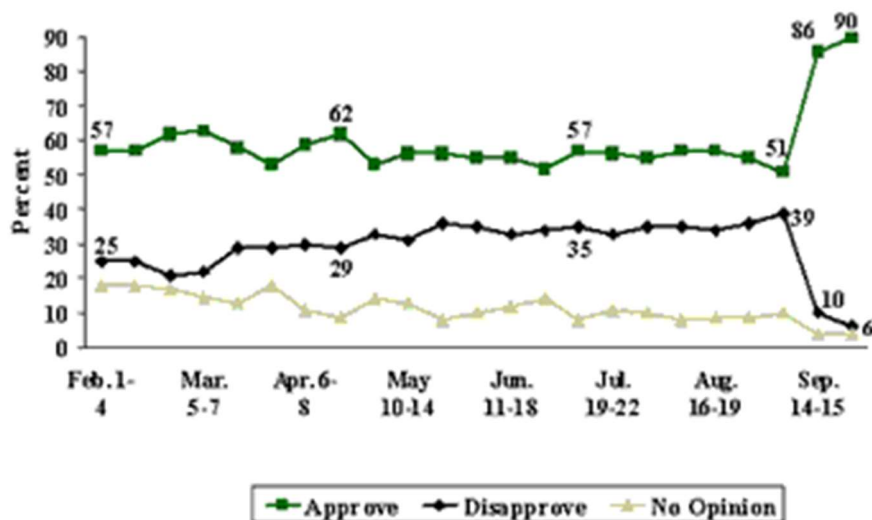


Politics of Lives: Natural Disasters

By Kaan Ertan

A natural disaster is a terrifying event for everybody. The chaos during and afterward an earthquake, the sadness of the atmosphere, and the instant primitivization of the people are unforgettable scenes. However, the ability to move on and to adapt to new situations are two strengths of humans. Knowing how to use these, the politicians can easily script their way into politically and monetarily profiting from disasters, even from human-made disasters.

Firstly, we need to distinguish natural disasters from human-made disasters. Although both yield similar consequences, people's reactions are quite different to each of them. For instance, let us take a look at the September 11 attacks in the USA. The terrorist attacks against civilians in US cities were clearly disastrous, causing many fatalities and injuries as well as economic losses. So, we can say that this is an example of a human-made disaster. This disaster had such a huge effect on the lives of people all across the world, that we still experience its results. Following the attacks, the US switched its foreign policy towards a more interventionist one and initiated the War on Terror. Countless countries eventually turned into battlegrounds and thousands of people were killed. Since this is a very wide topic, I will leave it as it is and move on to emphasize how September 11 affected the US' internal politics.



The Approval Rate of the President Bush Skyrocketed Following the 9/11 Attacks in 2001

Following September 11, a wave of patriotic fervor spread across the country. All the people united against the common threat and worked to heal the wound together. In the following

days, the approval rate of the president skyrocketed in the polls. According to the poll participators, the main reason was his proportional response to the attacks and his transparency towards the people. These are good things, but any other president would most probably act the same way. It only took up some money for the ammunition used in the counter-attacks and a couple of speeches for Bush to gain an additional 39% approval rating. So, we can say that human-made disasters can easily be used as a political instrument. When used the right way, they can unite the people, increase the support for a faction or a goal, justify an agenda, and so on. Of course, not all disasters yield favorable results for the governments. In such a case, the same manipulations regarding the disaster can, and usually is, used by opposition groups and parties, for similar ambitions.

Now that we see the possible political results of a human-made disaster, let us now focus on the impacts of the natural ones. Natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and drought are usually not preventable. This nature of them causes many people to attribute the impacts of these disasters to nature itself. But with modern technology, we have a wide understanding of the ways to prevent losses in disasters as well as the ability to predict them beforehand. For instance, Japan is one of the most seismic active countries in the world, experiencing around 160 earthquakes with a magnitude of 5 or higher each year. Yet, we do not hear earthquake news headlines from Japan 160 times a year. We hear it either for once or none at all. The reason is the Japanese people's expertise. They know how to build their infrastructure and cities beforehand, and know what to do during an earthquake. This way their lives do not usually get disturbed by mother nature. However, many other countries fail to follow the lead of Japan, paving the way to disastrous results.

Why do the other countries not simply do what needs to be done? After all, their people's lives are at stake. The simple reason lies under the politicians' ambitions. Investing in natural disaster prevention takes up a considerable amount of governmental budget. It requires the rebuilding of infrastructure, opening new dams, rehabilitating riverbeds, and so on. It also means changing the laws concerning the environment, agriculture, and urbanization, which ultimately affects big corporations and industries as well. Unless the rulers of a state are highly popular and powerful among the people, they would not be willing to oppose such powerful economic parties. After all, it takes up a great deal of political capital to make the investors conform to strict environmental laws.

But the politicians also profit from disaster prevention programs, you might suggest. The truth is, they rarely do. The reason for that is, whenever a natural disaster occurs, people usually look for support rather than a scapegoat. That is, they tend to accept the support of their government rather than accusing it of all the measures that should have been taken beforehand. Some attribute the disaster to nature and some to religious reasons. The right way to look at this is that the state does have the power to prevent its outcomes, if not the disaster itself. But unfortunately, when a disaster occurs, politicians and the state always

react “swiftly” to it and show their “support and empathy” for the victims. They may even hand out generous monetary aids and even a job to the victims, as a kind way of bribing them. At the end of the day, the government prevails from the disaster as the protector and savior of their people, while doing nothing real to prevent such a thing from happening again. This boosts the support of the government while taking up little to no money and resources, as well as keeping the corporates and investors satisfied.

An even more widely known example would be the COVID’19 disease, which may be seen as a natural disaster as well. To briefly explain, it has been more than a year since the first appearance of the virus, which is more than enough of a time for the governments to take necessary precautions against it. However, except for some responsible governments of the world, many governments fail to take necessary measures in time and on a sufficient scale. In addition, they fail to provide their people with the necessities the lock-down brings, such as extra unemployment benefits, governmental aid for the closed businesses, and 0% interest rated credits. Yet, whenever a country, in fact, its healthcare workers, succeeds in flattening the curve, the support for its government increases hugely. Some Western governments experienced increases in their approval rates ranging from 24% up to a fascinating rate of 61%.

To sum it up, the governments and the politicians are on their posts with the sole purpose of serving us, the people. They may, and always have, use tools of manipulation to distract us from what they failed to do and make us look to what they barely succeeded in doing. When natural disasters are the matter, there are usually lives lost, which make people emotional and sensitive. Yet, we should stay logical and critical especially at these times, to make sure that the politicians that we chose are working to prevent such disasters from happening ever again.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/09/200925113625.htm>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/4924/bush-job-approval-highest-gallup-history.aspx>