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Is Federalism the Reason for Policy Failure in Hurricane Katrina?

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Publius: The Journal of Federalism, Volume 38, Issue 4, 1 January 2008, Pages 692–714, <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjn020>

Published: 29 July 2008

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Abstract

Governmental responses to Hurricane Katrina are generally cited as policy failures. Media and popular analyses focus on the federal government's

policy failures in hazard preparedness, response, and recovery. Meanwhile, disaster experts realize that disaster response is a shared intergovernmental responsibility. We examine the federal nature of natural disaster policy in the US to consider whether federalism, or other factors, had the greatest influence on the failures in Katrina. We find that some policy failures are related to policy design considerations based in federalism, but that the national focus on “homeland security” and the concomitant reduction in attention to natural hazards and disasters, are equally, if not more complicit, in the erosion of government disaster management capacity that was revealed in Hurricane Katrina.

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Online ISSN 1747-7107

Print ISSN 0048-5950

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