

After a Storm Come Votes: The Electoral Consequences of Disaster Relief

Kentaro Fukumoto (Gakushuin University)

Kyosuke Kikuta (University of Texas, Austin)

Masao Yanagi (Gakushuin University)

In a conventional account, when a government distributes money to districts, people in the districts are more likely to vote for the governing party; in return, the governing party provides pork to the constituencies so as to increase its vote share. This argument, however, suffers from endogeneity bias: areas which receive grant may cast more ballots to the ruling party not because they owe the gift to it but because the party preemptively rewards the areas where it wins many votes anyway. This study addresses the problem by exploiting a unique analytical opportunity: the rainfall-induced variation in the allocation of disaster relief. Using maximum rainfall amounts between elections as an instrumental variable, we estimate the effect of disaster relief on vote shares in Japan, 2005-2013. We find supportive evidence regarding the Liberal Democratic Party but not for the Democratic Party of Japan.