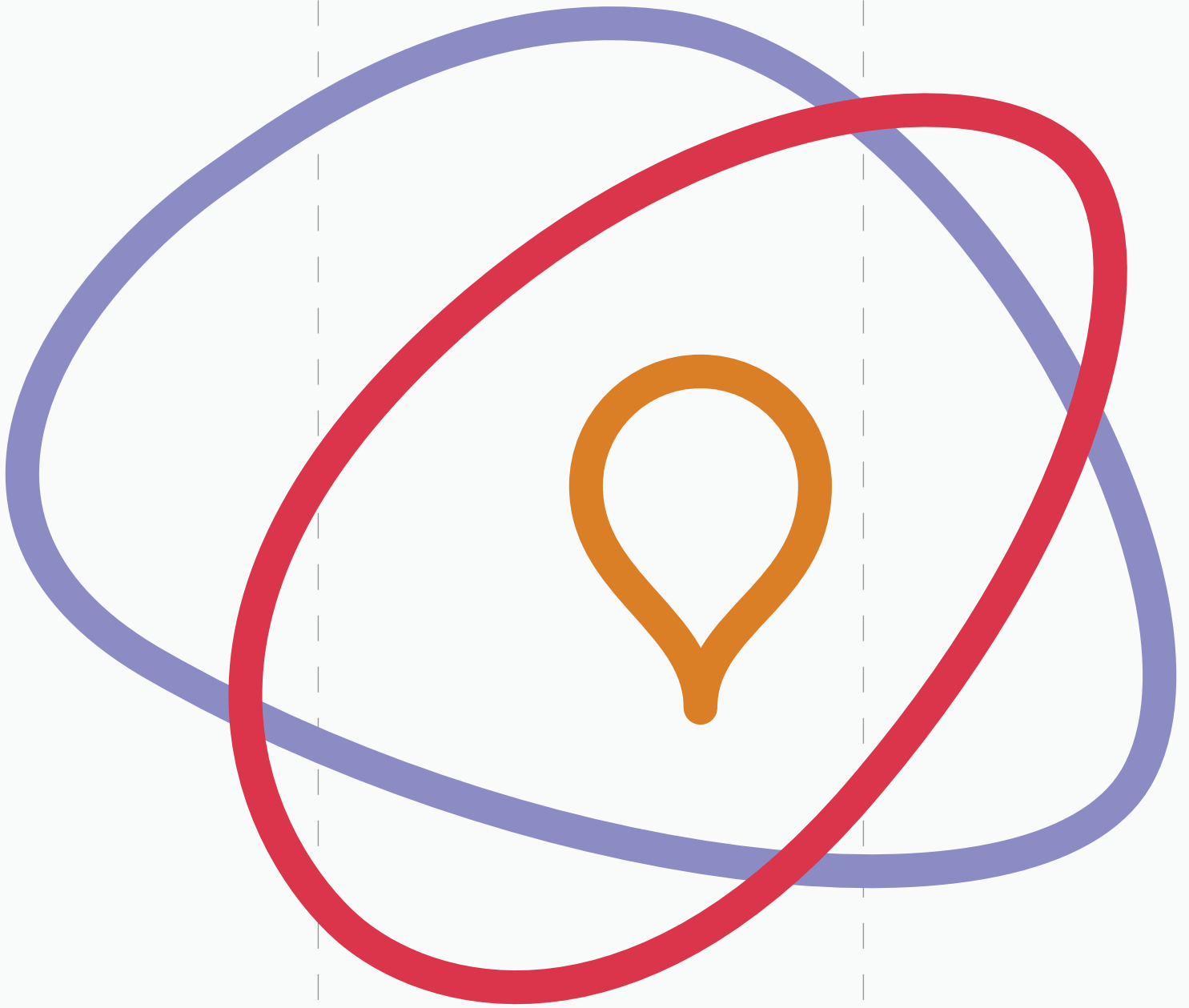




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HUMANITARIAN DISASTER RESPONSE: UNDERSTANDING AID REJECTION

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ABSTRACT

Communities the world over continue to be alarmingly vulnerable to natural hazards, leading to no shortage of devastating consequences. Whether or not climate change brings forth an increasingly ferocious variety of hazards, actors involved in disaster response will still face a multiplicity of challenges to delivering lifesaving aid. For instance, humanitarian organizations sometimes face the challenge of overcoming the reluctance of disaster affected states to accept their assistance. When disasters extensively overwhelm state capacity the refusal of external assistance can have serious ramifications for those affected. Despite the stakes, research surrounding aid rejection in these contexts is limited. This analysis sheds more light on why aid rejection occurs and highlights to humanitarian organizations and other researchers the fundamental considerations to develop an understanding on this subject.

A synthesis of existing research on disaster response reveals the very tangible political risk that disaster affected states face when engaging with international offers of assistance. It is in the effort to mitigate this political risk to their legitimacy that states may ultimately decide to reject aid. A few key state characteristics such as response capacity, level of external intervention and domestic politics may also amplify this risk, resulting in a higher likelihood that external aid is rejected. This analysis engages with these factors to determine their validity and relevancy to humanitarian practitioners seeking to develop the appropriate organizational strategies.

In an effort to better understand aid rejection a disaster dataset was developed based on the concept that disasters with higher visibility on the international scene present a higher level of political risk for an affected state, and therefore have the highest likelihood of resulting in cases of aid rejection. However, in analysing disasters that met this criterion over a 10 year period the research found no instances where external aid was universally and indiscriminately rejected. This is not to say that there were no cases where an affected state rejected assistance from a particular party but that even in these instances those states did accept aid from some other source.

The implication of these findings is that states affected by natural borne disasters are likely to accept external offers of assistance so long as those offers carry a manageable level of political risk. Humanitarian organizations should therefore consider how they can mitigate the political risk they might present to an affected state as part of their disaster response strategy.

Introduction

The notion that the world is entering a period of increased exposure to natural hazards due to climate change is becoming near ubiquitous throughout global policy discussions. The humanitarian sector as a collective has been especially active in emphasizing the consequences of this phenomenon (New Humanitarian, 11 March 2018). This concern stems from the prediction that climate change will progressively increase the frequency and severity of natural hazards thereby adversely affecting the communities most vulnerable to them (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 21). If this notion should prove valid, which recent weather patterns seem to substantiate (Oxfam International 2019), then local, national and international disaster response strategies should be of ever increasing importance. Given also that climate change is a global phenomenon, cooperation at the international level might be of particular importance as an opportunity for progress. It is therefore troubling that research suggests states are increasingly likely to reject international aid in the wake of natural borne disasters (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 16, 115). A stark example of this trend was observed following the string of disasters that struck Indonesia in July and September of 2018. Whether the national government was justified in actively rejecting foreign aid is up for debate but the discernible strain on state capacity in the wake of the disasters certainly raises the question of whether this aid could have facilitated the disaster response (Rose 2018). While Indonesia did eventually acquiesce to a limited and controlled stream of international assistance, the apparent reluctance with which it did so was not a promising sign for international humanitarian responders. However, aid rejection following natural borne disasters is not unique to Indonesia nor to the present. The seemingly increasing prevalence of aid rejection should be worrying though considering the substantial efforts that have already been made towards facilitating aid acceptance in these contexts.

If aid rejection can indeed be expected to rise, this trend could have significant costs for humanitarian organizations and their potential beneficiaries. Given the probable consequences more efforts should be made to better understand aid rejection in the context of these disasters. Unfortunately, the body of research on aid rejection remains relatively limited. Especially lacking are analyses on the perspectives of states affected by natural borne disasters that choose to reject aid. While theories abound on states' motives for doing so, no comprehensive predictive models have emerged that capture the widespread berth of relevant factors. Most datasets and analytical models developed for the purpose of researching aid rejection are also regrettably limited in their scope. This is not surprising given the general opaqueness of disaster aid flow despite several major efforts for increased transparency.

Besides raw data any truly substantive analysis of aid rejection will also most likely require in-depth knowledge and understanding of an affected state, including its disaster response policies, mechanisms and

the actions taken by its relevant domestic actors during the disaster. This insider knowledge, usually consisting of politically sensitive information, might often be outside the grasp of international researchers. In terms of terminological minutia, there is also considerable ambiguity surrounding the classification of disaster aid. Is a state considered an "aid rejecter" if it refuses offers of assistance from just one other state? If not, how many offers of assistance must it reject in order to be considered as such? Can analysts equate the discreet acceptance of monetary assistance with well-publicized transfers of material resources? Add the convoluted disaster response mechanisms available to states at the bilateral, regional and international level, not to mention the intricacies of domestic disaster response politics and these questions become increasingly complex. For good measure, consider also the subjective nature of even defining a disaster event. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), regarded as one of the most respectable stewards of disaster data, puts forth the following definition of a disaster:

"Situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance" (CRED 2019).

Unsurprisingly, problems arise when a divergence of opinion exists between the affected state and international actors in determining the necessity or magnitude of external assistance required.

Suffice to say that a multitude of factors contribute to making the study of aid rejection a complicated endeavour. While acknowledging these analytical barriers, in fact precisely because of them, it is the purpose of this research to contribute towards shaping a more foundational understanding of aid rejection. The analysis hopes to achieve this through three main objectives:

1. To provide a summary on the existing body of research on aid rejection
2. To extrapolate the most relevant indicators of aid rejection for humanitarian practitioners
3. To develop an accurate dataset model and analytical approach for studying aid rejection

These objectives will each comprise a section of the analysis which together will form its structure, followed by a summary of the key conclusions.

Section One: Why States Reject Aid

If there is a preformed explanation for aid rejection it perhaps lies in the image of a rogue state, atop of which sits an incontrovertible dictator, spurning the helping hand of the international community following a disaster and insisting that its people will rely instead on their uniquely superior power of self-sufficiency. Inconveniently, this image is a misrepresentation. Travis Nelson (2010, p. 395) in his research actually finds that regime type is not a determining factor in aid acceptance following natural borne disasters. In the wake of a cyclone a fairly elected representative government might be just as likely to reject aid as a brutal autocrat. Rather, the duration of time since a given state has experienced a significant regime transition has proved much more indicative of aid rejection (Nelson 2010, p. 395). In this theory, states view the acceptance of aid, especially following a highly publicized disaster, as an impactor on their legitimacy. Therefore, in periods of regime transition where their legitimacy is predictably most vulnerable, states are more likely to view acceptance of aid as a political risk they cannot afford. For example, Nelson notes how Myanmar's transition in progress from a military junta to a democracy was a key factor in why the regime rejected international assistance immediately following Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Nelson 2010, p. 396).

It is this notion of aid acceptance as a political risk which is especially important to recognize and is advanced by other research to greater and lesser degrees. What exactly is meant by the term "political risk" though? Within this analytical framework the term will refer to exposure to a potentially negative impact on state legitimacy. Since it is not within the scope of this paper to delve into the various contested definitions available for "state legitimacy" this analysis will satisfy itself with a common and general meaning which is the acceptance of the state's authority over its population. What is interesting to note is that political risk can be said to have two aspects: international and domestic. The international aspect of political risk can be seen as representing an external threat and the domestic an internal threat to state legitimacy. Although both aspects are doubtlessly intertwined, understanding them as two separate elements will assist in reviewing the relevant body of research.

Beginning with the international aspect of political risk, some research has found that states are more likely to reject aid if they perceive it as an attempt from an international actor to meddle in their domestic affairs (Allan & O'Donnell 2013, p. 47). In this case political risk might be interpreted as a threat to sovereignty. Some reports claim that disaster response can actually be a battleground for state sovereignty, with the affected state fending off incursions disguised in the form of aid (Bandopadhyay 2019). For instance, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti is a prime example of a state's agency being sidelined by an international response (Rodgers 2013). Considering the basic responsibilities a state holds to care for its population it is certainly not invalid to conclude that the assumption of some of this

responsibility by a foreign power during a disaster is an infringement on this sovereignty.

Applying Rachel Brewer's theories on state reputation, aid rejection can also be understood as part of a realist calculus that states perform (Brewster 2009). In certain cases, states determine they have more to gain in the international arena by rejecting aid, or that at the very least their reputation will not suffer from doing so. A possible explanation for why states might interpret aid rejection as beneficial is that from a certain perspective the capacity to unilaterally respond to a disaster marks a key divide between "developed" and "developing" countries. From this viewpoint, to accept foreign assistance is to admit a lack of independence, which can be interpreted as a lack of power. Contrast the idea of the United States and Haiti calling out to the international community for help following a disaster in their respective countries. One would be a shock and the other an expectation. Countries such as India and Turkey which in the last few decades have striven to transition from "recipient" to "donor" status (Smith 2011), or another growing regional power like Indonesia might be particularly keen to showcase their independence by rejecting aid.

For the governments of these countries, responding to a natural borne disaster under an international spotlight might actually present an opportunity to showcase their increased capability as a state. This is especially true considering the usually large involvement of military assets in disaster response. The rapid and effective mobilization of soldiers and military equipment in these contexts does not leave much to the imagination if rival states were considering what other means that force might be deployed for. From a humanitarian perspective though, that states are increasingly capable of unilaterally responding to disasters is theoretically an encouraging trend (UNESCAP 2017). However, real issues arise when states may prioritize the showcasing of independence over acknowledging when a disaster has overwhelmed their capacities, a point further discussed in section two. In terms of the international aspect of political risk, two factors emerge as significant. The first is the risk to sovereignty presented by the usurpation or perceived usurpation of the affected state's responsibilities by an external actor. The second is the risk to a state's international reputation by appearing weak or incapable in the face of a disaster.

On the domestic front, the acceptance of aid can also be seen to have significant political consequences. Parallel to the risk to its international reputation, a state's population could view their government as weak or inept depending on its response to a disaster (Cole, Healy & Werker 2012, p.167-181). There could be additional consequences when political contenders are poised to take advantage of an unfavorable disaster response narrative (Allan & O'Donnell 2013, p. 47). A good example in the United States is how the Bush administration's handling of Hurricane Katrina's

devastation of New Orleans in 2005 became a rallying cry for the rival Democratic Party (Walsh 2015). Given the political risk of not meeting the needs of their disaster affected population though, it might be assumed that states would be more likely to accept aid in order to bolster any national response. As Kent, Armstrong and Obrecht (2013) note in their research however, the unknown factor of aid acceptance is often seen as the greater political risk. It therefore probably behooves states to ensure as much control over the management of a disaster response, foreign aid pouring in is not exactly conducive to that effort. However, as these researchers note, governments, comprised of an array of individuals facing an extremely stressful situation, cannot always be expected to act rationally (Kent, Armstrong & Obrecht 2013) despite perceiving disaster management as a key impactor of domestic support and stability (Rubin 2019). Sometimes perhaps, aid rejection, rather than a conscious policy, occurs simply out of the mismanagement and bungling pervasive in any emergency context.

Returning to the theories and frameworks purporting deliberate aid refusal, Nelson's research (2010) is again valuable in building a coherent foundation for understanding state actions. For example, while Indonesia was not undergoing a significant regime change in 2018 one could assume the upcoming presidential election in 2019 was surely a factor for the government as they managed two major disaster responses, demonstrating perhaps that regime change and government transition can be similarly indicative of aid rejection. In fact, research surrounding voter behavior has concluded that constituents are influenced by not just the disaster response but the occurrence of the natural hazard itself (Cole, Healy & Werker 2012, p. 16). This makes increasingly clear the kind of political pressures a responding government faces in the attempt to overcome the negative bias already attached to them at the outset of a hazard event. Wooyeal Paik's research (2010, p. 442) goes a step further in actually validating states' treatment of aid acceptance as a political risk, pointing out several instances where government response to a disaster was inexorably linked to a subsequent regime change.

That governments are "right" to view international aid acceptance in this light may be uncomfortable to acknowledge for humanitarians whose main objective is the alleviation of suffering. However, as seasoned humanitarians already know, aid acceptance is politically charged and the practicalities of aid delivery will always be subject to some type of realpolitik. The worrying trend would again be that these political barriers are mounting, a concept not without validity according to some emerging factors. The immediacy of media coverage when a disaster occurs and its rampant spread across social media platforms combined with waves of nationalism that increase pressure on governments to appear strong and independent are some such factors (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 16, 115). A more optimistic factor is the increasing capacity of certain disaster prone states, especially in the Asia

Pacific region, which might be reducing the need for international aid thereby resulting in its rejection (ALNAP 2010). What is clear is that humanitarian organizations will need to be ready to adapt to the changing realities of disaster response and should be wary of the dangerous bedfellows that nationalism and aid rejection may have become.

Section Two: Identifying States More Likely to Reject Aid

While an academic background on aid rejection is useful for developing an understanding of the topic, more operationally minded humanitarian practitioners might long for the practical conclusions. One particularly useful aspect of understanding aid rejection might be the capacity to identify states that are more likely to do so before disaster strikes. With this knowledge humanitarian organizations could appropriately tailor their strategies for identified states to be better placed to deliver aid. This analysis will seek to contribute in this regard and while it cannot claim to provide a predictive equation for determining any given state's likelihood of rejecting aid, it should serve as a useful guide for identifying certain indicators that could help do so. Decision makers can use this information to develop more adaptive disaster response strategies as well as more effectively tailor the allocation of their resources. The analysis below covers three main theories, extrapolated from the reviewed research and other sources to highlight the indicators that may be most relevant for predicting aid rejection.

Capacity as an Indicator

Returning to the research, it was noted that states view aid acceptance as a political risk with significant international and domestic political impacts. Based on this understanding a general conclusion can be drawn that if states are able to avoid this political risk, they will (Carnegie & Dolan 2015, p. 3). In other words, if a state possesses the capacity to respond to a disaster without external aid it is very likely they will do so to mitigate this risk to their legitimacy. The inverse can be equally indicative, that is that states with less capacity for disaster response will more often find themselves in a position where the acceptance of aid is a necessity (Nelson 2010, p. 394). In this case, one need only look at an assessment of state capacity to determine the likelihood of aid rejection. For example, the severity of a natural hazard being equal, Austria should be more likely to reject aid than Afghanistan according to assessments of their disaster response capacity. Another way to simplify this notion would be that if a state truly needs aid, it will accept it. Obviously if that were always the case it would defeat the entire *raison d'être* of this research and its counterparts but it is worth noting that this trend is generally true.

This may seem like a rather obvious set of conclusions but taken one step further it becomes a rather troubling one. Given that management of the political risk largely centres around perception, a state's actual capacity may

be less important than its perceived capacity (Carnegie & Dolan 2015). In this case a state may reject external aid, forwarding the notion that it possesses the capacity to respond unilaterally, when in reality the disaster has exceeded its capacity. As researchers Allison Carnegie and Lindsay Dolan (2015, p. 3) note this maneuver can be accomplished (or attempted) when there is a plausible notion that the affected state might in fact possess the needed capacity. Drawing on these conclusions the states most likely to reject aid when their capacity has been overwhelmed would be those at high risk to natural hazards with passable levels of relevant coping capacity. These states are likely to experience the serious damage to life and property caused by natural hazards and possess enough capacity to justify a unilateral response. Taking the INFORM global risk index's measures of both exposure and capacity, countries that fall in this category would include China, India, Iran, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines and Vietnam, with Indonesia falling just shy of being included on the list (INFORM 2018).¹ It is significant to note that more than a few of these intermediately vulnerable countries have rejected aid in the past.

State capacity as an indicator then offers a promising start to predicting aid acceptance behavior, although, it is ultimately an incomplete one. While it might be relatively accurate in determining that countries below a certain threshold of capacity will accept aid and others above a certain threshold reject it, predictability between these two thresholds becomes much less clear. There are also instances where countries with high capacity scores have accepted aid such as Japan and countries with low capacity scores rejected it such as Myanmar. Even establishing such thresholds would be highly dependent on the severity of a disaster leaving much to be desired in terms of predictive capability. Still, humanitarian organizations are encouraged to consider the identified intermediately vulnerable countries when developing their disaster response strategies as this theory would indicate a higher prevalence of aid rejection among them.

External Intervention as an Indicator

As was previously mentioned, the threat of external intervention can represent a significant political risk for a disaster affected country. If this is the case then higher levels of foreign interference in a country might indicate that country is more likely to accept aid, as this external threat to its legitimacy already exists and has either been voluntarily or involuntarily accepted. Conversely, countries with low levels of foreign interference would be more likely to balk at any international influence over their governance, even if it comes in the form of well-meaning aid. With this in mind, utilizing the Fund

1 The analysis selected countries on the INFORM Global Risk Index with both an exposure to natural hazard score above 7.0 (High-Very High) and a lack of coping capacity score between 3.2 and 4.6 (Medium). Indonesia was only just disqualified with a lack of coping capacity score of 4.7.

for Peace's Fragile States Index (2018) to assess the level of external intervention in a state could prove a useful method for determining the likelihood of aid acceptance.² The theory is that countries with high levels of external intervention would be expected to accept aid and as the level of external intervention decreased so would the likelihood of aid acceptance.

As with state capacity this would probably not result in a perfectly linear predictive capability. While one could identify states with low levels of external intervention which would be more likely to reject aid it would be difficult to determine at what point the level of external intervention actually affects the likelihood of aid acceptance. Also similarly to state capacity, a good starting point for making this determination might be to focus on states which are transitioning from higher to lower levels of external intervention. States in this period might be particularly determined to avoid any international efforts which would hold them back from reaching a sought after, more complete autonomy. This might be especially true if external intervention did have any correlative relationship with state legitimacy, a higher level of intervention perhaps being indicative of a less commanding government and vice versa. A government attempting to assert its authority might then view curbing external intervention, certainly in the form of aid, as a means to do so. Whether the relationship between external intervention and state legitimacy can be isolated as correlative would be an interesting topic for further research and in fact has already been explored among various studies in the development sector, although not within the scope of disaster response as far this researcher is aware. What can be said though is that states with lower levels of external intervention are probably less likely to accept aid. While this again might appear a relatively simple conclusion to make it is an important one to elucidate in order to begin to establish tangible metrics with which to build predictive models.

Domestic Politics as an Indicator

The last potential indicator identified by this analysis concerns the theories centered on voter behavior in response to disasters. Several key conclusions have been reached surrounding this topic which are especially relevant. The first is that disaster response within a state can highly depend on the political importance of the affected area as Thomas Garrett and Russel Sobel (2003) found in their research on federal relief allocation in the United States. The implication of this is that national governments might be more intent on demonstrating a strong national response in areas where the political stakes are higher, likely increasing the aversion to accepting foreign aid into these areas. Although this is not yet a validated assumption, at the very least humanitarian organizations should be aware of this domestic political consideration. Perhaps making

2 The Fund for Peace's external intervention indicator takes into account development and humanitarian aid among other factors.

extra efforts to integrate themselves under a national response in high political value areas or focusing their efforts in areas that might be more neglected following a disaster due to their political irrelevance.

Another assumption can be made based on the findings of Shawn Cole, Andrew Healy and Eric Werker (2012, p. 22) who found that the political stakes for an incumbent government are higher when a disaster occurs in close proximity to an election. The temporal importance of a disaster response is reinforced by an earlier study by Healy, this time with Neil Malhorta, (2009) in which they determined the initial logistical response to a disaster may be the most significant in terms of electoral impact. Recalling Indonesia's initial public rejection of aid which took place at a time when the upcoming presidential election was undoubtedly of political significance these points seem expressly relevant. It would therefore not be without reason for humanitarian organizations to assess a country's domestic political situation within the identified contexts in order to determine a risk of aid rejection. The indicative theory being that countries in the midst of political transitions, whether they be planned in a stable democracy or represented by political unrest under an autocratic ruler, would be more likely to reject aid. This theory could compliment the concept of period-since-regime-transition advanced by Nelson as part of a dual assessment. One part linked to the transition of power within a political system and one on the transition between political systems. While various factors might make it difficult to operationalize this indicator in a predictive manner it might be best incorporated into the political analysis that is conducted prior to engaging in a disaster response.

Prioritization

This section has up to this point focused on specific indicators which might be useful for identifying risk of aid rejection. As part of the effort to assist humanitarian practitioners it might also prove sensible to introduce a decision making process as well. This process centers on prioritizing countries according to the likelihood of requiring more nuanced approaches should a disaster occur. In other words, which countries are more likely to be averse to accepting aid. That a country is likely to reject aid should not be the sole grounds for prioritization though. Rather, in line with the humanitarian principles, priority should be placed where rejecting aid would result in the greatest human cost. A practical way to calculate this could be to start with an assessment of country risk. In this case we can again take the INFORM Global Risk Index as our measure. An organization could focus on the top 10 most at risk countries, or whatever global sample is relevant to the organization's reach and resources. The next step would be to classify the countries on this list in terms of likelihood of aid acceptance. Priority would be given to countries with a combination of the highest risk and lowest likelihood of aid acceptance. From the subsequent ranking, organizations could identify specific countries or regions where they might require a more adaptive disaster response strategy. A simple

process, yet one that could provide decision makers with a critically increased level of preparedness.

Section Three: Measuring Aid Rejection

One of the main issues this research seeks to contend with is the very manner in which aid rejection is analysed. After all, varying disaster and aid flow datasets as well as varying definitions of what constitutes aid rejection will undoubtedly produce varying results. While the numerous perspectives taken by other research each hold a degree of validity, by adapting new research methods this analysis seeks to expand the richness of understanding in this field. Moreover, beyond the focus of aid rejection this research should also contribute to the wider field of international relations in terms of capturing data on state decision making practices.

As with most related research this analysis recommends drawing on CRED's Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) as the basis for natural borne disaster data. This analysis found it best to limit the types of natural hazards included in the dataset to those that have an immediate impact on the affected state's capacity and would subsequently warrant an immediate international response. The primary reason for doing so is that unlike in a protracted hazard such as a drought, a hazard with an immediate impact produces the specific and pronounced political risk that this analysis is concerned with. The state's response to this risk is more measurable and definitive and therefore allows for a clearer form of insight into the state's actions.

Where this research approach might begin to diverge from other frameworks is in determining the threshold for including these disasters into a dataset for measuring aid rejection. As the EM-DAT includes disasters with all magnitudes of human and material cost it casts too wide a net for identifying the instances of political risk posed by those disasters which could illicit aid refusal. The Austrian government for example is unlikely to face any serious political risk if faced by a storm that causes no casualties and limited economic damage. It would be unlikely to require outside assistance nor be offered it. How to determine the threshold where political risk is apparent then? Other research has taken the human death toll as a measure of a disaster's severity and therefore the political risk it might present. This is based on the notion that a high death toll attracts the attention of an international audience and it is ultimately the high visibility of a disaster which increases the political pressure on states, sometimes bringing about the rejection of aid (Nelson 2010). Our research will adopt this notion and focus its scope on disasters which can be expected to illicit this type of visibility, in this case measured by media coverage. However, as research conducted by Thomas Eisensee and David Strömberg (2007) concluded, the number of human casualties required to make international news headlines fluctuates wildly depending on the source of the disaster. While an earthquake that kills two people is likely to be covered by international news outlets a landslide that kills a

hundred times that amount probably won't be (Eisensee & Strömberg 2007). This being considered, instead of setting a rather arbitrary death count as the standard for inclusion in the dataset this research framework will adopt the hazard specific metrics revealed by Eisensee and Strömberg as found in the table below.

Table 1. Number of deaths expected to illicit international news coverage by hazard type.

Hazard	Number of deaths
Volcanic Eruption	1
Earthquake	2
Wildfire	12
Storm	280
Flood	674
Landslide	882

Source: Eisensee and Strömberg, (2007).

This established threshold therefore identifies disasters that should be more likely to compel aid rejection based at least on the international aspect of political risk. While one would assume domestic audiences would have lower casualty thresholds when applying the equivalent pressure on their governments the international threshold should sufficiently capture what this research is after. A compilation of disasters that are perceived as severe enough to warrant political risk. As far as the temporal parameters this research will capture a period of 10 years, from 2008 to 2018. This period provided a significant amount of data points with contemporary relevancy.³ The resulting dataset included 183 disasters for analysis, with a large share of these being earthquakes. The UN's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) is an excellent resource to measure the relevant aid flow for this dataset, and in most cases it allows researchers to relate aid from specific donors of all types to specific disasters in an affected state. For the purpose of analysing aid rejection this provides tangible data on when aid is sent which is a more desirable alternative than relying on rhetoric in the international arena to determine if a state did or did not accept it.

In terms of the actual analysis the principal shift that this approach takes from other related research is that it focuses on a much stricter definition of aid rejection.

³ And also focuses on the time period after the adoption of the IFRC's Guidelines on the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance or "IDRL". The IDRL guidelines represent a major policy milestone in facilitating the delivery of disaster aid and by analysing the time period following their introduction onto the international stage in 2007 we might gain a better understanding of how effective the initiative has been.

In doing so the intent is to discern the patterns of aid rejection which are most relevant to humanitarian organizations seeking to deliver disaster aid. After all, if Iran rejects aid from Israel following a devastating earthquake does that action reveal an established policy of aid refusal on the part of the Iranian government which might impact humanitarian organizations? In all likelihood it is only telling of the animosity that exists between the two states. To label Iran an aid rejecter in this case would be misleading if it was in fact accepting other, less antagonistic, offers of assistance. The aid rejection that truly impacts humanitarian operations is the broad and sweeping rejection which seemingly makes no effort to distinguish between an INGO and an international rival. In these instances the affected state makes a determined effort based on a conscious policy to refuse outside assistance regardless of where it might come from and how crucially it might be needed. In order to identify these specific instances the analysis has developed three benchmarks related to aid refusal which a state must meet in order to fall into the category of aid rejecter.

The first is whether the affected state accepted aid from any foreign entity which was directly related to the specified disaster. If it did, it cannot be considered an aid rejecter. This would mean that even if a disaster-struck United States only accepted aid from its benevolent Canadian neighbour and rejected all other offers of assistance it would not be classified as an aid rejecter. The logic of this standard is that if an affected state accepts aid from even one outside entity, whether governmental or not, it is displaying a willingness to receive assistance so long as that assistance is within an acceptable level of political risk. For our hypothetically disaster-struck United States, Canada might have presented the only politically acceptable donor option for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the US government doesn't view Canada as a threat, or the two countries have a long history of friendly relations which mitigates any notion of less than altruistic intent. Perhaps the consideration is even based more on the American public's favourable view of Canadians in general and accepting Canadian aid in the wake of a disaster could build a favourable disaster response narrative for incumbent government officials in an upcoming election. The same could be applied to non-governmental entities. Whether there is a religious affiliation, long standing relationship or a particular organizational framework, a certain combination of factors could make one specific organization more appealing as a donor or partner for disaster response. As was previously noted, this differs from other approaches to measuring aid rejection where a single or set number of rejections substantiate classifying a state as an aid rejecter. Simply but paradoxically put, a state is not an aid rejecter just because it rejects aid from certain entities, so long as it accepts aid from at least one other entity. By tilting the focus more towards instances of aid acceptance we should gain a better understanding of the kind of assistance an affected state wants rather than what it doesn't. Deepening this perspective would allow humanitarian organizations

to more suitably tailor their response based on the distinctive wishes of a particular state.

If an affected state did not accept aid from any foreign entity for the specified disaster then the second criteria applied is whether it did so for another disaster that took place in the same calendar year. This allows the research to control for disasters which definitively did not necessitate outside assistance. An earthquake that kills two people in China might spark international intrigue but given that country's scale and resources it would probably not result in a flood of international offers of assistance and therefore present no opportunity to reject such offers. However, if in the same year a flood swept through China and killed thousands of people the offers would likely come pouring in. If China accepted assistance in this case it would imply that it might have done so for the theoretical earthquake if the assistance had been needed. Regardless, if an affected state chooses to accept disaster aid in the same calendar year as other disasters for which it did not then the implication is that the political risk of aid acceptance is not so great as to spur a policy of blanket refusal. Therefore, if an affected state accepted aid for any newsworthy disaster in the same calendar year as another newsworthy disaster then it will not be considered an aid rejecter.

Should an affected state not accept aid for any newsworthy disaster in the calendar year the next criteria to be applied is whether it actively and publicly rejected aid from the international community. Once again we must acknowledge the general opaqueness which surrounds the flow of aid and prevents a clear determination of when aid rejection takes place. Offers of assistance between governments made behind closed doors will most likely not be reflected onto the public stage. However, when a disaster clearly exceeds the affected state's capacity resulting in a massive loss of life and/or level of human suffering, that state's rejection of plainly needed assistance is bound to make headlines. Since it is these instances humanitarian organizations are probably most concerned with, this final benchmark would identify them, relying on news coverage of the rejection as the indicator. This factor also helps control for disasters that again, while newsworthy, do not definitively exceed the capacity of the affected state and therefore do not result in a solicitation of aid.

Preliminary Findings

Applying these parameters to our dataset of 183 disasters this analysis found 0 instances where an affected state met the criteria to be considered an aid rejecter. The point should be emphasized here that these findings do not indicate that individual instances of aid rejection do not occur, they absolutely do. What these findings do illustrate is that on no occasion did an affected state deny all sources of external assistance. While there were 32 cases (17%) where the affected state did not accept aid, in none of these cases did the analysis find evidence that those states displayed an overt effort to reject all offers of international assistance. This was most likely due to the fact that the affected state

possessed the internal capacity to adequately handle the disaster response, at least based on the relatively low number of deaths in these cases (CRED 2019). Of the 32, only four cases (2%) represented disasters with a death toll higher than 50 and only one case (<0.5%) with a death toll higher than 100; a series of wildfires in Australia in 2009 (CRED 2019). Given the high level of disaster response capacity in Australia it is reasonable to assume it did not require outside assistance. However, it is still possible that within these 32 cases a real need for external assistance existed and assistance was offered but refused. This refusal might not have been identified by the analysis if it did not make international headlines. It is worth reiterating again the state of muddiness surrounding aid flow. While a case by case analysis would certainly help clarify this the fact that none of these cases represented major disasters in terms of human loss seems to substantiate the original conclusion. The affected states probably did not require external assistance.

Also of note is the fact that both Myanmar in 2008 and Indonesia in 2018 accepted international assistance following the respective disasters that impacted them. Myanmar's rejection of aid following Cyclone Nargis is often touted as a textbook example of aid rejection as is Indonesia's following the twin disasters in 2018. While much discourse surrounds the very real proclamations that each government made and followed through on about rejecting aid much less attention is paid to the manner in which each state accepted it. In Myanmar's case the channelling of aid through the regional body ASEAN rather than a seemingly more hostile international apparatus was a crucial condition for its acceptance, a process which certainly decreased the level of political risk faced by the transitioning regime (Allan & O'Donnell 2013). In Indonesia's case it may have been more a matter of controlling the scope of international assistance in order to make the political risk more manageable. It is worth noting that the first UNHRD shipment to the country didn't occur until 10 days after the disaster, a noticeably slower rate than most other responses (UNHRD 2019). Perhaps delaying the influx of aid was one way the Indonesian government sought to manage the political risk by ensuring that the national response was already well under way before an international response could take place. Similarly, in certain cases affected states were quite discriminatory with where they accepted aid from. Russia was such an example, accepting aid almost exclusively from close political allies or famously neutral Switzerland following a disaster (UNOCHA 2019). There were numerous such examples of this discrimination but the point being that the findings indicate states affected by these sudden onset hazards will ultimately accept international assistance if it is needed.

This perspective shifts the angle of focus onto successful aid deliveries rather than failures which in turn opens up the possibility for humanitarian organizations to mitigate the risk of aid rejection. For example, what factors about an aid delivery from Belarus make it palatable for the Russian government? Is it possible for a humanitarian

organization to mirror these factors? Returning to the case of Myanmar, might regional bodies present an opportunity to increase the efficacy of aid delivery (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2018)? Hopefully, other researchers will seek to answer these questions and in doing so assist humanitarian organizations in placing themselves in ideal positions to deliver aid when and where it is most needed.

Conclusion

This analysis began with a review of previous research surrounding the politics of disaster response which yielded several insights. First and foremost is the reality that disasters are both inherently political and highly charged with potential political impacts. As such, states are deeply aware of how their management of a disaster presents a political risk both in terms of their international status and domestic legitimacy. It is likely the attempt to mitigate this political risk that results in a state rejecting external aid. At least in terms of rhetoric this seems especially true for states that view themselves as “up and coming” on the world stage and may hold an increased desire to showcase competence and independence to international and domestic audiences. Even when a disaster exceeds their capacity they might still choose to reject aid for fear of political consequences. Perhaps more insightful is the notion that states that are intermediately vulnerable, in that they face high hazard exposure coupled with moderate capacity, are more likely to experience both the need for aid and the “need” to reject it. Capacity is therefore a useful indicator in determining likelihood of aid acceptance.

The level of external intervention in a state was also found to be a positive indicator for measuring the political risk of accepting aid. States with high levels of external intervention are likely to accept aid as the political risk to them is probably negligible. However, states with median levels of external intervention seem to face a potentially significant political risk when deciding to accept aid. This could be due to their transitory status between “donor” and “recipient” countries, with the acceptance of aid compromising their movement towards the donor side. Given that aid rejection is closely tied to a state’s desire to appear competent in the eyes of their own constituency, it is also likely that domestic politics heavily influence a state’s decision to accept aid.

Capacity, external intervention and domestic politics form a strong foundation for predicting the likelihood of aid rejection. The findings of this research suggest that the barriers to aid acceptance should not be insurmountable though. Humanitarian organizations that possess the foresight to identify potential risk of aid rejection, the capability to adapt themselves accordingly and the will to build equitable partnerships should ultimately be among the most effective facilitators of aid. Considering the potential trend for increased aid rejection and the mounting consequences of climate change there is ample impetus for organizations to strive

towards developing the most comprehensive disaster response strategies possible. The true challenge perhaps lies in upholding the humanitarian principles while doing so. Compromising the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence or impartiality for the sake of mitigating the political risk faced by the affected state would be a precarious path indeed.

While this analysis has decidedly focused on a negative connotation of political risk, there is undoubtedly a positive implication. Governments that effectively manage disaster responses, to include responses that make use of international assistance to bolster national efforts, stand to enhance their legitimacy as they fulfill arguably the most essential governmental responsibility of protecting life. That being said, it cannot help but be emphasized that the true key to fulfilling this fundamental responsibility lies in preventing disasters from taking place in the first place and investing in the necessary measures to reduce risk and vulnerability. Prevention might offer the most politically neutral opportunity for reducing disaster likelihood and should therefore sit within any truly effective disaster response strategy.

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