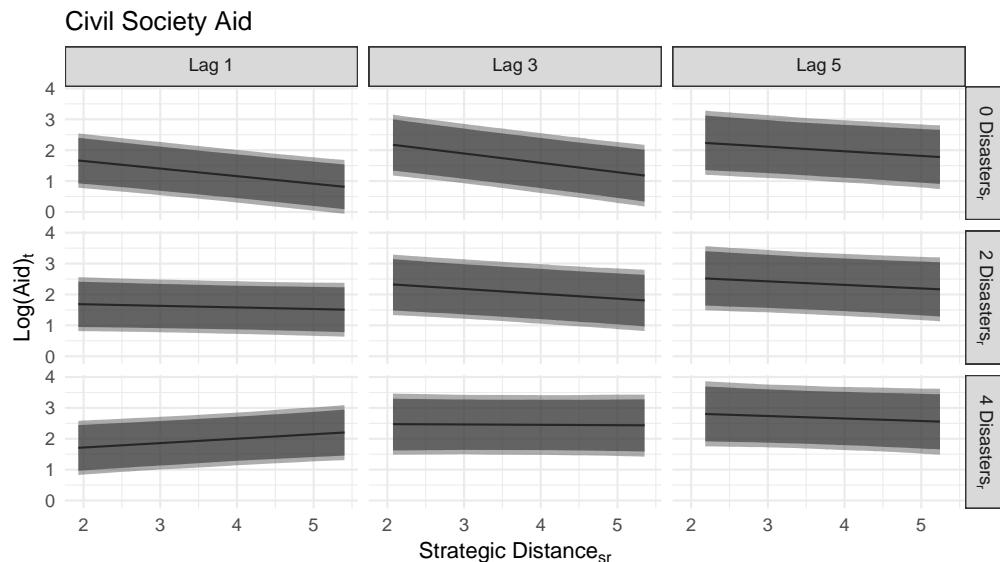
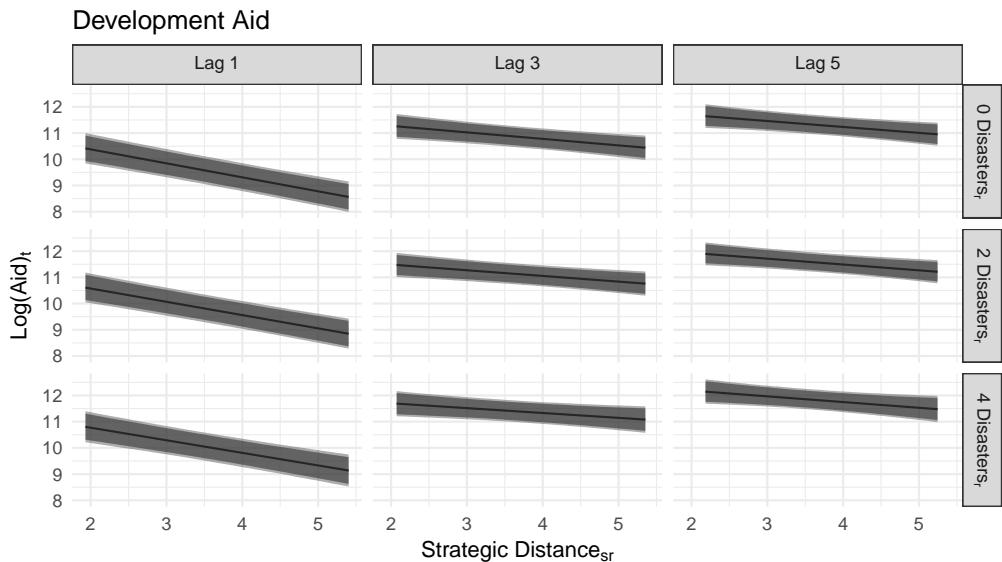


Figure 6: Simulated substantive effect plots for civil society aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

Figure 6 shows that while the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters positively affects the allocation of civil society aid, this effect is only consistent for a short time

following a natural disaster. One way to interpret these results is that donors recognize the difficulty of trying to influence domestic politics through civil society aid relatively quickly, and thus waste relatively little time in pursuing such attempts. Another interpretation is that civil society aid is actually rather effective and as such, recipient governments are likely to push back against allowing it in fairly short order. Teasing out the exact mechanism would be a fruitful area for future research.

Last, Figure 7 extends the earlier finding that the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters has little effect on development aid across a variety of different lags. This result further suggests that there is strong support for H3, that is donor counties focus on reserving development aid for strategic allies.



*Figure 7:* Simulated substantive effect plots for development aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

### *Robustness Checks*

We also ran a number of checks to test the robustness of our findings. We discuss these checks briefly here and invite readers to learn more in the Online Appendix. In particular, we find that our findings are robust to different operationalizations of the disaster variable, including when using

a binary variable for the number of disasters (see the Online Appendix) as well as when using the number killed in natural disasters. We also run model specifications with lagged dependent variables for both our main models as well as for models that analyze the persistence of foreign aid over time and find that our findings remain robust and substantively unchanged.

We also examined whether our results hold across different sub-samples of our data. For instance, Bermeo (2017, 2018)'s recent work suggests that it is increasingly in the donor's self interest to promote development against negative spillovers from developing countries in the post 2001 era. If a similar logic predominates in the event of a natural disaster, then we would expect it to wash out any consideration of more traditional self interest on the part of the donor. That is, if the prevention of negative spillovers were donor's only concerns, then we would expect donors to give most to countries for whom the potential negative spillovers from natural disasters would be greatest and thus would not expect to find any statistically significant relationship between more traditional strategic interest concerns and humanitarian aid in the event of a natural disaster. Given that, we test whether our findings hold when we restrict our sample to the post 2001 era and find that they do (see the Online Appendix). Numerous works also suggest that aid became less tied to security concerns after the end of the Cold War (Fleck and Kilby, 2010; Clist, 2009). As such, we also investigate whether our results are based on a similar dynamic by examining how our findings fare when we restrict our analysis to after the Cold War and find them to be robust (see the Online Appendix).

Finally, we also explored whether donors may find it easier to funnel aid to strategic allies through pre-existing channels in the wake of natural disasters. If so, then our findings that donors give more to strategic opponents through humanitarian aid channels may simply be an artifact of how different aid pipelines are labeled. We investigated whether this was a possibility by both exploring how aid composition changes depending on whether a recipient country is a strategic ally or opponent as well as whether strategic allies are more likely to get more overall aid. We do not find evidence that our findings are a function of a labeling effect (for more details see the Online Appendix).

Note, a potentially important covariate that we do not control for in our analysis is the role of media and public opinion. While Eisensee and Strömberg (2007) and Strömberg (2007) find

that news coverage of a natural disaster is a big factor in shaping US humanitarian aid allocation, Olsen et al. (2003) find that media coverage has only a limited effect on shaping humanitarian aid across a larger cross-section of donors. Other studies suggest that public opinion can help shape aid allocation (Bryant et al., 2018), including whether aid is given bilaterally or multilaterally (Milner and Tingley, 2013). This work strengthens our findings to the extent they suggest that increased media coverage and public opinion pushes donors to give purely for humanitarian motivations, in line with H1A. If so then this should have made it our findings in support of H1C less likely, as opposed to more likely, to have been found. All of these studies have either been conducted on select countries or select cross sections of time however; the relevant data to test these propositions over a large panel of countries over time is unfortunately not available and prohibitively costly to collect. Further research on how media coverage and public opinion affect aid allocation following a natural disaster however, will be an important avenue for future research.

## DISCUSSION

Our analysis suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of foreign aid is in order. While recent work has shown that accounting for the channel of aid delivery can go a long way toward understanding aid allocation decisions (Dietrich, 2013, 2016), we show that following natural disasters, donor countries actually direct greater levels of humanitarian aid to strategic opponents rather than allies. We argue that donor countries may allocate foreign aid in this way because they see natural disasters as an opportunity improve relations with their strategic opponents. As shown in our lag models, these findings are surprisingly persistent.

Moreover, natural disasters not only affect how donor countries allocate aid for short-term purposes. We find that strategic considerations also reign large when one considers the effect on the distribution of aid with longer-term targets. Specifically, donor countries are more likely to distribute civil society aid to strategic adversaries as the numbers of natural disasters these countries face increase. Civil society aid inherently involves engagement and intervention in the

domestic politics of a recipient country, an increase in civil society aid is indicative of a greater desire to increase donor influence over a recipient country, at least relative to development aid.

Meanwhile we find that donors are more likely to give development aid to strategic allies irrespective of exogenous shocks such as natural disasters. Why might donors pursue a sophisticated realist strategy for humanitarian and civil society aid but a naive one for development aid? To answer this question, we argue that context matters; what may further strategic interest in one situation may not work for another. It is nevertheless useful to note that almost 60% of the total aid flowing from donor countries can be categorized as development aid. This suggests that donors who seek to develop better relations with traditional strategic opponents by dispersing humanitarian and civil society aid recognize the inherent risk in this strategy and invest accordingly.

These results should be of particular interest as climate change continues to increase the incidence and the intensity of natural disasters. They suggest that while countries that experience natural disasters can expect humanitarian aid even from their strategic adversaries, such help can also open the doors to efforts to influence domestic politics in line with the interests of donors who have historically been antagonistic.

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