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FEMA and the Prospects for Reputation-Based Autonomy

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Following its 1992 reorganization, the once scandal-ridden and sclerotic Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) experienced a dramatic turnaround. The agency morphed from a caricature of the ills of bureaucracy into a model of effective federal administration. Politicians who previously blamed the agency for its slow and inefficient response to disasters came to depend on the agency to lend credibility to their own efforts. After the agency's reorganization, politicians at all levels of government purposefully appeared beside FEMA workers. As recently as 2002, FEMA's reputation was so strong that the designers of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) included FEMA in it to lend prestige to the nascent department. Unlike other agencies so included, FEMA was allowed to keep its name, confirming the cachet of its brand.

Little more than a decade after reorganization, however, the FEMA name once again fell into disrepute. The agency was criticized for poor preparation and a slow response to Hurricane Katrina, especially in the New Orleans area. Many of the same criticisms made of the agency after Katrina had been made in the wake of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the nadir that first led politicians to propose abolition of the agency and that later led to reorganization. The agency's poor performance in Katrina was all the more embarrassing because the fragility of the system of canals and levees that kept New Orleans dry was well known. Although a major hurricane that strikes a low-lying urban area is a worst-case scenario, emergency managers had stated publicly that New Orleans was one of the most likely candidates for a catastrophic disaster.[1]

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1. Brian Hayes, "Natural and Unnatural Disasters," *American Scientist*, 93 (Nov.–Dec. 2005): 496.

How could an agency so quickly transform from a leading light of public administration into a laggard? FEMA's recent history exposes the friable foundations of agency autonomy, the insecurity of a good reputation among critically located groups as a support for independent action. The agency built a reputation among pivotal groups as *the* effective "all hazards" natural disaster agency, one that brought similar resources and procedures to bear on all kinds of disasters. That reputation allowed FEMA to develop and exercise autonomy, or the ability to act independently of its political superiors to fulfill a public need. Reputation is an unstable source of autonomy, however, often leaving an agency more fully exposed to destructive forms of politicization when the priorities of the president, Congressional majorities, and state and local agencies change. The agency's promise of swift and effective natural disaster preparation and response earned it wide latitude from politicians but, when catastrophe struck, it was unable to deliver and failed to meet its self-determined standards.

In this article, I offer a brief history of FEMA's predecessors in cold war civil defense agencies, an account of the disaster agency's turnaround, and an explanation for its recent troubles. In presenting this history, the hope is that other agencies might be able to learn from FEMA's successes and steer clear of its failures. In the first part, I provide a history of emergency management agencies, with sections on civil defense, FEMA before 1993, FEMA during the Clinton years, and a final section on the disaster agency in the homeland security environment. In the second part, I analyze puzzles and paradoxes in this history in order to extend an understanding of how reputation functions as a foundation for autonomy. In this case, reputation proved a potent yet fragile source of autonomy in a politicized bureaucracy. After recounting the history, I compare reputation with other sources of bureaucratic autonomy and set this account of autonomy next to other scholarly treatments.

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I. FEMA: A HISTORY

A. Civil Defense and Disaster Policy during the Cold War

After World War II, emergency preparedness included a commitment to addressing both natural disasters and nuclear attack, but, as the cold war intensified, the threat of nuclear attack quickly became the primary focus of preparedness agencies. Could the same thing have happened to the FEMA after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001? The history of federal emergency preparedness organizations in America suggests that the answer is yes. Civil defense programs arose in the 1950s under conditions similar to those following the 2001 attacks—a new sense of vulnerability, the expectation of a federal organizational response after the crisis, the need to minimize casualties in the event of an attack, and the need to boost the public's morale for a long struggle against a protean enemy.

Although the term was not yet in vogue, the earliest emergency preparedness agencies were created with an all hazards approach to disasters in mind. In 1948, Russell Hopley, the director of the Office of Civil Defense Preparedness, submitted a report to Secretary of Defense James Forrestal in which Hopley announced the creation of a comprehensive civil defense agency, "a peacetime organization which should be used in natural disasters even though it may never have to be used for war."[2] In the "Hopley Report," policymakers realized that civil defense programs could be used for all types of disasters. President Eisenhower issued the first presidential declaration of a major disaster in 1953 to help four counties in Georgia recover from tornado damage. This was made possible by the Disaster Relief Act of 1950, which replaced ad hoc aid packages with general law governing disaster relief.[3]

As the cold war continued, however, the all hazards approach to disasters faded and preparedness agencies focused almost exclusively on the response to nuclear attack. Why were federal preparedness agencies unable to preserve their dual missions of preparation for and response to natural disasters? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the main responsibilities for disaster preparedness were placed in state and local entities; however, the main reason that preparedness came to be synonymous with defense against nuclear attack rather than with preparation for natural disasters was the sudden increase in the perception of a Soviet threat.

Nuclear fear was on the national agenda before the creation of the emergency preparedness agencies. In its earliest stages, civil defense planning was coordinated by the National Security Resources Board's Office of Civil Defense Planning which was created by the 1947 National Security Act with the premise that uncertainty about the likelihood of nuclear attack and the immense threat it posed required "a continuous state of readiness."[4] Two events shortly thereafter focused attention squarely on the threat of nuclear attack: the Soviet atomic test of 1949 and the Korean War. Policy elites reacted to public outcry over these events by creating the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) in 1950, which absorbed previous civil defense agencies.[5] Its mission was to engage in long term disaster planning, including providing civil defense education and training. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the press was awash in stories about the threat and magnitude of weapons of mass destruction—including stories about how the A-bomb could leave cities pulverized in a matter of hours.[6]

2. Russell J. Hopley, "Civil Defense for National Security," a Report to the Secretary of Defense by the Office of Civil Defense Planning (Oct. 1, 1948). Quoted in Jerry Conley, "The Role of the U.S. Military in Domestic Emergency Management: The Past, Present and Future," Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management Newsletter, George Washington University, 3:4, Jan. 2003. Also see Memorandum, Forrestal to Truman, Nov. 8, 1948, PHST, OF, Box 1651, Office of Civil Defense Planning Folder; "Progress Report on Civil Defense Planning Under the N.S.R. B. March 3, 1949–March 3, 1950," NA, NSRB, RG-304, Box 94, Folder E4-12. For studies of early civil defense programs, see Nehemiah Jordan, "U.S. Civil Defense before 1950: The Roots of Public Law 920," Study S-212 (Washington, DC: Institute for Defense Analyses Economic and Political Studies Division, May 1966). Various civil defense leaders recall that the earliest conceptions of civil defense included defense against natural disasters; for example, civil defense agencies during the Truman administration cooperated with the General Services Administration to share knowledge about how to fight fires. See Richard Gerstell, Director of Civil Defense, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, "State Civil Defense Plans and Programs," lecture given Nov. 22, 1963, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Washington, DC.

3. Thomas A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 49–50.

4. NSRB Doc. 76, Aug. 19, 1948, "Preliminary Statement on guiding Principles and Program Framework for Mobilization Planning," PHST, WHCF, Box 27, NSRB Folder 1.

5. Civil Defense Act of 1950, Public Law 920, 81st Congress, 2nd session. Also see Federal Civil Defense Administration, "The National Plan for Civil Defense Against Enemy Attack" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 7–103.

6. This was a popular theme in general interest magazines such as *Life* or *Collier's*. See Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 54–57, 142. Also see "Defense Lack seen as Pearl Harbor," *New York Times*, 10 Oct. 1949, 9; "Baruchis Critical of Defense Plans," *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1949, 41; US Congress Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Hearings, Civil Defense Against Atomic Attack, 81st Congress, 2nd sess., 1950, 140–150.

The Aug. 21, 1953 issue of *Collier's* magazine included a FCDA-sponsored quiz intended to prevent readers from becoming "victims of panic." The government's publicity campaigns were aimed at frightening people sufficiently so that they would take

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The fear of an atomic Pearl Harbor was akin to press accounts about the danger of another terrorist attack during the recent homeland security debates.

Policy elites, meanwhile, were wary that Americans might retreat into isolationism and erupt in what historian Spencer Weart called "nuclear fear" and planners referred to as "the problem of panic."[7] Many in the Truman administration made the link between popular domestic support and demonstrating to other nations that the U.S. was committed to a strong foreign policy.[8] A secret 1946 report to President Truman links civil defense programs with the need to shore up national morale in the face of a protracted war:

> Even a cursory examination of the characteristics of the American people and of the cultural and material fabric of their national life invites the conclusion that this nation is much more vulnerable to the psychological effects of the bomb than certain other nations. A study of the factors involved should not only assist us in determining the vulnerabilities of other nations, but, also, should lead us to the development of measures to lessen the effects of these phenomena should we be attacked.[9]

For Truman administration planners, the possibility of nuclear war, when mixed with America's democratic and capitalist character, could result in either isolationism, American surrender of nuclear weapons to an international organization, or simply apathy. Civil defense planners wanted to enable as many Americans as possible to survive a Soviet attack, but in addition they wanted to manage the public's expectations about preparation for war and the danger of nuclear weapons. The cold war was the dominant foreign policy issue of the day, and concerns about nuclear attack were the central focus of preparedness agencies, despite the original all hazards vision in the Hopley report. The federal government's use of the language of the "home front" to appeal to patriotic duty during the cold war resembles the twenty-first century language of the "homeland" which politicians employ for a similar purpose.

During the cold war, the federal government delegated much of the responsibility for civil defense preparedness to individual Americans; the government funded large scale programs such as the construction of bomb shelters and the printing of instructional materials, but the thrust of the civil defense program was educating the public through the "militarization" of the home: Dad built a bomb shelter in the backyard, Mom prepared a survival kit, and the children learned to "duck and cover" at school.[10] Americans responded by joining civil defense programs in droves; air raid drills voluntarily cleared the streets of New York, and the FCDA sent out almost 400 million pieces of civil defense literature to homes. Defense against nuclear attack, not natural disasters, inspired a sense of national purpose.[11]

One reason for the militaristic approach was that, from 1950 to 1972, Department of Defense (DoD) agencies led preparedness efforts that, not unexpectedly, centered on programs to prepare for nuclear and other kinds of human-caused attack. Shortly after his inauguration in 1953, President Eisenhower reorganized disaster relief programs into a new office of Civil Defense in the Department of the Army. A string of defense-dominated preparedness agencies followed: the Federal Civil Defense Administration (1950–1958); the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (1958–1961); the Office of Civil Defense (1961–1972); the Office of Emergency Planning (1961–1972); and the Office of Emergency Preparedness (1968–1973). Even while preparing for

part in civil defense drills but not so much that they would be paralyzed. Take the quiz at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/sfeature/panicquiz.html> (accessed 16 Apr. 2004).

7. Spencer Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 103–269. Also see Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red*. During hearings on the National Security Act, policymakers maintained that to forestall a post-war retreat into isolationism, the government had to reassure the public that the United States was prepared for an attack and that something could be done about it, both to prevent it and in recovery. This would help maintain the link between deterrence and credibility. James Forrestal, said in 1945 to the House Military Affairs Committee, that "the world must know, with equal conviction that, as much as we hate war, we are ready to wage swift and effective war against any nation which to overthrow by law and justice, replacing it with rule by force. We should make the determination clear—by deeds as well as words—to any dreamer anywhere who may be scheming for world domination." See Forrestal, Miscellaneous Files, Box 44, 1945 folder, "Statement by James Forrestal to the House Military Affairs Committee on HR 515 'Universal Military Training,"' Nov. 26, 1945, 2. Forrestal was speaking in favor of universal military training, a proposal that was defeated but which still makes the connection between credibility and commitment to preparedness at home. (Quoted in Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red*, 143).

8. Ansley J. Coale, *The Problem of Reducing to Atomic Attack* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Robert Jervis, Janice Gross Stein, and Richard Ned LeBow, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3–33, 125–52; Robert J. McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 15 (1991).

9. "Enclosure A", "The Evaluation of the Atomic Bomb as a Military Weapon," (PHST, President's Secretary's Files (PSF), Box 202, NSC-Atomic Crossroads Folder, p.11, 1947); Also see Marc Trachtenberg, "'A Wasting Asset': American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949–1954," *International Security* 13 (1988/89).

10. Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

11. Eli Lehrer and Amanda Dory advocate expanding civic participation in homeland security based on lessons from the civil defense era. See Eli Lehrer, "The Secret to Homeland Security," *The Weekly Standard*, 8 Dec. 2003, 13–14 and Amanda Dory, *Civil Security*, Washington, DC: CSIS, 2003.

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Fig. 1. Civil Defense Appropriations, 1951–1982 (in constant FY 1977 dollars)
Source: Wayne Blanchard, *American Civil Defense, 1945–1975* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1980); and Blanchard, *American Civil Defense, 1945–1984* NETC Monograph, Emmitsburg, MD, 1985.

the next great war, these agencies maintained some responsibility for natural disasters; from January 1953 to June 1964, the OEP coordinated federal disaster assistance for 180 major disasters including 87 floods, 27 hurricanes, 23 severe storms, and 18 tornadoes.[12] However, this level of disaster involvement pales in comparison to the resources devoted to preparation for nuclear war or to the resources devoted to natural disasters since the 1990s. The height of civil defense came in 1961 when President Kennedy, spurred by the Berlin crisis, stressed the need for a comprehensive civil defense program.[13] Civil defense spending reached nearly $600 million (in 1977 dollars) that year; however, between 1951 and 1973 spending was generally held between $100 and $300 million.[14]

After Kennedy, civil defense programs languished. Congress maintained funding levels at about $100 million per year in the 1970s, presidents preferred to fund offensive capabilities rather than passive defenses, and the public gradually lost faith in the effectiveness of civil defense efforts as the Soviet nuclear arsenal grew to include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that could reach the Untied States in a matter of minutes, not hours. While President Carter's reorganization plan to create FEMA consolidated civil defense programs, civil defense advocates tussled with proponents of mutually assured destruction, who believed that civil defense efforts were futile since the whole point of deterrence was to convince both sides that there could be no winner in a nuclear war.

After years of waning support, the Reagan administration briefly reinvigorated civil defense as part of a larger nuclear deterrence strategy.[15] In 1980, Congress amended the 1950 Federal Civil Defense Act, intending to revitalize civil defense and, in response, FEMA proposed a seven-year, $4.2 billion plan for new education and evacuation programs, among other initiatives.[16] Two years later, President Reagan affirmed the value of civil defense in the

12. Jerry Conley, "The Role of the U.S. Military in Domestic Emergency Management: The Past, Present and Future," *Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management Newsletter*, George Washington University 3 (2003).

13. John F. Kennedy, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Berlin Crisis," July 1961.

14. See Figure 1, Civil Defense Spending, 1951–1975. For a description of the activities of civil defense programs, see various reports to Congress, including "Activities and Status of Civil Defense in the United States," Report to the Congress by the Comptroller General of the United States, Oct. 26, 1971.

15. Amanda J. Dory, *Civil Security: Americans and the Challenge of Homeland Security* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2003), 10–13.

16. General Accounting Office, "The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Plan for Revitalizing U.S. Civil Defense," GAO/NSIAD-84-11, April 16, 1984, pp. i–iii.

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effort to defeat the Soviet Union in a National Security Decision Directive.[17] Congressional support weakened, however, and the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union effectively put an end to civil defense programs meant to protect the United States from a massive Soviet attack.[18]

In many ways, the genesis of civil defense in the United States mirrors the advent of homeland security policy. In both cases, a crisis led to the creation of new organizations devoted to securing the nation against foreign attack. Yet, while the natural disasters portion of the domestic preparedness agencies was obscured during the 1950s and 1960s, and again during the early 1980s when fears of nuclear war grew, the FEMA of the twenty-first century was, for a time, able to turn its reputation for natural disaster response into potent source of political capital and to resist calls for a change in its mission.

B. Formation and Early Disgrace

During the 1970s, many civil defense programs came to be seen as mere wishful thinking, and attention given to nuclear defense programs and their budgets withered. The congressional armed services committees were more concerned with offensive nuclear capability and deterrence than they were with passive defense. At the same time, Congress devoted an increasing amount of attention to natural and technological hazards after several high profile disasters and after pressure from state and local governments to rationalize the recovery process. From this attention came the Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1974 and Congress' decision to allow the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (DCPA) to develop "dual use" functions to prepare for both natural disasters and civil defense emergencies.[19] In 1975, Congress conducted hearings on federal emergency assistance programs and suspended those efforts only when President Carter began to review the issue. In 1979, Carter eventually submitted Reorganization Plan Number 3 to Congress, which established FEMA.[20] For the first time, emergency management functions were centralized at the federal level.

The FEMA reorganization rivals the creation of the DHS in complexity, if not in size (FEMA's staff is roughly one-sixtieth that of DHS'). It combined the DCPA with more than 100 federal disaster-response programs, all of which reported to 20 different congressional committees. To appease interest groups and congressional committees, the reorganization plan transferred each program's political appointees to FEMA, which created isolated divisions or "stovepipes" with their own connections to relevant congressional committees and interest groups but little connection to each other. One participant in the reorganization recalled that "It was like trying to make a cake by mixing the milk still in the bottle, with the flour still in the sack, with the eggs still in their carton."[21]

It was not only organizations but also professional cultures that divided the agency. At least three distinct cultures combined to create FEMA, including: (1) former DoD civil defense personnel, who tended to have seniority; (2) the disaster relief program, whose employees had considered themselves so close to the president in the 1970s that they answered the phones with the greeting, "White House"; (3) a firefighting culture from the scientific and grant-making programs established by the Fire Prevention Control Act of 1974. Divided by culture and organizational responsibility, the fragmented agency was not able to establish a clear mission. Even so, its first director under Carter, John Macy, attempted to put the agency on a path toward an all hazards approach by emphasizing the similarities between natural hazards, preparedness and civil defense activities.[22] Under Macy, FEMA began development of an integrated emergency management system that included "direction, control, and warning systems which are common to the full range of emergencies from small isolated events to the ultimate emergency—war."[23] All hazards, however, was just one idea in the policy stream, and it competed with agency divisions that wanted FEMA to emphasize their own special missions, whether earthquakes, fires, or civil defense. Whereas fire, floods, and even oil spills could rely upon identifiable constituencies or stakeholders, terrorism and civil defense had significant support only in the bureaucracy and on congressional

17. National Security Decision 23 on "U.S. Civil Defense Policy," Feb. 3, 1982.

18. In 1994, Congress repealed the Federal Civil Defense Act; Public Law 103–337, Oct. 5, 1994; available at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title50A>.

19. That decision had little immediate impact, but it laid the foundation for policymakers to later expand dual use and all hazards approaches. In 1976, Congress amended the Civil Defense Act of 1950 to recognize "that the organizational structures established jointly by the federal government and several states and their political subdivisions for civil defense purposes can be effectively utilized, without adversely affecting the basic civil defense objectives of this Act, to provide relief and assistance to people in areas of the United States struck by disasters other than disasters caused by enemy attack." Also see Keith Bea, "Proposed Transfer of FEMA to the Department of Homeland Security," *Congressional Research Service* (*CRS*) *Report*, July 29, 2002.

20. In June 1978 President Carter submitted to Congress "Reorganization Plan Number 3" to establish FEMA. After congressional approval the Reorganization Plan creating FEMA took effect Apr. 1, 1979. (See also Executive Order 12127; 44 FR 19367, Apr. 3, 1979.)

21. National Academy of Public Administration, *Coping with Catastrophe* (Washington, DC) Feb. 1993, 13.

22. Macy was Director from Aug. 1979 to Jan. 1981.

23. "FEMA History," at <http://www.fema.gov/about/history.shtm> (accessed 12 Nov. 2003).

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committees. These institutional supports might have withered away earlier if events had not propelled terrorism and nuclear war onto the national agenda.

Terrorism first drew the attention of emergency preparedness planners during the 1972 Munich Olympics; there, television cameras captured the images of hooded Palestinian terrorists who tried to leverage 11 Israeli hostages for the release of 200 Arab guerrillas imprisoned in Israel.[24] News coverage followed from the moments when the terrorists first captured the Israeli athletes to the eventual murder of the hostages the next day. The grisly material and the almost continuous television coverage "turned viewers into voyeurs," and while commentators have remarked on how this prominent coverage changed the nature of television, it was also true that the television coverage changed how Americans perceived terrorism.

Terrorism was the subject of several commissions and studies in the late 1970s, one of which was a 1978 National Governors Association report warning that "Little coordinated federal-state planning for terrorist consequence management has been undertaken."[25] The Association hoped that the newly established FEMA might "provide an important foundation for a comprehensive national emergency response system." Thus, along with a host of other responsibilities FEMA was given the task of coordinating terrorism consequence management though most of the work of responding to terrorist disasters would fall to state and local first responders.[26]

Terrorism might have gotten lost in the shuffle of reorganization were it not for Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency. Reagan took office with a clear idea that nuclear competition with the Soviets would be a centerpiece of his administration, and he made appointments accordingly. Reagan had been concerned with terrorism preparation and civil defense as governor of California. After witnessing the riots and student protests that defined the state in the 1960s, Reagan organized the California Specialized Training Institute, an emergency management counterterrorism training center in 1971. The director of the institute, Louis O. Giuffrida, a former National Guard officer and a general in California's state militia, became Reagan's first FEMA Director in 1981.[27]

Partly in response to the Reagan administration's focus on national security and partly out of his own interest, Giuffrida made counterterrorism part of FEMA's agenda. Giuffrida had written articles and memos about the government's responsibilities in the event of a terrorist attack, and according to one colleague of Giuffrida's, "He wanted to be a player in the national security realm" and envisioned the agency as a "junior CIA or FBI."[28] When Giuffrida first took office, he asked the FEMA general counsel whether he had the authority to rename FEMA as the "Office of Civil Defense." (He couldn't because FEMA was a statutory term.)

Giuffrida made some progress in bringing together the more than 100 disaster response programs that were moved under the FEMA umbrella, but he overreached in his desire to make FEMA the lead agency in responding to terrorist attacks. His expertise in terrorism and his confidence that FEMA could implement national security policy

24. Michael Thompson-Noel, 'This Televisual Life," *New Statesman*, 26 July 1996.

25. "Domestic Terrorism," *Emergency Preparedness Project* (Washington, DC: Center for Policy Research, National Governors' Association, 1978), 107.

26. In hearings on the plan to establish FEMA, members of Congress came to the conclusion that the agency would be responsible for the consequences of terrorism because such consequences resembled those of other kinds of incidents. One example of that conclusion is the following exchange:

Mr. McIntyre: We think the consequences of terrorist acts can he quite similar to the consequences of major natural and manmade disasters. For example, in both instances there will be serious disruptions of essential services or resources, or certainly could be, and I would emphasize the new Agency would be involved only with the consequences of terrorism and not with the incident itself. I want to underscore that point.

Mr. Levitas: That is the point I am most concerned about.

Mr. McIntyre: And so we felt that if you were going to have a broad-based agency to respond to emergency situations, that since the consequences of these terrorist acts could be expected to be similar to other emergencies, that this agency should be in a position to response.

U.S. Congress, House Committee on Government Operations, Reorganization Plan No. 3 (1978): 52. Also see Keith Bea, "FEMA's Mission: Policy Directives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency," *CRS Report for Congress*, Feb. 13, 2002, 14.

27. Giuffrida was an expert on domestic terrorism. At the U.S. Army War College in 1970, he wrote a thesis which in part concerned the logistics of interning African-Americans in the event of an urban riot. The thesis is reprinted here: Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Nomination of Louis O. Giuffrida. Washington, DC, 97th Cong., 1st Sess, (1981): 34–83.

28. In a memo requested by Giuffrida, FEMA Counsel George Jett lays out FEMA's authority in civil disturbances, "riots, demonstrations which get out of hand, etc." This memo and others refer to a previous Department of Justice memo that rejects FEMA's authority in "nonnatural catastrophes." The FEMA counsels explicitly disagree with Justice and advise that "dual use" provisions and FEMA's authority under executive order 12148 may allow FEMA to recommend declarations and assert authority in nonnatural disasters including Love Canal and "the Cuban inflex" as well as in "major civil disturbances," See George Jett, General Counsel, "Memorandum for Louis O. Giuffrida, Responsibilities in Civil Disturbances," July 10, 1981; Craig B. Annear, Assistant General Counsel, "Note for Lee Thomas, The Applicability of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 to Riots and Civil Disorders," May 21, 1981. Other disasters cross multiple categories. The 1992 Los Angeles riots were declared a presidential disaster because of fire damage rather than riots.

Giuffrida's desire for FEMA to become a national security agency is reflected in a proposed executive order on intelligence activities in which Jett writes, "I have suggested that consideration he given to the inclusion of a provision concerning FEMA involvement in intelligence matters in times of national emergency planning and response." See Jett, "Memorandum for Louis O. Giuffrida," Nov. 9, 1981.

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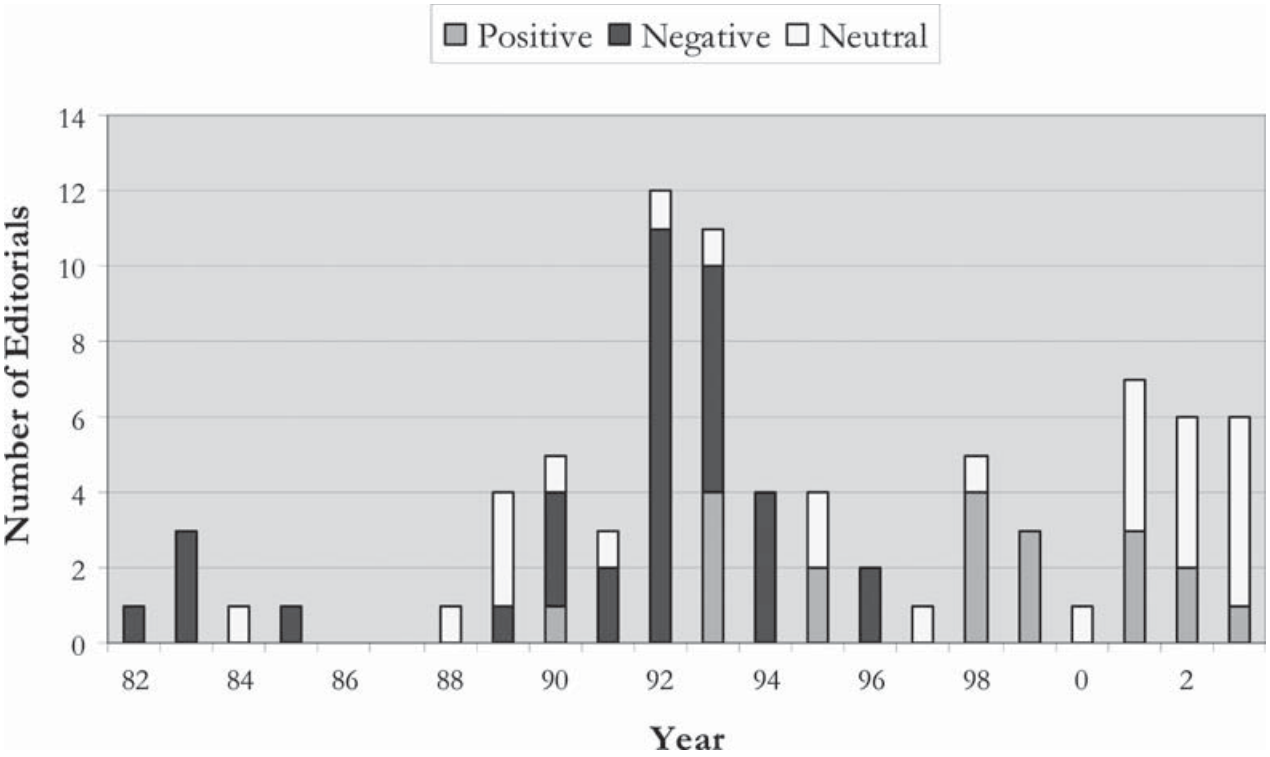


Fig. 2. Tone of Major Newspapers Editorials' Coverage of FEMA, 1982–2003
Source: Lexis-Nexis search of "Major Newspaper" mentions of FEMA. The most frequent newspaper in the results was the Washington Post. Tone is easier to establish in an editorial than in a news article because an editorial is, by definition, opinionated. Tone is negative when an editorial criticizes FEMA's ability to achieve some policy goal, such as efficiency, or blames FEMA or its leaders for a political or policy failure. Where there was doubt about the tone, I coded the article as neutral.

was not enough to overcome the fact that the agency lacked the budget, the expertise, the manpower, and, most importantly, the bureaucratic clout to be influential in the national security world. As a result, FEMA's forays into national security were bungling at best and scandalous at worst.

Giuffrida most famously led FEMA to overreach its capacity in national security by developing a secret contingency plan that called for a declaration of martial law and suspension of the Constitution, turning control of the United States over to FEMA during a national crisis. The plan itself did not define national crisis, but it was understood to refer to nuclear war, massive terrorist attacks, or violent and widespread internal unrest. Of course, President Reagan never acted on the plan, but portions of it were controversial enough within the Reagan administration to call FEMA's leadership into question.[29] The martial law portions of the contingency plan were found in a June 30, 1982 memo by Giuffrida's deputy for national preparedness programs, John Brinkerhoff.[30] The wide-ranging authority that would potentially be granted FEMA alarmed Attorney General William French Smith, who sent a letter to National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane on Aug. 2, 1984, urging that Reagan delay signing the draft executive order:

> I believe that the role assigned to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the revised Executive Order exceeds its proper function as a coordinating agency for emergency preparedness. This department and others have repeatedly raised serious policy and legal objections to the creation of an 'emergency czar' role for FEMA.[31]

29. It is not clear whether Reagan actually signed an executive order approving the contingency plan; the full facts remain obscured in part because President George W. Bush sealed some 68,000 pages of Reagan's White House records in November 2002. Elements of the draft executive order do appear in E.O. 12656 issued Nov. 18, 1988.

30. The scenario outlined in the Brinkerhoff memo somewhat resembles Giuffrida's thesis at the Army War College, Pa. in which he portrays the establishment of martial law in case of a national uprising by black militants. The paper also analyzed the roundup and transfer to "assembly centers or relocation camps" of at least 21 million "American Negroes." See Alfonso Chardy, "Reagan Aides the 'Secret' Government," *Miami Herald*, 5 July 1987.

31. William French Smith, Attorney General, letter to Robert C, McFarlane, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Washington, DC, Aug. 2, 1984.

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Table 1. Major Professional Emergency Management Associations and their Founding Dates

National Fire Protection Association (1896–)
National Emergency Management Association (1974–) (NEMA began as a civil defense organization, but gradually devoted itself to natural hazards and reduced its role in civil defense)
International Association of Emergency Managers Began as U.S. Civil Defense Council (1952–1983). Then became the National Coordinating Council on Emergency Management in 1983. Then renamed the International Association of Emergency Managers in 1998
The American Civil Defense Association (1962–) Has refashioned itself as a homeland security and counterterrorism defense association
American Strategic Defense Association (1970–)
Natural Hazards Center (1976–)
National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (1979–)

Source: Wayne Blanchard, *FEMA Higher Education Project*, (presentation materials) June 27, 2005.

Giuffrida did not stop with inserting FEMA into contingency plans. With the memory of the Munich attacks still fresh, Giuffrida asserted a role for FEMA in preparing for a possible crisis at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Other Reagan officials resented Giuffrida's ambition, and Smith's memo was one result of the backlash against Giuffrida and FEMA, according to some of Giuffrida's colleagues at the time.[32]

Chastened by the Attorney General and others in the national security community, Giuffrida resigned in 1985 after being the subject of a federal investigation of alleged fraud and mismanagement. No subsequent FEMA director had the same personal history and interest in counterterrorism and civil defense as Giuffrida, and his controversial tenure discouraged any reemergence of FEMA as a player in the national security realm.[33] By the mid 1980s, FEMA was seen as a liability and a potential source of embarrassment; few people could see how valuable the agency was to become for a president.

Even so, FEMA's reaction to major disasters was often slow or piecemeal.[34] It was not only the agency's dabbling in national security matters which gave FEMA a bad name—like the true stories about building a secret 112,544 square foot bunker under the Greenbrier resort in West Virginia to house Congress during a nuclear war.[35] FEMA also lacked coordination in responding to natural disasters. For large disasters, FEMA's response could be slow and excessively bureaucratic. For small and medium sized disasters, FEMA was often unclear about whether it should intervene at all, and its equivocation frustrated states and localities. Congress was to blame for some of the agency's schizophrenia—until reorganization in 1993 and the repeal of the Civil Defense Act in 1994, FEMA reported to over a dozen congressional committees, including the Senate Armed Services committee, which confirmed appointees to an associate director position. Congress attempted to give direction to the agency by passing the Stafford Act of 1988, but the legislation contained a broad mandate with only the most general guidelines about FEMA's role in disaster preparation and response, and the act itself was ambiguous about whether or not FEMA was a national security agency.

Ambiguity about FEMA's mission and a lack of resources contributed to a string of lackluster responses to high profile disasters, most notably Hurricanes Hugo in 1989 and Andrew in 1992. When Hugo struck the American Virgin Islands it caused $1.6 billion in damage, partly because of a rare case of looting not equaled until the apparent chaos following Katrina.[36] Buildings were torn apart and the federal government had to dispatch military police and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents to patrol the streets after 150 prisoners were freed from jail by the storm. The agency's slow response and requests for detailed cost assessments

32. Two other ambitious military men, Lt. Col. Oliver North and General Richard Secord, both later connected to the Iran-Contra scandal, were assigned to FEMA in the early 1980s.

33. It is notable that Giuffrida is not mentioned in FEMA's online history of the agency, <http://www.fema.gov/about/history.shtm> (accessed 20 Aug. 2004).

A number of articles in the 1980s criticized FEMA's secret continuity of government programs, including a much cited article in *Penthouse* featuring Giuffrida. See Donald Goldberg and Indy Badhwar, *Penthouse* Aug. 1985). Other critical articles included: Steven Emerson, "America's Doomsday Project," *U.S. News & World Report*, 7 Aug. 1989; Alfonso Chardy, "North Helped Revise Wartime Plans," *Miami Herald*, 9 July 1987. For a more judicious judicious evaluation of FEMA's continuity of government programs see Harold C. Relyea, "Continuity of Government: Current Federal Arrangements and the Future," *CRS Report*, Nov. 7, 2003.

34. Peter J. May, *Recovering from Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); Roy S. Popkin, "The History and Politics of Disaster Management in the United States," in *Nothing to Fear*, ed. Andrew Kirby (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

35. Read more about the bunker complex here: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/sfeature/floorplan.html> The government now offers tours, for a fee, to help defray the cost of upkeep for a Cold War hotel built for 1,000.

36. For the classic work showing that in most disasters the public does not panic, see E. L. Quarantelli, *Looting and Antisocial Behavior in Disasters*, Preliminary Paper #205 (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Disaster Research Center, 1994). Patrick S. Roberts and Robert B. Bateman, "The Roots of Extreme Practice in Emergency Management," paper presented at the Conference on Race and American Political Development, Eugene, Oregon, May 11–12, 2006.

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during the aftermath in South Carolina prompted Sen. Ernest Hollings to call FEMA's staff "the sorriest bunch of bureaucratic jackasses [he'd] ever known."[37]

Similar problems with recovery plagued FEMA's response to Hurricane Andrew, which struck south Florida in 1992. FEMA was determined not to repeat the mistakes made during Hugo; the agency had secured a disaster declaration and sent communications equipment to Dade County even before landfall.[38] But things soon fell apart when the emergency managers, police and fire departments, and power companies who were supposed to respond to the disaster were themselves victims of the hurricane. With first responders incapacitated, no one was able to mount a damage assessment. According to studies of the response,

> Officials in the state EOC at Tallahassee kept pleading with local officials to tell them what they needed, and frustrated and equally frantic local officials kept saying they did not know what they needed–Send Everything!" To which agonized state officials could only reply, "We can't send everything!"[39]

The response was so disorganized three days after the hurricane (and after a visit by President Bush and Director of FEMA Wallace Stickney) that Dade County Director of Emergency Preparedness Director Kate Hale held a press conference wondering, "Where the hell is the cavalry on this one? We need food. We need water. We need people. For God's sake, where are they?"[40] After the firestorm of criticism in the media, FEMA's authority in leading the recovery effort broke down. President Bush, in the midst of an election campaign, sent nearly 20,000 Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard troops to Florida.[41] Instead of the FEMA director leading the effort, the White House sent Secretary of Transportation Andrew Card to take charge of the recovery along with a cadre of generals. One report summed up the chaotic response by stating that: "The best laid plans and procedures are now vulnerable to disruption, indeed destruction, by one dramatic sound bite that the media turns into political shock waves."[42] While this was not exactly the plague in Athens, the situation was chaos for a bureaucratic age. FEMA veterans have said that the agency's poor response to fallout from Andrew in Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida contributed to Bush's loss in the 1992 presidential race.

C. Professionalization

While FEMA's organization was under attack, however, the emergency management profession was taking off. State and local officials began to invest in planning for how to respond to (if not yet mitigate) disasters ranging from hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes to chemical spills. States, counties, and cities began to centralize emergency response offices and deemphasize civil defense. In a few cities, national guardsmen still presided over civil defense offices that passed out brochures on how to build shelters but most communities moved toward the more urgent matters of figuring out how to respond to more frequent natural disasters. The development of an emergency management profession, with its improved warning and evacuation procedures, saved lives and property: In 1969, for example, more than 250 people died when Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf Coast but only 36 lost their lives when a similar hurricane, Andrew, hit Florida and Louisiana in 1992.[43]

The emergency management profession has roots in civil defense programs. As the faith in the latter faded, the idea of emergency management took its place. The U.S. Civil Defense Council, for example, was founded in 1952 and changed its name to the National Coordinating Council on Emergency

37. Baker, James N., Howard Manly, and Daniel Glick, "The Storm After Hugo," *Newsweek*, 9 Oct. 1989, 40. *Economist*, "Hurricane Hugo; When the Wind Blows," Oct. 1989, 22.

38. Fortunately, Andrew did not cause a major loss of life because the warning systems had been effective and the hurricane missed the population center of central Miami. But the storm did destroy property, including buildings that were built after the adoption of the South Florida Building Code. It was later revealed that new construction had been in violation of the code.

39. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*; Gary L. Wamsley and Aaron D. Schroeder, "Escalating in a Quagmire: The Changing Dynamics of the Emergency Management Policy Subsystem," *Public Administration Review* 56 (1996).

40. Peter Slevin and Dexter Filkins, "We Need Help," *Miami Herald*, 28 Aug. 1992.

41. Bob Davis, "Brewing Storm," *Wall Street Journal*, 31 Aug. 1992, A1. FEMA's poor reputation so penetrated public discussion that Wendy Brown, a political theorist writing about identity politics, emphasized the "… popular and media discourse about relevant state and federal agencies (e.g., the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA]), that came close to displacing onto the agencies themselves responsibility for the suffering of victims." Wendy Brown, States of Injury (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 68–69.

42. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, 19.

43. Hurricane Camille was the second most intense hurricane to strike the US in recorded history (ranked according to minimum pressure at landfall), at 909 millibars. Andrew was the fourth most intense, at 922 millibars. Though Camille killed more people, Andrew passed through more developed territory. Camille caused 6.1 billion dollars in damage in 1996 dollars while Andrew caused 26 billion dollars in damage. Data from the US National Weather Center, National Weather Service.

Even the response to Camille was an improvement over emergency management in previous generations. When the Great Hurricane hit the Caribbean in 1780, 22,000 people died. "The safety precautions, suggested the authorities, were for residents to put on all their clothes, tie pillows around their heads and hope for the best. By comparison the human toll of Hurricane Hugo was slight. The islanders knew in advance that the wind was coming – though about all they could do was duck." *Economist*, "Hurricane Hugo; When the Wind Blows," Oct. 1989, 22.

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Management in 1983. In 1998, it began coordinating efforts worldwide as the International Association of Emergency Managers.[44] The slate of conferences, reference materials, and contact points offered by associations institutionalized vehicles for debating and developing best practices and common ideas. The growth of an academic discipline of emergency management further added to the intellectual resources of the profession. Faculty hired to teach emergency management organized journals and conferences, and the students trained in newly formed degree programs began to staff federal, state, and local agencies. Gradually but steadily, emergency management grew from an occupation whose members entered the field as a third or fourth career and had primarily experiential rather than academic knowledge to one in which members actively participated in both the academic and practical sides of the profession.[45] Local and regional associations grew as well, and many began formulating state-regulated exams to license practitioners.

As the profession gained more resources, it also grew in sophistication. As one emergency manager put it, "some emergency management systems are exclusively 'ambulances at the bottom of cliffs,' whereas others are also 'fences at the top'."[46] The profession came to understand a disaster as the middle of a longer process of preparation and recovery surrounding the actual event. In addition to all hazards, the profession adopted the "all phases" concept, or the idea that emergency management encompasses not just disaster recovery but preparation, response, and long-term mitigation. Both all phases and all hazards would prove important in FEMA's 1993 reorganization. (Note that the term "all hazards" is often used to refer to both ideas.)

The brightest lights in the profession recognized that emergency management lacked coherence. What a 1993 National Academy of Public Administration report said of FEMA held for disaster management at all levels of government: "It has no strategic planning process for developing a mission and goals for the agency as a whole."[47] After analyzing their experiences, emergency managers realized that they could not afford to shut off discussion about one type of disaster from discussion about others. Nor could they examine the response to natural disasters in isolation from all emergency management functions: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Another panel recommended a solution that would be adopted during the agency's reorganization: "a national emergency management system that is comprehensive, risk-based, and all hazards in approach."[48] The profession's ideas, in addition to the institutional structures it provided, contributed to FEMA's success.

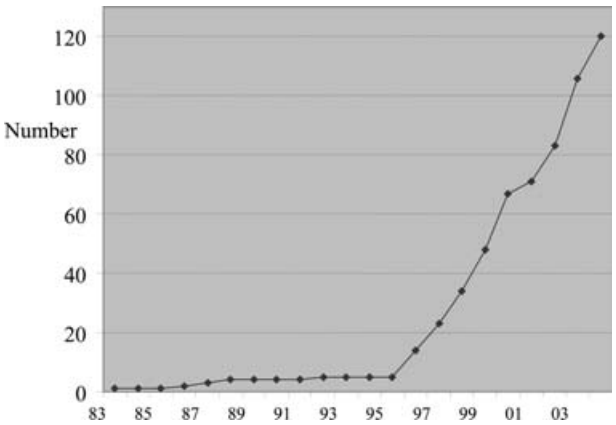


Fig. 3. Emergency Management Higher Education Programs, 1983–2004
Source: Wayne Blanchard, FEMA Higher Education Project, (presentation materials) June 27, 2005.

And, once the agency began to rebuild its reputation, it, in turn, provided the profession with jobs, visibility, and an institutional home, which led to exponential growth. By 1994, four universities had begun emergency management degree programs.[49] A decade later, there were at least 120 college level programs, from certificates and minors through doctoral degrees. Figure 3 charts the rise of these programs. FEMA recognized both a demand and an opportunity for more academic training and research and established a higher education project in 1995 to foster the growth of college and university programs. The profession as a whole grew accordingly. In 2003 the Bureau of Labor Statistics listed emergency management as one of the fastest growing occupations in the United States.[50]

44. See table 1 for a sample of major preparedness organizations.

45. Information from Wayne Blanchard, FEMA's Higher Education Project file and personal communication, June 4, 2005; Arthur Oyola-Yemaiel and Jennifer Wilson, "Three Essential Strategies for Emergency Management Professionalization in the U.S.," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, March 2005.

46. Neil Britton, "Higher Education in Emergency Management: What is Happening Elsewhere," Emergency Management Higher Education Conference, Emmitsburg, Maryland, June 2004, 2.

47. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, 41.

48. Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA Renewal, *Federal Emergency Management Agency National Performance Review Report* (Washington 1993), 2–3.

49. Bachelor's degrees in emergency management were offered at three schools by late 1994 and early 1995: University of North Texas, Thomas Edison University, and Rochester Institute of Technology. In addition, UCLA offered a continuing education certificate program.

50. The BLS listed occupations with the largest expected increase in employment between 2002 and 2012. Bureau of

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The profession was not so visible in 1993 but it had a strong enough core of prolific academics and experienced practitioners to develop criticism of existing government agencies and a plan for their reform. Although not univocal, the profession's counsel was instrumental in FEMA's reform. The profession provided ideas, training for current and future disaster managers, institutionalization outlasting any particular political leadership, and a common vocabulary waiting to be adopted by agency leaders and administrative politicians.

D. Post-Andrew Criticism

Experienced emergency managers, both academics and practitioners, produced two major reports that provided a blueprint for FEMA reorganization, one published by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and the other by the General Accounting Office (GAO).[51] The most bold and influential study, from NAPA, raised the possibility of a "death penalty" for FEMA; in the end, however, it recommended reorganization along the lines of the original intentions of FEMA's creators. One subhead in the report read "An institution not yet built." FEMA was created with the reasonable idea that it would be a clearing house for federal disaster preparation, response, and recovery, but after implementation it suffered from vague mission statements, an unclear legislative charter, and compartmentalized organization.

The real bêtes noires of the study were FEMA's civil defense and national security programs. The NAPA report declared that "the time has come to shift the emphasis from national security to domestic emergency management using an all hazards approach."[52] The study charged that FEMA's National Preparedness Directorate was unwilling to use its advanced communications and transportation equipment in rescue efforts for hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and fires because of concerns that they might expose national security assets to the enemy. The GAO study and a series of congressional hearings added to the expert consensus. U.S. Comptroller General Charles A. Bowsher testified that the national security divisions of FEMA, especially the National Preparedness Directorate, had "significant assets that could be used more effectively to help guide the federal government's response to catastrophic natural disasters, especially in light of the changing nature of national security emergencies."[53]

The NAPA report states clearly that FEMA must "demilitarize"—at the time of the study, about 38 percent of FEMA's total staff and about 27 percent of its budget (about $100 million, excluding the disaster relief fund) were dedicated to national security emergencies.[54] Of FEMA's 3,000 full time employees, 1,900 held security clearances, creating (at least) two competing cultures. Not all observers agreed with the NAPA assessment, however. William Cumming, an attorney who retired from FEMA in 1999 after serving in the general counsel's office since the agency's creation, said that, in truth, FEMA had been allowing its national security assets to be used for disaster response since 1984. According to Cumming, the national security divisions, with their distinct and at times secretive culture, made an easy scapegoat for FEMA's real problem: the agency was insufficiently staffed and funded to both prepare for and respond to disasters and play a role in national security.[55]

In addition to recommending the break up of FEMA's national security division, the reports concluded that to be effective, FEMA needed greater involvement from the White House so that the "full weight of presidential authority can be brought to bear in managing federal agency work in the aftermath of disasters."[56] FEMA would soon get a director who would throw his weight around while bearing the imprimatur of the president.

The central lesson that both reports drew from Hurricane Andrew was that FEMA lacked sufficient resources and sufficient coordination to respond to a major disaster, and the reports recommended shifting resources from the national security program to natural hazards programs so that more resources would be available for major disasters. The second lesson—not found explicitly in any

Labor Statistics, "Tomorrow's Jobs," 2003, accessed 12 July 2005 <http://www.bls.gov/oco/pdf/oco2003.pdf>.

51. Thomas W. Lippman, "Hurricane May Have Exposed Flaws in New Disaster Relief Plan," *Washington Post*, 3 Sept. 1992; Thomas W. Lippman, "One Disaster Followed Another," *Washington Post*, 7 Sep. 1992; Richard Sylves, "Coping with Catastrophe (Review)," *Public Administration Review* 54 (1994).

52. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, x.

53. Charles A. Bowsher, "Disaster Management: Recent Disasters Demonstrate the Need to Improve the Nation's Response Strategy," GAO/T-RCED-93-4, Jan. 27, 1993, 13.

54. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, 53–54.

55. William Cumming, Personal Interview, Arlington, VA, Dec. 10, 2003.

The FEMA counsel's office advised that defense assets could not be used for natural disasters: "However, the [Civil Defense] Act does not presently contain any authority for response, at the federal level, to a natural catastrophe." Patricia M. Gormley, FEMA General Counsel, "Memorandum for Steve Gaddy, Deputy Associate Director, External Affairs Directorate (cc: Grant Peterson)," July 14, 1992. Whatever the correctness of the counsel's advice at that time, Congress amended the FCDA in 1993 to make it "all-hazards." See Public Law 103–160.

Other divisions of FEMA saw a greater legal and practical role for civil defense funds and programs in natural disasters. For example, see Policy Coordinating Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Mobilization Civil Defense Working Group, Dual Use Memo, 1991. In practice FEMA was used to responding to technological disasters, including the Times Beach, Mo. dioxin contamination in the early 1980s.

56. Sylves, "Coping with Catastrophe (Review)," 1994.

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report—was that FEMA had to learn to operate in the age of the "plebiscitary" or "politicized presidency."[57] Without presidential intervention, a healthy agency might respond to failure by bringing in experts to evaluate its shortcomings and attempting to fix them by writing new procedures. Today, however, the president will not rely on technocratic government to take its course. If there is an opportunity for the president to take credit or escape blame, experience shows that the president will appeal to the people through the media. Ever since the Brownlow Commission, the presidency has evolved toward a conception of itself as not merely a coequal branch of government or a unit of the executive branch but as the head of a corporation whose job it is to oversee all that is underneath.[58] When something in the factory's machinery goes awry, as in the case of FEMA's response to Hurricane Andrew, it is the president's job to fix it.

In practice, the politicized or corporate model of the presidency results in the president's vacillation between ignoring FEMA and micro-managing it, as the National Academy report points out.[59] In addition to ambiguous statutes from Congress, FEMA received ambiguous signals from the president about the level of control or ownership he wanted over FEMA. The result was especially chaotic when mixed with a FEMA political leadership that was relatively inexperienced and un-professionalized—the agency was labeled the "federal turkey farm" by a House committee for its reputation as a dumping ground for political appointees.[60]

When the agency's reputation hit bottom during the early 1990s, the media routinely held up FEMA as an example of government inefficiency and incompetence; a *Washington Post* article labeled FEMA as "the agency that everybody loves to hate."[61] Most major newspaper editorials during the period cast the agency in a negative light and there were few positive portrayals (see Figure 2).

E. Resurrection: James Lee Witt and All Hazards

James Lee Witt's tenure proved to be a watershed for the agency, turning it from the "federal turkey farm" into one of the most respected agencies in the federal government. Witt was celebrated by emergency managers and politicians who saw Bill Clinton's popularity as president soar along with the agency's faster response to disasters. But Witt was also vilified both by those who found his promotion of FEMA to be crass and meretricious and by those partisans of counterterrorism and civil defense who saw their national security concerns pushed aside as the agency focused its resources on more conventional disasters. Witt's central accomplishment was to clearly define and articulate the mission of the agency by institutionalizing the all hazards approach.[62] Organizational changes accompanied his rhetoric, and politicians came to believe that the agency would perform tasks that would boost citizens' opinions of the federal government. His success depended on the work of the emergency management profession; before reorganizing the agency, he digested the NAPA report, made many of the recommended changes, and staffed the upper echelons of the agency with trained emergency managers.

Witt, however, earned admiration for his political skill; the former county judge and emergency services director from Yell County, Arkansas, was not blind to Washington politics. He quickly silenced the agency's implacable critics—Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), who until 1994 chaired the Senate appropriations subcommittee responsible for FEMA, and Rep. Curt Weldon (D-PA).[63] Mikulski had introduced a bill incorporating most of the suggestions of the NAPA study and although the bill died in committee, Witt proceeded to reorganize the agency along the same lines.[64] Winning political support in Congress was not easy—Witt recalls a meeting with Rep. Pete Stark, who had introduced a bill to abolish the agency,

> I went up to the Hill myself and I told him what I wanted to do to reform and I said give me one year and if we don't do it I'll tell you.[65]

What Witt did was reorganize FEMA to better accomplish tasks that would support the reelection goals of

57. Terry M. Moe, 'The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Presidential Advantage," in *The Presidency and the Political System*, ed. Michael Nelson (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1998); Moe, "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory,"in *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*, ed. George Edwards, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993); Aaron Wildavsky, *The Beleaguered Presidency* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

58. Barry D. Karl, *Executive Reorganization and Reform in the New Deal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

59. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, 21–23.

60. Larry Van Dyne, "Perfect Places for Those Hard-to-Place Contributors," *Washingtonian*, Nov. 1992.

61. William Claibome, "Cultures Being Clubbed," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1993, A21.

62. Organizationally, FEMA made a step forward in 1992 when it issued the Federal Response Plan, which provided a blueprint for coordinating resources during a disaster and clarified the agency's role as the clearinghouse for disaster assistance. Most importantly, the Plan introduced the all hazards approach into FEMA's fundamental operational document, joined by 25 federal agencies and the American Red Cross.

63. Carla Rivera and Alan C. Miller, "Streamlined FEMA Quake Assistance Seen," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1994.

64. Witt opposed the bill (S.995) because it reduced the power of FEMA by eliminating most political appointees, transferring the continuity of government functions to the Department of Defense, and establishing a domestic crisis monitoring unit in the White House. See William Claiborne, "Doling Out Praise, FEMA Critic Pressed for Reform at Hearing," *Washington Post*, 25 Mar. 1994, A21.

65. James Lee Witt, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Apr. 15, 2004.

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Table 2. Federal Emergency Management Agency Directors

Name	Term of fffice
* Gordon Vickery	April 1979 –July 1979
* Thomas Casey	July 1979
John Macy	August 1979–January 1981
* Bernard Gallagher	January 1981–April 1981
* John W. McConnell	April 1981–May 1981
Louis O. Giuffrida	May 1981–September 1985
* Robert H. Morris	September 1985–November 1985
Julius W. Becton, Jr.	November 1985–June 1989
* Robert H. Morris	June 1989–May 1990
* Jerry D. Jennings	May 1990–August 1990
Wallace E. Stickney	August 1990–January 1993
*William C. Tidball	January 1993–April 1993
James L. Witt	April 1993–January 2001
*John Magaw	January 2001–February 2001
Joe M. Allbaugh	February 2001–March 2003
Michael D. Brown	March 2003–September 2005

* Acting director.
Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency, www.fema.gov

members of Congress and the president. FEMA supported those goals chiefly through the quick and visible distribution of disaster relief funds. The agency also improved its ability to reassure disaster victims through public relations programs and it vastly increased its role in mitigation. Before Witt's tenure, congressmen such as Ernest Hollings won public approval by speaking out against FEMA, reflecting the public's frustration with the agency's slow response in a time of crisis. Witt was able to make FEMA's congressional critics realize that the agency could work to their advantage by providing constituents affected by disaster with an immediate response, one that would be the citizens' most palpable and reassuring connection with the federal government.

The potential for FEMA to perform more effectively had been present for some time, but it took active lobbying on Witt's part to become reality. He convinced politicians that an effective and relatively autonomous agency would attend to their interests by distributing resources to disaster-stricken communities both before and after disaster struck. Witt spoke to the chairs of the twenty committees that had a stake in FEMA's reorganization during his first months on the job. And Witt spent two days calling every member of Congress in the nine Midwestern states affected by flooding in the summer of 1993. "You have to reach out," Witt said. "I told them what we were doing, and that if they had a problem, to call me."[66]

Witt's accomplishments were even more impressive within his own agency. Immediately after becoming FEMA director, Witt articulated his mission: to support "all hazards, comprehensive emergency management."[67] Previous reports and officials had appealed to dual use or all hazards, but Witt put the concept at the forefront of all FEMA's missions.[68] For Witt, all hazards meant that programs that would enable the agency to respond to all disasters should be given priority over specialized programs. FEMA would still employ earthquake specialists or flood specialists, but those programs would be limited, and national security programs would be curtailed. FEMA remained in charge of a few national security programs concerned with preserving basic government functions during a time of war, but these programs were separated from the rest of the agency. As a result, "all hazards" became a mantra that, when combined with organizational changes, turned FEMA into a streamlined, professional natural disasters preparation and response clearinghouse. Most emergency management agencies today place all hazards at the core of their mission, which means that they emphasize programs that theoretically can be used to respond to all kinds of disasters—natural, technological, and terrorist and national security—rather than programs specific to one sort of disaster.

By adopting the all hazards approach, the agency streamlined core tasks and organized its missions, making it more effective. Having multiple response plans and multiple coordinators did not make sense, according to all hazards proponents, when the same police, fire, and emergency personnel would respond to all types of disasters. In the early days of the agency, "you had to be a librarian to keep up with all of the guidelines that were coming from FEMA," said Kay Goss, the agency's Associate Director for Preparedness from 1994 to 2001.[69] The all hazards approach won the allegiance of budget conscious emergency managers at all levels of government.

Organizationally, and in accordance with the NAPA study, Witt eliminated the National Preparedness Directorate and reduced its role to an Office of

66. Alasdair Roberts, "The Master of Disaster: James Lee Witt and the Federal Emergency Management Agency" (paper presented at the Council for Excellence in Government, Apr. 1997).

67. Saundra K. Schneider, "Reinventing Public Administration: A Case Study of the Federal Emergency Management Agency," *Public Administration Quarterly* 22 (1998), 42.

68. Witt's public speeches and internal memos made "all hazards" the centerpiece of FEMA's mission. For example, Witt, "Memorandum for All FEMA Employees, Organizational Structure and Management, Nov. 5, 1993.

69. Kay C. Goss, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Nov. 20, 2003.

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National Security Coordination, which became a liaison to the National Security Council and other agencies.[70] Procedurally, Witt refocused the agency's mission on quick response to natural disasters, and he interpreted statutes to allow a response to be set in motion even before disaster struck.[71] Witt intended to make the reorganization palpable to the public. He reduced the time it took for payments to reach disaster victims and in August 1993, the agency dispatched twelve tractor-trailer rigs of emergency supplies to North Carolina before Hurricane Emily made landfall. "We made a mistake with Hurricane Andrew by waiting for the states to tell us what they needed first," said Richard Krimm, a FEMA associate director, "Now we go to the state and say, Here are the things you need, just tell us if you want them."[72]

A precondition for Witt's success in refocusing the agency on natural disasters was cooperation from the president, Congress and the affected committees. Before taking office, Clinton recognized that FEMA needed reform, but he left the details up to his chosen administrative politician. Witt said that upon his nomination as director "The president knew something had to be done and he said are you going to be able to do it, and I said yes, I'll fix it."[73] Witt eliminated ten presidentially-appointed management posts in the agency, which had earned a reputation as a dumping ground for political appointees. "The White House didn't like that," Witt said, "but the president didn't mind."

While Witt had only to gain the confidence of a single president, he had to lobby many more members of Congress to support his move away from defense issues toward all hazards; when Witt testified at a 1994 hearing on civil defense he spoke not about national security but about what was wrong with disaster preparedness.[74] Witt's testimony gave the impression that the money and energy that the 1950 Federal Civil Defense Act mandated for national security matters was needed to improve the response to natural disasters. Pivotal coalitions in Congress agreed—the Armed Services Committees had lost interest in civil defense programs in the 1990s—and so the Civil Defense Act was repealed in 1994, ending all Armed Services oversight of FEMA.[75] The $146 million in FEMA's budget that was technically authorized by the Act, as well as $50 million more in "defense related" funds were moved to natural disasters and all hazards programs. During the reorganization, more than 100 defense and security personnel were reassigned to other duties, and nearly 40 percent of FEMA staff with security clearances had their clearances removed.[76] Changes in practice accompanied the organizational changes which reduced the priority the agency gave to national security. In the summer of 1993, FEMA used mobile communications vehicles that had been reserved for national security programs for the response to floods in the Midwest.[77] Witt continued to lobby for FEMA's independence throughout his term, and he established correspondence units to make sure that all letters from members of Congress and governors were answered within ten days.

In addition, Witt added a Mitigation Directorate to reduce the injuries and economic losses caused by disasters—a concern expressed by members of Congress in the NAPA and GAO reports. For example, the "Flood Safe" program persuaded some homeowners in flood prone areas to buy insurance against losses. It also delivered federal money to states and localities, which pleased constituents. While mitigation was only in its early phases during Witt's tenure, it was criticized for a lack of accountability and for moral hazard.[78] Insured parties had little incentive to avoid risk if they could count on being reimbursed by the federal government for losses. The mitigation programs wavered between being a program of open ended federal grants derived from tax dollars and a program to educate public officials and private citizens about how to protect themselves against disasters and, when absolutely necessary, to provide them with financial

70. See Witt, "Memorandum for All FEMA Employees, Organizational Structure and Management," Nov. 5, 1993.

71. Gary L. Wamsley and Aaron D. Schroeder, "Escalating in a Quagmire: The Changing Dynamics of the Emergency Management Policy Subsystem," *Public Administration Review* 56 (1996). The Stafford Act and other statutes give FEMA a broad—and vague—mandate. Witt did not have to interpret the statues in the way he did—legally, all FEMA directors could have been more active in disaster response and even more active in national security matters, but they declined intervention on a number of occasions because they lacked the resources.

72. Roberts, "The Master of Disaster."

73. James Lee Witt, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Apr. 15, 2004.

74. Witt, "Statement Before the Subcommittee on Nuclear Deterrence, Arms Control, & Defense Intelligence, Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, May 25, 1993; Witt, "Hearing on the Civil Defense Budget," Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, House Armed Services Committee, Apr. 21, 1994.

75. The Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1995 passed the House on Aug. 17, 1994 by a vote of 280 to 137. In 1993, the Civil Defense Act was amended in order to make legal the diversion of funds from civil defense programs to natural hazards programs. Congress deleted a clause that said civil defense funds could be used for natural disaster purposes only "in a manner that is consistent with, contributes to, and does not detract from attack-related civil defense preparedness."

76. See the "Trefry Report," Final Report and Recommendations, FEMA Security Practices Board of Review, Nov. 1992, Richard G. Trefry, Chairman. Also Memorandum From Deputy Associate Director, National Preparedness, Issue 4.B., "Which FEMA Personnel Should Be Required to Have Security Clearances to Fulfill Their Emergency Assignments?" Dec. 18, 1986. Also personal interview, former FEMA official, Washington, DC, Nov. 7, 2004.

77. Roberts, "The Master of Disaster."

78. Rutherford H. Platt, *Disasters and Democracy: The Politics of Extreme Natural Events* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999), 69–110.

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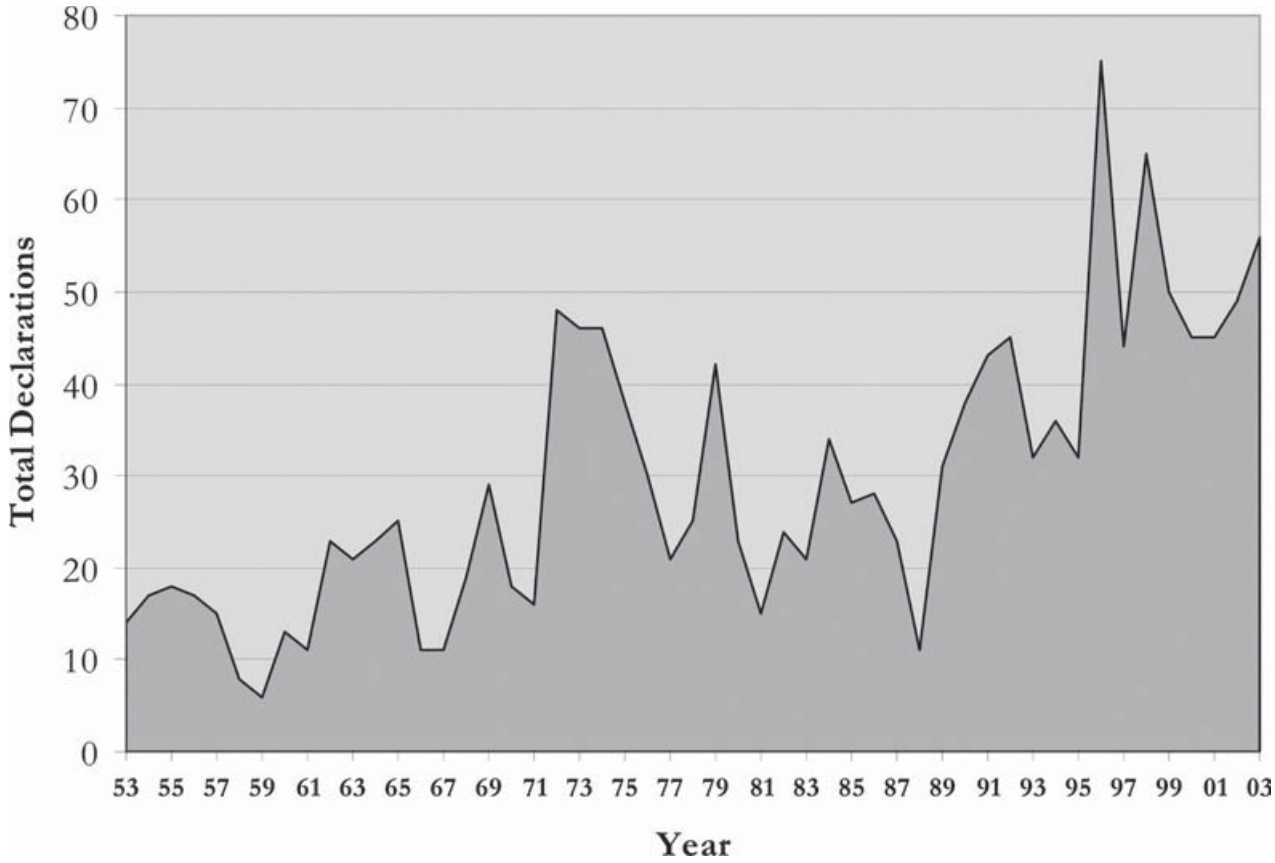


Fig. 4. Presidential Disaster Declarations, 1953–2003
Source: FEMA, www.fema.gov

assistance. Although mitigation can be useful for defending against terrorist attacks—structural mitigation prevented the attack on the Pentagon on 11 September from being worse than it was—during the 1990s mitigation programs focused primarily on natural hazards. The effect of creating a mitigation directorate was to move the agency away from national security functions toward natural hazards.

In addition to aligning the agency's interests with those of Congress, Witt made sure that by attending to disasters and mitigation FEMA helped the president's reelection chances. Behind the personal connection with Bill Clinton so often observed by political commentators, the agency projected an image as an extension of the office of the president. FEMA's improved disaster response attracted attention, and Witt himself appeared at disaster scenes as the "eyes and ears" of the president, as he described his role during the recovery of bodies from the TWA Flight 800 crash. In testimony before Congress, Witt said that "disasters are political events"—he was aware that elected politicians receive benefits when emergency managers help the public recover from disasters.[79]

During Witt's tenure, FEMA became more effective at responding to hazards and at mitigating their effects, but it also responded to more disasters than ever before and to more kinds of disasters, including "snow emergencies" for which previous administrations had refused aid. Disaster monies went to communities in need, but the level of aid was driven by political and electoral interests in addition to need. Only the president has the power to declare a federal disaster area, making it eligible for federal assistance, but FEMA bears some responsibility for shifting its tasks away from national security and increasing the cost of disaster aid—a change that served the interests of the president and members of Congress.[80] FEMA's increased popularity was in part driven by its improved efficiency in administering greater and greater distributive ("pork") spending.[81]

Garrett and Sobel note both that, from 1991 to 1999, states politically important to the president

79. Testimony to U.S. Senate, Apr. 30, 1996.

80. Platt, *Disasters and Democracy*, 11–46.

81. See figure 4. Peter J. May, *Recovering from Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 49. Thomas A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 37.

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had a higher rate of disaster declaration by the president and that disaster expenditures were higher in states that had congressional representation on FEMA oversight committees.[82] They also find election year impacts for disaster aid, controlling for the true size of a disaster measured through private property insurance claims and Red Cross assistance levels. Large disasters always received federal aid, but political interests determined whether smaller ones would receive federal dollars or have states make do on their own. For example, in 1994, Bill Clinton refused to provide aid for recovery for floods that caused $6.7 million in damage on Chicago's South Side. Illinois was considered a solidly Republican state and therefore not valuable to Clinton's reelection efforts. A year later, Clinton did provide aid to help residents of New Orleans, where a flood caused $10 million in damage. The difference was that Louisiana was deemed a competitive and Democratic-leaning state. Critics have charged that George W. Bush also used disaster spending for political purposes, especially in Florida, a key state in the 2004 presidential election.[83]

In addition to supporting political interests by providing material goods, FEMA improved its reputation through an aggressive public marketing campaign. At the one-year anniversary of the Reinventing Government initiative, Clinton noted that "today [FEMA] may be the most popular agency in the federal government." FEMA's internal communications adopted a focus on "customer service" like other agencies at the time, but perhaps more wholeheartedly.[84] Witt summed up the success this way: "We took FEMA and made it a brand name and people responded and supported it."[85] Going further than smiling faces and the language of customer service, the agency even established a toll-free telephone number where individuals could request help during disasters. Some of the explanation for the agency's success can be found in Witt's marketing skill and media savvy. But what else changed after the heralded reorganization of 1993–1994? FEMA still reported to multiple congressional committees, and Congress had not given the agency any new mandates to clarify its mission.

The change can be found in the activities of one administrator, James Lee Witt, who had refocused the agency's missions around natural hazards. He was given the opportunity by external events—the Armed Services Committee was prepared to cede oversight of FEMA and, after a string of highly publicized natural disasters, political actors were ready to take credit for improved disaster response. These structural and institutional factors allowed Witt to refocus the agency's core tasks on responding effectively to natural disasters. Although he did not have complete autonomy, he *did* have a remarkable ability to adjust FEMA's missions, given an ambiguous legislative mandate, to a position that benefited the agency's reputation and success.

There was a cost to the transformation of FEMA, however. It was precisely FEMA's celebrated focus on all hazards that caused the agency to deemphasize civil defense and terrorism. According to one longtime FEMA employee, "Some will say he introduced all hazards. I say he reduced the importance of some hazards at the expense of others."[86] In shifting resources to programs that could be more generally applied to natural hazards, Witt scaled back the agency's national security role and left it ill prepared to combat the emerging terrorist threat. From 1998 to 2001, the Hart-Rudman Commission looked for an agency to become the cornerstone for revitalizing domestic security to address the threat of terrorism, among other concerns, but found FEMA lacking. "FEMA was considered a centerpiece, but in need of significant resources and culture shock," according to Frank Hoffman, who directed the Commission's homeland security research.[87] FEMA's history and mission statement allowed for a greater national security and counterterrorism role, Hoffman said; however, by the late 1990s, its culture and capabilities were not up to the task. The Hart-Rudman Commission supported the concept of all hazards as a way to maximize federal support for disasters and minimize bureaucracy, but it also supported adding new security responsibilities to FEMA, many of which were eliminated during Witt's tenure.

Other bureaucratic actors knew that FEMA's national security role would have to be reduced in exchange for a more effective natural hazards response. While recognizing FEMA's new direction, other agencies asked plaintive questions about who, if not FEMA, would be responsible for domestic security functions that fall outside the purview of

82. Thomas A. Garrett and Russell S. Sobel, 'The Political Economy of FEMA Disaster Payments," *Economic Inquiry* 41 (2003). Other studies have found that the president's decision to issue a disaster declaration is influenced by congressional and media attention. See Richard T. Sylves, "The Politics of Federal Emergency Management," in Richard T. Sylves and William H. Waugh, Jr., Eds., *Disaster Management in the US and Canada*, (Springfield, II: Charles C. Thomas), 1996.

83. "FEMA Hurricane Payouts Under Attack," FOX News, Feb. 1, 2005. Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

84. FEMA News Brief, 1:2, Sept. 17, 1993. Letter From James Lee Witt to All FEMA Employees, "FEMA's Reorganization," Sept. 7, 1993. Also see various "Director's Weekly Update," including June 13, 1997.

85. James Lee Witt, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Apr. 15, 2004. Witt mandated that all of FEMA's 4,000 full and part time staff receive training in customer service techniques.

86. Former Senior FEMA official, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Mar. 12, 2004.

87. Frank G. Hoffman, Personal E-mail Correspondence, Dec. 11, 2003. FEMA's witnesses before the Hart-Rudman Commission were Lacey Suiter and V. Clay Hollister. Notes of their briefing do not exist.

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the FBI or state and local agencies. One letter from DoD to FEMA noted that,

> The relevant question is not whether we save the name civil defense, whether the [Civil Defense] Act is amended or replaced, or whether "all hazards" includes "attacks." Instead, the Congress and the Administration together must focus on stating clearly: What is the Government's commitment to Federal and State civil preparedness and military support for that preparedness, and how will they be authorized and funded after FY 1993?[88]

As support for traditional civil defense flickered out, terrorism was increasingly on the agenda in the 1990s. Some policymakers urged FEMA to make a meaningful organizational change in order to play a role in terrorism response, but the agency, having just completed a major reorganization, refused. Numerous commissions studied terrorism in the 1990s, spurred by terrorist bombing incidents in Oklahoma City (Murrah Federal Building), New York City (World Trade Center), and Saudi Arabia (Khobar Towers).[89] And in 1993 a Sense of Congress resolution called on the president to:

> … strengthen Federal interagency emergency planning by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other appropriate Federal, State and local agencies for development of a capability for early detection and warning of and response to: (1) potential terrorist use of chemical or biological agents or weapons, and (2) emergencies or natural disasters involving industrial chemicals or the widespread outbreak of disease[90]

The National Security Council, too, hoped that FEMA would take on additional responsibilities in preparing for a domestic terrorist attack. Richard Clarke, the first National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counterterrorism, was worried about the United States' organizational capability to respond to terrorism, but the NSC was not able to persuade FEMA to take on security responsibilities.[91] FEMA was offered the opportunity to train first responders for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attacks, but Witt declined; the training programs were eventually run by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and DoD, which created the Domestic Preparedness Program in 1998.[92] One former civil defense official said that he and others tried to persuade Witt to pay more attention to the growing terrorist threat by taking on programs to train first responders: "I went to Witt twice and asked him and he refused to do it."[93] In this account, Witt refused to allow the agency to take on a greater role in terrorism because he thought the agency lacked the resources, not the authority, to do an adequate job. The sustained refusal to take on more of a role in terrorism represented yet another instance of autonomy stemming from a reputation for addressing natural, not terrorist, disasters.

Witt tells a different story. He grants that a partnership between the FBI and FEMA to train responders to terrorist attacks was not successful because the program was buried within DOJ but says that he asked Attorney General Janet Reno to move the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) to FEMA and she refused. White House and congressional officials wanted the disaster agency to address counterterrorism, but, as Witt tells it, they would not supply sufficient resources for FEMA to do the job properly. It is not clear, however, if any level of resources would be sufficient to take responsibility for an ill-defined terrorist threat whose source, capacity and nature was unknown. In debates over whether to include FEMA in the Department of Homeland Security, Witt was fond of noting that the agency responded to more than 500 emergencies and major disasters during the 1990s. Only two of these, however, were related to terrorism (the Oklahoma City and New York City bombings).[94]

88. Letter from Maxwell Alston, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, to John McKay, FEMA, and Chris Heiser, OMB, May 7, 1993.

89. See a listing of major reports in "Commissions' Recommendations," by Steve Bowman in the CRS Electronic Briefing Book on Terrorism, at <http://www.congress.gov/brbkl/html/ebter93.html> (accessed 10 Dec. 2003).

90. P.L. 103–160, 107 Stat. 1855–56. Nov. 30, 1993.

91. Clarke sent a memo on Oct. 16, 1996 to Lacy Suiter, FEMA's Executive Assistant Director for Response and Recovery, asking the agency to clarify its responsibilities in the even of a terrorist incident. Clarke asked FEMA a series of questions about what prevented the agency from taking a greater role in terrorism preparedness and consequence management, especially during the recently completed Atlanta Olympics. The agency responded by saying that FEMA's policy was that it did not generally have the authority to use money for preparedness in advance of disaster threats. It also requested that "each agency with an emergency preparedness function for terrorist incident consequence management is responsible for requesting funding for its predeployment activities and emergency preparedness." See John P. Carey, FEMA General Counsel, "FEMA's Role in Advance of a Terrorist Incident," Memorandum for Richard A. Clarke, NSC, Nov. 21, 1996. Information about Clarke's actions comes from conversations with two of his colleagues in FEMA.

92. The Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP), in the Border and Transportation Security Directorate of DHS as of Mar. 1, 2003, was formerly in the Department of Justice. It is assigned by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107–296, as the principal component of the Department of Homeland Security responsible for preparing state and local governments and private entities for acts of terrorism. In carrying out its mission, ODP is the primary office responsible to providing training, funds for the purchase of equipment, support for the planning and execution of exercises, technical assistance and other support to assist states and local jurisdictions.

93. Telephone interview, Nov. 10, 2003, Washington, DC.

94. James Lee Witt, Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Apr. 15, 2004. Also see James Lee Witt and Associates, Department

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Eventually, the terrorism annex of the Federal Response Plan, issued in 1997, delineated responsibility for combating terrorism: crisis management responsibilities were given to the FBI and consequence management was given to FEMA.[95] It was a "kick in the pants" for the agency, according to one member of FEMA's national security division, but the agency made no major organizational changes in response.

If Witt wanted to preserve FEMA's reputation, he had little reason to invest in counterterrorism. With the depletion of its national security division, FEMA lacked the capability to address terrorism which, by its nature, was an unpredictable danger. The agency's reputation earned it remarkable deference from politicians but this autonomy had limits; the agency could not afford to gamble on an uncertain issue, terrorism, with its fortunes so closely tied to the election chances of politicians who might punish a small agency perceived to be at fault for failure.

F. FEMA after 11 September 2001

The durability of FEMA's missions, tasks, and all hazards concept after the crisis of 11 September 2001 provides the best evidence of the institutionalization of the Witt era reforms. The largest ever terrorist attack on American soil required a massive investment in recovery and intensive planning for how to restructure American government to face a new threat. This was a true crisis—a time when an extraordinary event was salient to American citizens and threatened their shared values, peace of mind and, for some, their lives and property. Significant change is possible during a crisis because politics is less bound by normal routine; vested interests lose their grip, and there is greater opportunity for a new consensus to prevail.[96]

The flurry of political activity following the 2001 terrorist attacks is understandable: politicians had to show voters that they were doing something—anything—to defend against the terrorist threat. Witness the many reorganizations of emergency services agencies at the state level. Just as politicians were able to use preparedness programs to convince suburban voters that the government was doing something to prepare for the worst during the cold war, politicians today have good reason to use preparedness agencies to convince the public that the government is securing the nation against the threat of terrorism.[97]

The most logical agency to take on preparedness and response tasks was FEMA, which had a preparedness brand identity and a history of civil defense programs. Until homeland security reorganization, FEMA was responsible for civil defense using plans that were much the same as those laid out by the FCDA in the 1950s. But although FEMA was included in the new Department of Homeland Security and tasked with counterterrorism preparedness and response, it retained a focus on all hazards, remarkably so, as experts had planned for the agency to be the centerpiece of a new domestic security effort.[98]

FEMA's stability immediately after the attacks was all the more striking because of the massive overhaul of other agencies in the new department. Formerly intransigent customs and border patrol agencies were later combined and then separated into border security and enforcement divisions. Even the most powerful Treasury Department ceded some of its law enforcement power to the new department. But FEMA, which had been asked to take on a greater national security role during the 1990s, was conspicuously immune from the shockwaves the attacks sent through the government. Although FEMA was folded into the new department, its organization and procedures remained much the same as before, especially compared to the massive reorganizations of immigration and aviation agencies.[99]

of Homeland Security and FEMA (Washington, DC 2002), unpublished.

95. Terrorism Annex of the Federal Response Plan, issued Feb. 7, 1997. The Federal Response Plan was first published in May 1992 by FEMA pursuant to the authority in the Stafford Act and after a lengthy coordination process with the other signatory agencies. The Plan coordinates delivery of disaster response services among 25 federal agencies and the American Red Cross. See Keith Bea, "Overview of Components of the National Response Plan and Selected Issues," *CRS Reports* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service), Dec. 24, 2003.

96. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

97. Government memoranda during the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations show that this kind of thinking was common. See Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red*.

98. The Hart-Rudman Commission envisioned FEMA as a the centerpiece of a new domestic security effort.

99. FEMA made minor adjustments to accommodate new concerns about terrorism, forming working groups on the subject and hiring emergency managers with some terrorism experience. For instance, Shawn Fenn was a graduate student at the University of Florida researching how to integrate terrorist threats into urban planning when terrorists struck on Sep. 11. He soon found that his research was a hot commodity and after working for the state of Florida, he joined FEMA's mitigation division in order to integrate counterterrorism into federal, state, and local "all hazard" mitigation programs. "There's a mitigation posture in the (emergency management) community right now," Fenn said. "How do you fold terrorism into that? That's the challenge."

In Jan. 2002, FEMA issued a paper stating that terrorism is just another hazard and therefore can be mitigated like any other. Of course it is not exactly like any other hazard, but FEMA found authority in the Stafford Act to provide mitigation for fire, floods, and explosions, regardless of their cause. One way FEMA can engage in terrorism mitigation is to encourage the adoption of building standards that can protect against earthquakes and floods while also providing defense against car bombs. But terrorism will take some time to he included in the mitigation division, Fenn says, because few people in his division have security clearances or are

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FEMA was able to resist political pressure to emphasize homeland security because of its evolution from an agency chastened in the 1980s after attempting to be a major player in the national security realm to a reorganized agency with a reputation among disaster-plagued communities for an all hazards and all phases approach. The first test of Witt's legacy came after the election of George W. Bush, who appointed his campaign manager, Joe Allbaugh, as FEMA director. Allbaugh wanted to take the agency in a new direction by refocusing its efforts on civil defense and counterterrorism. He reestablished the Office of National Preparedness (ONP), which had existed from 1981 to 1993, primarily to train first responders to terrorism.[100] Recreating the ONP caused some concern among agency employees, but the office did not become as powerful or as large as it was during the 1980s. Another part of Allbaugh's reorganization was the elimination of programs that administration officials deemed inefficient.[101] The most significant of these was a disaster mitigation program named Project Impact—a program central to Witt's reorganization—that provided education and grants to build disaster resistant communities. Immediately after Allbaugh eliminated the program the Nisqually Earthquake shook Seattle, one of the project's model communities. Seattle's mayor told a national television audience that Project Impact was the reason why the city suffered almost no damage from the 6.8 magnitude earthquake. The mayor's testament and protest from FEMA staff and state and local officials convinced Congress to fund Project Impact during the 2001 appropriations process. Good fortune, too, deserves credit for saving Seattle since a massive earthquake that struck closer to the city could have caused devastation no matter how much emergency managers planned for the worst. In any case, the timing of the quake elicited support for the mitigation program and made for great political theatre.

Mitigation was an important part of Witt's all hazards approach—natural disaster preparation with a long time horizon—and to eliminate such programs was to change the agency's core tasks. Even though political appointees had the legal authority to restructure FEMA's core tasks, the agency's reputation was strong enough to resist demands to shift resources from natural disasters and mitigation to counterterrorism, at least through the beginning of 2003. Whether the agency will continue to develop an intelligent mitigation policy or whether it will simply distribute money for structural improvement projects that are more pork than real solutions remains an open question.

The most striking instance of FEMA's ability to preserve its new all hazards mission in the face of political pressure came during the political upheaval that followed the 2001 attacks. Immediately after the attacks, political leaders again looked to FEMA to shift its mission and core tasks from natural disasters to counterterrorism. On 28 February 2003, Bush issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5, which called for the establishment of a National Response Plan (NRP) to delineate the responsibilities of emergency management in the homeland security environment. The resulting plan mentions "all hazards" and explicitly sets a new direction for emergency management. The original Federal Response Plan, written during the 1980s and promulgated in 1992, focused on natural disasters. Separate plans dealt with radiological and other hazards requiring technical expertise.[102] The president requested the new NRP in order to develop a single plan for all disasters, a true all hazards plan in which FEMA would have the authority to respond to disasters at the request either of the president or of other agencies—as in the case of an agricultural disaster that would fall under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Agriculture—or when multiple agencies are involved and FEMA assumes a coordinating role.

The Bush administration also requested the NRP in order to put its stamp on emergency management: the president and DHS Secretary Tom Ridge directed a policy team to develop a plan that replaced terms and concepts from previous plans with fresh ideas. Like the decision to adopt the term "homeland security," the Bush team wanted to develop a language that was distinctive, and often these terms had a military tone. One of the leaders of the planning group, Major General Bruce Lawlor, Ridge's Chief of Staff, asked for a "battle book" listing what would be done in the event of each type of disaster. Longtime FEMA employees found the request strange because it flew in the face of the all hazards

in contact with national security personnel who have access to threat information.

Examples of publications advising risk management for terrorism, published in Dec. 2003, include: FEMA 426, Reference Manual to Mitigate Potential Terrorist Attacks Against Building; FEMA 427, Primer for Design of Commercial Buildings to Mitigate Terrorist Attacks; FEMA 428, Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks; FEMA 429, Insurance, Finance, and Regulation Primer for Risk Management in Buildings. See <http://www.fema.gov/fima/rmsp.shtm>

100. Allbaugh reestablished the ONP on May 8, 2001. The original ONP was established in September 1981 and lasted until November 1993. This was not directly opposed to the direction agency took under Witt—Witt advised to move the Office for Domestic Preparedness from the Justice Department to FEMA.

101. George D. Haddow and Jane A. Bullock, *Introduction to Emergency Management* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Butterworth-Heiuemann, 2003), 13.

102. The FRP derived from the Federal Plan for Response to a Catastrophic Earthquake published in 1987. The FRP was published in May 1992.

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principle, but they complied, though one member of the policy team thought about vindicating the all hazards idea by "filling the book with page after page of the same instructions—it's the same for every hazard, that's what we've been taught."[103]

The initial NRP draft, issued 14 May 2003, begins with a "Mandate for Change" in the introduction and calls for a "new paradigm in incident management."[104] Like other documents issued at the time, it stresses "awareness and prevention" of hazards, using terms suited for law enforcement rather than the favored term of the emergency management profession, "mitigation." One could prevent a terrorist attack, but how does the government *prevent* an earthquake or a tornado? Furthermore, it lists natural disasters as only one of five areas of possible contingencies; the others are terrorism, civil unrest, technological accidents, and special events requiring extra security. FEMA is given an extraordinary amount of responsibility in the plan—an amount that would require significant reorganization or new resources.

After the policy team completed its task, the draft was sent to state and local agencies as well as to other federal agencies for review and comment. The response was swift and negative according to a FEMA director: "The guidance was to create an entirely new plan. We did that … but that guidance had to be reversed 180 degrees." States and localities did not like the new terms, and others in the DHS saw their point. There was already a considerable investment in existing definitions, plans, and procedures, and to create a new system would require a significant cost in time and money, a risky endeavor for a system that performed better than it did a decade ago. FEMA had engaged in niche construction, to borrow a metaphor from biology, and in doing so generated consistent support that helped its organizing concept and core tasks outlast political and environmental transitions.[105]

Back at the drawing board, the policy team developed a brief plan that could be applied to all types of contingencies. This draft was only eleven pages while the original was fifty-three. Rather than reinventing the wheel, planners relied on the existing understanding of all hazards and simply incorporated terrorism into the procedures, giving FEMA formal authority over the response to terrorist contingencies in an initial plan that was approved by the Homeland Security Council on 30 September 2003. Perhaps taking a page from Witt's successful appearances at disaster sites, the plan includes a provision for a "Principal Federal Official" who would represent the DHS Secretary at major disaster scenes. The official could be from FEMA, but the designation is left open, giving the president the flexibility to name an official who best represents him.[106]

G. FEMA's Response to Hurricane Katrina

After the homeland security reorganization, FEMA's capacities eroded. Although FEMA was strong enough to maintain its orientation as an all hazards natural disaster organization, it lost substantial autonomy and authority when the Bush administration decided to emphasize terrorism preparedness functions that occurred outside the agency. FEMA was relatively well-regarded for its response to the 11 September 2001 attacks and for its performance in Florida in 2004, where an unprecedented four hurricanes made landfall.[107] But its poor preparation and lackluster response to Katrina a year later, especially in New Orleans, has become legendary. In many ways, Katrina was a singular event, an especially severe hurricane that struck a poor urban area served by relatively weak state and local governments.[108] The hurricane killed more than 1,200 people in Louisiana and Mississippi, and even the most well-prepared disaster agency would have had trouble during the crisis.[109]

With so much blame to go around, the Katrina catastrophe was overdetermined. Some sections of the levees were poorly constructed because of poor communication and even malfeasance.[110] State and local agencies failed to adequately plan for the

103. Personal Interview, Washington, DC, Nov. 19, 2003.

104. Much of the substance of the initial response plan came from documents prepared by RAND corporation at the request of the DHS. RAND had never before prepared a response plan. The original mandate for the plan came from HSPD #5.

105. In biology, "niche construction" is the process in which an organism alters its environment in order to increase its chance of survival. By building a reputation as the lead natural disaster agency, FEMA altered the expectations of the president, congressional committees, and the the public. See Rachel L. Day, Kevin L. Laland, and John Odling-Smee, "Rethinking Adaptation: The Niche-Construction Perspective," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 46 (2003).

106. The initial official version of the plan was issued in Oct. 2003. Details about the plan presented by Charles Hess, Director of Advisory Services in the FEMA Response Division, at the GWU Workshop on Emergency Management in the Homeland Security Environment, Nov. 19–20, 2003; available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~workshop/download/1> (accessed 30 Mar. 2004).

107. No other state had been affected by four hurricanes in one season since Texas in 1886. An estimated one in five homes in Florida were damaged by hurricanes during Aug. and Sept. 2004 and 117 people in the state lost their lives from the storms. National Climatic Data Center, "Climate of 2004 Atlantic Hurricane Season," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, Dec. 13, 2004.

108. The 2000 census shows that 27% of New Orleans households, or approximately 120,000 people, lacked privately-owned transportation. In addition, New Orleans has one of the highest poverty rates in the United States, at 38%.

109. Patrick S. Roberts "What Katrina Means for Emergency Management," *The Forum* 3: Nov. 2005.

110. Audrey Hudson, "'Malfeasance' cited in Katrina flooding," *Washington Times*, 3 Nov. 2005. Also see the Oct. 2005 Social Science Research Council Forum "Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences," accessed 31 Oct. 2005 at <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/>.

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transportation, housing and security that would be needed during an extended crisis. Once the hurricane was bearing down on New Orleans, local officials waited too long to issue an evacuation order, and state and federal agencies were too slow to provide rescue and recovery resources. When help finally arrived, it was poorly coordinated. Even at the height of FEMA's power under James Lee Witt, Katrina would have been a costly disaster. And yet from 1993 until 2001, FEMA was far better prepared to handle a catastrophic natural disaster than it was in 2005, after the agency had been moderately politicized.

The current Bush administration filled FEMA's upper management with political appointees who lacked disaster experience.[111] The agency's dramatic turnaround in 1993 was brought about largely by experienced emergency managers, including Witt, who were able to organize the agency around all phases of natural disaster response and to command attention and resources from the president, Congress, and other agencies. The Witt regime was not replaced by emergency managers with equivalent professional or political experience. "I literally had to introduce (former FEMA director) Mike Brown to members of Congress," Witt said in 2004, well before Katrina. A congressional committee chairman asked him for help with wildfire relief after he left the agency, Witt recalled, because the congressman could not get his calls returned by DHS personnel.[112] By 2003, departures, early retirement, and job dissatisfaction had sapped the agency's career force.[113] The agency lost some of the professional knowledge, training, and experience that might have helped it successfully balance terrorism preparation with responsibility for other kinds of disasters.

After 2001, the White House and Congress changed FEMA's organizational structure to reflect three political goals: FEMA's once heralded mitigation division was given a reduced role, possibly because mitigation was associated with the previous presidential administration; granting and preparedness responsibilities were organizationally separated from response and recovery capabilities, in part to improve financial accountability; and importantly, the agency was incorporated into DHS and given a counterterrorism mandate.[114] Prevention, and not just preparation, formally became part of its mission, suggesting that its primary responsibility would be preventable attacks rather than natural disasters.[115] The cumulative effects of the politicization process weakened the agency's resources for addressing weather catastrophes since preparedness granting programs were moved into another division within DHS and the FEMA chief had to work through departmental bureaucracy to reach the White House and Congress. Slow crisis communication plagued the Katrina response, and states and localities were not prepared for the demands the response placed on communication, transportation, and security capabilities. While we do not yet know the details of exchanges between the FEMA leadership and the White House, it is clear that the White House and the homeland security operations center failed to appreciate the severity of the disaster soon enough and, therefore, failed to involve National Guard and DoD personnel and equipment soon enough as first responders.[116]

111. Spencer S. Hsu, "Leaders Lacking Disaster Experience," *Washington Post*, 9 Sept. 2005, A1. In addition to former FEMA director Michael Brown's lack of disaster experience, as of September 2003 others agency leaders lacked emergency management credentials before their FEMA appointments: chief of staff Patrick Rhode formerly planned events for Bush's campaign; the deputy chief of staff, Scott Morris, was previously a media strategist for campaigns. Neither had previous emergency management experience.

112. Witt tells a story of how Congress and the president wanted to give FEMA (and him) responsibilities beyond the agency's mission. "Senators Stevens and Byrd called me up and said they wanted to write a bill that would put USAID under you at FEMA because of problems we were having in Bosnia. I said please don't do that." Witt also recounts that the senators wanted to introduce a bill appointing Witt as director of FEMA for 10 years, but Witt refused. Despite rumors that some in the Bush administration wanted Witt to be reappointed, I have found no evidence that be had an opportunity to thrice refuse the crown. Witt, Personal Interview.

113. FEMA ranked last in worked satisfaction among large agencies in a 2003 survey. In 2005, the Partnership for Public Service and the Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation ranked the Department of Homeland Security, which absorbed FEMA, next to last among agencies (29th out of 30) as "best places" to work in government. Stephen Barr, "Morale Among FEMA Workers, on the Decline for Years, Hits Nadir," *Washington Post*, 14 Sept. 2005; Federal Emergency Management Agency: Status of Achieving Key Outcomes and Addressing Major Management Challenges (GAO-01-832, July 9, 2001).

114. Two former FEMA mitigation officials complained of politicization after 2001 for these reasons. From Personal Interviews, June 23, 2003 and Oct. 15, 2004. In addition Frank Reddish, the emergency-management coordinator of Miami-Dade County and a self-described "longtime Republican," sums up his view that the Bush administration rejected programs associated with Clinton in order to claim credit for new innovations by saying "They politicized it." See Shane Harris, "Cuts to Disaster Mitigation Program Questioned," *Govexec.com Daily Briefing*, Sept. 16, 2005.

115. There is evidence that industrial accidents can be "prevented" though we may have to live with a certain level of "normal accidents" in a complex society. See Charles Perrow *Normal Accidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

116. The Department of Defense may have been reluctant to allow military assets to he used for homeland security because of a fear that such uses could set precedent and drain resources. For instance, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has ordered that aid requests from the DHS must go through the Office of the Secretary of Defense before they are given to Northern Command, which can then permit military assets to be used for disaster response. James Kiltfield, "Poor Communications Slowed Military's Hurricane Response," *National Journal Daily Briefing*, Sept. 19, 2005. Confirmed by personal interview with former military official, Oct. 21, 2005.

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Although FEMA was roundly criticized for its response to Katrina, the character of its reputation began to change much earlier, soon after 2001. FEMA competed with the Office of Homeland Security and then with ODP within DHS for a reputation as *the* disaster clearinghouse. When the Preparedness Office began issuing grants to states and localities from within DHS and outside FEMA, emergency managers resented the separation of preparation and response functions that were formerly joined. The two phases of emergency management need not be located in the same physical space to succeed as long as they maintain some cooperation. As of 2005, however, communication was inconsistent and the granting office had not eliminated "stovepipes" among disaster specialties or instituted consistent, risk-based assessments.[117] Recall that the genius of the all hazards, all phases concept was its ability to unite the different parts of a disaster timeline—preparation, response, recovery, mitigation—into a single notion of preparedness. Civil servants whose tasks focused on granting programs or disaster planning, for example, assumed that recovery was a part of their preparedness mission. Ideally, they would craft plans with recovery in mind.

The organizational separation between preparation and response capabilities anticipated the disconnect between these functions in New Orleans. The NRP, adopted in December 2004 with great fanfare, gives DHS broad authority during a catastrophe to deploy "key essential resources" such as medical teams, search and rescue, shelters, and supplies, even without a request from state authorities. In the event of a catastrophe on the scale of Katrina, the plan notes, "A detailed and credible common operating picture may not be achievable for 24 to 48 hours (or longer) after the incident. As a result, response activities must begin without the benefit of a detailed or complete situation and critical needs assessment."[118] The Secretary of Homeland Security possesses the legal authority to bypass normal disaster procedures to begin rescue missions and to deliver aid. The Katrina response, however, did not follow the sprit of the plan. Despite federal authority to deliver resources soon after or even before a disaster, federal officials complained that they were slowed because state and local leaders did not request resources soon enough.[119]

Despite the blame levied at FEMA, the agency's reputation was strong enough to absorb criticism following Katrina and remain the primary all hazards disaster agency. The Bush administration attempted to assert political control over FEMA from its first days in office but succeeded to only a moderate degree. FEMA's stability provides evidence of the strength of its reputation. The President's National Strategy for Homeland Security, published in 2002, placed terrorism front and center of homeland security responsibilities.[120] At the same time, "all hazards" remained the centerpiece of the major policies governing emergency management. Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (issued on 17 December 2003) instructed the Homeland Security secretary to develop a "all-hazards preparedness goal."[121] Department documents emphasized natural disaster response as well as terrorism response, and the GAO found that DHS successfully implemented an "all-hazards" approach.[122] While the department added state and local grants for terrorism preparedness, it still offered the Emergency Management Performance Grants Program that had long assisted states with natural hazard preparedness.[123]

After Katrina, FEMA's major divisions responsible for response, recovery, mitigation and flood insurance remained intact. Most pundits and emergency management professionals agreed that FEMA had become too politicized and that it needed more, not less, independence.[124] Had FEMA's reputation been destroyed, the agency would not have survived its poor performance in Katrina. The pressure for radical reorganization or devolution of responsibility would have been too great. But all hazards remains at the core of emergency management and homeland security strategy documents, and the agency retained its coordinating role in disasters, immune from the kind of radical reorganization following crisis that shook the agency in 1979, 1993, and even 2001.

II. ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

A. Keys to a Turnaround: All Hazards, Administrative Politicians, and a Profession

FEMA stands out more for its transformations than for its continuities: it began as an object of blame

117. Patrick S. Roberts, "Shifting Priorities: Congressional Incentives and the Homeland Security Granting Process," *Review of Policy Research* 22:4 July 2005, 437–50.

118. National Response Plan, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC, Dec. 2004, CAT-3.

119. U.S. House. 2005. *Michael Brown Testimony to Congress.* 109th Cong., 1st Sess. 27 Sept.

120. Most replaced the term "mitigation," long associated with natural disasters, with the more security-oriented term "prevention." National Strategy for Homeland Security, Office of Homeland Security, White House, July 2002.

121. "National Preparedness," Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, White House, Washington, DC, Dec. 17, 2003.

122. "DHS' Efforts to Enhance First Responders All-Hazards Capabilities Continue to Evolve GAO-05-652." General Accountability Office, Washington, DC, Aug. 11, 2005.

123. Roberts, "Shifting Priorities."

124. Eric Holdeman, "Destroying FEMA," *Washington Post*, Tuesday, 30 Aug. 2005, A17; Amanda Lee Hollis, "A Tale of Two Federal Emergency Management Agencies," *The Forum* 3 (2005).

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and became a model of government effectiveness, and then after one of the most remarkable turnarounds in administrative history it again fell into disrepute following its performance in New Orleans. What built the agency's reputation out of a crisis in 1993, and can the agency follow a similar path after Katrina? The most obvious explanation follows the career of James Lee Witt who inherited an agency in crisis. He bought time from politicians ready to abolish FEMA by promising to reorganize the agency so that it would perform better in the future. Witt recognized the "electoral connection" between the agency's tasks and politicians' ultimate interest—reelection—when during congressional testimony he said that "disasters are political events."[125] He recognized that his power was ultimately located in the agency's ability to support the interests of politicians and, sometimes, to anticipate those interests better then politicians could do on their own.

Like a model "bureaucratic entrepreneur," Witt and his colleagues perceived an opportunity for policy change and brought innovations to the political market.[126] Witt, however, did more than bring a new product to market. He was an administrative politician who worked to connect the activities of his agency to the long term reelection interests of politicians by restructuring the agency and liberally reinterpreting statutes to gain authority where he thought the agency most needed it. The way in which Witt forged bonds with elected politicians was strikingly different from how Progressive Era bureaucratic entrepreneurs related to political actors. During the early twentieth century, maverick agency leaders Gifford Pinchot and Harvey Wiley staked out their independence from politicians and developed widespread support for their policies.[127] Administrative politicians in FEMA, however, enhanced their reputation through close relationships with elected politicians. This is the crucial difference between the progressive maverick and the modern administrative figure—Witt did not stake out a position independent of politicians as much as he supported their long-term interests. When he first became FEMA director in 1993, he clashed with some members of Congress who wanted to disband the agency, but he eventually persuaded them that he could improve FEMA's response to natural disasters so that the public would have an improved view of the agency and of the federal government in general. Instead of developing his own constituency in opposition to established political interests, Witt focused the mission of FEMA to accomplish manageable core tasks.

Witt's key innovation was the development of the all hazards, all phases approach. This single adaptable concept allowed FEMA to organize diverse and previously conflicting missions and to consolidate a reputation for competency in all phases of emergency management, particularly natural disasters. Witt divided the agency into mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery divisions. He allocated resources toward programs that could be used for many kinds of disasters rather than narrowly-tailored specialties. In practice, however, all hazards emphasized natural disasters over deliberate man-made ones. All hazards is a useful tool but not an entirely accurate empirical description of emergency management because not all hazards are the same. Floods require a different kind of preparation and response than do fires or earthquakes. While natural disasters encompass great variety, terrorism adds an even greater level of complexity to the all hazards idea. Witt never wanted FEMA to be *truly* all hazards because security matters such as terrorism or nuclear war involve very different kinds of operations. After a terrorist attack, the disaster site becomes a crime scene, and law enforcement and intelligence agencies take the lead, not FEMA. The agency used its quick response teams to assist in cleanup after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, but it never had to make major resource decisions between radically different terrorist and natural hazards concerns. Witt may have been wise to shy away from taking responsibility for all phases of terrorism preparedness because the threat was so unpredictable.

Although Witt is credited as one of the most successful public managers in the twentieth century, the knowledge, criticism, and training from a maturing emergency management profession deserve equal credit for the turnaround. During the 1980s, civil defense associations began to morph into emergency management groups. Universities began to offer degree programs in emergency management, later in cooperation with FEMA. By 1993, NAPA recognized emergency management as a specialty. These specialists produced a blueprint for FEMA's turnaround that Witt and others followed. Among other things, the public administration report recommended downgrading the agency's national security role, removing the stovepipes that separated various parts of the agency, and adopting an all

125. Testimony to U.S. Senate, Apr. 30, 1996; Also see David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

126. See Mark Schneider, Paul Eric Teske, and Michael Mintrom, *Public Entrepreneurs: Agents for Change in American Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3; Michael Mintrom, *Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000); Adam Sheingate, "Enhepreneurial Innovation, Institutional Change, and American Political Development," *Studies in American Political Development* 17 (2003).

127. Pinchot and Wiley both courted symbolically important politicians just like the courted other symbolically important social leaders. Convincing politicians that their agency's success was crucial to electoral ambitions was less important to Pinchot and Wiley's project, however, than it was to Witt.

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hazards approach.[128] Many of Witt's deputies were trained in emergency management, and the profession eased communication between federal, state and local offices of emergency management by providing a uniform vocabulary with which to talk about disasters. Three features, administrative politicians, an adaptable organizing concept, and the emergency management profession, combined to focus the agency's missions around tasks that it could perform well. With improved natural disaster preparation and response, politicians recognized the agency's utility to their reelection interests as well as the agency's own legitimacy.[129]

B. What is Bureaucratic Autonomy?

For bureaucracies, autonomy does not function in the strict philosophic sense of the term. No agency is entirely self-ruling since each operates under constraints presented by environmental conditions and organizational structure. Accordingly, most of the institutional literature employs autonomy to describe an agency's relative capacity to assert independence from its political superiors or bureaucratic equals[130]. Herbert Emmerich captured the essence of autonomy when he noted that "[t]here is a persistent, universal drive in the executive establishment for freedom from managerial control and policy direction."[131] Autonomy is simply the ability of an agency to implement its own ideas. More autonomous agencies can innovate and shape policy direction on their own while less autonomous agencies are more dependent on their political superiors. FEMA, for instance, reoriented its missions from civil defense to natural disasters while the Immigration and Naturalization Service never developed, let alone enacted, a single perspective with which to organize its diverse missions. Even though autonomy is a relative, not absolute, quality, some agencies are clearly autonomous when compared to other administrative organizations. Others are so closely tied to elected politicians that they lack substantial independence. The reorganization of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) increased the number and authority of the agency's presidential appointees, and the OMB became more responsive to the administrative designs of presidents.[132]

Agencies demonstrate autonomy when they act independently, though not necessarily in defiance, of their political superiors or other agencies for a sustained period. Autonomy includes instances in which an agency compels its political principals to reverse a command and defer to the agency or when an agency resists enacting a political directive. Agencies also act autonomously when they change the preferences and perspectives of politicians and the public over time by restructuring ideas, agendas, and material incentives.[133] In a few instances, an agency might act independently of, but consistent with, the interests of its principal.[134] Testing whether an agency has achieved a significant degree of independence requires detailed historical analysis of complex interactions because autonomy develops from social structures and institutions and in turn influences those structures and institutions. Identifying autonomy in such a case requires attention to the range and character of autonomous behavior.

Autonomy affects two basic properties: an agency's capacity to act and the manner in which it acts. Agencies that develop autonomy from the president and Congress can be particularly innovative because they can make policy independently of their political

Table 3. Interview Summary

Total interviews conducted: **29**
FEMA national security staff: **3**
Agency directors: **1**
FEMA appointees: **4**
Career civil servants: **10**
State and local emergency managers: **4**
None of the above: **7**
Average phone or in-person interview length: **55 minutes**
Interview methods: **17** in person, **8** by phone, **4** by e-mail.

Note: In addition, I had conversations with many other participants in FEMA's development including state and local emergency managers, FEMA employees, and one additional FEMA director. I also learned much by attending emergency management conferences.

128. National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*. In particular, the report criticized FEMA's national security division, which often prohibited resources from being used to respond to natural disasters. See Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

129. Carpenter claims that autonomy occurs when agencies "can bring their political legitimacy to bear upon the very laws that give them power."

130. Barnett and Finnemore define autonomy as multiple periods in which an institution acts independently, though not necessarily defiantly, of its political superiors. See Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 11. Also see Anne M. Khademian, *Checking on Banks: Autonomy and Accountability in Three Federal Agencies* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1996).

131. Herbert Emmerich, *Federal Organization and Administrative Management* (University of Alabama Press, 1971), 17.

132. David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Bruce E. Johnson, "From Analyst to Negotiator: The OMB's New Role," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 3* (Summer 1984): 504–15.

133. Krause defines autonomy as influence. See George A. Krause, "The Institutional Dynamics of Policy Bureaucratic Influence over Securities Regulation,"*American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996).

134. According to this definition, agencies might depend upon some source of external support and yet still be autonomous from other political institutions.

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superiors. For instance, agencies whose autonomy stems from a reputation for serving a particular social group—the nineteenth-century Post Office's connection to moral reformers comes to mind—might adapt to meet the group's changing needs. Ties to these groups might be tenuous, however; today the postal service lacks its former autonomy and carries out routine services, not the moral regulation that characterized the Progressive Era office.[135] Autonomous agencies can be particularly frustrating for congressional reformers because they either shape institutional change on their own terms or resist it altogether.

FEMA exercised autonomy in at least three periods. During the early 1990s, a significant portion of Congress opposed a major reorganization of the agency. Some wanted to abolish the agency, others wanted to ignore it, and still others benefited from FEMA's failure because they could shift blame away from themselves and onto the agency. Despite congressional resistance and presidential indifference to how FEMA should rework its missions, Witt and his associates persuaded Congress to assist in a reorganization that substantially reduced the agency's role in national security and built the foundations for an all hazards, all phases reputation. The 1993 reorganization exemplifies autonomy because it showed FEMA engaged in independent action against the preferences of key members of Congress. Remarkably, FEMA did this against a backdrop of failure. Witt and his staff gained the provisional confidence of politicians by promising improved performance and, implicitly, electoral benefits.

After the reorganization, FEMA worked to maintain its reputation and autonomy in the face of efforts to change its missions. During the late 1990s, FEMA resisted pressure to take on more counterterrorism responsibilities, most of which were eventually given to the DOJ. Most demonstrative of FEMA's autonomy was its ability to resist much but not all of the 2001 reorganization. Although FEMA was incorporated into DHS, it remained committed to the all hazards approach, and was one of the few agencies that was allowed to keep its name. FEMA would not change its missions and approach, so the DHS swallowed the agency and built new programs and emphases around it.

C. Reputation as a Foundation for Autonomy

Many other agencies besides FEMA exercise autonomy, though the source and scope of their power varies. Autonomy stems from at least three sources: law, the nature of an agency's tasks, and reputation. Some agencies enjoy legal separation from elected politicians. The Federal Reserve, for instance, enjoys legal insulation from political control and thus exercises an independent perspective, especially compared to other financial regulatory agencies.[136] Legal autonomy endures because to change it would require major legislation to alter an agency's statutory authority.[137] Other agencies gain autonomy through the nature of their tasks. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) uses secrecy, control over information, and emergency powers to win independence from politicians.[138] The agency hides some of its actions from political or public oversight, or it publicizes information when disclosure suits its purposes. To take a recent example, the agency twice violated its usual code of secrecy when it allowed two agency employees, Joseph Wilson and Michael Scheuer, to speak publicly about their work and criticize the Bush administration's foreign policy. Furthermore, politicians give all major security agencies sustained discretion because these agencies must sometimes act quickly to avert disaster. Task-based autonomy is as resilient as legal autonomy; despite expert and political consensus about intelligence reforms over the past 25 years, the CIA and FBI resisted many reforms that did not serve their interests, even as their reputations suffered amidst criticism of civil rights abuses and intelligence failures.

The third source of autonomy, demonstrated by FEMA, is a reputation among critical groups for fulfilling a public need. All agencies can use a good reputation to their advantage, but some agencies gain autonomy only through reputation. Reputation is the belief among a segment of the public, and then among politicians, in an agency's ability to anticipate and address public needs. A detailed administrative history brings to light *which groups* esteem an agency and for *what*. Reputation can adhere to a single agency, a small set of agencies or, in part, to an administrative politician who leads an agency.[139] FEMA developed a reputation as the primary disaster agency, the source for preparedness advice, the leader during a crisis, and the agency

135. Carpenter, *Forging Bureaucratic Autonomy* 353, 364.

136. John D. Huber and Charles R. Shipan *Deliberate Discretion? The Institutional Foundations of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). FEMA's authorizing statues grant it wide and vague authority that the staff of its counsel's office said was often not used because of political concerns. After overstepping its bounds in the early 1980s, the agency did not want to appear too ambitious nor did it want to take on missions that it lacked the resources to accomplish.

137. Legal autonomy is not impervious to political control. To take one example, local school districts once possessed substantial legal autonomy. Over time federal authorities, driven by organized interests, intervened in local affairs. Terry M. Moe uses "autonomy" to describe the former legal and organizational independence of state of local school districts in "The Two Democratic Purposes of Public Education," *Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education*, eds. Lorraine M. McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 134.

138. Amy B. Zegart, "An Emperical Analysis of Failed Intelligence Reforms Before September 11," *Political Science Quarterly* 121 (Spring 2006), 33–60.

139. Carpenter, *Forging Bureaucratic Autonomy* (2001): 13, 364–65.

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that would help pick up the pieces after a disaster. It was not always so. Before the 1980s, at least, citizens looked to states and localities if they looked to government at all for help with disasters. Until the mid 1990s, the agency was known as much for bungling disaster response as for its swift action during a crisis. A crisis of confidence at the agency opened the door to a radical change after 1993 when an exceptionally talented leader employed the resources of the emergency management profession to convince politicians to grant the agency leeway to build a reputation for all hazards, all phases emergency management. The agency's autonomy was sustained and institutionalized through its burgeoning reputation as an effective disaster agency.

While FEMA eventually gained wide name recognition among citizens never touched by disaster, the agency built its name among citizens threatened by frequent natural disasters and the members of Congress who represented them.[140] FEMA's clientele was more varied and less stable than that of other agencies because natural disasters don't arrive with the regularity of social security checks. But contrary to previous studies asserting that FEMA's weakness stemmed from the lack of a clientele, the agency served a grateful and vocal group of citizens who feared disaster and would complain to the media if they felt they were not receiving sufficient help.[141]

FEMA's history indicates, however, that reputation provides a more nuanced and less stable source of autonomy than either law or tasks. First, since reputation depends on an evolving belief among the public, it is inherently fragile—beliefs can change quickly and a single well-publicized event can harm reputation dramatically. The loss of the capacity to address unusually severe disasters leads to the second reason that reputation can be easily lost: it can closely adhere to an individual or small group rather than to an organization. FEMA's turnaround was so closely associated with James Lee Witt and his assistants that his departure from the agency opened the door to moderate politicization and left FEMA adrift. Once Witt and his associates were gone, the agency lacked the extraordinary legitimacy it had among pivotal congressional committees and the president. Members of Congress and state and local officials had relationships with Witt or with his deputies, not with a formal organization. Even though Michael Brown repeated the "all hazards" phrase after taking over as FEMA director, Brown lacked the knowledge of emergency management and the relationships with politicians that Witt had cultivated. Witt and his associates were central to maintaining FEMA's reputation, and after he departed political appointees with little emergency management experience were unable to fill his shoes.

Even if Witt had been replaced by an equally skilled leader, FEMA would have had a hard time living up to its reputation. The ratcheting up of expectations is the third reason why reputation is a fragile source of autonomy. A reputation focuses attention on particular missions and raises expectations for how well an agency performs these missions. Once FEMA had a good reputation for swift and effective disaster response, new information about its performance would either confirm its reputation or damage it. Inevitable subpar performances would violate expectations and generate attention. If politicians grant autonomy in the hopes that an agency will develop a reputation, when that reputation sours politicians will be more likely to revoke autonomy.

Finally, reputation-based autonomy is more prone to politicization than legal or task-based autonomy as well as reputation-based autonomy of earlier eras. Contemporary reputation-based autonomy depends on a reputation not only among social groups but also among pivotal coalitions in Congress and in the White House. In FEMA's case, Witt persuaded reluctant members of Congress and an agnostic president that he could improve disaster performance and implied that a well-functioning agency would provide electoral rewards. Securing full autonomy required a "buy-in" from the governing coalition that had to be convinced that the agency would use its reputation for performing particular missions and tasks to support the long term interests of elected politicians. While all politicians have an interest in reelection, the manner in which they assemble electoral coalitions differs. Because reputation-based autonomy and the work of administrative politicians are so closely tied to elected politicians, this form of autonomy is particularly fragile when presidential administrations or governing coalitions in Congress change. Different parties or even different candidates perceive the same tasks and missions as making different contributions to their electoral goals. In the FEMA case, Witt and others convinced politicians that an effective natural disasters agency would serve their interests. The Bush administration, however, wanted the agency to be more accountable to taxpayers, to turn over many of its functions to the private sector, and to make terrorist hazards a

140. Witt claims that after FEMA gained notoriety some members of Congress who had not struggled with disasters asked him whether the agency might take on responsibility for other tasks beyond its traditional mission.

141. Before the 1993 reorganization, assessments of disaster politics bemoaned FEMA's lack of a constituency that could lend support to an effective emergency management system. The NAPA report notes that "emergency management has almost no natural consistency base until an emergency or disaster occurs. Except for those personas and agencies with responsibilities for emergency management, which are modest in number and influence, the function has no generally attentive, supportive set of constituents or clients, which is so important to the survival and effectiveness of public agencies." National Academy, *Coping with Catastrophe*, viii.

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priority.[142] Administrative politicians never made the case after 2001 that an autonomous and vigorous natural disasters agency would serve Republicans' long term interests.

D. Politicization and Resistance

The increasing capacity of the White House and Congress for oversight and influence during the twentieth century leaves less freedom for agencies to nurture expertise, develop an independent perspective, and gain authority sufficient to exercise their perspective. Political institutions, whether the president, congressional committees, parties, or ideological factions, may seek control over the activities of federal agencies through the appointment process, budgetary oversight, rulemaking or agency design. With so many tools for control available to politicians, examples of autonomy in the contemporary public administration are all the more impressive.[143]

Politicization particular to the emergency management policy area manifests itself in two ways. First, political incentives lead to a disproportionate concentration of resources and attention on the recovery portion of disaster management rather than on other phases, such as efforts to mitigate the damage of inevitable disasters through building codes or through programs to prepare for a disaster by rehearsing evacuations and critical equipment failures. A disaster's life-cycle contains at least four stages: human efforts to shape the natural or technological environment; procedures to plan and prepare for a disaster; the event of the disaster; and efforts to recover from its effects. The media focus attention on dramatic scenes of human suffering in a disaster, and the suffering provides an opportunity for politicians either to show leadership or to be blamed for poor performance.[144] Other stages of the disaster cycle lack such intense public focus and, therefore, the opportunity for politicians to earn the public's scorn or approval.

Second, national security often trumps natural disasters in bureaucratic politics. The notion of preparedness always included preparation for natural and deliberate disasters. The most prominent of the latter included the possibility of cold war foreign attack and, later, international terrorism. While natural disaster policy was rarely a focus of party platforms and presidential campaign rhetoric, national security policy has been a central area of partisan differentiation. Agencies charged with preparedness could not help but be swept up in larger partisan and ideological struggles over national security.

Before 1993, the organization and tasks of FEMA and its civil defense predecessors reflected politicians' agendas for defending against nuclear war, riots, and terrorism. However, during the 1993 reorganization, FEMA found a way to clear the hurdles of politicization and craft an independent perspective centered on all hazards emergency management. The reorganization dramatically shrank the national security staff and shuffled it to a remote corner of the agency. The newly developed all hazards, all phases concept carried a normative force that helped resources target high probability natural disasters rather than low probability security disasters. The all phases idea ensured that more resources were directed to preparation and mitigation, though response and recovery still drew the bulk of funds. These ideas, when absorbed at all levels of government, made it more difficult to neglect the less politically rewarding parts of emergency management.

Yet after 11 September 2001, amid urgent calls for a sharper focus on terrorism, it became increasingly difficult for FEMA to exercise an independent perspective. The Bush administration aggravated the problem by filling the agency with political appointees who lacked the experience and expertise of their predecessors. These pressures, though powerful, did not spell the end of FEMA's perspective. The all hazards idea remained alive and well in preparedness strategies, and the agency maintained divisions for mitigation, response, recovery and, until 2003, preparedness.[145] The federal disaster agency was relatively autonomous, and the all hazards concept helped to steel it against political incentives to neglect natural disasters and long-term planning. Nevertheless, Congress and the president continued to insist that preparedness programs emphasize terrorism and moved these programs to a new office within DHS, leaving FEMA's all hazards and natural disaster responsibilities awkwardly intact.

FEMA resisted thorough politicization but its ability to act independently was undercut by state and local

142. For more on privatization and homeland security, see Eric Klinenberg and Thomas Frank, "Looting Homeland Security,"-*Rolling Stone*, 15 Dec. 2005.

143. The trend toward politicization, with roots in the Progressive Era and the New Deal, became a central feature of public life in the last quarter of the twentieth century as "responsive competence"replaced "neutral competence"as the organizing principle of bureaucratic power. Presidents began to use administrative reorganization as a tool of political control. See Peri Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency: Comprehensive Reorganization Planning, 1905–1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Terry Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," in John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson, *The New Direction in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985).

144. Disasters can spawn disjointed and reactive media coverage, which can lead policy responses to be similarly disjointed and reactive. See Roger W. Cobb and David M. Primo, *The Plane Truth* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003).

145. Paul Stockton makes a convincing case that both FEMA and the Bush administration retained a commitment to all hazards, even as the administration emphasized the terrorist threat. See Paul Stockton, "Katrina: Redefining the Essence of Homeland Security," working paper, Nov. 16, 2005.

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agencies' shift towards terrorism responsibilities. Preparedness granting programs were removed from FEMA and given to DHS. State and local disaster agencies received conflicting signals about what they should plan for. New federal grant money for terrorism-related programs far outweighed the money for all hazards programs, and most state and local emergency management offices morphed into homeland security offices. As early as 2003, thirteen states had undergone reorganizations to create new homeland security agencies, and forty-seven had created a terrorism committee or task force.[146] Law enforcement personnel, not seasoned emergency managers, began to staff state and local offices of homeland security.

After 2001, state and local offices juggled an infusion of new money and attention focused on the terrorist threat. In theory the equipment purchased with these grants could be used for all hazards but, in practice, the equipment was distributed according to state plans that emphasized terrorism. Michigan's Democratic governor, for example, issued an executive order directing that federal homeland security preparedness grants be used as part of a state strategy that, not surprisingly, emphasized the threat of terrorism.[147] In Indiana, Phil Roberts, deputy director of the Indiana State Emergency Management Agency, said that 75 to 80 percent of his time as of 2003 was spent on homeland security and terrorism issues.[148] New federal grant programs focused on terrorism preparedness put state and local agencies increasingly at odds with the natural disaster planning done by FEMA.

E. The Paradox of Presidential Control

Conventional explanations of bureaucratic autonomy privilege agencies that are formally insulated from presidential control.[149] For example, the Federal Reserve exercises autonomy in part because its board of governors is elected to terms of fourteen years, longer than the tenure of any president. The Air Force's top career officer collaborates with its top political appointee, giving its career professionals a great deal of influence compared to more appointee-laden agencies. The case of FEMA is a contrary example. FEMA's reputation-based autonomy flourished under direct presidential control, contrary to expectations that autonomy flourishes within departments or in independent commissions insulated from presidential control. At its peak, FEMA was institutionally subordinate to the president, and its director had a seat on the cabinet. Reputation-based autonomy does not operate like legal or organizational autonomy, where formal barriers frustrate political intervention in an agency. Rather, it creates a zone of independence, a range of decisions about tasks, missions, and concepts that politicians leave to subordinate agencies.[150]

Positive-theoretic studies of political control demonstrate how political "principals" grant agencies formal, organizational independence in order to extract informational advantages.[151] The not so new "new economics of organization" captures some of the basic sources of bureaucratic autonomy stemming from the relationship of bureaucracies to their political superiors. In some cases, politicians provide agencies with discretion in areas that do not bear on their reelection chances or policy interests. In other cases, agencies gain autonomy because there are too many principals for any single one to exercise substantial control.[152] Republicans facing off against Democrats, or members of Congress in a tussle with the White House, would often rather defer to a public agency than give ground to political opponents.

These theories fail to account for FEMA's extraordinary ability to set its own course. From its creation in 1979 until its incorporation into DHS, the agency reported directly to the president, not to a larger cabinet department. Congress approved some appointments and appropriated funds, but there were rarely deep divisions between the branches over emergency management policy that would account for autonomy. Other theories also fail to account for FEMA's autonomy. Historical scholarship identifies instances in which bureaucracies exercise power in policy areas that escape sustained political attention.[153] But the agency was always relatively prominent, and it began to exercise autonomy as its

146. Roberts, "Shifting Priorities."

147. See Michigan Executive Order No. 2003-6.

148. Phil Roberts, telephone interview, Oct. 6, 2003.

149. Jonathan R. Macey, "Organizational Design and Political Control of Agencies," *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 8 (1992): 93–110. For a study of the changing level of autonomy in a Dutch independent commission, see: Kutsal Yesilkagit, "Bureaucratic Autonomy, Organizational Culture, and Habituation," *Administration & Society* 36 (2004): 528–52.

150. Michael Barzelay and Colin Campbell, *Preparing for the Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003), 226.

151. See Steven J. Balla, "Administrative Procedures and Political Control of Bureaucracy," *The American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 663–73; David Epstein and Sharyn O'Halloran *Delegating Powers: A Transaction Cost Politics Approach to Policy Making under Separate Powers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Balla ("Administrative Procedures," 1998, 664, 671) uses the term "autonomy" to describe sustained bureaucratic discretion and concludes that "Given the technical nature of Medicare reform, legislators may have been willing to trade strict control over redistribution for accurate information about physicians' resource costs."

152. Terry M. Moe, "The New Economics of Organization," *American Journal of Political Science* 28(1984): 769.

153. See Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State in America, 1859–1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Joel D. Aberhach, *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Oversight* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990); Lawrence C. Dodd and Richard L. Schott, *Congress and the Administrative State* (New York: Wiley, 1979).

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prominence in the media and in political speeches increased.

For most of its history, FEMA was politicized in the narrow sense of the term. Cold war and Reagan-era emergency management agencies reflected the presidential emphasis on defense against nuclear war. The congressional armed services committees, too, supported programs to maintain civil defense and develop elaborate contingency plans in the event that Washington, DC was destroyed during war. FEMA was up and running only briefly during Carter's tenure, but the creation of the agency suited his larger plan to improve government through centralizing reorganizations.[154] Under George W. Bush, too, the agency appeared politicized. Its top ranks were filled with former employees of the Bush campaign, it was absorbed into a new department, and the agency was given directions, not always heeded, to develop an approach distinct from the one pursued under the previous presidential administration. In short, FEMA usually adapted to serve the larger goals of a presidential program.

The Clinton period was an exception. FEMA exercised autonomy even while it was closely tied to the president because administrative politicians and the emergency management profession influenced the preferences of the president and key members of Congress. Legal or task based autonomy occurs because agencies are separated from politicians. Reputation-based autonomy, however, requires a coincidence of interests between the agency and its political superiors. In the FEMA case, administrative politicians campaigned to convince elected politicians that a relatively autonomous agency with a reputation for disaster management, especially natural disasters, would perform well in crisis and help deliver electoral benefits.

Agencies insulated from political control, whether through organizational structure, legal protection, or the nature of their tasks, can act without concern for politicians' preferences to a greater degree than other agencies. FEMA, a small agency that reported directly to the president and congressional committees for most of its history, lacked this kind of autonomy. In order to gain some independence from the political programs of the day, it created and then maintained a reputation for all hazards emergency management that, for a time, politicians were loath to disturb because it served their interests.

154. Carter announced that "…Federal hazard mitigation activities should be closely linked with emergency preparedness and response functions. This reorganization would permit more rational decisions on the relative costs and benefits of alternative approaches to disasters…" From "Message to the Congress Transmitting Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1978," June 1978, in *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1978, I, 1128–1131. For a discussion of how Carter's reorganization plans fits with other presidential attempts at control see Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency*.

G. Carpenter's Account of Reputation and Autonomy

The explanation presented here builds upon, deepens, and updates the most thorough recent attempt to explain bureaucratic autonomy as sustained discretion cultivated by agencies. Daniel Carpenter locates the source of autonomy not in legal or organizational structures but in an agency's reputation. In this usage, reputation is an "evolving belief" among politicians and the public, and especially among organized interest groups, in the ability of an agency to anticipate and solve problems.[155] An agency gains autonomy when politicians believe that its connection to social movements gives it the foresight to create new programs that anticipate the needs of the public better than politicians could do through legislation. Carpenter defines bureaucratic power, and specifically "autonomy," as those occasions in which "elected authorities see it as in their interest to either (1) defer to an agency's wishes for new policy or (2) grant a wide range of discretion to an administrative agency over an extended period of time."[156]

My own concern is less with the creation of new policies—after all, much of the radical policymaking of the contemporary era involves eliminating programs—than with an agency's ability to define its missions and core tasks. FEMA was not an exceptional agency because politicians *chose* to give it wide-ranging autonomy. FEMA had very little organizational independence, and it was under direct presidential control for most of its history. Its legal mandate had long been vague, but it was a small agency with few material resources that had been chastised during the 1980s when it had attempted to exert its authority. The agency was exceptional for its ability to build autonomy by changing the preferences of policymakers. Witt and other administrative politicians within FEMA convinced elected authorities, who before had been neutral at best, to follow the prescriptions of the emergency management profession and to reorganize the agency and allow it to take the lead during disasters.

155. Carpenter, *Forging Bureaucratic Autonomy* (2001): 13, 364–65. The sociological literature has made attempts to understand the role of ideas and evolving beliefs in organizations. See Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52 (1998): 887–918. In political science, the comparative politics field has had a resurgence of scholarship on ideas in politics. See Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). In public administration Charles Goodsell has examined how the idea of a "mission mystique" shapes agencies. See Goodsell, "The Creation of Mission Mystique," unpublished manuscript (2005).

156. See Daniel P. Carpenter, "State Building through Reputation Building: Coalitions of Esteem and Program Innovation in the National Postal System, *Studies in American Political Development* 14 (2000), 124.

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Whereas Carpenter locates the source of an agency's reputation in the esteem provided by social groups, my account emphasizes the role of professions in building and maintaining a reputation. Contemporary agencies develop a reputation through connections to a combination of state and local agencies, the development of a recognizable and adaptable organizing concept, and above all a the rise of a mature profession, which helps to compensate for the support and information once provided by Progressive Era associations. As a relatively small agency, FEMA lacks the resources to communicate with most citizens directly. Instead, it learns about public concerns and implements its ideas through state and local offices of emergency management. Well-functioning state and local offices maintain sufficient communication with their communities to serve as the equivalent of the local chapter of a Progressive Era association. In the 1990s, these offices began to coalesce around the all hazards, all phases idea. With all levels of government on the same page, coordination of natural disaster preparation and response improved FEMA's reputation. The complications introduced by terrorism eventually broke down coordination between federal, state, and local agencies as well as between preparation and response capabilities.

In addition, modern agencies perform increasingly complex technical tasks, creating a demand for expertise that can be met only by a professional culture, with its knowledge, training, and academic and political associations. Social movements and local associations provide knowledge about the needs of constituents that should not be underestimated, but such knowledge is qualitatively different from the expertise supplied by a profession with a network of universities, associations, and training programs. By definition, a profession is a self-regulating body and therefore independent.[157] Professions provide a source for policy alternatives apart from the usual mix of ideas generated by political campaigns, constituent complaints, and interest group lobbying. In this case, the emergency management profession provided expertise about what should be done to prepare for and respond to disasters.

While the rise of professions and expertise separates the contemporary administrative state from earlier periods, the impressive ability of some bureaucracies to make policy independently remains the same. The administrative politician of today is just as innovative as the "bureaucratic entrepreneur" of the Progressive Era described by Carpenter; FEMA's all hazards concept is as revolutionary as the Department of Agriculture's concept of the farm extension system developed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The recent history of emergency management, however, makes me far less sanguine than Carpenter about reputation as a stable basis for autonomy. Because it depends so much on the perception of major and often singular events, reputational autonomy can change more quickly than either legal or task-based autonomy. If "disasters are political events" in the oft repeated phrase uttered by Witt, then each disaster provides an opportunity to create new winners and losers. Catastrophic disasters violate expectations about an efficient and forceful government response and damage agency reputations.

A good reputation by itself does not ensure future success, especially today. For a host of reasons, contemporary agencies' reputation-based autonomy is far more tenuous and unstable than it was in the Progressive Era agencies Carpenter analyzes. Presidents and members of Congress have more devices for political control available today. Large White House staffs vet and keep tabs on political appointees; performance assessment tools condense information on agency behavior; and media act as conduits for information about agency performance, especially information about scandal or unusually subpar performance.[158] Furthermore, presidents, now unmoored from party discipline, remake agencies according to their own agendas, making it difficult though not impossible for a single agency to build autonomy that lasts past a single administration.

Recognizing the instability of autonomy built on a reputation should enhance scholarly appreciation of even brief periods of such autonomy. FEMA's accomplishments between 1993 and 2003 are all the more impressive because the politicized environment of contemporary agency politics makes bureaucratic autonomy difficult. Even the Food and Drug Administration, which Carpenter suggests qualifies as the best contemporary candidate for autonomy, has come under fire for giving in to political control.[159] All agencies strive for autonomy, and some achieve it through a reputation. A brief period of autonomy may be enough to sustain a policy concept like "all hazards" beyond the period in which the concept was created. Whether an agency can sustain the capacity for continued innovation and independent action with autonomy based solely in reputation remains an open question.

157. See the literature on professionalism, including: Steven G. Brint, *In an Age of Experts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Anurag Sharma, "Professional as Agent," *Academy of Management Review* 22 (1997): 748–98.

158. Consider the Performance Assessment Rating Tool and Government Performance and Results Act reporting requirements. For accounts of "news values"see Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1997); Larry Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

159. Carpenter calls the Food and Drug Administration "one of the nation's most powerful federal agencies" and a "highly legitimized actor in contemporary American politics" that "accords more or less with the theory presented here." See Carpenter, *Forging Bureaucratic Autonomy*, 2, 366.

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III. CONCLUSION

FEMA's history provides fertile empirical ground for testing ideas about bureaucratic autonomy and illuminates how a federal agency that was once a bureaucratic backwater might come to set policy of its own accord rather than merely reflect the changing preferences of policymakers. Autonomy emerged from a reputation for "all hazards, all phases" emergency management built from the knowledge and training provided by a profession, the skill of administrative politicians, and the opportunity provided by crisis. A more deterministic account might stress how the agency's all hazards concept evolved in response to the demands of its constituents and the logic of its central tasks rather than through the exercise of autonomy.[160] But the agency changed course amidst relatively steady public expectations. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, at least, people wanted and eventually demanded disaster assistance from government. FEMA failed to provide such assistance in its early years, leading editorial writers to mock the agency and local officials to blame it for a chain of ineffective and inefficient preparation and response at all levels of government. In short, FEMA's transformation from a poorly performing federal backwater to one of the most popular "brand name" agencies in government was not predetermined.

FEMA's unexpected autonomy raises new possibilities for theories of autonomy and public administration. The intensified politicization of bureaucracy in recent decades compounds the volatility of reputation-based autonomy, and yet FEMA's autonomy flourished under direct presidential control. Although real, this reputational autonomy was unstable. The brittle character of reputation-based autonomy leaves two paths down which FEMA, now perceived as at the ebb of its strength in both preparation and response, might proceed in the future. The agency could become a funnel for federal disaster relief monies, while leaving preparation to Homeland Security and leadership during a crisis to military and law enforcement personnel.[161] This would be the agency at its most politicized, stripped of responsibility for mitigation, preparedness, and quick response and used as a tool of presidents and congressional majorities to reward electorally critical groups seeking government help.

However, FEMA's dependence upon reputation-based autonomy need not be a death knell for the agency. FEMA might also take a more ambitious path by learning from the lessons of the Witt reorganization, which grew out of a crisis no less severe than the agency's present situation. Witt and his colleagues began their work with the agency's reputation in tatters. Enterprising bureaucrats within FEMA today might be able to convince politicians that only a relatively independent disaster agency can reconcile the conflicting demands of terrorism and natural disaster emergency management. Although terrorism is a newly significant threat, politicians stand to lose public trust if they allow natural disaster capacities to be vitiated in the process of reorganizing for homeland security. FEMA, with the support of career professionals, might have better resources than Congress or the White House to coordinate preparedness activities across all levels of government and with the private sector.

Were FEMA to pursue this strategy, it would follow a course different from the one Carpenter charts. Carpenter draws attention to Progressive Era bureaucrats whose causes attained moral legitimacy among the public. The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, seemed to follow this model for a brief time when it earned a reputation among crucial interests as a protector of the public good.[162] Most agencies, however, cannot hope to capture the moral high ground. For these agencies, the partnership-style of autonomy exemplified by FEMA during the Witt era might serve as a model. Such agencies do not seek insulation from politics in order to act independently. Rather, they try to influence the preferences of politicians. This is a particularly hard road to travel because each governing coalition in Congress and the White House must be convinced to abandon its initial preferences and adopt the agency's understanding of its policy environment. However difficult, a partnership between pivotal politicians and agencies, continually renewed by administrative politicians, might be the best way to produce innovative and successful bureaucracies in a politicized environment.

160. It is difficult to know whether demand always exists, waiting to be tapped, or whether demand can be created out of whole cloth.

161. FEMA is one of only a very few agencies to keep its name while being included in the Department of Homeland Security. After Katrina, some policymakers suggested eliminating the FEMA acronym and using "Emergency Response and Recovery" instead.

162. It is not clear whether even the EPA can be successful at environmental protection and still avoid strategies that make it appear to be an organization of compromise with business and property owners rather than one of advocacy for the good and the just. See Christopher J. Bosso, *Environment, Inc.* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Marc K. Landy, Marc J. Roberts, and Stephen R. Thomas, *The Environmental Protection Agency: Asking the Wrong Questions from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

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