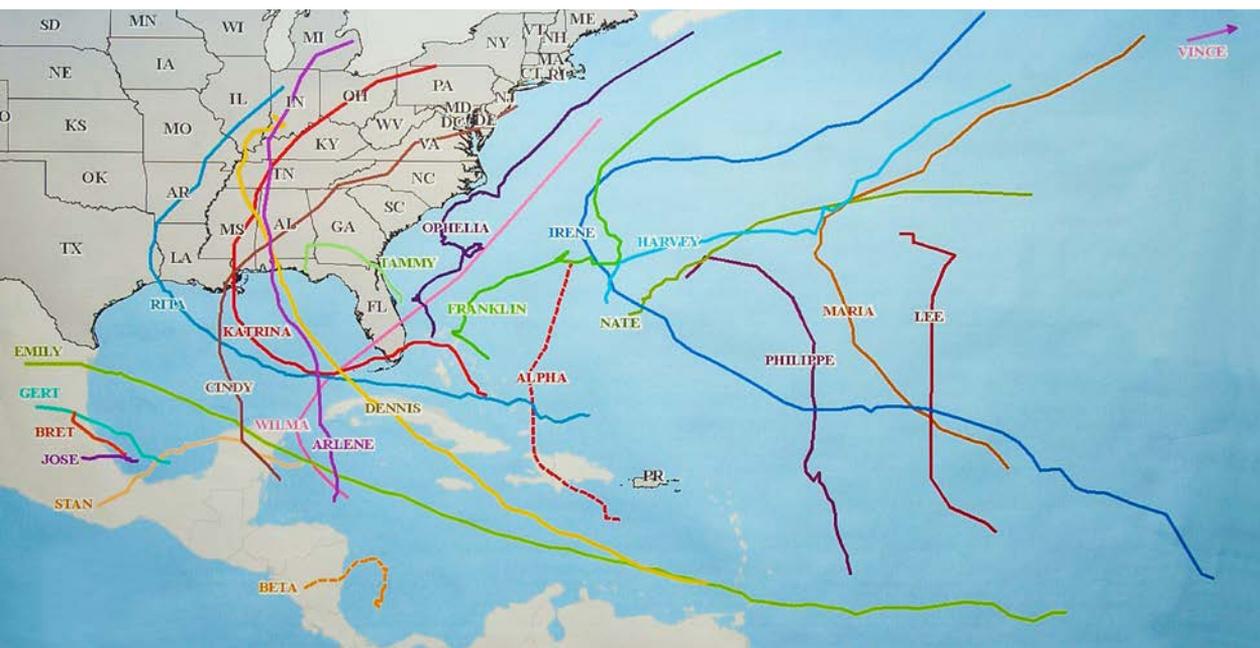


The 2005 Hurricane Katrina response failure

Seeing preparedness for foreseeable complex problems through a neo-institutional lens



Christer Brown

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Radboud Universiteit



CRISMART

Crisis Management Research and Training

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Beleidsfalen ten tijde van Orkaan Katrina in 2005

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omgang met te voorziene complexe problemen

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The 2005 Hurricane Katrina response failure
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problems through a neo-institutional lens

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Hurricane Katrina struck south-eastern Louisiana early on the morning of Monday, 29 August 2005.¹ While a majority of the city's population had fled the city before landfall, as many as 100,000 local residents still remained, huddled in private homes or the few local shelters that were open. Over the coming hours storm surge would overwhelm several key levees that had protected the city from flooding for decades. Over 80 per cent of central New Orleans was flooded by a toxic mix of water, fuel, sewage and debris as a result. The situation was only marginally better in affected communities elsewhere along the Gulf Coast from Texas in the west to Florida in the east. All told, at least 1,800 individuals would perish as a result of the storm. Some bodies have yet to be recovered.

According to Richard T. Sylves, 'Hurricanes are perhaps the type of disaster most familiar to Americans'.² Indeed, Waugh suggests that 'for many Americans, great hurricane disasters have helped shape the public perception of what disasters [...] are' and how they should be managed.³ However, what most Americans witnessed after Katrina far exceeded the 'usual' destruction that they had grown accustomed to seeing in their local communities or on television. The question on the minds of journalists, elected officials and citizens alike was how this could have been allowed to happen?⁴ How was it possible that so many people could lose their lives? Where was the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) immediately after landfall? And what was one to make of the seemingly anaemic response that the agency orchestrated once staff in FEMA shirts finally began appearing on the scene? The Katrina disaster was all the more puzzling given the sweeping reforms to the nation's emergency management system in the wake

1 Knabb, et al., 2006.

2 Sylves, 2007: 143.

3 Waugh, 1990, in Sylves, 2007: 143.

4 Senate Homeland Defense and Governmental Affairs Committee, 2006.

of the 9/11 attacks just four years earlier. In their wake, members of Congress successfully pushed through the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), what would be the single largest reorganization of the Federal Government since the Department of Defense (DoD) after World War II. Proponents of the move argued that by joining over 20 federal agencies, including FEMA (at the time responsible for emergency management coordination at the federal level), within DHS, the Federal Government's efforts in managing all manner of threats, natural or antagonistic, would be better coordinated and more effective.⁵

As Claire Rubin points out, Hurricane Katrina constituted one of the first opportunities to evaluate the effects of these and other post-9/11 reforms.⁶ One could reasonably expect that given the amount of political capital, human resources and money that had been expended in 'securing the homeland' after the 9/11 attacks, foreseeable threats like hurricanes would be managed just as effectively as they had been in the past. Instead, the Katrina response seemed to suggest that the Federal Government's ability to manage large-scale disasters had in fact deteriorated.⁷ According to Donald Kettl, the 9/11 attacks constituted a 'stress test' that 'revealed serious weaknesses in the nation's homeland security fabric'.⁸ The Katrina response suggested that there was remained much work to do before the homeland could be said to be fully secured.

According to Kettl, 'Democracies don't prepare well for things that have never happened before'.⁹ What democracies are much better at managing are regularly recurring events that are familiar and predictable, what I refer to in this study as foreseeable complex problems. These include major meteorological events like Katrina. According to Graham Allison's organizational process model of government action in *Essence of Decision*, bureaucracies tend to maintain readily available sets of 'standard' answers to the 'standard' problems that they encounter on a regular basis.¹⁰ Despite the fact that FEMA did prioritize efforts aimed at preparing for a major hurricane striking New Orleans ('the big one' in the parlance of FEMA planners and locals alike) in the years preceding Katrina, the federal response to the storm suggests that the answers that were available to the agency in 2005 were inadequate and/or ill-suited to the problem that they were faced with.¹¹ Why was this? Was Katrina in fact so big that the standard answers available to FEMA and its partners were simply inadequate? Or had the post-9/11 reforms and general elite attentiveness of terrorism writ large

5 Kettl, 2007: viii.

6 Morris, 2006: 291; Rubin, 2007: 1.

7 Rubin, 2007: 1.

8 Kettl, 2007: 12.

9 Kettl, 2007: 100.

10 Allison, 1971.

11 Berger, 2001; Irons, 2005.

changed the nature of the available answers such that they no longer applied to the hurricane threat? Or was there some other explanation?

The dominant interpretation of the Katrina response tends to place blame at the feet of individual decision-makers (President George W. Bush, the DHS secretary, the FEMA director, the mayor of New Orleans, to name a few) or entire government agencies (usually FEMA). The argument goes that had these actors been more attuned to the hurricane threat facing New Orleans and/or more engaged as Katrina approached the Louisiana coast, the resulting response would have been much more robust and many more lives would have been saved.¹² While this interpretation certainly goes some way in explaining the outcomes of the Katrina response, it arguably neglects other, less obvious factors that influenced the ability of the relevant actors to coordinate their activities long before, immediately prior to, and then after landfall such that ‘the right tools [were] available in the right place at the right time’.¹³ Indeed, Vicki Bier argues that ‘many of the problems observed [during the response to Katrina] were not due to any one person or organization, but rather were problems of coordination at the interfaces between multiple organizations and multiple levels of government’.¹⁴ The many public inquiries launched in the wake of the storm came to the same conclusion – if government agencies had just been able to coordinate their activities better, the fiasco that Katrina evolved into could most likely have been avoided.¹⁵

In 2008, just three years after Katrina, New Orleans was again threatened by a major hurricane, Hurricane Gustav. The response to Gustav suggested that the relevant government actors had dramatically improved their ability to coordinate with one another since 2005.¹⁶ Indeed, state and local authorities, supported by FEMA and other federal agencies, oversaw the near-total evacuation of New Orleans by the time the storm made landfall – only the National Guard and a few hundred stubborn hold-outs remained.¹⁷ As it was, Gustav veered westward at the last moment, leaving the city largely unscathed. For its part, FEMA received praise for its work in the years after Katrina that served to strengthen state and local capabilities generally and contributed to effective multi-level and interagency coordination as Gustav drew closer. While it is impossible to know how FEMA would have performed in the event that Gustav actually struck New Orleans head-on, it is clear that far fewer people would have lost their lives as a result

12 Kettl, 2007: 76; Preston, 2008: 51-52; Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, 2006; US Senate Homeland Defense and Governmental Affairs Committee, 2006.

13 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming. See also Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009.

14 Bier, 2006: 243.

15 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming.

16 Goodnough, 2006; Williams, 2006.

17 Brown and Johansson, 2008.

(given that the city was almost totally emptied prior to landfall.) If the Gustav response would appear to indicate a high level of government preparedness for hurricanes and their possible consequences, the response to Katrina three years earlier arguably suggests just the opposite – a comparatively low level of pre-storm preparedness at all levels, not least on the part of the Federal Government and FEMA in particular.

The literature on policy fiascoes tells us that seeing FEMA's response to Katrina as a failure is hardly unproblematic. As Bovens and 't Hart point out, 'The absence of fixed criteria for success and failure, which apply regardless of time and place, is a serious problem for anyone who wants to do a comparative study of major policy failures'.¹⁸ In the absence of a set of agreed-upon criteria, events tend to be judged either on the basis of objective metrics or on the basis of the observer's own unique values and experiences.¹⁹ One of the central themes of this study is that federal systems of government generate interdependencies between actors on both a multi-level and an interagency basis. When agents at one level are overwhelmed, agents at the level above should be prepared to assist as appropriate. However, the overall effectiveness of the ensuing multi-level interagency response is likely to be reduced where they are ill-prepared to do so. Such was arguably the case in the Katrina example – FEMA was perceived as slow to respond to the storm and ineffectual when it did finally arrive on the scene in meaningful numbers. While it is important to recognize that decisions made by state and local government officials undeniably contributed to the dire situation that emerged in and around New Orleans, many significant elements of FEMA's performance failed to meet the agency's own standards, let alone the expectations (realistic or not) of the relevant stakeholders.

While the literature on Katrina certainly goes a good way toward explaining the government's flawed response to the storm, it does only so much to depict the broader context in which FEMA and its partners operated in the years leading up to the storm. With a better understanding of the institutional environment in which FEMA operated, we might be able to identify those forces/pressures that compelled the agency to behave in certain ways and how these shifts affected its ability to manage different complex problems (like hurricanes). In this study, I argue that the 9/11 attacks in particular created immense pressures on policy-makers to act to prevent future such attacks on American soil, and that the flurry of legislation that came as a result prompted major change in the institutional environment that FEMA operated within.²⁰ This shift in elite priorities generated expectations that FEMA (alongside many other actors at every level of government) behave in ways that served to enhance the nation's preparedness for terrorism.

18 Bovens and 't Hart, 1996: 4.

19 McConnell, 2010. See also Bovens and 't Hart, 1996: 5.

20 Kertl, 2007: 10.

In practical terms, this shift meant being relocated to a new department (DHS), being compelled to deemphasize its so-called all-hazards approach to preparedness and response, and suffering major cuts in funding for certain disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness programmes. At the same time, the agency's terrorism preparedness efforts received more resources and elite attention. Taken together, these changes arguably created conditions that served to reduce the agency's readiness to effectively manage a large-scale natural disaster while at the same time presumably enhancing its readiness to manage a major terror event.

It is one thing to identify the effects of institutional change. It is quite another to actually understand the conditions under which actors are compelled to alter their behaviour and how this affects states of readiness to manage different problems. It is here, in comprehending the nature of the pressures that FEMA was under and that led to changes in the agency's behaviour, that neo-institutionalism plays an important role in this study. While the different streams that make up this expanding body of theory have different theoretical pedigrees, they share the original neo-institutionalists' view that norms, rules, routines, and values that make up the institutional environment that actors operate within serve to constrain and enable the behaviour of actors in all that they do. In other words, the neo-institutionalists are interested less in the behaviour of actors than they are in the different forces in the institutional environment that constrain and enable their behaviour in different ways. This study provides us with an opportunity to test the usefulness of at least three of these neo-institutional streams as we go about trying to better understand the 2005 Katrina response. These include normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism.

While the existing literature on the post-9/11 reforms and Hurricane Katrina offers strong evidence of dramatic change in the institutional environment in the years between September 2001 and August 2005, it says far less as to what implications they had for FEMA's ability to respond to different types of threats, including terrorism and natural disasters like hurricanes. It is only when we fully understand the conditions under which FEMA operated after 9/11 that we can confidently explain the Federal Government's unsatisfactory response to Hurricane Katrina in what was otherwise a time of heightened elite sensitivity to issues related to homeland security.

In the process of delving into the case, I also aim to develop a small set of indicators of preparedness that may prove to be vital inputs to the development of what I refer to as a diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness. This model is intended as a practical tool for use by academics and practitioners seeking to quickly and inexpensively measure actual levels of preparedness in organizations.

In the sections that follow, I will present the central research question to be answered in this study, the chosen research methodology, as well as the theoretical and societal relevance of the study and its likely outcomes.

1.1 Central question

The role of the Federal Government during times of emergency has evolved significantly over time. Where it was once disinclined to provide any emergency assistance to state and local authorities on a combination of legal and philosophical grounds, the Federal Government is today a central player in a standardized multi-level interagency emergency management system that is reflected in sets of highly refined plans, routines and protocols that promote what Roberta Sbragia describes as ‘more national uniformity and less diversity’. The result is that government authorities around the country are able to respond to different disruptive events in similar fashion.²¹ It is in part for this reason that we would expect government bureaucracies like FEMA to be particularly well-suited to manage threats²² that occur on a regular basis and that are predictable. Equally so, we would expect that the standardized responses that these bureaucracies generate will yield similar results.

Such was arguably not the case after Katrina. Here, the relevant federal, state and local authorities failed to meet the emerging needs that arose in New Orleans and countless other communities along the Gulf Coast. One of the central themes informing this study is that federal systems of government like that in the United States are made up of interdependencies between actors on a multi-level and an interagency basis. In such systems, functions like that provided by FEMA should exist to coordinate the efforts of other actors so that, as Fredrik Bynander and Arjen Boin put it, ‘the right tools are available in the right place at the right time’.²³ It follows that where such functions are ill-suited to the task, the overall effectiveness of the multi-level interagency response as a whole is likely to suffer. This, I argue, is exactly what happened in the Katrina example – FEMA was slow to respond to the storm and ineffectual in the first days after it finally arrived on the scene. As a result, the totality of the federal response suffered.

As with any organization, FEMA’s preparedness was not something that remained constant over time, but instead rose and fell over time due to different factors, many of which were influenced by shifting conditions in the institutional environment. In other words, we need to identify those institutional conditions that constrained and enabled the agency’s behaviour in ways that explain why the agency was as prepared as it was at different points in its organizational life,

21 Sbragia, 2006: 240.

22 I make a distinction between *threats* and *risks* in this study. A threat is defined as something dangerous that has yet to happen. A risk, meanwhile, describes the likelihood that a threat will become reality. According to Eriksson, which term one decides to use depends on which research discipline one is writing within. In the field of political science, for instance, the term threat tends to be preferred over risk (Eriksson, 2004: 25-27).

23 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming.

but also, ultimately, why it performed as it did in response to Katrina. In other words, we need to answer the following research question:

What are the conditions that promoted change in FEMA so as to generate (or prevent the generation of) high levels of preparedness in managing hurricanes?

As noted above, the three streams of neo-institutionalism considered in this study may be helpful in depicting how individual organizations and their leaders are influenced by major institutional change of the kind dealt with here. They may also provide at least some indication as to how useful neo-institutionalism can be in helping researchers understand cases such as this.

1.2 Research method and relevance

In order to fully answer the questions posed in the previous section, we will need to examine FEMA's activities over several decades in preparing for a single type of foreseeable complex problem, namely the hurricane threat facing the southern and eastern seaboard of the United States. This is accomplished using a slightly modified version of process tracing borrowing from cognitive institutionalism.

In essence, we are interested here in understanding how one government bureaucracy prepared for one kind of foreseeable complex problem over time. For this reason, we can expect that many findings will be applicable to other cases involving government agencies dealing with foreseeable complex problems of their own, and not just ones that fit squarely within the field of emergency management/homeland security. As the discussion in Chapter 2 will make clear, while the nature of the problems themselves may differ, the challenges that foreseeable complex problems pose are universal.

This study makes a number of contributions of scientific relevance, and nowhere more so than to the fields of preparedness, emergency management, crisis studies, political science, public administration, inter-governmental relations, and neo-institutionalism. According to Thomas Drabek, 'Disaster preparedness [is] a complex black box that few investigators have sought to explore empirically'.²⁴ Relatively few studies have been carried out that approach the subject from a neo-institutional standpoint specifically.²⁵ Presumably, the decision to do so here should give us insights into any number of issues that have long vexed researchers, not least how preparedness should be defined and how, if at all, it is possible to confidently detect indications of preparedness in organizations. In its current state, the preparedness literature struggles to articulate a definitive set of factors that promote preparedness, let alone indicators that suggest to what extent organizations are prepared for different eventualities. The fields of

24 Drabek, 1986: 21.

25 See Wendling, 2009, which employs neo-institutionalism to understand different EU emergency management arrangements.

emergency management and crisis studies also stand to gain where we achieve a better understanding of the conditions promoting preparedness. After all, it is my view that it is impossible to fully explain organizational behaviour in managing problems without first comprehending just how prepared they were (and for what). This study draws on and will provide new insights that contribute to the fields of political science and public administration. Among other things, this study conceives of preparedness in government organizations as something that is determined in part by the outcomes of security politics and the interplay between policy elites and senior administrators. The case at hand promises to provide us with multiple observations that shed light on these and other related claims. We should also be able to gain insights into how different bureaucratic traits influence preparedness. This issue tends to be neglected, not least by members of the disaster research community. Finally, as noted above, the body of work on neo-institutionalism continues to expand as it incorporates perspectives from other fields of theory.²⁶ This study provides an opportunity to assess the utility of three of these streams as they related to the case at hand.²⁷

This study has obvious practical implications for anyone working in emergency management or public administration, as well as policy elites charged with overseeing those government bureaucracies that look for, prepare ahead of and manage disruptive events like hurricanes. Given the fact that major disruptive events occur on a relatively infrequent basis, it is vital that workable tools are available to researchers and practitioners hoping to ascertain actual levels of organizational preparedness. (As Lee Clarke points out, there may well be some discrepancy between how prepared organizations appear to be on paper and their actual state of preparedness.²⁸) Among other things, this study aims to develop a small set of primary indicators of preparedness that can be used to gauge organizational preparedness for different contingencies. Furthermore, I propose that levels of organizational preparedness are also dependent on conditions in two distinct dimensions, one technical and the other political-administrative. The assumption is that individual leaders with different types of education, training and professional experience will be more or less suited to operate effectively in the different dimensions. Finally, this study is certain to generate useful insights concerning both how emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs) operate and go about preparing to manage different problems/threats.

26 Peters, 2011: 19.

27 Research on the Katrina response has been carried out by d'Almeida and Klingner, 2008; Chapell, et al., 2007; Congleton, 2005; Ewing and Sutter, 2007; Foyou and Worsham, 2012; Guion, et al., 2007; Holcombe, 2007; Jung, 2005; Kettl, 2007; Shughart, 2005; and Sobel and Leeson, 2005, among others.

28 Clarke, 1999.

Taken together, these findings should allow us to develop what I refer to as a diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness. As I argue repeatedly throughout this study, it is not always easy for policymakers and senior administrators to maintain a realistic idea as to just how prepared the bureaucracies that they are responsible for in fact are. While organizations are apt to use high-visibility and nominally high-fidelity large-scale exercises to validate their capabilities, the literature and my own professional experience suggest that their value as tools by which to accurately assess states of preparedness is limited. In my view, organizations would do well to embrace other, cheaper and less labour-intensive assessment strategies that may actually do a better job of indicating just how prepared they actually are. The diagnostic model that is proposed here is intended as just such an alternative that organizations might use to quickly and inexpensively evaluate their own preparedness to manage different kinds of problems, including those that manifest themselves only very rarely.

Finally, this study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the long-standing hurricane threat facing New Orleans, the response to Hurricane Katrina, and the development of American emergency management policy and practice in recent decades.²⁹

1.3 Thesis structure

In Chapter 2, I will present an institutional perspective on preparedness, which forms the basis for the four research hypotheses that are presented at the end of the chapter. The research methodology that is used to test these hypotheses is described in Chapter 3. The case at hand, FEMA's preparedness for hurricanes between 1979 and 22 August 2005, is presented in Chapter 4 and then analysed in Chapter 5 on the basis of the research hypotheses. The outcomes of the study, including a presentation of the diagnostic model mentioned above, are presented in Chapter 6.

29 Alexander, 2006; American Red Cross, 2006; Arnold, 2006; Banipal, 2006; Bankoff, 2006; Barnshaw, 2006; Barsky, 2006; Birch and Wachter, 2006; Boin, et al., 2010; Bourque, et al., 2006; Brodie, et al., Brookings Institution, 2005; Brunnsma, et al., 2007; Burby, 2006; Burns and Thomas, 2006; Campanella, 2006; Childs, 2006; Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, 2006; Clarke, 2006; Coates, 2006; Comfort and Haase, 2006; Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Daniels, et al., 2006; FEMA, 2006a; Government Accountability Office, 2006a; Government Accountability Office, 2006b; Government Accountability Office, 2006c; Government Accountability Office, 2006d; Hassett and Handley, 2006; Kapucu, 2006; Lakoff, 2006; Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, 2006; Office of the White House Homeland Security Adviser, 2006; Olshansky, 2006; Quarantelli, 2006a; Rodríguez, et al., 2006; Rose, 2007; Scanlon, 2006; Schneider, 2005; Takeda and Helms, 2006; Tierney, et al., 2006; Trainor, 2006; United States Conference of Mayors, 2006; US Senate and House of Representatives Democrats, 2006; Wachtendorf and Kendra, 2006; Waugh, 2006; Waugh and Streib, 2006.

Chapter 2: An institutional perspective on preparedness

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will draw on insights from the fields of preparedness, emergency management, crisis studies, political science, and public administration in order to situate the foreseeable complex problems that organizations are expected to prepare for and manage in relation to other terms that routinely appear in the literature. I will then describe how and for what organizations prepare in federal systems of government (like the one FEMA found itself operating within). This is followed by the presentation of a set of indicators that might be used to suggest just how prepared organizations are for different types of eventualities. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, various so-called streams of neo-institutionalism that have emerged in recent decades offer different perspectives on the mechanisms that serve to constrain and enable the behaviour of actors. In this study three particularly well-developed streams, normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism, will be applied to the case at hand. These streams are presented in section 2.5, followed by a brief presentation of the hypotheses that these streams inspire and that this study sets out to confirm or reject.

2.2 Foreseeable complex problems

Hurricanes – large-scale meteorological events that occur on a seasonal basis and affect large geographical areas administered by multiple local, state and even national actors – constitute but one form of foreseeable complex problem that government is expected to if not prevent then at least effectively manage. The foreseeability of problems like these should allow responsible government authorities to build up the capabilities necessary to manage them if and when

they inevitably occur. That being said, the Katrina example suggests that this is not always the case – just because a threat is foreseeable does not necessarily guarantee that government capabilities will exist so as to ensure an effective response.¹ In this section, I will define foreseeable complex problems and then situate them in relation to other terms that routinely appear in the literature to describe major disruptive events. This is followed by a discussion of general methods by which governments at every level may opt to prepare themselves and constituents in the face of such problems.

2.2.1 Defining foreseeable complex problems

The emergency management and crisis management literature is awash with different terms that can be used to describe events like Katrina. These include disaster, emergency, catastrophe, crisis and, most recently, mega-crisis, to name a few. Unsurprisingly, there is considerable debate in the literature over how these related terms should be defined and in which situations they are most applicable.² While this is certainly an interesting question, it is in my view primarily a semantic one that this study does not actively engage with. So as to distance this study from this debate, I will refer throughout this study to Katrina and other events like it as major disruptive events, defined as events, small- or large-scale, that deviate from the norm and interrupt the normal functioning of organizations, specific societal mechanisms and/or whole societies. My view is that every major disruptive event has the potential to become a crisis, what Eric Stern defines as ‘a situation, deriving from a change in the external or internal environment of a collectivity, characterized by three necessary and sufficient perceptions on the part of the responsible decision-makers’, namely: threats to basic values; urgency; and, uncertainty.³ No matter where they might be, constituents arguably expect certain levels of service from their governments both in times of normalcy and in times of disruption. Where gaps emerge between constituents’ expectations and the services that government actually delivers, the responsible actors may feel that they are in a state of crisis.⁴ No matter how long they last, crises may create pressures for change, not least on the part of responsible government actors, many of which are seen in the literature as ‘slow and deliberative’ bureaucratic

1 Effectiveness can be measured in at least two ways, either based on objectively measurable technical standards, or on the basis of stakeholder satisfaction. See Adamski, et al., 2006: 13 for an example of how to measure response effectiveness from a technical standpoint.

2 Beck, 1992; Boin, et al., 2005: 6; Boin, et al., 2008a: 312-313; Birkland, 2006: 2-3; Dynes, 1983; Faulkner, 2001: 137; Lagadec, 2009; Quarantelli, 1998; Quarantelli, 2006b; Reason, 2006: 247.

3 Stern, 2003: 8. See also Faulkner, 2001: 137, in Birkland, 2006: 2-3.

4 Birkland, 2006: 6; Stern and Sundelius, 2002: 73-74; Ullberg, 2005: 7. See also Platt, 1999: 44.

organizations.⁵ In some cases, crises bring about change in entire policy domains or the very framework within which organizations operate and all manner of policy domains are organized.⁶

As noted above, the literature offers us many different ways to conceive of major disruptive events, most of which tend to emphasize their negative consequences. The literature is particularly attentive to ‘everyday’ emergencies and novel, difficult-to-predict crises, not the relatively large class of disruptive events whose origins are easily grasped and whose onset is largely foreseeable, but which are complicated to manage.⁷ I refer to such events as foreseeable complex problems.⁸ This term emphasizes the various challenges associated with preparing for and managing problems, not what consequences they are likely to have. Foreseeable complex problems are understood to be problems that are predictable, involve actors from multiple jurisdictions and different levels of government, and have potentially adverse consequences (for health and human life, the environment, the economy, etc.) if not managed effectively. Hurricanes, major winter storms, spring flood events, and seasonal power outages are examples of foreseeable complex problems. Finally, by focusing on a large class of what some would view to be mundane or run-of-the-mill events, I hope to avoid the risk for hindsight bias – that simply because an event has occurred (like, say, 9/11), it should have been easily foreseeable.⁹ Foreseeable complex problems are widely recognized problems that authorities and citizens alike are cognizant of and tend to maintain strategies for dealing with.

Before going any further, it is necessary to recognize the growing body of literature on mega-crises. According to Lagodec, this literature emphasizes ‘the embedded engine of a chaotic world that evolves and mutates through global dynamics whose texture is made up of complex, unstable webs of constant, global, major dislocations’. The advocates of mega-crises worry that existing emergency management systems are ill-suited to address and manage the problems that stem from these dynamics.¹⁰ In my view, the primary strength of the mega-crisis literature lies in its ability to illustrate the interconnected nature of systems and actors in an ever more globalized world, and how crises in one sector may have immediate, potentially serious effects in others. However, I am not entirely convinced that existing systems are always ill-suited to manage ‘modern’ crises. The notion of foreseeable complex problems proposed here is much less pessimistic

5 Boin, et al., 2008a: 285.

6 Birkland, 2006: 4-5, 168.

7 Taleb, 2001.

8 Baubion, 2013.

9 Dekker, 2006: 23.

10 Lagodec, 2009. See also Boin, et al., 2005: 6; and Helsloot, et al., 2012.

than the mega-crisis literature insofar as it implicitly suggests that though they certainly pose difficult challenges, organizations can and in fact have no option but to deal with those problems that arise.

Insights from the cognitive-institutional and warning response literature suggest that just because a disruptive event is foreseeable does not mean that it will necessarily be foreseen. Any number of factors, including individuals' beliefs, past experiences, tendencies toward attentiveness to specific issues/sets of issues, limits in information processing capacity, and stress may prevent individuals and groups of individuals within organizations from identifying salient threats early enough such that they can be effectively managed.¹¹ According to Charles Parker and Eric Stern, the task of foreseeing problems is further complicated by a broad range of bureau-organizational and agenda-political factors that exist in any setting where 'a large number of organizations and often competitively interacting individuals' exist and interact.¹² Even where the salient threats have in fact been identified, individuals and organizations alike may nevertheless struggle to see the entire spectrum of possible consequences that they entail.¹³ In other words, foreseeable complex problems are just that – complex. The hurricane example aptly illustrates this. While authorities in the United States certainly recognize the likelihood of hurricane activity during the Atlantic hurricane season (1 June to 30 November every year), they cannot possibly foresee with any degree of certainty how many hurricanes will develop during this period, how intense each storm will be, where they will make landfall, or how prepared authorities in the affected areas will be when they come ashore.

Generally speaking, the larger and more complex the nature of the problem, the more actors will be involved in working to resolve it. The greater the number of actors involved, the more important it becomes that they are able to coordinate their activities effectively between levels and across organizational boundaries.¹⁴ (Works like Snowden and Boone's from the emerging field of complexity science serve to demonstrate just how complex complex systems of actors in fact are, and what implications this has for our ability to predict outcomes.¹⁵) However, the nature of federal systems in particular complicates matters. According to Peter Eisinger, for instance, such systems are 'highly decentralized' and consist of 'loosely coupled' actors.¹⁶ Obviously, the prospects for getting everyone to sing

11 Brändström, et al., 2004; Parker, et al., 2009; Stern, 2003: 36-39; Stern and Sundelius, 2002.

12 Parker and Stern, 2005: 312. See also Posner, 2004.

13 Kettl, 2007: 82.

14 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Seidman, 1998. For a thorough discussion of the promises and pitfalls associated with organizational cooperation in the context of problem-solving, see Svedin, 2009.

15 Snowden and Boone, 2007.

16 Eisinger, 2006. See also Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Kettl, 2007: 26, 39; and March and Olsen, 2006b: 693.

from the same proverbial hymn sheet are not great. Nevertheless, many of the problems associated with complex multi-level coordination in a multi-layered federal context can be reduced where different mechanisms/structures (common emergency management principles, plans, routines, protocols) are put in place to facilitate interactions over organizational/jurisdictional boundaries.¹⁷ However, it is important to recognize that the simple fact that organizations successfully coordinate with one another does not necessarily guarantee successful response outcomes. This issue is discussed in more detail in section 2.3.2.

2.2.2 Preparing for foreseeable complex problems

Having described what foreseeable problems are and what challenges they pose, I will now describe how organizations may go about preparing for them. Before going any further, we will need to define what exactly organizational preparedness is. Insights from the fields of political science, crisis management, disaster studies, public administration, and business studies offer a number of different views on this question.¹⁸ According to David A. McEntire, it is nevertheless possible to discern three general strains of thinking on the subject of preparedness in the literature. The first strain conceptualizes preparedness in terms of sets of specific activities ('planning, resource identification, warning systems, [and] training and simulations') intended to enhance organizational capabilities. The second strain, meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of problem anticipation and threat monitoring, while the third strain is primarily concerned with the spectrum of activities that organizations pursue in order to enhance different generic capabilities that are useful in managing different problems.¹⁹

For the purposes of this study, preparedness is defined as the ability of an organization to effectively respond to a given problem or problems. (Organizational preparedness should not be confused with organizational readiness, which appears in the public administration literature and describes the extent to which organizations are prepared to respond to institutional change, not their ability to respond to emerging problems.²⁰) My view is that organizational preparedness is something that exists to one degree or another at any given point in time. Organizations achieve a certain state of preparedness by, among other things, engaging in activities that are intended to enhance organizational capabilities to manage a given problem or set of problems. Activities of this kind might include planning, exercises,

17 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Faraj and Xiao, 2006; Fayol, 1949; FEMA, 2007: 3-4; Kettl, 2006: 375; Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009.

18 Eriksson, 2010: 12; Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 156-157.

19 McEntire, 2007: 414. See also Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 155; Godschalk 1991: 136; Kreps, 1991: 34; McEntire and Myers, 2004: 141; Mileti, 1999: 215; Perry and Lindell, 2003: 338; and Tierney, et al., 2001: 27.

20 Blackman, et al., 2013; Weiner, 2009.

trainings and courses, and regular reviews of routines and protocols, for instance. Activities such as these are seen to be purposive in nature, i.e. carried out with the explicit aim of enhancing organizational preparedness in one way or another.²¹ (It may be the case that these activities enhance organizational preparedness in dealing with other problems as well. It is fair to suggest that the more general the capability being developed, the greater number of problems and problem types the organization should conceivably be prepared to manage effectively.²²) My view, inspired by work by Clarke and Enrico Quarantelli, is that organizations that take purposive steps aimed at achieving higher levels of preparedness are at least more likely to effectively manage all manner of problems than those that do not engage in explicit preparedness activities at all.²³

The argument made throughout this study is that members of the policy elite, including the president and members of the Congress, play a central role in determining which threats the federal bureaucracy is expected to prepare for, but also just how prepared they are expected to be for them. In other words, simply because a given threat is foreseen does not mean that the relevant organization or organizations will be provided the means to prepare for it. Instead, I argue that elites are forced to select which foreseeable threats are most salient and thus worthy of additional spending. Of course, we see in the case of the United States that policymakers have during certain periods embraced the all-hazards approach to preparedness long championed by emergency management professionals. Doing so arguably removes at least some of the expectation that elites choose between different foreseeable threats.

In the section that follows, I will describe the relationship between policy-makers and the bureaucracy, as well as the process by which bureaucracies go about preparing for the threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda.

2.3 Preparedness in a federal setting

2.3.1 *The shared governance model of preparedness in federal systems*

Federalism describes a system of government where sovereignty is apportioned between a central governing authority (a federal government, for instance) and authorities at the regional (state) and local (municipal) levels. In other words, federal systems consist of multiple institutional layers with different mandates and responsibilities. Just as in all but the most centralized systems of government, original sovereignty in the United States is not readily transferred from one level to another, be it 'upward' or 'downward'. This is important to keep in mind in

21 Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 156; Kettl, 2006: 375.

22 Kettl, 2007: 77-78.

23 Clarke, 1999: 57; Quarantelli, 2000: 19.

the context of emergency management. Here, disruptive events have the potential to overwhelm the capabilities of actors at one level, meaning that actors at the next level up are obligated (or at least expected) to step in to help while at the same time not violating the sovereignty of the overwhelmed actors in the process.

At each level of sovereignty in the United States, three separate and distinct branches of government exist, namely the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The separation of powers that exists between these branches makes for a system of checks and balances that ensures that no one branch of government acquires a disproportionate amount of power in relation to the other two. Of the three branches, the executive and legislative branches are particularly relevant to the study at hand. While the legislative branch is vested with powers to create and authorize, fund, and oversee the government departments and agencies charged with turning policy into practice, the executive is responsible for providing direction to and the conduct of said departments and agencies.²⁴ The priorities of government bureaucracies are a result of the interplay between the bureaucracy's leadership and, on the one hand, the executive and, on the other, the legislature.²⁵ Agency heads typically report to and receive direction from secretaries/ministers who in turn are accountable to the executive (the president, a state governor, a mayor). However, these same agencies also report to different legislative bodies vested with the power to authorize, fund and oversee their operations. In other words, the legislature controls much of the funding that agencies require to finance their operations.²⁶ According to Kettl, it is for this reason that government agencies may 'find themselves pulled in different directions by the fragmented institutions – especially Congress – that oversee them'.²⁷

But what of the interplay between levels of government as it relates to emergency management specifically? From the outset in the late 1700s, the Federal Government resisted calls to provide emergency management assistance to state and local authorities.²⁸ In the following decades, however, some exceptions were made on a case-by-case basis that at times could seem arbitrary.²⁹ The creation of a federal emergency management authority charged with administering federal aid on the basis of relatively standardized criteria in the mid-1940s marked a major turning point in federal-state relations insofar as emergency management was concerned.³⁰ Over the coming decades, the Federal Government would go on to take on an ever larger role in emergency management, not least by taking

24 Shepsle and Bonchek, 1997: 359.

25 Zegart, 1999.

26 Boin, et al., 2008b: 5; Genschel, 1997, in Peters, 1999; Goldstein, 1988; Hall and Taylor, 1996.

27 Kettl, 2007: 47.

28 Farber and Chen, 2006: 20; Schneider, 2005: 19.

29 Barry, 1998: 369-370; Cooper and Block, 2006: 47; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 50; Schneider, 2005: 19; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 361-362.

30 FEMA, 2005; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 361.

the lead in carrying out work aimed at developing a standardized, interoperable emergency management model that would be applicable at every level of government across the country.

The contemporary model of emergency management that emerged out of these efforts is centred on the subsidiarity principle, which states that disruptive events should be managed at the nearest possible level of government to the event itself.³¹ In practice, this means that state and local authorities have 'lead' responsibility for responding to and recovering from events that occur in their jurisdictions. When authorities on one level of government are or foresee themselves being overwhelmed by disruptive events, the nation's emergency management system creates expectations that authorities at the next level of government will be prepared to step in and fill emerging capability gaps. Just as mayors can request assistance from the state government where municipal resources are inadequate, so too can state governors ask the Federal Government for help in similar such situations.³² In this, what Saundra K. Schneider refers to as the shared governance model of emergency management, responsibility for dealing with problems 'percolates' upward from one administrative level to the next in a relatively organized fashion.³³ However, as organized as this arrangement would appear to be, federal systems of government tend to create dense, multi-layered organizational environments that pose various types of coordination challenges to the actors involved. For this reason, the Federal Government works to ensure that national-level frameworks, plans, guidelines, etc. exist so as to guide the various stakeholders in their interactions with one another. These structures are intended to ensure that multi-level and interagency coordination takes place such that threats are managed to the expectations of the relevant stakeholders.³⁴

In the United States, the emergency management cycle, first developed during the 1970s, helps to structure work within the field of emergency management at every level of government. Generally speaking, this cycle consists of four sequential phases, namely: 1) preparedness; 2) response; 3) recovery; and 4) mitigation.³⁵ The focus in this study is primarily on the preparedness phase, which itself can be divided into different phases. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), for instance, the preparedness phase consists of six distinct sub-phases, namely: 1) identify and assess threats; 2) estimate capability requirements; 3) build and sustain capabilities; 4) plan to deliver capabilities; 5) validate capabilities; and 6) review and update frameworks, guidelines, plans, routines, etc.³⁶ This phased view on preparedness provides a basis for discussion

31 Morris, 2006: 291.

32 NRE, 2008: 5-6.

33 Schneider, 1990: 101-102, in Morris, 2006: 290-291. See also Sylves, 2006; and Warner, 2006.

34 NRE, 2008: 5-6.

35 Heath, 2000.

36 FEMA, 2014.

in the sections that follow on how different actors go about identifying, assessing and prioritizing threats, building capabilities to manage them, and then accounting for and learning from them in multi-level interagency systems of government, but especially federal systems like that in the United States.³⁷

Identifying, assessing and prioritizing threats

The first phase in the preparedness cycle entails identifying existing threats and then making determinations as to which are worthy of further attention. Assuming the shared governance model is correct, work to these ends should begin at the local level, where authorities conduct their own assessments of which threats are most pressing from their unique perspectives. These are then passed on to officials at the state level, who carry out assessments of their own, this time with a regional perspective. The outcomes of the states' threat identification and prioritization exercise are eventually made available to their federal counterparts tasked with national-level preparedness. Unlike their state and local counterparts, actors at the federal level are looking to identify those 'low-probability, high-consequence' threats that state and local authorities around the country are unlikely to cope with on their own.³⁸ The outcomes of this highly formalized multi-tiered process provide the Federal Government with an idea as to which threats are facing the nation at any given point in time, what work needs to be done in order to enhance the federal bureaucracy's preparedness, and what, if any, federal support is required so as to ensure that at-risk regions and/or local communities are as prepared as possible.³⁹

Clearly, the shared governance model serves to portray this process as a tidy and organized one. In fact, the threat identification/prioritization process has the potential to be highly disorganized where it becomes politicized, or, as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde put it, when it falls within the realm of security politics. In this realm, contestants (political elites, senior administrators, members of the public, the media, scholars, think tanks and interest/lobby groups) fight over which issues, or policy domains (national defence policy, public health policy, environmental policy, emergency management, homeland security, etc.), should be elevated on the policy agenda, making them central matters of security that government departments and agencies are expected to act on. Put another way, it is the elite contestants who determine who or what should be protected, what they should be protected from, and to what extent they should be protected,

37 There are numerous other conceptualizations of what preparedness consists of. In Stern's view, for instance, preparedness is a staged process that includes: organizing and selecting; planning, educating, training and exercising; cultivating vigilance; and protecting preparedness (Stern, 2013).

38 FEMA, 2014. See also Kettl, 2007: 39; Schneider, 1995: 59; DHS, 2011; and NRE, 2008: 5-6.

39 DHS, 2011.

not the professionals involved in the nominally objective threat identification/prioritization process described above.⁴⁰ It is worth keeping in mind that the contestants who engage in a given policy debate come to the table with varying degrees of resources and authority. This in turn determines how much influence they have over the outcomes of the game.⁴¹ Besides having won the privilege to choose which policy domains are elevated on the policy agenda, the winners of the policy debate are well-positioned to decide which departments/agencies should be responsible for managing what, and how much resources should be available to them in doing so.⁴² Wittingly or not, the policy choices that elites make are likely to leave government bureaucracies particularly well-suited to manage certain problems, and less so in managing others.

The intensity of debates over policy is likely to increase in the wake of what Thomas Birkland refers to as focusing events, or 'events that cause members of the public as well as elite decision makers to become aware of a potential policy failure'.⁴³ In his view, events such as these have the potential to 'change the dominant issues on the agenda in a policy domain'.⁴⁴ The different streams of neo-institutionalism hold different views concerning any correlation that might exist between focusing events and institutional change. This subject is revisited later in the chapter. Regardless of just how useful policy failures are in explaining shifts in the overarching policy agenda and other forms of institutional change, they present windows of opportunity for actors to realize their own individual goals, which might include translating their own beliefs, preferences and interests into policy.⁴⁵

Building and maintaining capabilities

Once the policy agenda is set (on the basis of the bureaucracies' own assessments, the outcomes of contests in the realm of security politics, or some combination thereof), the task then becomes one of building organizational capabilities so as to ensure that any threats that have been prioritized can be managed to the satisfaction of the relevant stakeholders. In essence, we have reached the policy implementation phase. Given the interdependencies that exist between the different levels of government in federal systems, we might expect that changes in behaviour on the part of departments and agencies at one level will generate

40 Buzan, et al., 1998: 23; Kingdon, 1995.

41 George and Bennett, 2005: 100; Kingdon, 1984, in Majone, 2006: 234-235; Parker and Stern, 2005: 318; Peters, 2011: 18; Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Rubin, 2007: 6; Susskind, 2006: 270.

42 Stern and Sundelius, 2002.

43 Birkland, 1994, in McCarthy, 2004: 84. See also Cobb and Elder, 1972: 83, in McCarthy, 2004: 84; Downs, 1972: 39; and Kingdon, 1995, in McCarthy, 2004: 84.

44 Birkland, 1998: 53.

45 Jenkins-Smith and St. Clair, 1993: 152, in McCarthy, 2004: 84; Kingdon, 1995, in McCarthy, 2004: 84.

pressures for corresponding shifts at others. The only problem is that preparedness activities can be costly and their benefits not always immediately (if ever) apparent. While from a federal perspective it might make sense to dedicate billions of dollars to prepare for low-probability, high-consequence scenarios, state and local officials may not be equally keen on spending what little resources they have at their disposal on, say, terrorism preparedness when their communities grapple on a daily basis with chronic problems, like failing schools, aging infrastructure, endemic crime and poverty, to name but a few.⁴⁶ Even if they could defend major expenditures for worst-case preparedness, it is unlikely that constituents would reward them for it.⁴⁷ For this reason, state governments may seek to ‘push’ responsibility for preparedness for low-probability, high-consequence threats either downward onto local officials or upward, onto the Federal Government.⁴⁸ Local officials who find themselves in this situation may feel that they have no choice but to push upward, in some rare cases bypassing the state level entirely. For instance, by arguing that existing threats/vulnerabilities have strategic implications, local officials may be able to convince federal authorities to bear at least some responsibility for funding the necessary preparedness measures.⁴⁹

In some instances, the Federal Government may find reason to exert pressure on state and local governments to prioritize certain threats that they themselves have not prioritized. Such pressure can take numerous forms. For instance, the Federal Government may choose to alter federal laws that state and local officials are obliged to comply with, or issue new federal guidelines that they are expected to adhere to. Another particularly effective method is to make available federal grants that can only be used to fund specific forms of preparedness activities.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that these grants are sometimes offered on a competitive basis, something which has the potential to create or exacerbate preexisting tensions between state and local authorities who end up competing against one another. In extreme cases, these tensions can influence their ability to work with one another on a day-to-day basis and, crucially, in responding to and managing disruptive events.⁵¹

This discussion demonstrates the complexity of the shared governance model as it relates to preparedness, but particularly in instances where different actors on different levels in federal systems have different ideas concerning what should be securitized. In the next section, we will theorize as to how these same actors are likely to behave during the accountability phase that typically comes in the aftermath of a major disruptive event.

46 National Academy of Public Administration, 1993: vii-viii; Parker and Stern, 2005: 312; Sbragia, 2006: 243, 255.

47 Frederickson and LaPorte, 2002: 33-43, in Kettl, 2007: 85.

48 Sapat, 2001: 351.

49 Schneider, 1995: 59.

50 Sbragia, 2006: 239, 243; Zegart, 1999.

51 Sbragia, 2006: 243, 240, 255.

Before going any further, it is important to recognize that while this study is primarily interested in the interplay between different government actors and the preparedness that comes as a result, the spectrum of actors involved in building up preparedness is in fact much broader than this. For instance, different private and non-governmental actors have key roles to play in determining priorities on the policy agenda and in providing capabilities that are complementary to those of the government that serve to strengthen overall levels of preparedness. We should also recognize the role that private citizens play in building up their own preparedness for different threats. In many instances, there would seem to be a correlation between how prepared individuals are for different eventualities and the burden that government authorities are obligated to shoulder in responding to problems when they appear.

Accountability (and learning?)

Emergency management organizations and other types of organizations involved in managing emergencies and other types of disruptive events tend to assess their performance, if not on a regular basis, then certainly in the wake of major disruptive events. The stated aim of these activities (lessons learned processes, hotwashes, after-action reviews, etc.) is to learn from past experience and identify areas for improvement.⁵² However, the literature paints a rather gloomy picture of the ability of organizations to actually learn from these exercises, let alone implement any of the prescribed changes.⁵³ According to Arjen Boin, Allen McConnell and Paul 't Hart, this is due to 'the deep institutionalization of rules, practices, budgets and communities of stakeholders' that in different ways preclude organizations from implementing meaningful change in a timely manner.⁵⁴ Instead, the learning process in the absence of significant outside scrutiny tends to result in fine-tuning, where actors make relatively minor changes to their routines, protocols, procedures, etc.⁵⁵ Organizations hope that these minor changes will be sufficient to head off criticism that might compel them to make deeper changes that promise to be disruptive, time-consuming and require that they collaborate with other actors.⁵⁶

The nature of federal systems is such that the same policymakers who provide the bureaucracy with policy direction may also assess the bureaucracy's performance in managing disruptive events. However, Parker and Stern remind us that major policy failures in particular also tend to prompt questions concerning the wisdom

52 March and Olsen, 2006b: 699; Norges offentlige utredninger, 2012; Parker and Stern, 2005: 318; Peters, 1998:10; La Porte and Consolini, 1991; Marone and Woodhouse, 1986; Sagan, 1993: 14-17; Wildavsky, 1988.

53 Bovens and 't Hart, 1996: 3.

54 Boin, et al., 2008b: 5. See also March and Olsen, 2006b: 697-698.

55 Boin, et al., 2008a: 295.

56 Boin, et al., 2008b: 5. See also Kettl, 2007: 39, 41.

of previous policymaking, which in turn threatens the credibility of policymakers themselves.⁵⁷ It is for this reason perhaps understandable then that policy failures sometimes spark intense contests involving a broad spectrum of actors over ‘the nature and depth (severity) of a crisis, its causes (agency), [and] the assignment of blame for its occurrence or escalation (responsibility)’.⁵⁸ The outcomes of these contests have significant implications for what lessons are learned and what reforms are tabled.⁵⁹ Ironically, the more attention a policy failure attracts and the more politicized it becomes, the less likely it becomes that organizations and their members will actually learn and improve on past performance. So argues Philipp Genschel, who reminds us that policy failures threaten careers, reputations and, in some instances, the continued existence of organizations.⁶⁰ As such, actors will be incentivized to ‘learn’ in ways that satisfy policy elites, but do not necessarily enhance actual organizational capabilities in future.⁶¹

2.3.2 Organizations, bureaucracies and EPMA's

An organization is defined as an entity that has a stated purpose, formalized boundaries to and relations with the external environment, and requirements for membership.⁶² Besides meeting the criteria necessary to be viewed as organizations, the federal departments and agencies that figure prominently in this study also possess archetypical bureaucratic characteristics. According to Kettl, these include:

- A mission defined by top officials;
- Fixed jurisdictions within the organization, with the scope of work defined by rules;
- Authority graded from top to bottom, with higher-level officials having more authority than those at the bottom;
- Management by written documents, which create an institutional record of work;
- Management by career experts, who embody the organization’s capacity to do work; and,
- Management by rules, which govern the discretion exercised by administrators.⁶³

57 Parker and Stern, 2005: 318.

58 Boin, et al., 2008a: 286, 287.

59 Boin, et al., 2005: 109, 111-113; Boin, et al., 2008a: 286-287; Boin, et al., 2008b: 9.

60 Genschel, 1997, in Peters, 1999.

61 Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Birkland, 2006: 10; Boin, et al., 2008b: 5; Goldstein, 1988; Hall and Taylor, 1996.

62 Selznick, 1949.

63 Kettl, 2006: 371.

Bureaucracies are relatively hierarchal entities where areas of responsibility, the scope of work within each area, and the methods by which this work is carried out are clearly defined by, among other things, rules and routines.⁶⁴ That being said, John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan argue that ‘a sharp distinction should be made between the formal structure [and activity] of an organization and its actual day-to-day work activities’. In many instances, the rules and routines that supposedly explain how organizations are to behave represent instead the ‘myths of the institutional environment’, for instance other actors’ expectations of them.⁶⁵ Bureaucracies are also typified by the tendency to seek as much autonomy as possible. This has obvious implications for principals’ ability to exercise effective control over organizations, but especially where they seek to bring about major change in organizational behaviour.⁶⁶ Bureaucracies are also resistant to change, both because it encroaches on their preference to be autonomous, and because change typically necessitates renegotiating the relationships and interdependencies that exist between different bureaucracies. This is something that most bureaucracies would prefer to avoid. According to Peters:

*[P]ublic institutions once created tend to have structural relationships with society and with powerful social actors so that changing the institutions becomes politically more difficult. They also have relationships with other institutions, so that change becomes threatening to a number of actors.*⁶⁷

These bureaucratic characteristics influence how government agencies receive, interpret and implement elite policy direction. According to Michael Lipsky, bureaucratic organizations rely on routines and protocols to ‘cope with uncertainties and work pressures’. These structures are likely to play a key role in determining how and to what extent the bureaucracy implements elite policy.⁶⁸ In other words, the ‘baseline goals’ that elites set out for the bureaucracy may be ‘resculpted at the very scene of implementation’.⁶⁹ These insights from the literature on implementation are complemented by one of the central tenets of neo-institutionalism, namely that how organizations react to policy shifts and their willingness to change as a result is influenced by the norms, rules, routines, and ideas that guide bureaucratic behaviour.⁷⁰ According to Boin, McConnell and ‘t Hart, ‘The deep institutionalization of rules, practices, budgets and communities of stakeholders’ prevents organizations from making significant changes,

64 Kettl, 2007: 47.

65 Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341-342.

66 Emmerich, 1971: 17, in Kettl, 2007: 40. See also Scott: 2008: 178, in Deverell, 81.

67 Peters, 1998: 4.

68 Lipsky, 1980: xii.

69 Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973: 256. See also Laws and Hajer, 2006: 410-411; Lipsky, 1980; Immergut, 2006: 565; Majone, 2006: 235; March and Olsen, 2006b: 698; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; and Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984.

70 Edelman, 1992.

especially where they share interdependences with one another.⁷¹ This topic is discussed later in the chapter.

In the United States, responsibility for coordinating emergency management and preparedness activities at different levels is assigned to what I refer to as emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs).⁷² Generally speaking, these are comparatively small bureaucratic organizations that are charged with coordinating the efforts of other government, private sector and non-governmental actors in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from different types of disruptive events.⁷³ Depending on their mandate, EPMAs may maintain some technical capabilities and tools that few other actors maintain - urban search and rescue (USAR), mortuary affairs expertise, highly survivable mobile communications suites, etc. Where EPMAs are organized within the government architecture varies by jurisdiction. For instance, EPMAs can be found within the executive branch or as part of another department or ministry. In some rare instances, EPMAs are their own ministries, like the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations (EMERCOM).

In the United States at least, officials have long grappled with the question of where EPMAs are best situated. In a report issued after Hurricane Andrew, for instance, the National Academy of Public Administration found that ‘the location and relationship of an emergency management agency to the institutional presidency and the President have always been variable and problematic’.⁷⁴ On the one hand, the president benefits from knowing exactly as quickly as possible that something has occurred and then acting accordingly. On the other hand, though, there are obvious advantages to an arrangement whereby other departments of government bear responsibility for emergency management (but especially where things do not go to plan). However, what is clear, Bea argues, is that the president needs to ‘be involved in emergency management functions, [given that] catastrophic disasters should involve decisions by, and with the support of, the president’.⁷⁵

Regardless of where they are organized within the government bureaucracy, EPMAs may find themselves in the thankless position of coordinating the activities of other actors who may resist being coordinated, or who are willing to be coordinated but are ill-prepared and thus unable to perform to others’ expectations. Sylves has written extensively on the relationship between FEMA and the states and local government in the context of hurricane preparedness and response. In

71 Boin, et al., 2008b: 5.

72 Klintz, 2011.

73 Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Fink, 2013; Kettl, 2007: 78-79; Seidman, 1998.

74 National Academy of Public Administration, 1993: 22.

75 Bea, 2007: 95. The report is National Academy of Public Administration, 1993: 22.

his description, FEMA is left to deal with the consequences of decisions made at other levels of government long before the onset of a hurricane, some of which serve to mitigate the impact of hurricanes and others that do not:

Pre-disaster hurricane politics [at the local level] involves decisions about zoning and setback regulations, code enforcement, beach preservation and dune protection, open space requirements, and a host of other concerns that affect a community's protection from or vulnerability to hurricanes.⁷⁶

The same is true in the immediate pre-storm period, when 'it is local governments [...] that have primary responsibility for preparing for disasters and the evacuation of residents'.⁷⁷

Circumstances such as these, which are for the most part out of the EPMA's control, may dramatically reduce the effectiveness of government's collective response to a given problem. However, the historical record suggests that EPMAs, and not weaker members in the emergency management system, risk being blamed where response outcomes are not to the satisfaction of stakeholders, not least elite policymakers. It follows then that EPMAs are particularly likely to encounter pressures to change their behaviour in the wake of major policy failures, even in instances where they were not actually at fault.

2.3.3 Technical and political-administrative dimensions of preparedness

The discussion above suggests that policymakers and government bureaucracies have different roles to play in the realm of preparedness – policy elites formulate government policy while the government bureaucracy carries out the work required so as to ensure that their policy preferences are implemented as intended. According to W. Richard Scott and John W. Meyer, these actors operate in different organizational environments, one technical and the other institutional, which overlap in ways that influence organizational preparedness. The technical environment is one 'in which a product or service is produced and exchanged in a market such that organizations are rewarded for effective and efficient control of their production systems'. The institutional environment, meanwhile, is one 'characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy'. To paraphrase Scott and Meyer, organizational success is based more on the appropriateness of the form (the 'social fitness') of the organizations involved than on the quality of their outputs.⁷⁸

These insights give rise to the notion that organizational preparedness is dependent on and determined by conditions in two distinct dimensions, one

76 Sylves, 2007: 144.

77 Sylves, 2007: 115.

78 Scott and Meyer, 1991: 123. See also Meyer and Rowan, 1991: 53.

technical and the other political-administrative. The technical dimension of preparedness concerns the methods, tools, and practices that are employed by organizations, both independently and in coordination with others, in order to achieve a certain level of preparedness. Put another way, the technical dimension concerns how and by what means organizations go about executing policy insofar as it relates to preparedness.⁷⁹ The political-administrative dimension, meanwhile, is a space inhabited by policy elites (the executive and members of the legislature, department heads, senior advisers, and other unofficial policy entrepreneurs) and senior agency administrators.⁸⁰ Here, we are concerned with the interplay that exists between elite policymakers, who make determinations as to what the bureaucracy should expend its energy and resources preparing for, and agency heads, who are expected to provide direction to the organizations under them so that elite policy is implemented as intended.⁸¹ According to Beryl Radin, how successful leaders are in implementing elite policy is in part determined by their ability to identify the different factors that constrain and enable their leadership and the organizations under them.⁸² Seen through an ideal type lens, it is typically the prerogative of the bureaucracies to determine how best to execute the technical work necessary if elite expectations are to be met. For this reason, the technical dimension of preparedness is seen as being subordinate to and dependent on the policy direction that emerges out of the policymaking process and subsequent interplay between actors in the political-administrative dimension.

In this section, we have discussed the complicated process by which policymakers set the agenda concerning what threats the bureaucracy should address. In the section that follows, we will identify a set of primary indicators of preparedness that help us gauge just how prepared organizations are to deal with these and other threats.

2.4 Primary indicators of preparedness

While the emergency management literature is largely optimistic that preparedness can be observed and measured in organizations, relatively little research has been carried out with the aim of explaining how exactly this can be accomplished in a systematic fashion, let alone identifying those indicators of preparedness that researchers should be looking for.⁸³ In this section, I will elaborate on what I argue are three primary indicators of preparedness that, when examined on a case-by-case basis, may reveal just how prepared organizations are to manage

79 Birkland, 2006: 126-127; Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009: 485.

80 Domhoff, 1992; Skrentny, 2006; Svava, 1998.

81 Cook, et al., 2002; Fischer, 1991.

82 Radin, 2002: 70.

83 Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 157, 159, 163-165.

different threats.⁸⁴ These indicators, namely inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols, are inspired by findings in the existing body of literature on preparedness, organizations, bureaucracies and neo-institutionalism. Assuming these indicators are shown to be relevant when applied to the case at hand, they will be included in the diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness that is presented in Chapter 6.

2.4.1 Inter-organizational relations

One of the main assumptions underpinning this study is that the larger and more complex the problem, the more actors will be involved in managing it.⁸⁵ Policymakers expect that the responsible bureaucracies will coordinate their activities so as to ensure a seamless multi-level interagency response.⁸⁶ Though effective multi-level interagency coordination is hardly a guarantee of success, actors who enjoy good working relations with others are more likely to solve problems on a collaborative basis than those who do not. That being said, it is important to be aware of the possibility that bureaucracies will be seen to coordinate with one another for the sake of appearances (because others expect them to do so), and that the actual relations that exist between the actors involved may in fact be quite poor.⁸⁷

2.4.2 Threat identification/prioritization

Bureaucracies may possess mechanisms intended to facilitate the work of identifying external threats and internal vulnerabilities that have the potential to weaken their ability to effectively respond to externalities.⁸⁸ Ideally, the threats and/or vulnerabilities that they identify through this process are weighed against one another in a systematic fashion, allowing organizations to decide which are most pressing and, thus, worthy of closer attention. However, where discrepancies exist between the bureaucracy's own threat/vulnerability assessments and elite priorities, they may find themselves compelled to favour the interests of policymakers over their own. They otherwise risk losing elite support and legitimacy.

84 von Schirnding, 2002: 19.

85 Eisinger, 2006. See also Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Kettl, 2007: 26, 39; and March and Olsen, 2006b: 693.

86 Boin and Bynander, forthcoming; Clarke, 1999: 2; Dynes, 1983; Fayol, 1949; Faraj and Xiao, 2006; Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 157; Harmon and Mayer, 1986; McEntire, 2007: 414; Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009; Parker, et al., 2009; Perry, 2004: 66; Perry and Lindell, 2003: 338; Perry and Lindell, 2007: 8; Quarantelli, 1980: 50-51; and Quarantelli, 2000: 19.

87 Jones, 2006.

88 Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 155; Reason, 2006: 247, 249.

2.4.3 Routines and protocols

Bureaucracies are dependent on routines and protocols in order to function both under normal conditions and in times of crisis. Plans, guidelines, frameworks, standard operating procedures (SOPs), mutual aid agreements, partnership arrangements, etc. are important tools that are intended to facilitate effective multi-level interagency coordination of effort in the event that problems arise. By explaining who should do what, routines and protocols serve to reduce transaction costs and the uncertainty that actors might otherwise feel when they are required to interact with one another. That being said, it is important to recall Meyer and Rowan, who assert that ‘a sharp distinction should be made between the formal structure of an organization and its actual day-to-day work activities’.⁸⁹ According to Clarke, routines and protocols may constitute ‘fantasy documents’ that reflect stakeholders’ expectation of them, and not how organizations actually intend to behave in different circumstances.⁹⁰

2.5 A neo-institutional view on preparedness in federal systems

The preceding sections help us to better understand the process by which organizations work to prepare for threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda in federal systems of government. Neo-institutionalism, which is primarily concerned with the effects that institutional pressures have on the behaviour of actors, provides an additional lens through which to see and understand this process.

Up until the early 1950s, the field of political science was largely a normative one that sought to promote good governance in political institutions.⁹¹ In the original institutionalists’ view at the time, the behaviour of actors was constrained solely by things like formal rules, frameworks of law, and organizational design. However, the appearance of behaviouralism and rational choice theory in the 1960s brought these assumptions into question.⁹² Over the decades that followed, some scholars would grow increasingly worried that the institutional environment’s role in generating, among other things, norms, rules and routines that constrained and enabled behaviour was no longer being taken into account.⁹³ It was out of these concerns that neo-institutionalism (otherwise referred to as new institutionalism) was born in the late 1970s.⁹⁴ According to the original neo-institutionalists, James G. March and Richard P. Olsen, this new body of theory provided:

89 Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341-342.

90 Clarke, 1999.

91 Commons, 1910; Cooley, 1930; Krier, 2009: 395-397; Mitchell, 1935; Veblen, 1948.

92 Campbell, et al., 1960; Franklin, 1985; Peters, 1999: 8, 11, 12-14.

93 DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Hay, 2002: 10-11; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977.

94 March and Olsen, 1989; North, 1990; Peters, 1999: 18; Pierson, 1994; Skocpol, 1979; Steinmo, et al., 1992.

[...] a set of theoretical ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance and change [that] emphasizes the endogenous nature and social construction of political institutions. Institutions are not simply equilibrium contracts among self-seeking, calculating individual actors or arenas for contending social forces. They are collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life.⁹⁵

The field of neo-institutionalism would grow in the years that followed as other bodies of theory were combined with or incorporated into March and Olsen's original conceptualization, creating different 'streams' of neo-institutionalism.⁹⁶ That these streams have sometimes very different theoretical pedigrees has prompted considerable debate as to just how broadly the field of neo-institutionalism should be defined. While some scholars argue that the streams have few commonalities bar their rejection of behaviouralism and rational choice theory, Peters instead advocates a 'big tent' approach, given that '[the streams] consider institutions the central component of political life'. If nothing else, he argues, the 'discussion of one of the approaches naturally [leads] to a discussion of some aspect of another'.⁹⁷ While I find the question of how broadly or narrowly to define neo-institutionalism an interesting one, I choose not to engage in it at this stage. That being said, key claims from different sides of the debate have served to inform the process by which I have selected the streams of neo-institutionalism that will be applied to the case at hand. For instance, it is important that the chosen streams are sufficiently specified and have similar views on what institutions are and how actors interact with one another within them. Otherwise, it might be difficult to make general claims concerning the utility of neo-institutionalism in studying cases like this.⁹⁸ It is with these considerations in mind that I have chosen normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism for use in this study. Besides being comparatively well-developed, they share the view that 'institutions matter' and 'history matters' in constraining and enabling actors' behaviour.⁹⁹ Institutions matter insofar as they have a 'mediating' effect on otherwise unbounded political processes (either by creating expectations as to what is appropriate or by putting in place sanctions (consequentiality) that serve to punish certain forms of behaviour and reward others. Meanwhile, history matters to the extent that the legacy of the past sets

95 March and Olsen, 2006a: 4.

96 Garrett and Weingast, 1993; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Krasner, 1984; Kreps, D., 1990; Peters, 1999: 19.

97 Peters, 1999: 19. See also Garrett and Weingast, 1993; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Krasner, 1984; and Kreps, D., 1990.

98 Campbell, 1998; George and Bennett, 2005: 77, 116, 182; Hall and Taylor, 1996: 14-15, 20; Pedersen, 1991; Peters, 1998; Peters, 1999: 90-91, 128.

99 Hay, 2002: 46.

organizations on paths that limit the range of available policy options available to them at later points in time. In the parlance of the historical institutionalists, this is referred to as path dependency.¹⁰⁰

In the discussion below, we shall explore the unique perspectives that the different streams of neo-institutionalism provide us concerning how different actors will behave, especially in the event of major institutional change, defined here as significant and lasting change across the spectrum of institutions that constrain and enable the behaviour of actors. This is followed by a brief discussion of what I refer to as the actor-centric institutional environment that each individual actor exists within and is constrained and enabled by. It is only once we understand this environment that we can begin to identify those institutional forces that influence how actors behave, as well as the sources of and/or impetuses for institutional change of the kind that we are concerned with here.

2.5.1 Three streams of neo-institutionalism

In this section the three streams of neo-institutionalism that are considered in this study are discussed. These include normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism.

Normative institutionalism

Normative institutionalism, the ‘original’ neo-institutionalism first articulated by March and Olsen, sees institutions consisting of norms, values, rules and routines that serve to ‘define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations’, what is otherwise referred to as the logic of appropriateness.¹⁰¹ The individuals who belong to these institutions are motivated to participate not by the prospect of personal gain, but because they are committed ‘to the goals of the organization, or at least [accept] the legitimate claims of the organization (or institution) for individual commitment’.¹⁰² Here, individual behaviour is seen to be ‘intentional but not wilful’ insofar as it is strongly influenced by prevailing institutional values and norms.¹⁰³ That being said, the literature on normative institutionalism is somewhat vague as to when exactly individual interests and organizational goals coincide. Are individuals attracted to like-minded organizations, or do organizations and other forms of socializing mechanisms have the power to shift the interests and preferences of individuals such that they come to share the same goals as the organization that they are members of?¹⁰⁴

100 Hay, 2002: 14, 46; Peters, 1999: 174-175.

101 March and Olsen, 1989: 21-26. See also Barnard, 1938; Downs, 1957; Khademian, 2002; March and Olsen, 1984; March and Olsen, 1996; Peters, 1999: 25-46; and Selznick, 1949.

102 Peters, 1999: 27.

103 March and Olsen, 1989: 161.

104 Dowding, 1994; Jordan, 1990; March and Olsen, 1996; Mills, 1940: 908; Pedersen, 1991; Peters, 1999: 26-27; Sened, 1991; Searing, 1991; Wildavsky, 1987.

March and Olsen argue that policy failures in particular are likely to create opportunities for institutional change. These are 'transformative periods where established orders are delegitimized, are challenged, or collapse'.¹⁰⁵ Peters suggests that in such instances, institutions have 'the option either of reinforcing commitment to the old values or finding some way of making effective changes'.¹⁰⁶ Where institutions choose the latter option, normative institutionalism would have us expect that they will prefer to draw on pre-existing sets of standard responses. In this, the so-called garbage can model of change, organizations are only forced to develop new sets of responses where all readily available policy responses in the garbage can have been exhausted or are otherwise ill-suited to the situation at hand.¹⁰⁷

Normative institutionalism is not without its critics, who primarily adhere to the rational choice school of political science.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Keith Dowding argues that individuals have considerably more autonomy than normative institutionalism is prepared to acknowledge.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Kjell Goldman worries that the notion of appropriateness is vague, thereby making it difficult to falsify.¹¹⁰ According to Tom Christensen and Kjell Arne Røvik, this problem becomes particularly obvious in studying multi-level organizations, where the notion of what is 'appropriate' is likely to be different at different organizational levels.¹¹¹

Historical institutionalism

A central theme of historical institutionalism is that policy choices made at the point of institutional inception continue to influence patterns of institutional behaviour over time.¹¹² This notion (that history matters) is otherwise referred to as path dependency.¹¹³ According to Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, path dependency is a 'type of causal process [that] occurs in cases that consist of a sequence of events, some of which foreclose certain paths in the development and steer the outcome in other directions'.¹¹⁴ In other words, historical institutionalism emphasizes continuity of behaviour over time. At the same time, though, historical institutionalism does allow for institutions to overcome persisting, historically determined patterns of behaviour in the event of

105 March and Olsen, 2006b: 700.

106 Peters, 1998: 10.

107 Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972. See also Peters, 1999: 37.

108 Jordan, 1990; Pedersen, 1991; Sened, 1991; Searing, 1991.

109 Dowding, 1994, in Peters, 1999: 43.

110 Goldman, 2005.

111 Christensen and Røvik, 1999.

112 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 7.

113 Hall, 1986; King, 1995; Krasner, 1984; Pierson, 2000; Pierson and Skocpol, 2002; Skocpol, 1992; Steinmo and Longstreth, 1992; Peters, 1999: 72.

114 George and Bennett, 2005: 213.

a focusing event (otherwise referred to in the literature as an ‘external shock’ or ‘frame-breaking’ event).¹¹⁵ In such instances, Frank K. Baumgartner and Bryan Jones suggest, ‘Forces tend to build and then to erupt explosively in large, fundamental change’. Here, ‘important political questions’ suddenly come into focus and are elevated on the policy agenda, thereby increasing the likelihood for policy change.¹¹⁶ However, critics argue that the notion of punctuated equilibrium fails to satisfactorily explain major institutional change that occurs in the absence of a major disruptive event.¹¹⁷ Punctuated equilibrium has also been criticized for its apparent reliance on exogenous factors to create conditions for change. In other words, few allowances are made for institutional members themselves to create pressures for change from within.¹¹⁸ In an attempt to address these criticisms, Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen have proposed that gradual institutional change takes place in four different ways, namely: displacement (shifts in rules); layering (new rules as complements to/on top of existing rules); drift (rule changes due to environmental changes); and conversion (utilizing existing rules in unintended ways).¹¹⁹

No matter what prompts it, historical institutionalism stipulates that a necessary precondition for institutional change is shifts in the ideas that guide patterns of institutional behaviour. For instance, Ellen M. Immergut’s research on implementation of health care policy showed that making significant changes to medical policy in the United States necessitated shifts in doctors’ notions concerning what good medical practice was. In Immergut’s view, the doctors constituted so-called veto points in the process of revising national health care policy. Without their consent, policy change would have been impossible. Immergut’s argument is that the more veto points exist within a given policy area, the less likely institutional change is to occur.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Tsebelis suggests that institutional change is particularly unlikely where the veto players lack common political aims and interests.¹²¹ Even where they may have common aims, Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor remind us that asymmetries of power are nevertheless likely to exist, ‘[giving] some groups or interests disproportionate access to the decision-making process’.¹²²

115 Boin and ‘t Hart, 2003; Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007; Gould, 1996; Hay, 2002: 15; Raddatz, 2007.

116 Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 20-21, in Kettl, 2007: 130-131. See also Lindblom, 1959.

117 Peters, 1999: 78.

118 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 17; Krasner, 1984; Peters, 1998: 20; Peters, 1999: 82.

119 Streeck and Thelen, 2005. See also Thelen, 2009.

120 Immergut, 1990; Immergut, 1992a; Immergut, 1992b; Immergut, 2006: 567. See also Hall, 1986; Hall, 1989; Hall, 1992; Peters, 1999: 74; Reich, 1990.

121 Tsebelis, 1995.

122 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 9. See also Steinmo, 1993.

Rational choice institutionalism

In Helen V. Milner's view, 'much of the "new institutionalism" [...] has focused on institutions to explain political outcomes while disregarding actors' interests'.¹²³ Rational choice institutionalism, which sees individuals as rational actors who voluntarily choose to join institutions in the hope of increasing the likelihood that they will be able to achieve their own interests and preferences, would seem to address this issue.¹²⁴ Rational choice institutionalism differs from the body of rational choice theory that emerged in the 1960s in its recognition of the various constraints (primarily in the form of rules) that institutions impose on the self-interested behaviour of individuals.¹²⁵ Deviations from these institutional rules are discouraged by the threat of sanctions. From this perspective, individuals rely on the so-called logic of consequentiality in order to avoid being sanctioned while at the same time maximizing their utility as institutional members.¹²⁶ Though institutions might impose constraints on individuals' behaviour, the rational choice institutionalists hold that they nevertheless provide 'more benefits [...] than alternate institutional forms'.¹²⁷

Before proceeding to discuss different strains of rational choice institutionalism, it is necessary to define the interests that individuals seek to achieve through membership in institutions. In her discussion of economic and political actors in *Interests, Institutions, and Information*, Milner equates the interests of actors with 'their fundamental goals, which change little' over time. In her example:

*The interests of economic actors involve maximizing income, whereas those of political actors largely concern maximizing the chances of retaining political office. On any issue, these generic interests do not distinguish among political actors or economic ones.*¹²⁸

A given actor's preferences, meanwhile, 'derive from their interests':

*Preferences refer to the specific policy choice that actors believe will maximize either their income or changes of reelection on a particular issue. Although all political actors may share the same interest, their policy preferences will vary according to their political situation, for example, their party affiliation, constituency characteristics, and so on. [...] Interests are the stable foundation on which actors' preferences over policy shift as their situation and the policy area vary. Preferences are a variable; interests are not.*¹²⁹

123 Milner, 1997: 15.

124 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 13, 20.

125 Duquech, 2001; Peters, 1999: 48, 49.

126 Christensen, 2011.

127 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 13, 20.

128 Milner, 1997: 15.

129 Milner, 1997: 15.

The three main strains of rational choice institutionalism provide different ways of understanding the behaviour of individuals and any change that can be witnessed in organizations. The first strain, principal-agent theory, emphasizes efforts by organizational elites and elected officials (principals) to exert control over the bureaucracies (agents) that are responsible for implementing elite policy.¹³⁰ However, like principals, agents too have goals that they hope to achieve. In some instances, the aims of principals and agents run counter to one another.¹³¹ Where this is the case, principals need to develop structures that allow them to ensure that policy is actually implemented as intended.¹³² However, principal-agent theory suggests that this is a difficult balancing act, where principals must be prepared to cede just enough power to bureaucracies such that they can be permitted to implement elite policy, but not so much that bureaucracies are able to threaten policymakers' sovereignty.¹³³ Principals have at their disposal different forms of control over their agents, including 'oversight – monitoring, hearings, investigations, budgetary reviews, sanctions – and procedural constraints'.¹³⁴ Their control over bureaucracies may also be enhanced through the selection of so-called good agents who they can trust to implement policy to the satisfaction of elites.¹³⁵

Game theory, meanwhile, sees principals and agents locked in long-running competition with one another.¹³⁶ Regardless of the specific context in which such competition takes place, the behaviour of principals and agents is determined by expectations as to how the other will act (Tucker's prisoners' dilemma). Disincentives exist for the various parties to defect early on for fear that this may result in sanctions at a later stage. In Hall and Taylor's view, games like this prevent actors from acting in ways that promote collectively superior outcomes. Instead, outcomes tend to be 'collectively sub-optimal'.¹³⁷

The final strain of rational choice institutionalism is rules-based. Here, institutions are seen to be aggregations of rules that serve to 'prescribe, proscribe and permit' behaviour by institutional members.¹³⁸ In exchange for following the rules, individuals gain access to any benefits that institutional membership might entail. As Peters points out, this strain shares some similarities with normative institutionalism insofar as they both rely on 'standards of behaviour to establish the nature of the structures'.¹³⁹ That being said, sanctions feature more prominently in the rules-based perspective.

130 Banks and Weingast, 1992; Hall and Taylor, 1996: 12; Peters, 1999: 56-57.

131 Krause, 1999; Krause and Meier, 2005.

132 Peters, 1999: 56-57.

133 Kettl, 2006: 374.

134 Majone, 2006: 235.

135 Kettl, 2006: 369.

136 Peters, 1999: 58-59.

137 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 12.

138 Peters, 1998: 17. See also Ostrom, 1986; and Ostrom, 1990.

139 Peters, 1999: 53.

Like many other streams of neo-institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism has been criticized for failing to adequately explain where exactly institutions stem from.¹⁴⁰ This stream of theory is intentionalist insofar as sets of rational actors are in control of the process of creating and then running institutions in ways that allow them to achieve their goals.¹⁴¹ To the critics, however, it is not at all clear that actors are in fact capable of exerting the necessary levels of control, let alone having access to all the information required, to make the decisions necessary to create institutions like this.¹⁴²

2.5.2 *The actor-centric institutional environment*

The streams of neo-institutionalism discussed above provide different albeit related views on the institutional environment in which actors operate. For the purposes of this study, institutions are seen as collections of norms, rules, routines, and values that create pressures on actors to behave in certain ways, either out of respect for what is appropriate so as to avoid being sanctioned, or some combination thereof.¹⁴³ It is for this reason that institutions are seen to contribute to behavioural predictability where they promote 'patterned interactions that are [...] based upon specified relationships among [relevant] actors'.¹⁴⁴ According to Scott and Meyer, institutional environments are characterized by:

*the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy. The requirements may stem from regulatory agencies authorized by the nation-state, from professional or trade associations, from generalized belief systems that define how specific types of organizations are to conduct themselves, and similar sources. [...] Whatever their source, organizations are rewarded for conforming to these rules or beliefs.*¹⁴⁵

According to Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, the institutional environment '[penetrates every given] organization, creating the lenses through which actors view the world and the very categories of structure, action, and thought'.¹⁴⁶ While I share DiMaggio and Powell's view concerning the function that the institutional environment plays in determining how different actors see and relate to the world around them, I would argue that it is important to emphasize that no two actors operate within one and the same institutional environment. In other

140 Peters, 1999: 60.

141 Goodin, 1995; Kliemt, 1990.

142 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 19. See also Goodin, 1995; and Weimer, 1995.

143 March and Olsen, 1989: 21-26, in Peters, 2011: 30.

144 Peters, 2011: 19-20. See also Hall, 1986; Ikenberry, 1988: 222-223; Jung, 2005; and Thelen and Steinmo, 1992: 2-4.

145 Scott and Meyer, 1991: 123.

146 DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 13. See also: Selznick, 1949; Gouldner, 1954; Dalton, 1959; Clark, 1960; Scott and Meyer, 1991.

words, there are as many institutional environments as there are actors, as Michael Howlett and M. Ramesh suggest.¹⁴⁷ For instance, while FEMA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) work together in preparing for major public health emergencies, the CDC has little contact with FEMA in meeting its responsibilities in other policy domains. In other words, the two agencies exist within different institutional environments, albeit ones that overlap in different ways. It follows that major institutional change is likely to influence individual actors with their own unique sets of interests and preferences operating within their own unique institutional environments differently.

Actors and the unique institutional environments that they operate within are influenced by developments in the wider political sphere, what I refer to in this study as the political-administrative dimension. According to Manning and Westreicher, institutions 'are the substance of which politics is constructed and – by underpinning power structures, patterns of interests and patronage systems – a vehicle through which the practice of politics is transmitted'.¹⁴⁸ In other words, understanding the institutional environment in which a given actor operates requires taking into account the wider political sphere. It is equally important to take into account the type of government system in which the actors exist. This is likely to influence the norms, rules, routines and values in the institutional environment that constrain and enable the behaviour of actors. For instance, actors responding to complex problems in federal systems will be expected to coordinate their activities over agency boundaries and between administrative levels. The contacts that take place between actors as a result may shape the norms, rules, routines and values that they are all guided by. On the other hand, these contacts are just as likely to reveal that actors have completely different motivations, ideas about how things are done, and levels of engagement, making it all the more difficult to achieve effective coordination of effort.

In the figure below, the institutional environments unique to three different actors (Actor X, Actor Y and Actor Z) are shown to exist within a single political-administrative dimension. Each actor is seen to be guided by a set of norms, rules, routines and values unique to that actor. Where overlap exists between the institutional environments of the different actors, we are likely to see the development of common sets of norms, rules, routines and values, or, at the very least, pressures for actors to adhere and/or adapt to the norms, rules, routines and values of one another.

147 Howlett and Ramesh, 2009: 43-44.

148 Manning and Westreicher, 146.

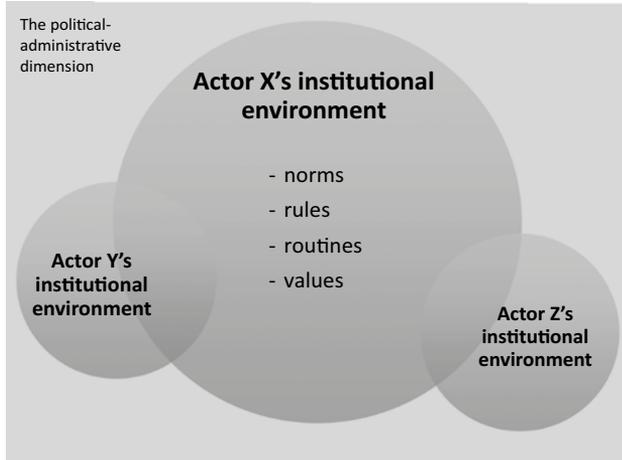


Figure 1. The actor-centric institutional environment

Obviously, actors operating in a complex multi-level interagency environment are likely to come into contact with far more actors than those depicted here. The figure above is merely intended to illustrate the overlapping nature of different actors' institutional environments.

2.6 Research hypotheses

The different streams of neo-institutionalism described above provide us with different views as to what motivates individuals to join organizations, what constraints institutions place on individuals and organizations, how change in institutions can be explained, and then how institutional change influences individual and organizational behaviour and, thus, their preparedness to deal with different types of problems.

This section aims to briefly set out four research hypotheses that relate in different ways to the different streams of neo-institutionalism. Each hypothesis supposes how actors (FEMA in this case) will behave in the event of major institutional change (which I argue came in the wake of the 9/11 attacks), and what effects this change will have on their preparedness to manage different problems. Furthermore, each research hypothesis relates in one way or another to the primary indicators of preparedness (inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols) that were presented in section 2.4. In testing the various hypotheses in the chapters that follow, we should be able to see evidence to suggest just how useful the different indicators actually are as gauges of organizational preparedness.

The question of how these four hypotheses will be confirmed or rejected is revisited in the discussion on methodology in Chapter 3.

2.6.1 Hypothesis I

The normative institutionalists' view is that the behaviour of actors is determined by the norms, rules, routines, and values that exist in the institutional environment relevant to them. Assuming that this is in fact the case, one could hypothesize on a general basis that:

The more organizations are defined by deeply entrenched sets of norms, rules, routines, and values, and the deeper the structural relations between one another, the more difficult it is for them to make adjustments to commitments, values and aims in the event that priorities change in the overarching policy arena.

The case-specific research hypothesis follows:

The more deeply entrenched the norms, rules, routines and values that constrain and enable FEMA's behaviour, the less likely the agency will be to alter its mission and the focus of its activities in the event that priorities change on the policy agenda.

2.6.2 Hypothesis II

Historical institutionalism holds that policy choices made at the point of institutional inception will continue to influence patterns of behaviour over time (path dependency). Seen from this perspective, organizations are only able to overcome these patterns of behaviour where major focusing events punctuate the existing equilibrium through the creation of forces for change that are stronger than those that keep actors on a given policy path and compel them to behave in a certain historically determined ways. Seen through the historical institutionalists' lens, then, one might assume that:

The greater and more sudden the emergence of pressures for change in the institutional environment, the more likely an organization is to deviate from its current path determined by earlier policy choices, and the more likely the organization's behaviour is to change.

The hypothesis as it relates to the case at hand follows:

The greater and more sudden the emergence of pressures for change in the institutional environment, the more likely FEMA will be to alter its priorities concerning what threats it prepares for.

2.6.3 Hypothesis IIIa

Whereas normative institutionalism and historical institutionalism are primarily interested in factors that influence overall organizational behaviour, rational choice institutionalism is most interested in explaining why utility-maximizing individuals choose to join institutions, how they go about leveraging them in pursuit

of their own interests, and how institutions are nevertheless able to constrain their behaviour. As such, rational choice institutionalism is particularly useful in hypothesizing about how individuals, especially those in leadership positions, are likely to behave in the face of major change in the institutional environment. The assumption here, which borrows heavily from the principal-agent and rules-based strains of theory, is that:

The more individual leaders work to ensure that the priorities of the organizations that they lead are aligned with those on the overarching policy agenda (by acting as (or at least being perceived to be) 'good agents'), the more likely they are to achieve their own interests.

More specifically:

The more individual leaders at FEMA work to ensure that the agency is prepared to manage threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda (by acting as (or at least being perceived to be) 'good agents'), the more likely they will be to achieve their own interests.

2.6.4 Hypothesis IIIb

The notion that organizational preparedness is determined by developments in two separate dimensions, one technical and the other political-administrative, was introduced in section 2.3.3. Conceiving of preparedness in this way gives rise to the idea that the professional background, competences, and work-related experience that leaders possess, what I refer to here as their professional profile, will influence how they perceive and respond to major change in the institutional environment. We might assume that individuals with a political or administrative (managerial) background are likely to be particularly sensitive to developments in the political-administrative context, but especially in times of change. In the same way, leaders with a technical background are likely to be more interested in the operations of the organizations that they lead and the tools that they use to carry them out than in the concerns of policy elites. As a result, developments in the institutional environment, not least shifts in elite attention, may be neglected. Of course, we should also allow for situations where individuals with a political-administrative background are interested in and have a good working knowledge of technical issues, and vice versa, where 'technician'-style leaders follow and are responsive to shifts in elite policy and/or other forms of change in the institutional environment. According to Manning and Westreicher, 'Being aware of the "nature of the [political] game" is likely to enhance performance'.¹⁴⁹ The assumption here is that individuals who are sensitive to and understand the

149 Manning and Westreicher, 146.

implications of change in the political-administrative dimension will be more effective agents than those who do not.

The hypothesis below depicts the relationship between the individual's professional profile and his or her behaviour in the event of major institutional change:

If an organizational leader has an administrative or political background, his or her motives will be informed by various administrative and political considerations. On the other hand, if an organizational leader has a technical background, he or she will be primarily motivated by the technical standards of his or her profession.

The hypothesis as it relates to this study is stated below:

If members of the FEMA leadership have a political or administrative background, they will be more likely to act (and direct the agency they lead to act) in accordance with change in the institutional environment. Meanwhile, individuals with a technical background are less likely to be responsive to institutional change unless it corresponds with what they believe to be appropriate based on the technical standards of their profession.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented an institutional perspective on preparedness that draws on insights from a wide range of disciplines, including preparedness, emergency management, public administration, security studies, and political science. Using the institutional perspective, we are able to frame different disruptive events as foreseeable complex problems, which entail a number of different challenges that actors must face. Furthermore, the institutional perspective depicts both the process by which different threats (problems) achieve (and lose) prominence on the policy agenda, and the interplay that exists between principals and their agents, in this case a small set of actors within the federal bureaucracy. This chapter also builds on the existing literature on preparedness where it seeks to identify a small number of primary indicators of preparedness that can be used to show just how prepared different organizations are for different eventualities. Besides being useful in structuring the analysis in Chapter 5, the indicators are vital to the task of developing the diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness that is presented at the end of the study.

At its core, the institutional perspective on preparedness relies on insights from neo-institutionalism, which sees actors operating in an institutional environment that consists of norms, rules, routines and values that serve to constrain and enable their behaviour in different ways. When viewed through different neo-institutional lenses, it is possible to discern different explanations as to where institutional change comes from and why organizations behave as they do in

different contexts. Insights from the different streams of neo-institutionalism described in section 2.5 provide a foundation on which to base the set of hypotheses that were presented in this chapter, and will be evaluated over the course of the chapters to come. Doing so should bring us closer to solving the puzzle that drives this research, namely what explains FEMA's pre-Katrina preparedness to manage hurricanes in what was otherwise an era of heightened attention to homeland security? In the following chapter, I shall present the research design and methodology that are used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research design and method

3.1 Introduction

As the discussion in the preceding chapter illustrates, different streams of neo-institutionalism offer different predictions concerning how actors will behave in the event of major change in the institutional environment. The streams are used in this study to examine the behaviour of a single federal bureaucracy (the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA) in managing one type of foreseeable complex problem (hurricanes) prior to and after the onset of major institutional change (following the 9/11 attacks) from different theoretical angles. Ideally, doing so will yield insights that enable us to answer the research question that forms the basis for this study, namely:

What are the conditions that promoted change in FEMA so as to generate (or prevent the generation of) high levels of preparedness in managing hurricanes?

In this chapter, the case study methodology that is employed in studying the case is described, followed by a discussion of how the independent variable (institutional change) and the dependent variable (hurricane preparedness) will be operationalized, which objects will be studied, which methods will be used to study them, and the source selection process. In the latter half of the chapter, the hypothesis confirmation or rejection process, research limitations, and the prospects for generalizability are discussed.

3.2 A single-case case study methodology

This study utilizes a single-case case study methodology, which has been chosen because it allows for the case (government management of a specific type of foreseeable complex problem) to be approached from different theoretical

angles.¹ This methodology is suitable for other reasons as well. For instance, the case at hand is a large one that spans several decades and involves many different actors, including a dozen congresses and four presidential administrations, all of which had a role to play in determining the conditions under which FEMA operated. The single-case methodology is able to accommodate complex, empirically dense cases like this.² Furthermore, this methodology should be useful in filling certain gaps in the existing body of knowledge on any number of subjects, not least the history of emergency management policy, practice and organization in the United States over the past few decades.³

However, the single-case case study methodology does have certain weaknesses that need to be recognized and taken into account. For instance, Gary King warns that case studies of this kind 'have limited success in theory building [and] cannot exclude alternative theories'. Furthermore, 'Their findings are limited by the possibility of measurement error, probabilistic causal mechanisms, and omitted variables'.⁴ While valid points all, the view here is that these limitations can be managed through the use of process tracing (described in section 3.2.4), which allows for many observations on the dependent variable. The data set generated through process tracing should provide a robust basis for theory testing while simultaneously reducing the risk for different types of measurement error.

3.2.1 Case selection

The general phenomena being studied here are complex problems and how government bureaucracies operating in a federal setting manage them. In this case, we will examine a single government agency (FEMA) and how it worked over time (its behaviour) to address a specific foreseeable complex problem (the seasonal hurricane threat facing the nation) prior to and then after an instance of major institutional change (prompted by the 9/11 attacks in September 2001), or, put another way:

FEMA's activities between 1979 and 22 August 2005 in independently and together with other federal, state and local authorities preparing for a possible hurricane affecting the United States.

1 Eckstein, 1975: 99, in George and Bennett, 2005: 75. The chosen methodology is inspired by other notable studies that use case studies to test theory. These include Allison's 1971 study of the Cuban Missile Crisis and Sagan's study of US nuclear safety using normal accidents and high reliability organizations (HRO) theory (Allison, 1971; Sagan, 1993: 49, in George and Bennett, 2005: 118-119). See also Denzin, 1978; and Webb, et al., 1966.

2 Hay, 2002: 47. See also George and Bennett, 2005: 81.

3 George and Bennett, 2005: 93.

4 King, et al., 1994: 208-211, in George and Bennett, 2005: 220.

The year 1979 was the first year in which a single agency of government (FEMA) was responsible for coordinating the totality of federal emergency preparedness and management activities. (Having said this, it is important to recognize that some of FEMA's preparedness responsibilities were reassigned to other parts of the federal bureaucracy, soon after FEMA joined the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).⁵) Meanwhile, 22 August 2005 has been chosen as an end point for the case in light of the fact that this was arguably the last point at which FEMA could engage in general preparedness activities without having any specific knowledge that a large-scale hurricane was likely to strike south-eastern Louisiana in the coming days. That being said, it is important to emphasize that this case is squarely focused on FEMA's hurricane preparedness activities generally, and not its hurricane preparedness relating to the New Orleans scenario specifically.

Before going any further, it is necessary to acknowledge the massive decades-long effort led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and other federal, state and local authorities to build flood protection infrastructure in and around the city of New Orleans. However, these efforts fall beyond the scope of this study, given that flood protection tends to be organized within the mitigation phase in the emergency management cycle, not the preparedness phase.

This case has been chosen for the fact that FEMA failed to effectively respond to Katrina. By all accounts, FEMA's preparedness to manage a major hurricane (the dependent variable) was inadequate in the face of Katrina and I hope to establish why this was the case. However, it should be said that the decision to choose a case based on pre-knowledge of the value of the dependent variable at a given point in time (August 2005) is frowned upon by neo-positivists. For instance, Barbara Geddes argues that while cases selected on the dependent variable may be 'ideal for digging into the details' and may serve to 'identify plausible causal variables', they typically fail to 'test the theories they propose, and, hence, can not contribute to the accumulation of theoretical knowledge'.⁶ On the other hand, George and Bennett suggest that the selection of cases on the basis of known outcomes '[makes] the process-tracing test of [the] theory more severe' than it otherwise might be.⁷ I find this and other arguments in favour of selecting cases on the basis of the dependent variable more compelling than those against.⁸ That being said, it is nevertheless important that various 'methodological safeguards' (including process tracing and congruence testing) are put in place so as to mitigate the risk for selection bias.⁹

5 Peters, 2011: 76; Stern, 2003: 42.

6 Geddes, 1990. See also Achen, 1986, in Dion, 1998: 127-145; and King, et al., 1994, in Dion, 1998: 127-145.

7 George and Bennett, 2005: 23, 24.

8 Hall, 2000, in George and Bennett, 2005: 206.

9 Flyvbjerg, 2006. See also Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 56-91.

3.2.2 *The independent and dependent variables*

The institutional environment is conceptualized as an actor-centric one that consists of norms, rules, routines and values that serve to constrain and enable the behaviour of actors in different ways. It follows that change in the institutional environment will prompt varying degrees of change to these institutional forces, which in turn will influence how actors behave. In my view, major institutional change is most likely to occur where a major disruptive event of an exogenous nature focuses elite attention on a given policy issue/set of policy issues, resulting in change to the norms, rules, routines and values that make up, in this case at least, the institutional environment unique to FEMA (the independent variable, X). As some combination of these institutional forces change, we would expect to see at least some change to the way in which FEMA behaves and, thus, its preparedness for hurricanes (the dependent variable, Y). In other words, we should expect to see FEMA's preparedness to manage hurricanes change as change occurs in the institutional environment specific to FEMA. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables is depicted in the figure below.



Figure 2. The independent and dependent variables

The case is divided at the point of major institutional change into two phases using the before-after approach (otherwise referred to as the within-case method of causal interpretation).¹⁰ Assuming that major institutional change is only possible as the result of a focusing event, it is necessary to identify those events during the period under study (1979-2005) that were able to bring considerable amounts of attention to bear on the field of emergency management. With the pre-knowledge available to me at the outset of this study, the fall of the Soviet Union, Hurricane Andrew, and the 9/11 attacks would appear to meet this criterion.¹¹ As the threat of nuclear war faded following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of the resources that had been used to build up and maintain the massive national civil defence apparatus that existed in the United States could now be used to deal with other issues instead. The question was which. Hurricane Andrew, which happened to make landfall just as this debate was taking off,

10 van den Bosch and Cantillon, 2006: 298-299; George and Bennett, 2005: 166.

11 Other possibilities that were considered include the Love Canal environmental disaster (first detected in the late 1970s), the Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989), the Loma Prieta and Northridge earthquakes (1989 and 1994, respectively), and the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

revealed serious gaps in the Federal Government's capabilities necessary to deal with natural disasters. Though the storm and the problems that it revealed would capture policymakers' attention in the months to come, the nation's strategic emergency management architecture at the federal level went largely untouched. While it was clear that FEMA would be expected to pay more attention to natural disasters in the future, little was done to alter FEMA's mandate, give it more resources, or redraw the burdensome oversight landscape that the agency was forced to operate in. In other words, the policy debate during the first half of the 1990s resulted in nothing more than fine-tuning at FEMA and the field of emergency management more broadly.

The terror attacks that struck the United States during the mid-1990s served to reopen debate concerning the nation's emergency management capabilities. Whereas FEMA had been central to the post-Andrew debate, it was a relatively peripheral player in the emerging fight over how to achieve better coordination between the law enforcement, border control *and* emergency management domains in preparing for future terror attacks in the United States. The 9/11 attacks presented the proponents of a broader 'homeland security' approach with an opportunity to push through their agenda, prompting dramatic government reforms on a scale not seen since the 1940s. As part of the government reorganization that followed, FEMA lost its status as an independent executive agency when it was reorganized within the new DHS. In this respect, the post-9/11 reforms would appear to constitute the single most dramatic example of institutional change in the period stretching from 1979 to 22 August 2005, far exceeding that which occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union or Andrew. As such, the 9/11 attacks provide a suitable point at which to divide the case into two phases, one stretching from 1979 to 10 September 2001) and the other from 11 September 2001 until 22 August 2005).

The dependent variable in this case, meanwhile, is hurricane preparedness at FEMA. The assumption here is that major change in the institutional environment after the 9/11 attacks resulted in shifts in norms, rules, routines and values that compelled the members of FEMA to alter their behaviour in ways that influenced the agency's hurricane preparedness (by all accounts negatively). However, we should nevertheless expect to see at least some variation in the dependent variable over time, even in the absence of major institutional change.

3.2.3 Objects of study

Having defined the case and depicted the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, we now turn to the task of identifying the objects to be studied. While dozens of federal departments and agencies have formal responsibilities in supporting federal hurricane responses, FEMA alone was responsible

for coordinating the entirety of the Federal Government's efforts, both in preparing for and responding to hurricanes between 1979 and 2004 (when FEMA's preparedness tasking was relocated elsewhere within DHS). For this reason, the primary object of study in this case is FEMA and its hurricane preparedness activities over time. The fact that formal responsibility for preparedness was shifted out of FEMA in 2004 should be acknowledged and is accounted for in the analysis in Chapter 5.

In order to understand how major institutional change influenced FEMA and its preparedness, we shall focus primarily on the behaviour of the FEMA leadership, which I argue comprises a small group of political appointees and civil servants charged with, among other things, formulating policy, effectively administering the agency, and ensuring that policy is implemented as intended.¹² The FEMA leadership as conceived here is the agency's primary point of contact with policymakers, and does not belong within the policy elite. My view is that while FEMA's leadership certainly plays an important role in providing information to policy elites responsible for overarching policy formation, they are typically not full-fledged players in the policy debate.

Who exactly is part of the FEMA leadership? For the purposes of this study, this group includes a small number of individuals who are organized within the Office of the FEMA Administrator (more commonly referred to as the FEMA director). Besides the director himself,¹³ the Office of the Administrator has through the years typically included a deputy director, a chief of staff, various advisory functions, the assistant administrators for different agency departments and programme offices, as well as officers responsible for the agency's overarching functionality (administration, procurement, and, information/data/IT). Of these, however, I argue that very few have a vital role to play in the interplay with the policymaking level, let alone in making strategic decisions concerning agency direction and focus (in this case what it should be prepared for and to what extent it should be prepared). These individuals include: 1) the FEMA director; 2) his or her chief of staff; 3) the deputy administrator; and 4) the assistant administrators for preparedness, response and recovery, emergency management, and disaster coordination. Obviously, this is a highly formalistic conceptualization of the FEMA leadership. While I do recognize that informal leaders may play an important role in shaping particularly the norms, informal rules and values that define organizations, we are unlikely to detect any influence that they might have if they are not members of the FEMA leadership as it is defined here.

12 Brunsson and Olsen, 1993; Andrew and Carr, 2013.

13 To date, no woman has ever held the post of FEMA director.

Mile's Law (where one sits determines where one stands) could lead one to assume that the FEMA leadership may be constrained and enabled by the same set of norms, rules, routines and values that guide the behaviour of other members of the FEMA bureaucracy.¹⁴ Like Allison in his 1971 study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, I argue here that the behaviour of the FEMA director and other members of his staff may reflect the norms, rules, routines and values that guide the behaviour of the organization as a whole.¹⁵ That being said, March and Olsen remind us that 'politics follows the logic of consequentiality while public administrators and judges follow the logic of appropriateness'.¹⁶ As such, it is conceivable that agency leaders with political ambitions or who hope to be promoted to, say, a senior leadership position within DHS, may be motivated to behave in ways that offer them the best prospects for advancement, and not on the basis of what is considered to be appropriate behaviour within the agency that they are charged with leading.¹⁷ Any evidence to suggest that members of the FEMA leadership failed to adhere to the prevailing logic of appropriateness within FEMA might give credence to the claims of the rational choice institutionalists, and undermine certain claims made by the normative institutionalists in particular.

All too often, case studies concerning disruptive events neglect to situate them in a broader institutional context. For instance, what other issues on the policy agenda were decision-makers grappling with at the time? Which were prioritized, and what implications did these prioritizations have for the ability of actors to manage disruptive events when they did finally occur? Using the institutional perspective on preparedness presented in Chapter 2, we should be able to capture the broader institutional environment in which FEMA operated in the long lead-up to Katrina. Specifically, we should be able to see what issues hurricane preparedness competed with on the policy agenda, how FEMA responded to any policy shifts that took place, and what implications the agency's response had for its preparedness for hurricanes. So as to depict the broader institutional context, we will need to capture the behaviour of many other actors, including successive White House administrations, members of Congress, senior administrators at DHS and other relevant federal departments and agencies that FEMA partnered with, policy entrepreneurs (think tanks and lobby organizations, for example), and the media. This will be accomplished using process tracing, which is discussed in the following section.

14 Miles, 1978.

15 Allison, 1971.

16 March and Olsen, 2006b: 703.

17 Morris, 2006: 288.

3.2.4 *Process tracing*

Process tracing is employed in this study to confirm the existence of any causal mechanisms that might exist between change in the institutional environment in which FEMA operated and the agency's preparedness in managing the complex and foreseeable threat posed by hurricanes.¹⁸ According to George and Bennett, process tracing enables the researcher to be 'deliberately selective, focusing on what are thought to be particularly important parts' of otherwise extended, highly complex historical narratives like that at hand.¹⁹

In this case, we seek to capture and understand the behaviour of different actors (discussed in the preceding section) operating in the field of emergency management/homeland security as they go about preparing (or not) for major hurricanes over the course of several decades. This task will be accomplished by following a number of different processes chronologically. As Stern, et al. point out, the original process tracing methodology can be augmented by insights from other fields of study to make it more useful in studying particularly complex crisis cases.²⁰ In his dissertation from 1999, Stern proposed a cognitive institutional approach to process tracing consisting of four steps, namely:

- Place the crisis in context
- Establish a time frame/develop a narrative
- Dissect the acute crisis
- Reassemble the crisis and place it in a broader perspective²¹

While this is not a crisis study, but rather a pre-crisis study, Stern's approach nevertheless reminds us of the need to properly contextualize the case and to construct a sufficiently rich and focused empirical narrative that allows us to draw sustainable conclusions concerning the different causal mechanisms at play.

Given that the research at hand is squarely focused on the preparedness phase of the emergency management cycle, process tracing is applied in order to follow certain processes at primarily the federal level that played a part in determining just how prepared FEMA was for Katrina in 2005. These processes include congressional debate and lawmaking pertaining to emergency management/homeland security, certain year-to-year funding decisions made by members of Congress, executive decisions influencing the relevant federal agencies and their operations, FEMA's relations with other federal, state and local actors, and internal agency processes influencing what the agency was prepared for and to what extent, to name a few. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the cyclical nature of emergency management means that organizational preparedness will inevitably

18 George and Bennett, 2005: 183, 210, 213, 217.

19 George and Bennett, 2005: 211.

20 Stern, et al., 2014: 404.

21 Stern, 1999: 59.

be influenced by events, developments, trends, etc. within the other stages in the cycle.²² Assuming this is the case, it is important to recognize those events (natural disaster-related or not) and the responses to them that had the potential to influence the agency's preparedness for hurricanes in particular. Equally so, we should recognize and account for any mitigation works/programmes that may have the effect of reducing the burden on organizations that would otherwise need to prepare for certain, now-mitigated contingencies.

Some critics of process tracing contend that single-case case studies provide an insufficient number of observations on the independent and dependent variables alike (the degrees of freedom problem), preventing the researcher from drawing anything more than what Bennett and George refer to as 'provisional conclusions'.²³ The fact that process tracing is capable of generating multiple observations on the dependent variable should enhance the validity of the findings, at least when compared with multi-case studies with multiple variables.²⁴ Furthermore, the use of process tracing should enable the researcher to detect evidence of equifinality (where a given end state is reached down a path other than that which was initially envisioned) and spuriousness (the presence of unforeseen variables that are part of the causal path).²⁵

Finally, the ability of process tracing to capture phenomena that are central to specific streams of neo-institutionalism should facilitate the theory testing aims of this study. For instance, Colin Hay argues that process tracing is useful in capturing indications of both gradual and more sudden forms of change in 'political structures, institutions, codes, conventions and norms' over time.²⁶ Furthermore, process tracing has the potential to reveal instances of path dependency and to depict the nature of relationships between principals and agents.²⁷

3.2.5 Sources

The task of piecing together the case has been accomplished in part through: media reports (national and international print and web-based media, network, cable television and radio broadcasts); popular history accounts; reports published by think tanks, interest groups, and industry representatives; academic works; and a website maintained by a retired FEMA employee. Every effort has been made to identify any biases the authors may have had and, equally important, what role, if any, these documents played in the policy debate on emergency management

22 Rubin, 2007: 4-5.

23 Bennett and George, 1979. See also Cook and Campbell, 1979.

24 Bennett, 1992; Eckstein, 1975: 85; King, et al., 1994: 225.

25 Bennett and George, 1979; Cook and Campbell, 1979; Garrett and Weingast, 1993; George and Bennett, 2005: 182, 201, 209, 212, 215, 217, 220-221, 283; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Krasner, 1984; Kreps, D., 1990; Peters, 1999: 19.

26 Hay, 2002: 136.

27 George and Bennett, 2005: 213.

in the United States. After all, accounts of this kind may serve as 'an important part of contextual developments to which policymakers are sensitive, to which they are responding, or which they are attempting to influence'.²⁸ Academic works in the fields of cultural geography, sociology, psychology, economics, public administration, organizational studies, political science, and international relations have also been helpful in capturing certain crucial elements of the case.

The study also draws on numerous official documents, including government reports, congressional minutes, interviews, public investigations and inquiries, and internal evaluations. Besides providing valuable empirical data concerning the case, some of these documents provide indications of change in the institutional environment and show how FEMA behaved in response. That being said, the methodology accounts for the possibility that such documents may be used to advance 'the political and personal goals of those officials who control their release'.²⁹

It should be said that the body of data on FEMA and the agency's management of different disruptive events over the period spanning from the mid-1990s until 2005 is much larger than it is over the period from 1979 to the mid-1990s. In other words, the historical record pertaining to the case suffers from a certain imbalance over time. Furthermore, it is important to point out that large amounts of new data tend to emerge in the wake of major disruptive events, but especially ones that are managed poorly. For instance, the amount of information concerning FEMA's preparedness activities before and after the likes of Andrew and Katrina dwarfs that concerning 'quieter' periods in the agency's history. This has certain implications if we are interested in drawing valid conclusions concerning the impact of institutional change on organizational behaviour.

Between 2005 and 2008 I conducted several trips to the United States that were funded by the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in order to study the government responses to Katrina and Gustav. All told, nearly 40 interviews (one-on-one or in a group setting) were carried out with mid- and senior-level officials at FEMA, the US Department of Transportation (DoT), the US Coast Guard (USCG), state and local government, as well as key non-governmental and private sector organizations such as the Red Cross and private ambulance providers in Louisiana, Texas and Washington, D.C. These interviews have been useful in contextualizing the circumstances immediately leading up to and surrounding the management of Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav. That being said, the information collected tends to concern the management of Katrina and Gustav and thus falls beyond the scope of the case at hand. Repeated attempts were made at the time to contact many of the key players in the White House, Congress, at FEMA, and within the DHS leadership that figure prominently in this study. Unfortunately, they were either unavailable or not willing to be

28 George and Bennett, 2005: 95, 97-98.

29 George and Bennett, 2005: 99-100.

interviewed for the project underway at the time. This was perhaps to be expected. After all, Katrina in particular was a highly politicized event that was closely scrutinized at all levels of government. Even if these officials had been willing to participate, they are unlikely to have provided more detail than that which already exists in the public record.

3.3 Hypothesis confirmation or rejection

In this section, the conditions necessary to confirm the four research hypotheses depicted in section 2.6 are set out and discussed.

3.3.1 Hypothesis 1

If the normative institutional assumption is correct, we would expect to see that *the more deeply entrenched the norms, rules, routines and values that constrain and enable FEMA's behaviour, the less likely the agency will be to alter its mission and the focus of its activities in the event that priorities change on the policy agenda.* The first step in testing this hypothesis is to look for evidence of organizational norms and values that determine the organization's purpose ('why we are here') and what practices and behaviour are appropriate within the organization ('how things are done around here'). In order to see why actors formally exist, we need to look to documents like letters of authorization issued by legislative bodies and/or the executive and organizational mission statements. However, normative institutionalism tells us that organizations and their members may perceive of themselves as having an entirely different purpose and/or are prone to behave in ways that are not necessarily reflected in official documents. As such, the task of determining how things are actually done requires that we examine the formal plans, SOPs and guidelines that formally guide organizational behaviour, and then consider whether or not they are reflected in the actor's observed behaviour. Where they do not correspond, it is necessary to identify those institutional forces that compel actors to behave the way that they do.

This study relies heavily on the available historical record to provide evidence to suggest the nature and strength of the institutional forces that may or may not compel actors to behave in ways that differ from the expectations of policy-makers. We might expect to see a particularly entrenched logic of appropriateness in organizations that have existed for a long time, have clear mandates, enjoy stable leadership, and have low rates of personnel turnover. Different institutional forces will conceivably be less deeply rooted where the organization's mission is perceived as being poorly articulated, its existence is in question, or where rates of personnel turnover are high (thereby making it difficult to establish and maintain common understandings as to what appropriate behaviour is).

The normative institutional assumption is that the stronger the logic of appropriateness within the organization, the more convinced its employees will be that what they are doing and how they are doing it (the methods they employ in accomplishing their work) are correct and defensible. Proving or disproving this hypothesis requires looking for evidence to suggest how this and other related institutional forces influence the organization's behaviour, specifically in times of major institutional change. Instances like these tend to pose challenges to the institution's conceptualization of itself, its own worth, and its purpose. Here, organizations have 'the option either of reinforcing commitment to [...] old values or finding some way of making effective changes' that bring their behaviour in line with other actors that they share interdependencies with.³⁰ Again, we might assume that organizations with particularly strong and deeply rooted institutional norms, rules, routines and values will be resistant to the pressures to change that emerge as shifts occur in the institutional environment. The stronger the organization's logic of appropriateness is, the more likely it will be to seek to stave off pressures to alter its behaviour. In this study, we will seek evidence to suggest efforts on the part of actors that can sometimes take very public forms, for instance where agency officials openly oppose proposed changes, or that sometimes take place behind closed doors. Of course, the study is also sensitive to the possibility that actors who are hostile to on-going changes may simply be slow to alter their behaviour accordingly, if at all. However, evidence of this kind is perhaps most likely to emerge in the wake of major disruptive events, which tend to reveal how organizations actually behave.

3.3.2 Hypothesis II

The historical institutionalists' view is that organizations are set on certain trajectories at the point of inception, which they then find it exceedingly difficult to deviate from.³¹ Institutional life is characterized by long periods of relative stability that are occasionally punctuated by events that have the potential to bring about sudden, sometimes dramatic institutional change that create conditions allowing organizations to overcome both 'the inertia created at [institutional/policy] inception' and historically determined patterns of behaviour.³²

In order to test Hypothesis II (*the greater and more sudden the emergence of pressures for change in the institutional environment, the more likely FEMA will be to alter its priorities concerning what threats it prepares for*), we will first need to identify different occasions that had the potential to punctuate the policy equilibrium as it pertained to FEMA.³³ This will be accomplished using process tracing,

30 Peters, 1998: 10.

31 Streeck and Thelen, 2005.

32 Peters, 1999: 72.

33 Streeck and Thelen, 2005.

which allows us to see any evidence in the history of both FEMA and the wider emergency management/homeland security domain that events prompted major institutional change in the institutional environment unique to FEMA. Once these events have been identified, we can then begin to evaluate the extent to which each actually generated pressures on FEMA to alter its behaviour in one way or another. (As noted above, my argument is that the 9/11 attacks alone prompted major institutional change in the institutional environment unique to FEMA. This is an opportunity to test this claim.) Evidence of this kind may take any number of forms. For example, we might expect to see that certain events led to a sudden increase in the number of players engaged in a given policy debate over a relatively short period of time. Presumably, the greater the number of players involved in the contests that tend to arise over priorities before, during and particularly after the onset of certain major disruptive events, the more organizations are likely to feel compelled to alter their behaviour as a result. (At the very least, we should see evidence to suggest an enhanced readiness on the part of actors to alter their behaviour once the policy fight is over and a new policy is articulated and handed down.³⁴)

Assuming my assumption is borne out by the case, we will be able to observe to what extent, if at all, FEMA's behaviour changed as a result of shifts in institutional conditions that occurred after the 9/11 attacks. Even where my claim is not supported by the data, we should nevertheless be able to draw certain conclusions concerning how other more significant events subsequently influenced FEMA's behaviour as a result.

3.3.3 Hypothesis IIIa

Rational choice institutionalism would have us believe that individuals are rational actors with their own unique set of interests who attempt to maximize their utility from within the institutions that they join voluntarily.³⁵ Here, individuals' decision-making takes place on the basis of the logic of consequentiality ('how likely am I to be rewarded or punished for my behaviour?') and not on the basis of what is most appropriate in the institutional context. The assumption based on this stream of thinking is that *the more individual leaders at FEMA work to ensure that the agency is prepared to manage threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda (by acting as (or at least being perceived to be) 'good agents'), the more likely they will be to achieve their own interests.* In other words, the FEMA leadership could be expected to align the agency's focus with those issues that dominated the policy agenda as long as doing so was likely to move them closer to achieving their own personal interests.

34 Hall and Taylor, 1996: 9.

35 Ostrom, 1986; Ostrom, 1990.

In order to test this hypothesis, we will first need to identify those interests that motivated the various individuals belonging to the FEMA leadership during the period under study. The discussion in Chapter 2 suggests that interests can be motivated by any number of things, including professional standards, the desire to be a team player, the pursuit of career advancement, status, financial gain, or some combination thereof. However, it is possible that it may be difficult to determine which specific interests are actually at play in motivating different individuals' behaviour. Indeed, in the absence of empirical data that clearly and irrefutably states their interests, we are reliant on individuals themselves to reveal what motivates them. The odds of this happening are low. That being said, we are reminded of the claim made by Milner, that a given actor's 'preferences [...] derive from their interests'. As such, we may be able to extrapolate individual interests from their policy preferences. By the same token, however, Milner warns that individuals' 'policy preferences will vary according to their political situation, for example, their party affiliation, constituency characteristics, and so on'.³⁶ Though process tracing is certainly useful in reconstructing the context and political situation in which actors find themselves operating, we may nevertheless be confronted with certain instances where it is impossible to confidently claim to have identified which specific interests motivate the behaviour of individuals.

Assuming that it is in fact possible to identify the interests underlying individuals' behaviour, the next step in proving or disproving Hypothesis IIIa entails observing how individuals behave in leadership positions at FEMA, particularly during periods of major institutional change. Regardless of what is seen to motivate their behaviour and no matter how receptive they are to the policy determinations made by elites, rational choice institutionalism predicts that leaders will seek to avoid being sanctioned for their behaviour. It follows then that even where they are opposed to the institutional change that is underway, they will be compelled to align (or at least be seen to align) the organizations under them and their activities with the revised priorities on the policy agenda. That being said, the methodology is arguably also equipped to capture instances where leaders are torn between intra-organizational pressures to competently represent and defend the interests of the organizations that they lead and their own inclination to behave in ways that advance their own individual interests, whatever they may be.

3.3.4 Hypothesis IIIb

The final hypothesis in this study is closely related to and shares the same theoretical underpinnings as Hypothesis IIIa. Here, we are concerned with what role, if any, the professional profile of individual leaders plays in shaping their

36 Milner, 1997: 15.

interests, but also whether an individual's professional profile can be used as a predictor of how they are likely to respond to major change in the institutional environment. Generally speaking, the suggestion here is that individuals with a political or administrative background will be more likely to act in accordance with change in the institutional environment than their counterparts with a technical background.

While a total of seven individuals were confirmed by Congress to head FEMA between 1979 and 2005, the behaviour of only three of them will be used to test this hypothesis. These include Louis P. Giuffrida, James Lee Witt and Michael Brown. This decision has been made for two reasons. First of all, these three men headed the agency during particularly transformative periods in the agency's history (the years following the creation of the agency and the resurgence of civil defence, in the aftermath of Andrew and the rise of terrorism on the policy agenda, and during the process by which FEMA joined DHS). Seeing how these individuals behaved during these turbulent periods in FEMA's history is likely to yield findings that should be particularly helpful in proving or disproving the hypothesis at hand. Second, significant amounts of empirical data on certain former FEMA directors (Macy, Becton, Stickney and Allbaugh) appear to be missing, leaving with me little or no basis upon which to assign them a professional profile.

The first step in testing this hypothesis is to assign the three former FEMA directors a professional profile. My assumption is that university education, professional training and previous professional experience will be helpful indicators to this end. That being said, it may not always be obvious which profile an individual should be assigned, but especially where he possesses a combination of technical and political-administrative attributes (say, an elected official with a degree in engineering). Once the task of assigning each FEMA director a professional profile has been completed, they will then be observed as they respond to and deal with change in the institutional environment. Presumably, political-administrative-type leaders will be more aware of and responsive to such shifts than their technical-type peers. One relatively simple way of measuring attentiveness to such shifts is to observe how quickly government agencies shift focus and how engaged leaders are with members of the policy elite in the process, and also how satisfied policymakers are with their performance.

3.4 Limitations

This study's narrow focus on a small number of actors at the federal level presents certain potential blind spots that should be addressed. First of all, the discussion in Chapter 2 shows that federal systems tend to create deep interdependencies between different actors with unique roles and competencies operating at different levels of government. This is certainly true in the field of emergency

management/homeland security, which has in fact become all the more complex in recent decades as more and more non-governmental and private sector actors take on formalized roles in responding to disruptive events. This arguably reflects a philosophical shift within the field away from a preference for tightly controlled government-led responses toward more collaborative responses that incorporate resources and capabilities on a community-wide basis.³⁷ In other words, the number of stakeholders with a voice in the field of emergency management/homeland security has increased at the same time that the predominant role of government in setting the agenda and dictating relevant policy has been undermined. With some rare exceptions, this study does not take into account the contacts that FEMA had with these actors, nor how, if at all, these contacts influenced FEMA's hurricane preparedness over the years.

Furthermore, the argument in this study is that the FEMA leadership is guided by and represents the common set of norms, rules, routines and values that exist throughout the agency that they lead. That being said, the literature suggests that different organizational cultures are likely to exist within one and the same bureaucracy.³⁸ Assuming this was the case at FEMA, the FEMA leadership would presumably have been forced to choose actively or not which set of norms, rules, routines and values that existed within the different sub-cultures or factions within the agency they were to be guided by. As it is, though, this study goes only so far in capturing the FEMA leadership's relations with the different departments and component programmes that made up the agency.

3.5 Generalizability

Achieving external validity, or the ability to generalize results to other cases, requires that we stipulate which class or classes of typologically similar cases we expect the study to be applicable to.³⁹ This case is narrowly focused on a relatively small number of actors within the Federal Government in the United States charged with responding to a specific form of complex foreseeable problem, namely hurricanes. While recognizing that 'cases that appear to be typologically similar may differ in an as-yet unspecified causal variable that leads to different outcomes', I posit that the study's findings should apply to cases involving the management of foreseeable complex problems by constellations of actors operating in complex institutional environments, particularly government agencies operating in a federal context.⁴⁰ Such problems might include major winter storms, spring flood events, seasonal power outages, major public health events,

37 DHS, 2011; Kettl, 2006: 375.

38 Christensen and Røvik, 1999.

39 George and Bennett, 2005: 115-116, 117, 102. See also Elman and Elman, 2002: 240.

40 George and Bennett, 2005: 77, 120. See also Deverell, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Skocpol, 1979; and Yin, 2003.

and even foreseeable financial disturbances. The study should also yield findings concerning the challenges individuals and organizations everywhere tend to encounter in balancing the imperative to prepare for rare but serious threats with acute pressures to respond to more immediate and persistent problems.

Finally, the close attention that this study pays to FEMA should allow us to draw conclusions concerning the effects that reforms of different kinds have on government bureaucracies, especially in instances where they are relocated and/or where their status/mission set is subject to renegotiation.⁴¹ Obviously, a slightly smaller set of findings unique to this study should be applicable to other emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs) operating in federal and non-federal systems of government alike.

3.6 Conclusion

Having presented the methodology used in this study and the different processes by which I will seek to confirm or reject the different hypotheses that guide study in the coming chapters, I now turn to the case at hand, namely FEMA's hurricane preparedness from 1979 to August 2005, just days before Katrina made landfall.

41 Government Accountability Office, 2003.

Chapter 4: Hurricane preparedness at FEMA from 1979 to 2005

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) work in the field of emergency preparedness with a particular emphasis on hurricanes is described using process tracing. A brief overview of the Federal Government's involvement in emergency management generally and hurricane preparedness specifically prior to 1979 is provided in section 4.2. The purpose of this discussion is to contextualize and provide general background information on the bureaucratic environment that FEMA was expected to operate in and the legacy that it inherited when it was created in 1979.¹ The subsequent sections are intended to describe how policymakers and the federal bureaucracy behaved in response to various disruptive events in the country's history, including Hurricane Andrew and the 9/11 attacks. The decision to divide the narrative at these two junctures in particular was made in order to strengthen the claim repeated throughout this study that the 9/11 attacks and not Hurricane Andrew or some other event constituted the single most dramatic change to FEMA's institutional environment between the point of FEMA's creation in 1979 and August 2005, when Katrina made landfall.

While it is important to emphasize that this is not a study of FEMA's preparedness for a hurricane strike on New Orleans specifically, the empirical data presented in section 4.6 provides indications as to how major institutional change in the post-9/11 period affected FEMA's own hurricane preparedness as well as its work in supporting state and local partners in what was arguably one of the most at-risk regions of the country.

1 Stern, 1999: 33-59.

4.2 Preparedness for hurricanes prior to 1979

Responsibility for emergency management and emergency preparedness in the United States in the years following independence was exclusively a local matter.² The first documented instance of piecemeal federal assistance to a state or local authority came in 1803, when Congress allocated financial assistance to the town of Portsmouth, Massachusetts in the wake of a major fire. This decision, which many members of Congress worried was an unconstitutional intervention into state and local affairs, would go on to provide the legal precedent for over 100 subsequent instances of federal assistance between 1803 and the late 1940s.³ According to Keith Bea, this ad hoc way of managing disasters, sometimes with federal assistance but more typically without, would over the course of the coming decades '[evolve] into an established policy area that reflected a greater awareness of the complex responsibilities of federal and nonfederal entities before and after catastrophes'.⁴ The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and the Dust Bowl drought in particular were instrumental in demonstrating the need for the federal government to interject itself in instances where 'disasters and their effects [did] not respect state boundaries'.⁵ However, this would be difficult to accomplish so long as no federal disaster programs existed.⁶

In 1950, Congress sought to address the lack of federal structures through the Disaster Relief Act, which, among other things, pre-authorized the president to distribute federal disaster aid, established consistent standards for use in making such determinations, and encouraged state and local partners to develop their own emergency management plans.⁷ The new law promised that state and local authorities, alongside disaster victims:

[would] no longer [have] to wait until Congress met, debated, and acted upon a reported need. Rather, Congress authorized providing assistance in advance, so that just one person – not hundreds of lawmakers – could decide that a disaster warranted the distribution of funds.⁸

According to Schneider, the 'framework for governmental disaster assistance that [the Act established] has essentially remained in place' ever since.⁹

Following the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb in 1949 and the subsequent outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula the following year,

2 Schneider, 2005: 19.

3 Barry, 1998: 369-370; Cooper and Block, 2006: 47; May, 1985; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 50; Morris, 2006: 287; Schneider, 2005: 19; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 361-362. See also Butler, 2007a: 13; Moss, 1999: 312; and Rubin, 2007: 6.

4 Bea, 2007: 81.

5 Butler, 2007b: 49.

6 Kreps, D., 1990: 281. See also FEMA, 2005.

7 Bea, 2007: 83-84; FEMA, 2005; Morris, 2006: 287, 289; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 361.

8 Bea, 2007: 83-84.

9 Schneider, 2005: 20.

the threat of communism and nuclear war with the Soviet Union were coming to dominate the national political agenda in the United States.¹⁰ As the nuclear threat grew, many states, not least California and New York, began putting in place or ramping up pre-existing World War II-era civil defence programmes intended to protect the general public from harm, either through evacuation, by sheltering in place, or some combination thereof. Following calls by the states for the Federal Government to better support their efforts, Congress passed the Civil Defense Act (CDA) of 1950. Among other things, the Act called for the creation of a Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), the construction of shelter facilities around the country, and the procurement of material that could be provided to the states to support their own civil defence activities. The FCDA would be authorized to 'prepare civil defense plans and programs for the nation, coordinate federal activities with states and border countries, encourage states to develop interstate mutual aid compacts, and provide grants to states for civil defense activities'.¹¹

Initially at least, civil defence and emergency management would be administered by different agencies at the federal level, but by 1953, the FCDA was given authority for both tasks. Meanwhile, President Truman for the first time delegated various so-called emergency functions to different federal departments. Going forward, the FCDA (later known as the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM) after being merged with the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM) in 1958) would be responsible for coordinating the efforts of other federal departments and agencies both in orchestrating civil defence activities and in providing disaster relief.¹² Which mission dominated the new agency then? The record is somewhat muddled in this regard. On the one hand, Schneider and Schroeder, et al. both paint a picture to suggest that as civil defence came into vogue, other threats, including natural disasters, faded as national priorities.¹³ On the other hand, the historian Harry B. Yoshpe suggests that 'the federal government [was criticized] for its seeming evasion of responsibility for civil defense [during the 1950s]', so much so in fact that Congress would be compelled to pass an amendment to the CDA clarifying the Federal Government's role.¹⁴ What is clear is that the Federal Government was spending much more on civil defense than it was on emergency management during the 1950s and into the first half of the 1960s. For instance, Bea points out that 'from 1950 to 1964, the federal government issued 174 disaster declarations, resulting in total expenditures of almost \$275 million [...]. By comparison, Congress had appropriated more than \$450 million for civil defense planning from FY 1951 through 1958'.¹⁵

10 Bea, 2007: 82; Schlosser, 2013: 176.

11 Bea, 2007: 82.

12 Bea, 2007: 84-85.

13 Schneider, 1995: 20-21; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 361.

14 Yoshpe, 1981: 27. See also Bea, 2007: 85.

15 Bea, 2007: 87.

Upon taking office in 1961, President John F. Kennedy ordered that responsibility for the federal civil defence mission be moved from the OCDM to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) within the Department of Defense (DoD). A year later, in 1962, the OCDM would be shuttered and the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) in the Executive Office stood up in its stead.¹⁶ In subsequent years, the new office was confronted the 1964 Alaska earthquake and then Hurricane Betsy (1965). According to Bea, these events 'gave further evidence of a recognition by Congress that the policy framework for disaster relief that had been built in 1950 [with the first Disaster Relief Act] could be expanded to accommodate more complex emergencies'.¹⁷ In response, Congress passed the Disaster Relief Act of 1966. Besides broadening the scope of eligibility for various federal relief programmes, the Act '[linked] civil defense warning systems with threats from natural disasters (a forerunner of the 'dual-use' or 'all-hazards' concepts developed later) and [authorized] the president to coordinate federal assistance efforts'.¹⁸ Two years later, the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 was passed, creating the hugely popular National Flood Insurance Program.¹⁹

The major disasters that struck across the United States during the mid- to late 1960s certainly did their part to elevate emergency management on the policy agenda. Meanwhile, civil defence was relegated to 'the back burner', but especially once public opinion concerning US nuclear strategy and the nation's involvement in Vietnam began to sour.²⁰ Civil defence was seen by many Americans as part of a wider, offensive nuclear strategy that they worried was likely to make it all the easier for the United States to be drawn into an all-out nuclear war.²¹ In some respects, these public sentiments dovetailed with the aims of US foreign policy during the late 1960s and early 1970s vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Whereas once the United States sought confrontation with the Soviet Union, it now sought to build trust between the two superpowers. Continuing to build up the nation's civil defence infrastructure in such an environment might send the wrong message.²² In this climate, it was impossible to attract additional funding for civil defence despite concerns that the programme was growing increasingly ineffectual in the face of an actual nuclear attack.²³

In 1969 Congress passed legislation that further refined Disaster Relief Act. However, this legislation was slated to 'sunset' the following year. In a letter to members of Congress, President Nixon made it clear that he intended to put

16 Bea, 2007: 84-85.

17 Bea, 2007: 90.

18 Bea, 2007: 92.

19 Bea, 2007: 92.

20 Bea, 2007: 88.

21 Green, 2014.

22 Green, 2014.

23 Bea, 2007: 88.

forth new legislation that, as he put it, would make the nation's 'federal disaster assistance program more effective and efficient'.²⁴ The Disaster Relief Act of 1970 that came as a result of the White House's efforts is noteworthy for several reasons. Besides further expanding federal authority in responding to disasters, the Act for the first time emphasized the Federal Government's role in mitigation and preparedness.²⁵

As noted above, the Disaster Relief Act of 1966 first opened the door for the nation's considerable civil defense capabilities to also be used in managing disasters.²⁶ Eight years later, the National Security Council directed the OEP and numerous federal departments to implement 'dual-use plans, procedures and preparedness within the limitations of existing authority, including appropriate related improvements in crisis management planning'.²⁷ At DoD, for instance, 'The dual-use policy led to new responsibilities [...], such as funding emergency preparedness grants submitted by state and local governments, administering emergency warning and communications systems, and building an intergovernmental network to reduce catastrophic losses'.²⁸

The mid-1970s brought several dramatic changes to the nation's emergency management system. In 1973, Nixon shut down the OEP, transferring its various authorities to other federal departments (the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA) within the Department of Housing and Human Services (HUD), the General Services Administration (GSA), the Department of the Treasury, etc.).²⁹ According to Bea, 'This restructuring shifted the responsibility for disaster assistance from the White House to agencies outside the Executive Office'.³⁰ The same year, the Nixon administration embarked on a programme aimed at devolving certain disaster relief responsibilities to the states and local government. However, members of Congress opposed this proposal. In the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 that was passed the following year, the Congress actually broadened the Federal Government's role even further (although it did seek to placate the Nixon administration in requiring that recipients of federal relief create and maintain mitigation strategies). Crucially, the 1974 Act for the first time articulated the presidential disaster declaration process and gave the president the authority to establish a nationwide preparedness programme, while allocating funding to support state and local authorities in developing emergency plans.³¹

24 Bea, 2007: 93.

25 Bea, 2007: 94-95.

26 Senate Special Committee on National Emergencies and Delegated Emergency Powers, 1976.

27 Green, 2014; National Security Council, 1972.

28 Bea, 2007: 101.

29 Morris, 2006: 287.

30 Bea, 2007: 95.

31 Adamski, et al., 2006: 6; Bea, 2007: 99-101; Sylves, 2007: 144.

As much as civil defence might have languished on the proverbial back burner during the 1970s, all accounts are that DoD had been successful in creating a well-oiled national organization with clear roles and responsibilities.³² The same could not be said where disaster management was concerned. For instance, a report issued by the National Governors' Association in 1978 argued that there were too many federal emergency management agencies and programmes, they were incapable of effectively coordinating with one another, and they were overly focused on the recovery phase.³³ A succession of reports commissioned by the Carter administration and Congress came to much the same set of conclusions.³⁴ As a result, the Carter Administration drafted what came to be known as Reorganization No. 3, which would consolidate the Federal Government's emergency management programmes into a single independent executive agency accountable to both the president and members of Congress. The following year, President Carter issued a set of executive orders that served to consolidate all existing federal emergency preparedness, management, recovery and mitigation programmes, as well as many civil defence programmes, into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).³⁵ (It is worth noting that according to Cumming, President Carter himself had at least some reservations that the creation of FEMA would create a form of moral hazard whereby the existence of a 'one-stop shopping system for disaster relief and other assistance [FEMA] [...] might easily result in even more pressure for financial assistance to the states, and in particular those who were the least prepared for disasters of all types'.³⁶)

Rather than confront various political interests in Congress, Schroder, Wamsley, and Ward suggest that the Carter White House opted to simply transfer the various programmes and their authorizing statutes into FEMA without asking members of Congress to change the law or to reauthorize the agencies and programmes slated to be reorganized. As a result, FEMA 'came into existence fragmented, with hermetically sealed program compartments each overseen by a political appointee with his or her own links to [...] congressional committees and the interest groups concerned with the specific program'.³⁷ The circumstances surrounding the creation of FEMA left the agency ridden with different sets of interests that hampered efforts to formulate a common agency mission, let alone achieve effective intra-agency cooperation and coordination. Over the longer term, this fragmented oversight arrangement allowed several distinct threat cultures

32 Cooper and Block, 2006: 48; Green, 2014.

33 Adamski, et al., 2006: 6; Bea, 2007: 102; Popkin, 1990; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 369-370.

34 Bea, 2007: 103.

35 Cooper and Block, 2006: 49; Cumming, 2010a; Green, 2014; Morris, 2006: 285.

36 Cumming, 2010a.

37 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 369-370. See also Cumming and Sylves, 2005: 29.

(‘a disaster culture, a flood insurance culture, a HAZMATS culture, including civil defence, and a national security culture’) to emerge at the agency.³⁸

As the discussion above suggests, developments in the field of emergency management since the founding of the United States have been toward more standardization and shared responsibility between and among the different levels of government. At the same time, though, it is clear that the policy agenda has seen certain threats wane in relevance as others emerge and take their place.

4.3 From the Carter Administration to Hurricane Andrew

John Macy, a civil servant who had previously served as head of the US Civil Service Commission and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and who had experience working in the Nixon White House, was chosen by President Carter to head FEMA in its first years. In many ways, Macy was a logical choice, given his long experience of government reorganizations.³⁹

The passage of the Civil Defense Act in 1980 for the first time formally broadened ‘the definition of civil defence to include peacetime disaster response’. With the passage of the Act, funds and resources that had previously been reserved exclusively for civil defence were now available for use in managing peacetime emergencies as well. As Macy saw it, the emergence of an increasingly common pool of federal resources for use in dealing with all types of emergencies necessitated the development of an all-hazards approach to emergency management and a common national response framework at the strategic level, what later came to be known as the Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS).⁴⁰ (The National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), later shortened to NIMS (National Incident Management System), first adopted by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group in 1982, is IEMS’ tactical counterpart. Over the decades to come, stakeholders at every level of government would adopt NIMS.⁴¹) The fact that the agency was being compelled to broaden its focus to include threats other than nuclear attack appears to have prompted the FEMA leadership to take steps to demonstrate what this meant for the nation’s civil defence capability. One outside report commissioned by FEMA itself found in 1981 that FEMA’s civil defence programmes were being ‘neglected’ by the president and members of Congress.⁴² Even early on, the new agency was clearly resisting institutional pressures to shift focus away from civil defence.

38 Cumming and Sylves, 2005: 23.

39 Cumming and Sylves, 2005: 29; Haddow and Bullock, 2003.

40 Green, 2014.

41 Harrald, 2007: 162.

42 Yoshpe, 1981.

During Macy's 17-month stint as FEMA director, the agency received high marks in managing a number of major disruptive events, including Hurricane Fredric, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the tail end of the Love Canal environmental disaster, and the eruption of Mount St. Helens.⁴³ Meanwhile, Americans were preparing to go to the polls. The incumbent, President Carter, who had been pushing for détente with the Soviets and a reduction in the size of both countries' nuclear arsenals, was to be roundly defeated by his Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan. According to Eric Schlosser, Reagan's 'optimism had tremendous appeal to a nation that seemed in decline' and felt itself to be weak in relation to the Soviets, who seemed to be extending their reach and influence around the globe. Part of the Reagan Administration's decidedly more hawkish strategy in the coming years would be to outspend the Soviet Union militarily in the hope of bringing about the collapse of the entire Soviet system.⁴⁴ If the nation's nuclear arsenal was to be expanded, the Reagan Administration needed to ensure that its citizens would be safe in the event of a nuclear attack. After nearly a decade of dwindling interest in civil defence, it was suddenly in vogue again.⁴⁵ This shift in priorities had immediate implications for FEMA, which was responsible for a number of national preparedness programmes, including civil defence and continuity of government operations (CoG).⁴⁶

The incoming Reagan Administration replaced Carter's FEMA pick, John Macy, with Louis O. Giuffrida, a former military officer who was close personal friends with Reagan's attorney general, Edwin Meese.⁴⁷ The Reagan Administration's reemphasis on civil defence created a 'two-headed' organization at FEMA, where spending on various highly classified 'black budget' programmes within the agency's National Preparedness Directorate far exceeded that on natural disaster preparedness and response by the much smaller State and Local Preparedness and Support Directorate.⁴⁸ One employee at the agency during this period suggests that a clash of cultures emerged between 'the national security folks' and the 'weenies' working with emergency management.⁴⁹ At the same time, FEMA under Giuffrida was quickly acquiring a reputation as a 'dumping ground' for individuals that the White House or the FEMA director himself owed favours to. In order to free up positions for these individuals, Giuffrida's staff either fired civil servants outright, or, where this was not possible, forced them into 'dead-end and unpalatable jobs that would lead them to resign'.⁵⁰

43 Cooper and Block, 2006: 50-51.

44 Schlosser, 2013: 433, 441.

45 Cooper and Block, 2006: 51; Perrow, 2005; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 374-377.

46 Cooper and Block, 2006: 53-54; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 373.

47 Cumming, 2010d.

48 Gup, 1994.

49 Cooper and Block, 2006: 55.

50 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 372-376; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 110-111.

Like Macy before him, Giuffrida grudgingly made regular appearances before the various congressional committees and subcommittees with oversight authority over FEMA's many component programmes. According to Cumming and Sylves, 'FEMA leaderships were often highly defensive in their dealings with Congress', given the fact that members of Congress tended to use these opportunities to demand that FEMA 'take on new programs, functions, or activities' that risked running counter to the president's own agenda.⁵¹ Such was certainly the case during Giuffrida's visits to Capitol Hill, during which congressional Democrats called on FEMA to redirect its attention away from civil defence to other, more likely threats.⁵²

In 1985, allegations emerged that federal disaster assistance administered by FEMA had been used to reward the Reagan Administration's political allies at the state level.⁵³ Then Representative Al Gore, a Democrat from Tennessee on the House Science and Technology Committee began pushing for congressional hearings. Meanwhile, the Department of Justice (DoJ) launched a formal investigation into Giuffrida and many of his top aides.⁵⁴ Ultimately, a number of FEMA officials including Giuffrida were compelled to leave the agency. Gore later stated that Giuffrida's 'resignation [marked] the end of a disastrous era for FEMA and [brought] hope for more competent stewardship' in future.⁵⁵ While Giuffrida was credited with some successes (in consolidating the various FEMA programme offices into a single headquarters building in Washington and implementing IEMS across the country, for instance), the scandals that defined the agency during the early to mid-1980s would haunt FEMA for years to come.⁵⁶

Just as Giuffrida was leaving office, FEMA was in the process of launching a National Hurricane Program (NHP). The NHP, which would exist for decades to come, was headed up by FEMA in cooperation with numerous other federal agencies, including the National Weather Service (NWS), the Department of Transportation (DoT), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to name a few. The purpose of the programme was primarily to generate research on the hurricane phenomenon and to support hurricane preparedness activities at the state and local levels.⁵⁷

Julius W. Becton, Jr., a former Army lieutenant general who had previously served in a senior leadership position at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), replaced Giuffrida.⁵⁸ Like Giuffrida before him, Becton

51 Cumming and Sylves, 2005: 29. See also Schroeder, et al., 2001: 374; and Green, 2014.

52 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 374; Green, 2014.

53 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 375.

54 Adamski, et al., 2006: 7; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 375-377.

55 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 111.

56 Cumming, 2010d; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 377.

57 Sylves, 2007: 144-145.

58 Cumming, 2010d; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 377.

was primarily focused on FEMA's national preparedness operations, even though the agency would only deal with non-nuclear events during his time at FEMA. Though Becton would be 'credited with restoring integrity to the operations and appropriations of the agency', Democratic policymakers continued to take issue with the discrepancy between what FEMA was preparing for and those threats that it was regularly confronted with.⁵⁹ That FEMA continued to struggle in managing relatively minor natural disasters suggested to many members of Congress that the framework by which the Federal Government engaged with state and local authorities in responding to emergencies and disasters was in need of additional refinement. In 1988, Congress passed the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which replaced the Disaster Relief Act of 1974.⁶⁰ According to Tonya Adamski, Beth Kline and Tanya Tyrrell:

*The Act [...] made several changes in existing federal disaster policy. First, inconsistencies in past policies were clarified by redefining the definition of an emergency situation. Second, the responsibilities and obligations of public institutions during natural disasters were expanded. Third, a process to guide when and how emergency management agencies across the intergovernmental system would become involved in a crisis situation was established [...], delineating how the response would move from the local level through the state up to the federal level [...].*⁶¹

Furthermore, the Act vested in the president the power to unilaterally declare federal emergencies and disasters so as to expedite the Federal Government's ability to render aid to the states. Finally, the Act stipulated that FEMA develop a Federal Response Plan (FRP) that reflected the reforms that had been made. (It would take nearly four years to complete the first version of the plan, which was released in 1992.⁶²) Simply put, these changes were intended to standardize the Federal Government's interactions with state and local authorities during all phases of the emergency management cycle, and not just in the recovery phase (as had been the case in earlier decades).⁶³

The following year, George H. W. Bush succeeded Ronald Reagan at the White House. In the months following Bush's inauguration, FEMA responded to a succession of major disruptive events, including an earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area and Hurricane Hugo. The agency was roundly criticized for its response to Hugo in particular.⁶⁴ A subsequent House investigation found that FEMA was a seriously flawed organization that, among other things, remained a repository for unqualified political appointees.⁶⁵

59 Adamski, et al., 2006: 7. See also Haddow and Bullock, 2003.

60 Schneider, 2005: 22.

61 Adamski, et al., 2006: 7.

62 Harrald, 2007: 161-162.

63 FEMA, 2006d; Harrald, 2007: 162; Schneider, 2005: 22.

64 Franklin, 1995.

65 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378.

In 1990, Wallace Stickney, a former New Hampshire transport commissioner with little emergency management experience, replaced Becton. How Stickney ended up at FEMA is illustrative of FEMA's continued susceptibility to political whim. According to John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein, John Sununu, President Bush's chief of staff and the former governor of New Hampshire, had long been hostile to FEMA, which in earlier years had stymied efforts to build a nuclear power plant in his home state.⁶⁶ To Sununu's mind, Becton's replacement needed to be friendly to the nuclear power industry. Stickney appears to have fit the bill, though he was reportedly uninterested in the agency he was being asked to lead. More than anything, Stickney viewed the appointment as an opportunity to put together what he at one time referred to as a 'nice retirement package'.⁶⁷ According to one long-time FEMA employee, Stickney would go on to demonstrate 'a real aloofness' as Director.⁶⁸

Stickney joined FEMA just as the agency's primary Cold War-era missions were once again being 'undermined and eroded', this time by the sudden and by many accounts largely unexpected fall of the Soviet Union. Seemingly overnight, the threat of full-scale nuclear war and/or a Communist takeover of the government had disappeared. In Stickney's own words, 'The evil empire had crumbled, the Warsaw Pact nations were becoming independent [...] It was a time of transition on the world scene'.⁶⁹ The Trefry Report, an internal review on FEMA security practices, was released a mere year later. This report reflected the dramatic changes taking place on the world stage. Among other things, the report found that 'the geopolitical tenor in the world has evolved from that of two superpowers with their client and satellite states to that of one superpower and a series of states involved in a search for stability and development'. In what President Bush himself would refer to as this new world order, there was a reduced need for the utmost secrecy at FEMA.⁷⁰

However, a number of factors prevented the agency from swiftly declassifying its operations and shifting focus away from civil defence. First of all, FEMA's national security activities involved close coordination with the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy, both of which required high levels of security from those that they partnered with. As long as this was the case, FEMA was prevented from lowering its own security levels in any meaningful ways.⁷¹ Even if FEMA's relations with other key stakeholders had allowed for declassification, agency leaders were likely to have encountered considerable internal opposition to any such move from the agency's National Preparedness

66 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 112-113.

67 Cooper and Block, 2006: 57.

68 Bosner, 2005.

69 Gup, 1994.

70 FEMA, 1992b: 8.

71 FEMA, 1992b: 10.

(NP) Directorate, which was deeply vested in maintaining the agency's security culture. This and other factors led to serious 'territorial divisions' between the NP and the State and Local Preparedness and Support (SLPS) Directorates (the aforementioned emergency management 'weenies').⁷² Finally, the Trefry Report showed that many at FEMA believed that 'a security clearance is important for a successful career' within government.⁷³

The Bush White House was reportedly aware of the situation facing FEMA, as well as persistent congressional criticism of the agency's performance. One of the foremost critics of the agency during this period in time was Senator Barbara Mikulski, a ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee on Appropriations. Recognizing that any attempt to reform FEMA would bring his White House into conflict with any number of congressional committees with stakes in FEMA, President Bush preferred to defer dealing with the FEMA problem until after the 1992 presidential election.⁷⁴ However, the Bush Administration failed to anticipate Hurricane Andrew, which brought national attention onto FEMA and would go on to scuttle the president's chances of winning re-election later in the year.

Andrew struck southern Florida in August 1992, leaving in its wake millions without electricity, over 200,000 residents homeless, and 61 dead. What federal officials in Washington failed to realize was that the storm had totally incapacitated state and local authorities.⁷⁵ In an effort to retake command over the situation, President Bush effectively circumvented FEMA in creating a presidential task force headed by his Secretary of Transportation, Andrew Card, who visited Florida for the first time six days after landfall, just as the first federal troops were arriving in the state.⁷⁶ Candidate Bill Clinton, then the Democratic governor of Arkansas, saw opportunity in the Bush Administration's handling of Andrew, which had transformed Florida into a swing state going into the fall election season. Three months later, Clinton took Florida and the White House.⁷⁷ Clinton had learned one important lesson by watching Bush – 'responding to disasters could be good politics'.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, FEMA emerged from Hurricane Andrew a much lambasted and demoralized agency that the public had little confidence in. President-elect Clinton signalled that he had every intention of reforming the agency once in office.⁷⁹

72 Cooper and Block, 2006: 55; FEMA, 1992a.

73 FEMA, 1992b: 9.

74 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 374-375, 378-381; 'The Storm', 2005.

75 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 113-115; Schneider, 2005: 87-101; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378.

76 Adamski, et al., 2006: 8; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 113-115; Schneider, 2005: 87-101; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378.

77 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 113-115; Schneider, 2005: 87-101; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378.

78 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 119. See also Adams, 2005.

79 Cooper and Block, 2006: 58.

4.4 From Hurricane Andrew to 9/11

The government's botched handling of Hurricane Andrew breathed new life into Senator Barbara Mikulski's earlier calls for a thorough study of the nation's emergency management system. In the months after the storm, Mikulski slipped an addendum into the notes of an appropriation bill requiring that FEMA commission the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to carry out just such a study. Using her clout as chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, she forced the Government Accounting Office (GAO) to carry out a similar study.⁸⁰ According to one GAO official at the time, '[Mikulski was not] a member of Congress we were eager to upset. [...] [She was] a very key player in Congress for us, and we were there to help her'.⁸¹

In early 1993, the NAPA report was released. The investigators did not mince words. In their view:

*FEMA has been ill served by congressional and White House neglect, a fragmented statutory charter, irregular funding, and the uneven quality of its political executives appointed by past presidents. In short, the agency remains an institution not yet built.*⁸²

Among other things, the NAPA report recommended 'a reduction of political appointees [...], development of a competent, professional career staff and appointment of a career executive director' and 'access to, and support of, the President through the creation of a Domestic Crisis Monitoring Unit in the White House'.⁸³ The GAO came to a similar set of conclusions. The Clinton transition team, while receptive to these findings, was keen to avoid being forced into action by Mikulski. It is for this reason that one of Clinton's first moves as president was to nominate James Lee Witt, a business owner, former country judge, and former state emergency management director, as FEMA director.⁸⁴ Witt's nomination was intended to signal to members of Congress that the Clinton Administration was aware of and would work to resolve the problems plaguing FEMA. During his nomination hearing, Witt asked members of Congress for one year to reform the agency. If he failed, Witt promised to support legislation that would do away with FEMA.⁸⁵ The Clinton Administration was well aware of the political stakes associated with fumbling the next Andrew. So as to avoid the same fate as George H. W. Bush before him, Witt was 'specifically ordered [by the White House] to focus FEMA on natural disasters even though its portfolio as assigned by statute

80 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378-381.

81 Franklin, 1995.

82 National Academy of Public Administration, 1993: ix.

83 National Academy of Public Administration, 1993: ix.

84 Cooper and Block, 2006: 59; Cumming, 2010c; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 378-381.

85 Cooper and Block, 2006: 60, 70.

and Executive Order was broader'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Clinton saw to it that Witt always had a direct line of contact in to the White House. Later on, in 1996, Witt was even given *ex officio* status in the president's Cabinet.⁸⁷

Witt's arrival at FEMA on April 7, 1993 heralded a number of reforms at the agency, most of which had been recommended by the GAO and NAPA, as well as the FEMA Inspector General. As Witt saw it, many of the changes that needed to be made hinged on employee morale, which could only be expected to improve once the agency did away with its reputation as a 'dumping ground' for political appointees.⁸⁸ As such, Witt worked to secure assurances from the Clinton Administration that the FEMA director would have veto power over the White House Personnel Office's hiring to FEMA posts. In so doing, Witt was able to '[return] the agency to a commitment to merit or career professionalism [...] similar to other agencies'.⁸⁹ At the same time, Witt worked to emphasize the value of FEMA's cadre of loyal career civil servants who felt that they had received little recognition during the Giuffrida and Becton years. In what has since become a central piece of FEMA lore, Witt reportedly stood at the front entrance to FEMA headquarters on his first day on the job and introduced himself personally to every employee that passed.⁹⁰ According to Aaron Schroeder, Gary Wamsley and Robert Ward, symbolic gestures such as these served to '[wipe] away much of the bitterness and dissension' that had plagued employees' relations with the FEMA leadership in earlier years.⁹¹

In the years to come, many of FEMA's programmes concerned with civil defence and CoG were either dissolved or converted for use in managing natural disasters. At the same time, senior administrators were encouraged to focus on natural disaster preparedness.⁹² Meanwhile, the agency's emergency operations centre (EOC) was relocated from a reinforced underground bunker at FEMA's Mt. Weather site in western Maryland (one of the sites where the nation's leadership was to be located to in the event of a nuclear attack) to its headquarters in Washington, D.C.⁹³ The agency also adopted a new approach in dealing with its state counterparts.⁹⁴ Under Witt, FEMA established Performance Partnership Agreements/Cooperative Agreements (PPA/CAs) with state offices of emergency management. According to Sylves, 'A PPA/CA is analogous to a contract between FEMA and state officials regarding the outcomes expected from funding

86 Cumming, 2010c.

87 Cumming, 2010c; Sylves, 2007: 113.

88 'FEMA Faces Intense Scrutiny', 2005; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 371, 380-381.

89 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 391.

90 Cooper and Block, 2006: 60-62.

91 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 380-381.

92 Cooper and Block, 2006: 61-62.

93 Green, 2014.

94 Elliston, 2005.

support'. With each PPA/CA, which was signed by both the state's governor and the president, 'FEMA and state officials hoped to achieve mutually agreed-upon performance outcomes while building emergency management capacity'.⁹⁵ In addition, FEMA worked to give the states more discretion concerning how they spent federal funds and by further streamlining federal aid request procedures.⁹⁶

It is perhaps unsurprising that given the one-year deadline that he had imposed on himself, Witt made sure that FEMA had competent media/congressional relations staff that could promote and defend the reforms that the FEMA leadership was pursuing. This was no small feat, given that the number of committees and subcommittees with formal oversight over the agency's programmes numbered 16 and 22, respectively. Unlike many of his predecessors, Witt demonstrated a keen appreciation for the importance of good working relations with members of Congress if his reforms were to be successful. Despite his and other FEMA officials' efforts, however, the agency was unable to prevent Senator Mikulski from proposing a bill in August 1994 calling on FEMA to more clearly focus its activities on natural disasters and to develop a national emergency management plan. However, the bill was forgotten after the fall 1994 elections, which saw dramatic Democratic losses in both the House and the Senate.⁹⁷

According to Sylves, 'Each president's declarations reveal something about that president as a person, as a public executive, and as a politician'.⁹⁸ President Clinton redoubled his efforts to ensure that he would be re-elected in 1996 following the Democrat's congressional losses. Part of the Clinton Administration's re-election strategy reportedly entailed using FEMA as a means to shore up support in critical battleground states. According to Cooper and Block, 'Communities hit by [...] disaster [were known to use] federal cash to bankroll pet projects that had previously been shot down by Congress'. In other words, the president was in a unique position to inject federal funds into political backers' home districts through the federal emergency/disaster declaration process. During his eight years in office, Bill Clinton would issue more emergency/disaster declarations than any president past or since.⁹⁹ The majority of these were issued in election years.¹⁰⁰ There is of course another, somewhat less cynical explanation for why the number of presidential emergency/disaster declarations increased during the 1990s. As noted above, it may have been the case that FEMA's PPA/CA initiative gave the states better tools with which to seek out federal disaster relief that they had earlier lacked.¹⁰¹

95 Sylves, 2007: 115-116.

96 Boin, et al., 2005: 107; DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 113-114; Sapat, 2001: 340; Schroeder, et al., 2001: 397-398; Sylves, 2007: 115-116.

97 Schroeder, et al., 2001: 370-371, 378-381, 394-395.

98 Sylves, 2007: 118.

99 Cooper and Block, 2006: 64; Sylves, 2007: 120.

100 Garrett and Sobel, 2003.

101 Sylves, 2007: 117-127.

The bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the Mississippi River floods of the same year, and the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 constituted opportunities to test the capabilities of the 'new' FEMA under Witt. While the agency received generally high marks in all three instances, FEMA's own investigators and the GAO saw room for improvement in a number of areas, not least the agency's ability to effectively coordinate with state and local authorities.¹⁰²

While FEMA responded to over 500 different events during the 1990s, only two, the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings, were acts of terrorism.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, these and other events abroad, including gas attacks in the Tokyo subway (1995), the Khobar Towers bombing (1996), and attacks on two US embassies in Africa (1998), suggested to many observers a growing terrorist threat facing the nation.¹⁰⁴ The situation was all the more worrisome given that security was growing increasingly lax at numerous chemical and nuclear weapons depots at various sites in the former Soviet Union. The likelihood that these materials would fall into the hands of terrorists appeared to be growing. There was at the time a growing consensus among policymakers in Washington that FEMA should be responsible for supporting state and local authorities in preparing for such an eventuality.¹⁰⁵ This was later formalized in the 1996 Defense against Weapons of Mass Destruction Act (otherwise known as the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Amendment), part of a larger defence authorization bill passed the same year.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Witt would grow increasingly worried that this tasking risked distracting FEMA from what he considered to be the agency's primary mission, namely natural disaster management. Senior FEMA officials reportedly advised Witt to reconsider his stance, given growing inertia in Washington toward the terrorism issue. They argued that if Witt was not willing to whole-heartedly embrace the task of training state and local authorities in managing the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the agency risked becoming irrelevant. As it was, Witt eventually shifted his stance on the issue, but not before Congress reassigned the WMD preparedness tasking to DoD and relocated one of FEMA's terrorism preparedness programmes to the DoJ. Soon after, planning began ahead of the first major national-level emergency management exercise of the new century, TOPOFF 2000, which would simulate a major terror attack.¹⁰⁷ By this point, FEMA had revised the FRP to for the first time include a terrorism annex.¹⁰⁸

102 DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 114-116; General Accounting Office, 2001: 7; Sylves, 2006: 42.

103 Lehrer, 2004.

104 Sylves, 2007: 128.

105 Cumming and Sylves, 2005: 39.

106 Sylves, 2007: 128-129.

107 Cooper and Block, 2006: 64-66; Cumming, 2010e; Kettl, 2007: 77.

108 Harrald, 2007: 161-162.

Following the passage of the 1996 Act, members of Congress and the White House entered into negotiations concerning the creation of the United States Commission on National Security/21st Century. What later came to be known as the Hart-Rudman Commission was tasked with carrying out a thorough review of the nation's national security priorities going into the new century. In early 2001, the commission released its findings. In light of the growing likelihood of a major terror attack on US soil, the commission recommended the creation of a National Homeland Security Agency (NHSA) able to effectively coordinate all necessary federal resources in the event of any major disruptive event, including a major terror attack. While the new agency proposed by the Commission's members was intended to replace FEMA, it would 'retain and strengthen FEMA's 10 existing regional offices as a core element of its organizational structure'.¹⁰⁹

While President Clinton was reportedly receptive to the Commission's findings, he preferred to let his successor, George W. Bush, act on them as he saw fit. As it was, the NHSA proposal was a 'non-starter' for Bush, who had run for president on a platform of small government and less spending. He was not about to launch his presidency by expanding the size of the federal bureaucracy. While Bush fully intended to leave FEMA in place, he chose to replace James Lee Witt with Joe Allbaugh, Bush's former campaign manager.¹¹⁰ Even though Allbaugh would have preferred a position within the White House, he would go on to loyally pursue the Bush Administration's small government philosophy as FEMA director. For instance, Allbaugh explained in an interview soon after coming to FEMA that he 'was concerned that federal disaster assistance had evolved into both an oversized entitlement program and a disincentive to effective state and local risk management'.¹¹¹ As Allbaugh and others in the Bush Administration saw it, one way of 'incentivizing' the states to take more responsibility for their own preparedness was to make disaster recovery more costly. Initially at least, the White House hoped to convince members of Congress of the need to amend the Stafford Act so that the states would be obligated to cover a larger percentage of the cost of post-disaster recovery work. When these efforts failed, Allbaugh stepped in, implementing a number of internal policy changes that were aimed at devolving as much responsibility as possible to state and local authorities. One particularly controversial change involved offering federal funding for state-led initiatives on a competitive basis, rather than on a per-need basis as had been the case earlier. (The concern was that some of the most vulnerable jurisdictions around the country lacked the resources and grant-writing expertise necessary to compete for and win the federal grants being offered by FEMA.) Meanwhile,

109 Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-2.

110 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 129.

111 Cooper and Block, 2006: 71.

Project Impact, one of FEMA's most popular disaster mitigation programmes launched during the Witt years, was cut outright, while other programmes suffered funding cuts.¹¹²

In order to fully implement these policy changes, Allbaugh felt the need to rid the agency of remaining Witt loyalists, either by letting them go or by side-lining them within the agency. Cooper and Block later likened Allbaugh's arrival at FEMA to the process of 'de-Stalinizing Russia'. Agency morale suffered as a result.¹¹³ During Allbaugh's first year, new applications to FEMA slowed to a trickle, while agency veterans began making plans to either go into early retirement or to begin working as private contractors.¹¹⁴ Ironically, FEMA would become increasingly reliant on these contractors as the size of its permanent staff dwindled.¹¹⁵

While Allbaugh worked to reduce the agency's responsibility for preparedness and mitigation at the state and local levels, he was lobbying the White House to allow FEMA to take more responsibility for the nation's terrorism preparedness (much of which was assigned to DoD at the time). Soon after, President Bush approved a request by FEMA to establish an Office of National Preparedness at the agency. According to Adamski, Kline and Tyrrell, 'This was the first step [by the George W. Bush Administration] in refocusing FEMA's mission and attention from the all-hazards approach of emergency management embraced by the Clinton Administration'.¹¹⁶ In May 2001, Vice President Dick Cheney notified Allbaugh that he was planning to announce FEMA's new direction at a meeting of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) on 12 September 2001.¹¹⁷ Cheney's scheduled appearance was subsequently cancelled for obvious reasons.

4.5 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina

The 9/11 attacks (and the anthrax attacks targeting members of the media and senior members of Congress that came soon after) prompted momentous change across the country, not least within the Federal Government. According to John R. Harrald, the Federal Government's examination of its structures in the months after the attacks 'identified a need for a fuller integration of law enforcement and emergency management during the response to a terrorist attack and for the creation of a true national response system that can integrate the efforts of local,

112 Cooper and Block, 2006: 68; Elliston, 2005; FEMA, 1999; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 129.

113 Cooper and Block, 2006: 73.

114 Cooper and Block, 2006: 73; Elliston, 2005; Perrow, 2005.

115 Sylves, 2006: 34, 42.

116 Adamski, et al., 2006: 10. See also Haddow and Bullock, 2003.

117 Cooper and Block, 2006: 73-74.

state, and federal civilian and military response forces'.¹¹⁸ Based on these findings, the Congress would in subsequent sessions pass the USA PATRIOT Act, which strengthened law enforcement's powers to investigate suspected terrorists, and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA), which, among other things, created the position of Director of National Intelligence (DNI), who would be charged with coordinating the work of the nation's intelligence-gathering agencies and leading the new National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). Otherwise, the Act made changes to federal law as it pertained to any number of areas, including transportation security, border control and immigration, and visa routines.

The attacks also prompted calls by ranking members of Congress for Bush to reconsider the Hart-Rudman Commission's recommendations. However, whereas the Commission had only recommended that FEMA be replaced by another federal agency, members of Congress were now pushing for the creation of a whole new Cabinet-level department focused on homeland security. Bush hoped to placate members of Congress by creating a small Office of Homeland Security (OHS) in the White House in October 2001, just one month after the 9/11 attacks. The OHS would be charged with coordinating the federal bureaucracy in areas pertaining to homeland security.¹¹⁹ The job of leading the office was given to Tom Ridge, a former Pennsylvania governor who Kettl suggests 'had perhaps the toughest job in government after the president's', seeing as he had a small staff and a weak mandate to lead. Furthermore, members of Congress were pushing for the passage of some form of homeland security legislation that gave them more control over Ridge's operations.¹²⁰

Rather than allow Congress to pass legislation authorizing the OHS or any similar structure within the White House, the Bush Administration chose instead to enter into negotiations with members of Congress and union leaders over the creation of a new homeland security department. Key sticking points in the negotiations concerned whether or not the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) should be included in the new organization, and also whether the employees in the new department should be provided the same labour protections as other federal employees. Though negotiators could ultimately agree that the FBI and CIA would not be reorganized, they could not come to a compromise on the labour issue, which enjoyed considerable support among Democrats in Congress.¹²¹ The stalemate ended following unexpected gains by Republicans in the 2002 mid-term elections, forcing remaining Democrats in Congress to abandon their position on the issue. Weeks later, President Bush announced the creation of a new Department

118 Harrald, 2007: 166.

119 Harrald, 2007: 166.

120 Kettl, 2007: 38, 48-49.

121 Shenon, 2009.

of Homeland Security (DHS) with 160,000 employees, which, in his words, would 'increase [the Federal Government's] focus and effectiveness' in securing the country from future acts of terrorism.¹²² The new department would have three primary missions, namely: '(1) to protect the United States from further terrorist attacks; (2) to reduce the nation's vulnerability to terrorism; and (3) to minimize the damage from potential terrorist attacks and natural disasters'.¹²³

The task of designing the new department and the national strategy for homeland security that it would be charged with implementing fell to the OHS.¹²⁴ Working with the White House chief of staff, Andy Card, the OHS set about creating a planning committee consisting of a small group of senior officials, military officers, and academics that would develop a detailed proposal as to which agencies should be included within the new department. The planning committee's proposal was then handed to a small group based out of the Transition Planning Office in the Executive Office of the President tasked with handling the practicalities associated with creating the new department. There was wide recognition that the transition planning group had received an unenviable assignment, given any number of physical, cultural and organizational hurdles that would need to be addressed in merging nearly two dozen federal agencies into a single cohesive organization, and then winning over the support of members of Congress.¹²⁵

Allbaugh, who reportedly opposed the inclusion of FEMA within DHS on the grounds that the agency would lose a direct line of contact into the White House, saw to it that FEMA was represented in the transition planning team by his former college roommate, Michael D. Brown, who had gone on to become a lawyer, one-time political candidate and former commissioner for an international Arabian horse association before coming to FEMA in February 2001 as general counsel.¹²⁶ Like Allbaugh before him, Brown had little previous emergency management experience. According to Cooper and Block, Brown's involvement in the DHS transition process would make him numerous enemies, but also some allies among other DHS sceptics working in the federal bureaucracy.¹²⁷

The planning team's initial proposal envisioned FEMA inheriting a number of terrorism preparedness and emergency medical programmes from the FBI, DoJ and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). However, DoJ patrons in Congress subsequently managed to block the transfer of the department's first responder preparedness training programme to FEMA, while the FBI, unable to stop the loss of its programmes to FEMA, stripped them of

122 Kertl, 2007: 53-55.

123 Adamski, et al., 2006: 10.

124 Harrald, 2007: 166-167.

125 Kertl, 2004: 20-21, 46.

126 Sheff, 2006.

127 Cooper and Block, 2006: 77-80.

staff before they could be transferred.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, a new proposal emerged for several pre-existing FEMA offices, including the recently created ONP, to be moved to the Border and Transportation Security Directorate within DHS.¹²⁹ The Government Accountability Office (GAO) worried that such a move would in part give FEMA less visibility over the entirety of federal preparedness and mitigation programmes and disrupt the agency's relationships with state and local emergency managers around the country.¹³⁰

Neither Allbaugh nor Brown appears to have anticipated the direction the work in the technical group would take. According to Cooper and Block, 'Brown, who had thought he was drawing up plans for an enhanced FEMA as a central hub of the nation's homeland security efforts, suddenly discovered that FEMA would lose programmes under the new configuration and drop a rung in stature'.¹³¹ The final outputs of the transition planning team fed into the process of drafting the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which created DHS, stood up on 1 March 2003 under the leadership of Tom Ridge.¹³²

The new department was initially organized into five directorates, each of which was headed by a deputy secretary who reported to the DHS secretary directly. Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson would be responsible for the newly created Emergency Preparedness and Response (EP&R) Directorate, in which FEMA, the Coast Guard (USCG), the Secret Service (USSS), and Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), along with smaller programmer offices from other departments.¹³³ Particularly, FEMA would be tasked with '[leading] the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident'. It would also retain responsibility for certain disaster mitigation programmes, first responder training activities, and the US Fire Administration (USFA).¹³⁴ However, Harrald points out that not all of the Federal Government's pre-existing preparedness functions were moved to EP&R. For instance, the DoJ's Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) ended up as part of the State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness Office in a wholly different directorate within DHS. As a result, it would become 'a competitor to FEMA for mitigation and recovery funding'.¹³⁵

Initially at least, FEMA and several other agencies joining EP&R would not be permitted to retain their names and unique logos. After considerable lobbying by the FEMA director and his staff, an administrative decision was made reversing this decision insofar as FEMA was concerned.¹³⁶

128 Cooper and Block, 2006: 79-80.

129 Morris, 2006: 287.

130 Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-13.

131 Cooper and Block, 2006: 80.

132 Cecchine, et al., 2004: 22; Marek, 2005.

133 Harrald, 2007: 168; Morris, 2006: 287; Tierney, 2005.

134 DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 111. See also FEMA, 2006b; and FEMA, 2006c.

135 Harrald, 2007: 168.

136 Cumming, 2010b.

One of the new department's first assignments would be to develop a National Response System (NRS) in accordance with Homeland Security President Directive 5, issued in February 2003. This new arrangement was expected to account for and, where appropriate, incorporate the existing 'incident command system; multi-agency coordination systems; [and] unified command.' This work was expected to generate a national 'all-discipline, all-hazards' plan for responding to disruptive events (the National Response Plan (NRP), described below).¹³⁷ According to Harrald:

*The development of emergency management policy and structure following 9/11 was the extension of a thirty-year trend. Since the 1970s, the U.S. emergency management community had increased its ability to structure and manage a large response through improved plans and adoption of the ICS.*¹³⁸

As many as eighty-eight congressional committees and subcommittees exercised some form of oversight over the various federal agencies programmes that now belonged within DHS.¹³⁹ According to Thomas A. Garrett and Russell S. Sobel, this entailed a more indirect and muddled form of congressional oversight over each DHS component agency, including FEMA. Meanwhile, the DHS leadership was obligated to answer to 'many masters' with different, often conflicting interests. In this new environment, it would not always be easy to interpret and then convey elite direction to the various actors making up the massive DHS organization. Garrett and Sobel argue that the task of interpreting the preferences of the various committees and subcommittees had in fact been much easier when FEMA was an independent agency, when 'oversight [over the agency] was clear, as were the sources of congressional influence'.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Thomas Foley and Warren Rudman argue that the 'fragmentation of oversight' that came with the creation of DHS served to '[preserve] rivalries and cultural barriers that the creation of [DHS] was intended to eliminate; and it prevent[ed] DHS from acting as a single, well-coordinated team'.¹⁴¹

According to Harrald, the various agencies to be reorganized within DHS experienced the transition very differently:

*For some agencies, the transition went relatively smoothly. The Secret Service was moved with form and function intact. The Coast Guard moved from the U.S. Department of Transportation to DHS without losing its unique status as an independent entity, and it gained a direct reporting relationship to the secretary of homeland security. [...] FEMA, however, lost much of its bureaucratic and operational strength.*¹⁴²

137 Harrald, 2007: 169.

138 Harrald, 2007: 177.

139 Kettl, 2004: 20-21, 46.

140 Garrett and Sobel, 2003.

141 Foley and Rudman, 2004.

142 Harrald, 2007: 168.

For many at FEMA, the move to DHS was interpreted as a 'demotion' that only further demoralized the agency. According to one long-time FEMA employee:

When I first started here in the early 1980s, the old-timers were thrilled to be an independent agency – they thought they had really moved up in the world. Those of us who were here through the 1990s really thought we'd accomplished something as an agency. We had a good reputation; we'd worked hard to be an effective agency, and we were visible. When discussions began in 2002 to make us part of DHS, a lot of us felt like we'd been kicked in the gut. It was as if our reward for all we'd accomplished was a great big demotion.¹⁴³

Immediately before FEMA was formerly transitioned into DHS, Joe Allbaugh announced his intention to leave the agency.¹⁴⁴ President Bush subsequently nominated Michael Brown to replace him, reportedly over the objections of Karl Rove, one of the president's closest advisers.¹⁴⁵ Brown, who had been hoping for a more senior position within DHS, was nevertheless excited by the prospect of leading FEMA through the DHS transition period.¹⁴⁶

To many veteran civil servants at FEMA, the agency's sinking morale during the early Bush years was as much a consequence of any on-going organizational changes as they were internal staffing choices. In Brown and the other new members of the FEMA 'front office', agency veterans saw a return to the Giuffrida-era cronyism of the 1980s. Most troubling for many was the fact that with the exception of an acting deputy director of operations, none of FEMA's senior administrators had any significant prior emergency management experience. According to a former director of response who chose to leave the agency in February 2005:

The impact of having political [sic] in the high ranks of FEMA [...] that's what killed us [sic] was that in the senior ranks of FEMA there was nobody that even knew FEMA's history, much less understood the profession and the dynamics and the roles and responsibilities of the states and local governments.¹⁴⁷

It is important to mention the relationship between Michael Brown and DHS Secretary Ridge was reportedly fraught with tension from the get-go. Ridge later said of Brown: 'I didn't like him. I don't know what his problem was, but I felt that he wanted to be the guy in charge'.¹⁴⁸ (According to Brown, 'DHS and I had a personality clash, for lack of a better term'.¹⁴⁹) The relationship between Ridge and Brown would deteriorate further during the late spring of 2003, when Brown began pushing for the ODP to be moved from the State and Local Government

143 Morris, 2006: 288.

144 Dyson, 2006: 49.

145 Rove, 2010: 449-450.

146 Brown, 2007; Cumming, 2010b.

147 Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-5.

148 Cooper and Block, 2006: 81.

149 Sheff, 2006.

Coordination and Preparedness Office to FEMA, a proposal that had been blocked by members of Congress in 2002. (Brown's reasoning at the time was that 'if the ODP controlled terrorism grants, which after 9/11 had grown into the billions of dollars (compared to the few hundred million on offer for natural disasters), it risked skewing the way states prepared for all-hazards management'.¹⁵⁰) Ridge, who recognized the political headaches that taking on DoJ's patrons in Congress entailed, rejected the idea out of hand.¹⁵¹ In fact, Ridge in September 2003 would approve a proposal to move most of FEMA's preparedness grant programmes to the ODP.¹⁵² According to Cooper and Block, the dispute between Brown and Ridge over ODP was symptomatic of 'a wider philosophical battle' within DHS:

*On one side were former law enforcement officials who advocated secrecy, tight security, and intelligence as the key to minimizing the trauma of any terrorist attack. On the other side were firefighters, rescue workers, and emergency managers who emphasized collaboration, information sharing, public awareness, and mitigation efforts to reduce the impact of all disasters, whatever their origin.*¹⁵³

Evidence suggests that FEMA found itself under significant pressure to shift its focus away from natural disaster and toward terrorism instead. So long as it remained focused on natural disasters, the agency risked being perceived as out of step with the new department's foremost priority, terrorism. However, senior FEMA officials, including Michael Brown, found themselves torn between the need to adjust to the bureaucratic changes going on around them and agency's preference not to abandon what had by the early 2000s become its primary core competency, namely managing natural disasters.¹⁵⁴ A set of studies carried out by the Partnership for Public Service and the Federation of Government Employees in late 2003 found FEMA to be suffering from low morale and severe staff retention issues.¹⁵⁵ In June 2004, the head of FEMA's union sent an open letter to members of Congress, stating that:

*Over the past three-and-one-half years, FEMA has gone from being a model agency to being one where funds are being misspent, employee morale has fallen, and our nation's emergency management capability is being eroded. [...] Our professional staff are systematically being replaced by politically connected novices and contractors. [...] So many people have left who had developed most of our basic programs. A lot of institutional knowledge is gone. Everyone who is able to retire has left, and then a lot of people have moved to other agencies.*¹⁵⁶

150 Cooper and Block, 2006: 81. See Harrald, 2007: 172-173 for a list of different federal terrorism grant programmes that were implemented in the post-9/11 years.

151 Cooper and Block, 2006: 81.

152 Cooper and Block, 2006: 85-86.

153 Cooper and Block, 2006: 81.

154 Cooper and Block, 2006: 84-85; Perrow, 2005; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-6.

155 Hsu, 2005; Morris, 2006: 288; Sylves, 2006: 35.

156 Elliston, 2005.

It is clear that by 2004, numerous warnings existed in the public record concerning the deteriorating situation at FEMA.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Brown continued working within the DHS organization to defend FEMA's interests, not least keeping the preparedness tasking within the agency. In a letter sent to DHS Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson, for instance, Brown made the case that:

*In this new era of heightened security, we have created an ever evolving department and sometimes emergency preparedness is inadvertently considered the same as other DHS functions such as law enforcement duties at airports, interception of illegal aliens and inspection of cargo at ports of entry. Those are true law enforcement duties inherent to the DHS mission. For these organizations, their preparedness mission is focused on prevention of incident, not response to disasters. Emergency Preparedness means the capability to respond a disaster, regardless of what causes that disaster. [...] FEMA is a very small part of DHS in terms of budget, personnel and other resources. Merging FEMA's small preparedness functions with the prevention mission of the department will destroy the emergency management cycle and lead to failure.*¹⁵⁸

However, it is ironic that the more Brown sought to defend FEMA and its role, the more problems he seems to have created for the agency. According to Bill Carwile, a senior FEMA official who retired immediately before Katrina:

*Mike was his own worst enemy. He was smart and he was often right but he always undermined himself with this bizarre mix of insecurity and arrogance. He never cultivated any friends [within DHS] or anywhere in Washington for that matter that I could see who were willing to go to bat for him. And the sad truth is that FEMA suffered for it. FEMA suffered because people were making stupid decisions and Brown could not stop them.*¹⁵⁹

Relations between FEMA and the DHS leadership deteriorated even further during the process of developing a new National Response Plan (NRP), which was to replace the FRP. Initially, Secretary Ridge tasked the head of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to lead the effort to develop the new plan with the assistance of consultants from the Rand Corporation.¹⁶⁰ In the months to come, a number of inter-agency working groups were created to support the TSA in drafting the new plan. However, FEMA would reportedly withdraw from the project after tensions developed between the RAND project manager and FEMA's representatives. In May 2003 a first draft of the new plan was distributed to state and local emergency managers for comment. The new plan, which appeared to suggest that the Federal Government would be in charge of responding to disruptive events rather than an equal partner working with state and local authorities, was roundly rejected.¹⁶¹

157 Kettl, 2004.

158 Cooper and Block, 2006: 89.

159 Cooper and Block, 2006: 90. See also Carwile, 2005.

160 Bosner, 2005; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 135.

161 Cooper and Block, 2006: 82; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 135-136.

At this stage, DHS Secretary Ridge and his staff took responsibility for the task of rewriting the plan, which, unlike its predecessor, was expected to address every stage in the emergency management cycle.¹⁶² Officials at DHS argued that the NRP needed to be an all-hazards incident management plan that '[provided] the framework for federal interaction with state, local, and tribal governments; the private sector; and NGOs in the context of domestic incident prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities'. The plan was touted as a vital tool in ensuring 'the seamless integration of the Federal Government' in supporting authorities at the state and local levels. The Secretary's office went to great pains in the next draft of the plan to emphasize the fact that 'incident response [should] be handled at the lowest possible organizational and jurisdictional level'.¹⁶³

While state and local authorities were still critical of the new draft (for being too long, too complicated, too focused on terrorism), the NRP replaced the FRP in early 2005. State and local emergency management agencies were requested to 'modify [their] existing incident management and emergency operations plans [...] to ensure proper alignment with NRP coordinating structures' by April of the same year. Federal departments and agencies had until mid-autumn of the same year to complete this task.¹⁶⁴ According to the DHS Inspector General, 'The implementation of the NRP occurred on an aggressive schedule' and only with grudging support from state emergency managers, many of whom did not receive training on the intricate and acronym-heavy plan prior to implementation.¹⁶⁵ According to Cooper and Block, Brown was 'scrupulously loyal' to the Bush Administration, and thus made few if any public statements critical of the new plan.¹⁶⁶ Brown later claimed that he had indeed had doubts about the plan, mainly that it created an unnecessary amount of bureaucracy that threatened to reduce the effectiveness of any government response, but that he chose to 'work within the system' to address the issue.¹⁶⁷

According to Harrald, the national 'response system was in transition' as the 2004 hurricane season approached:

*Housed within DHS, FEMA maintained its Stafford Act responsibilities, including the obligation to appoint a federal coordinating officer for each state included in a presidential disaster declaration. [The National Incident Management System (NIMS)] had become a national standard, but its implementation was not yet required. The final NRP was in draft form; the governing policy document essentially continued the policies and practices of the FRP with changes made to acknowledge the location of FEMA within DHS.*¹⁶⁸

162 Harrald, 2007: 171; Moynihan, 2006.

163 DHS, 2004b: 1, 2, 8-11.

164 Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 27-12.

165 DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 23. See also Harrald, 2007: 169-170.

166 Cooper and Block, 2006: 86. See also Elliston, 2005.

167 Brown, 2005. See also Cooper and Block, 2006: 86.

168 Harrald, 2007: 174.

As it turned out, four major hurricanes would strike Florida during the hot summer months, making it the most costly hurricane season on record and prompting what FEMA described as the ‘largest mobilization of emergency response and disaster resources’ in the agency’s history.¹⁶⁹ For Brown, this was an opportunity to demonstrate that FEMA was still relevant, and, if anything, could manage the hurricanes without help from DHS. (At one point during the 2004 response, Brown reportedly asked Andrew Card, the president’s chief of staff, to keep DHS ‘out of [his] hair’.¹⁷⁰) On the surface at least, the almost entirely FEMA-orchestrated response received high marks from federal, state and local officials alike.¹⁷¹ According to Harrald, ‘The agency’s organizational location within DHS helped it to obtain and coordinate other DHS resources, but in general, the disaster response was managed using pre-DHS procedures and protocols’.¹⁷²

However, the DHS Inspector General later identified any number of problems related to the agency’s long-term recovery operations, supply chain management and data processing that were not immediately evident to observers.¹⁷³ According to Michael Brown himself, ‘[FEMA’s] logistics just sucked. It was awful’.¹⁷⁴ For many seasoned agency hands, the 2004 hurricane season revealed an even larger problem, namely a lack of effective leadership at FEMA. In September 2004, FEMA’s cadre of federal coordinating officials (FCOs), a group of senior officials specially trained for leadership in coordinating federal responses to major disruptive events, raised this issue with Michael Brown personally.¹⁷⁵

The Bush Administration nominated Michael Chertoff, a former DoJ official and judge, to replace Tom Ridge as DHS secretary in late January 2005.¹⁷⁶ According to McQuaid and Schleifstein, Chertoff was ‘a product of the GOP meritocratic establishment’ who appealed to Republicans and Democrats alike.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, Chertoff appeared to understand the immense challenges facing the department, one of which was ‘knitting [the department’s] many fiefs into a cohesive whole’ and reconciling the various, sometimes oppositional interests in Congress that were simultaneously pulling the department in different directions.¹⁷⁸

Brown reportedly saw the departure of Ridge as an opportunity to put a stop to repeated cuts in FEMA’s funding, or what FEMA officials had come to refer

169 Drye, 2004: FEMA, 2006e.

170 Brown, 2006.

171 Brinkley, 2006: 247-248; Cooper and Block, 2006: 86; Parker, et al., 2009: 210.

172 Harrald, 2007: 175, 180.

173 DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 74, 84, 133; Harrald, 2007: 176.

174 ‘Pre-Katrina study exposed FEMA woes’, 2006.

175 Cooper and Block, 2006: 87.

176 Carney, et al., 2005; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 136-137.

177 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 136.

178 Cooper and Block, 2006: 88. See also Kettl, 2004.

to as 'DHS taxes' levied against the agency. According to Cooper and Block, 'FEMA [...] was dunned for as much as \$80 million a year. For an agency with only a \$550 million operating budget on average, the loss was huge'.¹⁷⁹ These cuts forced FEMA to cut full-time staff and reduce the total number of operational emergency response teams tasked with providing emergency medical care, urban search and rescue (USAR) capabilities, and victim identification competencies.¹⁸⁰ According to one observer, the fact that FEMA belonged to DHS was 'making it very, very hard for FEMA to function as it used to'.¹⁸¹

In early 2005, at around the same time that Chertoff was nominated to lead DHS, FEMA awarded an outside contractor, the MITRE Corporation, a \$500,000 contract to investigate FEMA's response during the 2004 hurricane season. Just as many at FEMA had suspected, the study found numerous problems at the agency, including 'unclear lines of communication [...]; a dearth of top-level emergency management expertise; low morale; and a lack of manpower, training and money'.¹⁸² The investigators described an agency unable to fulfil its core mission, led by individuals who 'wasted too much time' in conflict with the DHS leadership.¹⁸³ One FEMA employee responding to an anonymous survey that was part of the study described a 'void' at the top of the agency, which was wont to react 'to politics and hot potatoes', while another employee suggested that the leadership did not fully understand the emergency management cycle, nor how the agency actually responded to disruptive events.¹⁸⁴

The idea was that elements of the MITRE report could be used as leverage in future discussions with Chertoff, who exercised considerable control over the process of allocating funds within DHS. However, any such discussion would have to wait until a department-wide Second-Stage Review (2SR) ordered by Chertoff had been completed. According to Chertoff himself, the purpose of the 2SR was 'to make sure that [the DHS] organization [was] best aligned to support [its] mission'.¹⁸⁵ However, the review process was presumably also intended to ensure that the department was adhering to its original mandate and that each component agency was doing that which policymakers intended them to do. Indeed, Kettl argues that DHS had long struggled 'to define its mission and just what 'homeland security' meant'. The same was true of every agency that joined the department, each of which was expected to carry out new homeland security

179 Cooper and Block, 2006: 84.

180 DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 119; Franklin, 1995; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-7.

181 Elliston, 2005.

182 'Pre-Katrina study exposed FEMA woes', 2006.

183 Cooper and Block, 2006: 91.

184 Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-5-6.

185 Reylea and Hogue, 2005.

missions ‘without sacrificing any of their existing missions’. ‘The more time that passed after September 11, the more the older missions reasserted themselves and presented problems of balance to top officials’.¹⁸⁶

As noted above, FEMA had by this point already lost several programmes either to other directorates within DHS or to other departments. The hope at FEMA was that the 2SR findings would recommend that FEMA reclaim at least some of these programmes.¹⁸⁷ This was not to be. Among other things, the 2SR findings released in July 2005 recommended that the EP&R Directorate that FEMA belonged to should be closed down, and two new directorates, a Response Directorate and a Preparedness Directorate, be created in its place.¹⁸⁸ The majority of the existing FEMA organization would be organized within the Response Directorate, where it would ‘focus on its historic and vital mission of response and recovery’. Meanwhile, all remaining FEMA preparedness programmes would be moved to the Preparedness Directorate, which would be expected to ‘support FEMA with training resources and [...] continue to rely on FEMA’s subject matter expertise and the expertise of our other components in promoting preparedness’.¹⁸⁹ The post-2SR reorganization was to be completed by October of the same year.¹⁹⁰

Chertoff rightly expected that the 2SR findings would disappoint many actors in the field of emergency management. For instance, David Liebersbach, the president of NEMA, wrote to members of Congress only days after the 2SR was released to protest the ‘unnecessary separation of functions [that] will result in disjointed response and adversely impact the effectiveness of departmental operations’. Three weeks later, Liebersbach and Michael Brown met with DHS Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson in Washington to make the same argument in person.¹⁹¹ Brown for his part appears to have resigned himself to the fact that he could not prevent the impending reorganization of DHS. In fact, Brown had decided to leave FEMA, effective late August 2005.¹⁹²

By the time Katrina made landfall in late August 2005, many of the changes proposed by Chertoff had been implemented. However, there was still much work to be done before the reorganization was fully implemented.¹⁹³ What was in place was, as Harrald puts it, ‘a new, but basically untested, national response system

186 Kettl, 2007: 53, 136.

187 Cooper and Block, 2006: 88.

188 Cumming, 2010b; Relyea and Hogue, 2005: 9-10.

189 Chertoff, 2005b.

190 Relyea and Hogue, 2005: 9-10; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-13.

191 Cooper and Block, 2006: 88-89.

192 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 138.

193 DHS, 2005; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 14-13.

that made emergency management an integral part of homeland security'.¹⁹⁴ In the following section, FEMA's preparedness to deal with the New Orleans scenario, arguably the nation's single most significant hurricane vulnerability at the time, is discussed.

4.6 Preparing New Orleans for 'The Big One'

New Orleans has been called 'the impossible but inevitable city' – inevitable to the extent that market imperatives dictate that a major port must exist at the mouth of the Mississippi River, but impossible given the region's 'wretched' climate and geography. Residents have for centuries seen fit to make significant alterations to the city's physical landscape in an attempt to maximize the economic potential and increase the liveability of the region.¹⁹⁵ However, these efforts have had the unintended consequence of increasing the vulnerability of the city and its residents to hurricanes.

As noted in Chapter 2, the Federal Government has long shown reticence in responding to major disruptive events, let alone helping the states and local municipalities to mitigate known risks. However, the disruption to river-borne commerce caused by the Great Flood of 1927, which affected communities up and down the Mississippi River, was simply too great for the US government to ignore. In the wake of the flood, Congress tasked the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with developing a system of flood barriers to protect built-up areas along the Mississippi, including New Orleans.¹⁹⁶ A series of hurricanes that struck the southern United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s prompted discussion for the first time concerning the Federal Government's role in hurricane preparedness. Less than ten years later, the Corps of Engineers identified New Orleans as particularly at risk from hurricanes.¹⁹⁷ In 1965, the US Congress passed the Flood Control Act, authorizing the Lake Ponchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project (a series of levees, concrete floodwalls, barriers, and flood control gates intended to protect the city of New Orleans from a fast-moving Category 3 hurricane).¹⁹⁸ The project, which was delayed many times due to design alterations, technical issues, and legal challenges, was slated for completion in September 2005, one month after Katrina made landfall.¹⁹⁹

194 Harrald, 2007: 180.

195 Lewis, 1976: 17.

196 Government Accountability Office, 2005: 2-7; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 28-31; US Army Corps of Engineers, 2006.

197 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 54-55.

198 Cooper and Block, 2006: 24, 26; Hallowell, 2005: 164; van Heerden and Bryan, 2006: 4, 205; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 2.

199 Carter, 2005; Government Accountability Office, 2005: 2-7; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 71-86.

According to Karen Bakker, Bruce Braun and James McCarthy, there is evidence to suggest that the sheer scale of the New Orleans-area flood protection project contributed to a false sense of security among Corps officials, local authorities and members of the public alike – everyone believed that the city was at less risk from hurricanes than was actually the case.²⁰⁰ However, it was only with the bungled evacuation of New Orleans ahead of Hurricane Georges in 1998 that state and local officials grew truly alarmed that New Orleans might actually be vulnerable to what would come to be known as ‘the big one’.²⁰¹ After Georges, the state office of emergency preparedness and local officials agreed to develop a regional evacuation plan, which, among other things, would describe how to implement contraflow lane reversal. The Federal Government provided some funding for the development of the plan.²⁰² Meanwhile, the local office of emergency preparedness in New Orleans began work on what would be the city’s first Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).²⁰³

With a finalized regional evacuation plan in hand, the director of Louisiana’s emergency preparedness agency, Michael L. Brown (no relation to FEMA Director Michael Brown) penned a 22-page letter to FEMA in the year 2000 requesting funds for a regional catastrophic hurricane exercise. The request was turned down, though this did not dissuade Brown, who re-sent the letter to the Allbaugh-era FEMA a year later, this time via a powerful Louisiana senator.²⁰⁴ In one way, Brown’s timing was excellent; FEMA had recently identified the hurricane threat to New Orleans as one of three primary catastrophic scenarios facing the country (the other two being an earthquake in San Francisco and a terror attack in New York City). The agency estimated that as many as 25,000 residents could be killed, with another 250,000 stranded as a result of flooding.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, Brown’s request arrived in Washington immediately before the 9/11 attacks. Unsurprisingly, Brown’s request was again turned down.²⁰⁶ It was around this time that the local newspaper in New Orleans published ‘Washing Away’, a series of Pulitzer Prize-winning articles that illustrated the correlation between coastal erosion in the Mississippi Delta and south-eastern Louisiana’s increasing vulnerability to hurricanes.²⁰⁷ The ‘Washing Away’ series would inspire

200 Bakker, et al., 2005. See also Colten, 2006; and Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 2.

201 Bradberry, 2006.

202 Beamish, 2005; Bradberry, 2006.

203 Brinkley, 2006: 19.

204 Fontenot, 2006.

205 Berger, 2001.

206 Cooper and Block, 2006: 7-11; Gilgoff, 2005.

207 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 125-126; ‘Washing Away’, 2002.

similar articles in a number of national popular scientific and trade publications in the years to come, all of which served to demonstrate the region's growing vulnerability to hurricanes.²⁰⁸

As it turned out, New Orleans was slated to host the Super Bowl, the first major national event after the 9/11 attacks. For this reason, 'New Orleans got more attention than most places [in the United States after the 9/11 attacks]. First FEMA, then DHS, poured money out of the terrorism spout and the city spent it on weapons-of-mass-destruction drills'. The city's Office of Homeland Security and Public Safety (OHSPS) appears to have been focused on little else during 2001 and the first half of 2002.²⁰⁹ In the years following the Super Bowl, New Orleans would join several neighbouring parishes in a number of projects within the framework of the Urban Area Security Initiative administered by DHS. (As an indication of the initiative's focus, the city's request for flat-bottom boats was rejected – the DHS argument was that such boats would be useless in the event of a CBRN attack.)²¹⁰

In 2003, FEMA allocated \$500,000 to fund a two-week catastrophic hurricane exercise in New Orleans the following summer. What became known as the 'Hurricane Pam' exercise, which depicted a slow-moving Category 3 hurricane hitting New Orleans, would present a good opportunity for federal officials to evaluate the new DHS organization in managing a large-scale natural disaster.²¹¹ Due to budget constraints, however, the exercise was subsequently shortened to a week, but nevertheless attracted approximately 250 federal, state and local officials, including at least one White House representative.²¹² Few follow-up meetings were conducted to discuss the exercise outcomes, resulting in delays in finalizing the regional catastrophic hurricane plan that the Pam exercise was expected to generate.²¹³ Nevertheless, the exercise was credited with fostering relationships between federal, state and local participants, many of whom had never met nor previously been aware of the severity of the threat facing New Orleans.²¹⁴

Just two months later, Hurricane Ivan struck south-eastern Louisiana. The state's attempt to evacuate metropolitan New Orleans using contraflow resulted in gridlock from New Orleans to the state capital, Baton Rouge.²¹⁵ In the wake

208 Bourne, 2004; Parker, et al., 2009: 210.

209 McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 144-145.

210 Cooper and Block, 2006: 83-84; Ebbert, 2006.

211 Cooper and Block, 2006: 13-22; FEMA, 2004; van Heerden and Bryan, 2006: 7; Horne, 2006: 201-202; 'How Ray Nagin Won His First Term as Mayor of New Orleans', 2006; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2006: 144-145; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 8-2-5.

212 'Hurricane Pam', 2005; 'In case of emergency', 2004.

213 Bradberry, 2006; DHS Office of Insp. Gen., 2006: 123; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 8-6; Wells, 2005.

214 US Department of State, 2014.

215 'Direct hit Ivan in New Orleans could mean a modern Atlantis', 2004; Horne, 2006: 26-28.

of Ivan, Louisiana's Democratic governor ordered the state police and the state department of transportation to revise the state's evacuation plan in cooperation with officials at the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (LOHSEP).²¹⁶

The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami served as a reminder to senior FEMA officials concerning the vulnerability of coastal communities to major wave events. Soon after returning from a visit to Southeast Asia in early 2005, FEMA Director Michael Brown reportedly ordered agency planners to refocus their attention on preparing for an event on a similar scale in the US. According to one FEMA official, 'New Orleans was the number one disaster we were talking about'.²¹⁷

By April 2005, state planners in Louisiana had revised the regional evacuation plan as per the governor's instructions after Ivan. The planners had also harmonized the state's 'all-hazard' emergency operations plan and incident management system with national-level planning documents, including the NRP. However, it is unclear if they had time to conduct any trainings or exercises in the region based on the new plan.²¹⁸ At around the same time, officials in New Orleans released a revised but incomplete emergency plan.²¹⁹ Given the fact that local planners had yet to finalize certain elements of the plan that would be crucial in the event of a hurricane (like mass sheltering), prominent local leaders recorded during the late spring a series of public service announcements (PSAs) urging residents to assist each other in leaving the city ahead of any future hurricane.²²⁰

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we are able to see the path by which the modern system of emergency management in the United States was developed, from whence the origins of FEMA as the nation's single federal-level emergency management agency stem, and then how FEMA and the institutional forces that constrained and enabled the behaviour of its members were shaped over the ensuing decades by shifting threats and priorities, different leaders, and also by varying degrees of elite attention (and inattention). Furthermore, we were able to watch as the agency was confronted with the 9/11 attacks and the institutional change that they prompted. For FEMA, this meant relinquishing its status as an independent executive agency and instead becoming one of over twenty federal agencies that were joined under the DHS umbrella. Throughout, it has been possible to observe the agency's work relating to natural disasters and hurricanes in particular

216 Blanco, 2005; Bradberry, 2006.

217 Parker, et al., 2009: 209.

218 Bradberry, 2006; Harrald, 2007: 179; Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, 2005; DHS, 2004a; Sen. Home. Def. and Gov. Affairs Comm., 2006: 6-7.

219 New Orleans Office of Emergency Preparedness, 2004: 8.

220 Nolan, 2005.

and to collect evidence to suggest just how prepared FEMA was to deal with these and other eventualities at different points in the agency's history. In the analysis below, I shall seek to establish what, if anything, the historical record provided here allows us to say about the claim made earlier that the 9/11 attacks prompted the single most significant instance of institutional change in FEMA's history. Assuming a convincing argument can be made for this claim, I am then prepared to argue for what practical implications this change had specifically for the agency's hurricane preparedness, and then to what extent the different hypotheses articulated in Chapter 2 are borne out by the case.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The case presented in Chapter 4 provides a foundation for the analysis of FEMA's preparedness for dealing with the hurricane threat prior to and then after the 9/11 attacks, which I argue prompted major institutional change within the institutional environment that FEMA operated within. The agency's preparedness for hurricanes is then approached from different analytical angles that are inspired by the primary indicators of preparedness (inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols) that are included as part of the institutional perspective on preparedness. Based on the outcomes of the analyses of FEMA's hurricane preparedness prior to and after the 9/11 attacks in sections 5.3 and 5.4, respectively, we should be able to see how, if at all, major institutional change influenced the state of FEMA's hurricane preparedness. Based on the outcomes of the analysis, the research hypotheses are evaluated in the section that follows. Among other things, we should be able to see which streams of neo-institutional thinking are supported by our observations on the case. Citations appear in this chapter only where new information is introduced.

5.2 Major institutional change in the wake of the 9/11 attacks

This study centres on the claim that the 9/11 attacks prompted the single most significant period of institutional change within the field of emergency management/homeland security between the point of FEMA's inception in 1979 and August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. In order to ascertain the state of FEMA's hurricane preparedness over time, but particularly before and after 9/11, we must first demonstrate that the independent variable that I have selected is in fact valid, and that various potential errors in inference have been accounted for.

In Chapter 3, I argued that besides the 9/11 attacks, the fall of the Soviet Union and the flawed response to Hurricane Andrew in particular had the potential to create certain pressures for change at FEMA and to emergency management policy writ large. Both of these events created a space in which policy debate ensued over what the nation's emergency management system should be tooled toward managing (civil defence, natural disasters, all manner of threats?). In the years to come, a divide would emerge between those policymakers who preferred that FEMA be allowed to make itself more relevant in the post-Soviet world (by deemphasizing civil defence, for instance) and those who would that FEMA be shut down and a new agency created in its stead. As it was, the former, gradual reform approach prevailed.

Meanwhile, the record shows that the first World Trade Center attack and the Oklahoma City bombing ignited a policy debate concerning the growing threat of terrorism and what should be done about it. That being said, the change that came as a result was also largely gradual in nature, in large part because the outgoing Clinton Administration preferred to leave the arduous work of implementing any major reforms to the next president. As it was, Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, was initially disinclined to implement any dramatic reforms.

The 9/11 attacks, which took place just eight months after Bush had taken office in early 2001, prompted an unprecedented level of elite and popular debate on the terror issue. The resulting policy response – major intelligence and law enforcement reforms and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – reflected the long-held view of many powerful members of Congress and opinion-makers at Washington-area think tanks and in academia, namely that the counter-terrorism, intelligence-gathering and emergency management domains would be better coordinated if they were organized within a single homeland security domain. Seen from the historical institutionalists' perspective, the 9/11 attacks disrupted the policy equilibrium that had existed, thus creating a window of opportunity for the proponents of homeland security to push through their reform agenda. The results arguably constitute the single most dramatic example of institutional change during the period under study. For FEMA, the changes entailed losing its status as an independent executive agency, being forced to join DHS, and, by 2004, a winnowing down of its responsibilities.

Having proven the validity of the independent variable, we now move to assess the state of FEMA's preparedness to deal with a major hurricane event prior to and then after the 9/11 attacks using an analytical framework underpinned by the primary indicators of preparedness identified in Chapter 2.

5.3 Hurricane preparedness at FEMA prior to 9/11

In this section, we examine FEMA's hurricane preparedness from 1979 up until 9/11 from a number of different analytical perspectives inspired by the aforementioned primary indicators of preparedness. Doing so, we should be able to

see just how prepared FEMA was for a major hurricane strike at different points in its history, not least on the eve of the 9/11 attacks – immediately prior to the onset of major institutional change.

5.3.1 *Inter-organizational relations*

Foreseeable complex problems are problems that necessitate effective multi-level and interagency coordination of resources. For many reasons, the Federal Government struggled in this regard until the late 1970s, when a single federal agency responsible for emergency management, FEMA, was created. By consolidating all existing federal emergency management agencies and programmes within FEMA, policymakers aimed to improve the speed with which the Federal Government responded to disruptive events and to reduce the administrative burden on those states seeking federal emergency/disaster assistance. In my view, the state of inter-organizational relations is a useful indicator of just how prepared a given organization is to effectively collaborate with others in managing problems that emerge. The deeper the relationships that exist between actors, the better able they are likely to be to coordinate their activities in ways that are effective and that meet stakeholders' expectations. Analysing FEMA's relationships with other key actors with a role to play in dealing with disruptive events should provide some clues as to just how prepared FEMA was, and for what, between 1979 and September 2001. These actors include the Executive Office of the President (the White House), members of Congress, other federal departments and agencies, and state and local authorities.

The White House

The decision by the Carter Administration to organize FEMA within the executive branch and not as part of some other government department was made in order to expedite the process by which the president authorizes the states' federal emergency/disaster assistance requests.¹ While FEMA was formally in close organizational proximity to the president and his staff, the record suggests that few presidents demonstrated any particular interest in the agency's operations. That being said, certain presidents were more engaged than others. For instance, President Clinton actually provided his FEMA director, James Lee Witt, with a seat in the Cabinet. Doing so gave Witt a more direct link to the president, members of his staff, and the heads of other government departments that FEMA needed to coordinate its activities with. In some ways, the general lack of presidential attention to FEMA is surprising, given the significant political risks that the president faces in situations where government is perceived to mismanage

1 Sylves, 2007: 117.

disasters. In fact, making FEMA an executive branch agency arguably made it all the easier to hold the president accountable where things went wrong in the Federal Government's response.

Meanwhile, many at FEMA saw only advantages in belonging to the executive branch. That being said, it is clear that this arrangement complicated the agency's relations with the White House and influenced the agency's operations in ways that were not always conducive to high levels of preparedness.² Simply put, FEMA risked being used (or at the very least being perceived by others as being) a political tool of the White House. Among other things, the president's political supporters were offered jobs at FEMA, even when they lacked relevant professional qualifications and/or experience. While this practice was rare during particularly the Clinton era, President Clinton would gain a reputation for using his emergency/disaster assistance authority as a means to curry and reward political favours. Finally, the agency was expected to behave in ways that reflected and reinforced the administration's agenda and priorities, no matter which president FEMA served under. In certain instances, the agency would find itself torn between allegiance to, on the one hand, the White House and, on the other, members of Congress with oversight authority over the agency's various component programmes.

Congress

Though all existing federal emergency management agencies and programmes were consolidated within FEMA in 1979, the Carter Administration neglected to reauthorize each one. As a result, FEMA was left answerable to over twenty different congressional committees and subcommittees. This made for an exceedingly fragmented organization that struggled to reconcile the various and in many instances wholly contradictory forms of direction that it received from different members of Congress, but also the White House. Put another way, the agency found itself torn between different elite interests that expected different things of the agency. This situation effectively hampered the FEMA leadership's ability to formulate an agency-wide mission and a common view on what the agency was working toward. While successive US presidents (not least Jimmy Carter, who personally oversaw the creation of FEMA) recognized the problems that FEMA's complicated congressional relations created, they were reluctant to address the fundamental problem. After all, this would require asking certain members of Congress to cede oversight authority over 'their' component of the FEMA bureaucracy, and risked being perceived as an attempt on the part of the president to encroach on the legislature's oversight authority.

2 For a thorough discussion of FEMA's reliance on the White House for political support, see Sylves, 2007: 114.

Federal departments and agencies

As noted elsewhere, FEMA was created so as to more effectively coordinate the federal bureaucracy's efforts in support of overwhelmed state and local authorities. However, the new agency was by Federal Government standards a comparatively small and untested organization with relatively little political clout. For these reasons, it would take many years for FEMA to gain the acceptance of other federal actors, especially large departments like the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Justice (DoJ), and the Department of Energy (DoE). One consequence of the imbalance that existed between FEMA and key players like these was that FEMA was compelled to adopt some of their norms, rules, routines and values. For instance, DoD and DoE in particular refused to share information with counterparts that did maintain strict security procedures. As a result, FEMA had little choice but to retain much of its own Cold War-era security routines long into the 1990s, just as James Lee Witt was working to declassify much of the agency. In other words, the interdependencies that existed between FEMA and some of its larger partners sometimes prevented the agency from implementing its own policy agenda to schedule and/or as intended.

State and local authorities

The consolidation of the Federal Government's emergency management functions within FEMA prompted similar moves at the state and local levels, the aim being to achieve operational harmonization across the country. In the years that followed, FEMA introduced different sets of common guiding principles that were intended to ensure that disruptive events would be managed in similar fashion no matter where they occurred around the nation. These principles appeared in structures/documents like the Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS) and the Federal Response Plan (FRP).

While these guiding principles enhanced the prospects for effective multi-level and interagency coordination, the nation's primary emergency management agency was apparently preoccupied with civil defence during much of the 1980s. In practice, this meant that FEMA was particularly attentive in supporting preparedness in areas of the country that were likely targets for a Soviet nuclear strike (usually large urban centres). The nation's general multi-level coordination capacity was limited as a result, something that was demonstrated time and again when FEMA responded to hurricanes and other natural disasters during the late 1980s. With Hurricane Andrew, however, the problem could not be ignored any longer. While state governors and members of Congress began pushing for reforms to the nation's emergency management system, the incoming Clinton Administration preferred a less radical approach. Rather than shutter FEMA and create a new agency in its stead (as some in Congress were proposing), Clinton was betting that James Lee Witt would be able to right the proverbial ship at FEMA, strengthen its relations with state and local partners around the country,

and give them more of a voice in determining how federal preparedness dollars were spent. By all accounts, Witt succeeded on every account. Calls for FEMA to be dismantled ceased.

The George W. Bush Administration, which came to office in 2001 on a platform of smaller government, felt that many of the preparedness and mitigation programmes that had been put in place during the Clinton years constituted a moral hazard. In order to get state and local authorities to take more responsibility for their own preparedness, Bush's appointee to lead FEMA cut much of the funding for these programmes. Those funds that did remain were to be divvied up among state and local authorities on a competitive basis, not on the basis of who was most at-risk. The record suggests that this new policy strained relations between FEMA and the states, but also between many state governors and the White House. In practical terms, these cuts left FEMA officials with little regular contact with their state and local counterparts.

5.3.2 Threat identification/prioritization

The shift in institutional attention away from civil defence during the late 1970s, just as FEMA was finding its footing, was as much a reflection of the increasing professionalization of emergency management in the United States as it was the Carter Administration's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Given the political climate at the time, the agency began developing a new, all-hazards approach to emergency management. However, Ronald Reagan's win in the 1980 president election breathed new life into civil defence and put most of the work on all-hazards preparedness on the back burner. If the US was to outspend the Soviet Union militarily (a cornerstone of President Reagan's national defence strategy), the administration needed to demonstrate that a robust civil defence programme was in place to protect the American populace in the event that an all-out nuclear war broke out between the two superpowers. As the record shows, FEMA would struggle for over a decade to shed the civil defence culture that emerged at the agency during the Reagan years.

Though emergency management was rarely a hot-button issue during the Reagan years, it did bubble up to the top of the political agenda on occasion, and never more so than during the heights of the Giuffrida scandal. While the Reagan Administration's emergency management policy enjoyed strong Republican support in Congress, the Democratic opposition routinely raised concerns that FEMA's apparent preoccupation with civil defence left the nation vulnerable to other threats. Though Giuffrida's successor, Julius W. Becton, Jr., publicly recognized these concerns, there is little evidence to suggest that any major changes took place at the agency as a result. The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union served to reinvigorate the debate on emergency management in Congress. Many congressional Democrats and even a few Republicans argued that it was time for FEMA to abandon civil defence and embrace the all-hazards

approach to emergency management instead. The flawed response to Andrew only reinforced their argument. The empirical record points to a subsequent shift within FEMA from civil defence to all-hazards preparedness, but with an emphasis on natural disasters. This shift might conceivably have occurred even sooner were it not for certain factions within the agency that were vested in the agency's civil defence/national security order. For many long-serving employees at FEMA, civil defence was all they knew and all they believed the agency should be focused on. Bringing them over to a new way of seeing FEMA's role, or waiting for them to retire or find work elsewhere would take time. Second, as noted in the preceding section, structural relationships with other federal actors with strict security routines and protocols prevented FEMA from completely abandoning its Cold War mentality, even where the relevant parties within FEMA were prepared to do so.

I have emphasized in this study the role that focusing events play in bringing about major change in the institutional environment. It could be argued that the fall of the Soviet Union left policymakers in what was essentially a threat vacuum, or a situation in which there was no single threat around which they could immediately build consensus. When seen in this way, the end of the Cold War arguably constitutes a 'de-focusing event'; all-hazards preparedness was embraced by policymakers, at least until a new threat replaced the spectre of nuclear war at the top of the policy agenda. I argue that this new threat was terrorism. By the latter half of the 1990s, the perception was that the nation was dangerously vulnerable to terrorism and that significant reforms were needed so as to facilitate the bureaucracy's work in addressing the new threat. For its part, the FEMA leadership worried that policymakers risked losing sight of other threats that were just as if not more destructive than even a major terror attack.

It was in this climate that the Hart-Rudman Commission issued its findings. Among other things, the Commission found that the US had indeed grown more vulnerable to terror attack and recommended that a new National Homeland Security Agency (NHSA) replace FEMA. With less than a year left in office, President Clinton opted to leave these recommendations to the incoming Bush Administration to act on as it saw fit. As it was, the Bush Administration formed an Office of National Preparedness (ONP) within FEMA that would be tasked with coordinating elements of the Federal Government's terrorism preparedness activities. It is clear that while the Bush Administration did recognize terrorism as a serious threat, it was initially reluctant to make any more significant changes to the federal bureaucracy.

5.3.3 Routines and protocols

This study reveals a general trend in the United States toward increased standardization in dealing with problems like natural disasters on a multi-level interagency basis. The pace of this trend accelerated starting in 1950, when the Congress

passed the Disaster Relief Act. Though the federal emergency/disaster assistance request process described in the Act was revised many times over the decades to come, the states maintained that it still failed to adequately explain how the federal-state-local interface was intended to work in practice. One of FEMA's first tasks as an independent agency was to develop new routines and protocols that addressed these concerns. A few years later, FEMA unveiled the FRP. Like the Integrated Emergency Management Systems (IEMS), the FRP was intended to be used by federal, state and local actors in all manner of situations except nuclear war. (Separate plans existed for such a contingency.) By all accounts, the FRP was well-received across the country.

Never before had the nation's emergency management system and the principles that guided it been so well-defined. Assuming there is a correlation between organizational formalization and response effectiveness, one could argue that the nation had never been more prepared to manage major disruptive events than it was during the 1980s. That being said, Meyer and Rowan remind us that routines and protocols may in fact depict the 'myths of the institutional environment', not how things are actually done or how prepared different actors actually are to carry out the work described in these documents.³ According to Clarke, the 'fantasy documents' that organizations hold up as evidence of preparedness may in fact reveal more about stakeholders' expectations than they do about actual organizational capabilities.⁴ The case reveals some grounds to support Clarke's claim. Indeed, we see that though these routines and protocols were instrumental in helping federal, state and local actors orchestrate effective responses to some disruptive events during the 1980s, they were inadequate in other instances. That being said, the failure of organizations to perform to expectations need not necessarily impugn the quality of the plans themselves. Besides a good plan, successful responses are predicated on good working relations between the relevant stakeholders, but also that the stakeholders are prepared to perform to certain pre-agreed levels/standards. One of the arguments made earlier in this study, that systems of actors are only as robust as their weakest members, is borne out by the case – many of the response failures in the years leading up to the 9/11 attacks were not due to any identifiable deficiencies in the routines and protocols intended to facilitate multi-level interagency coordination. Instead, actors lacked familiarity with the relevant plans, were ill-equipped to deal with emerging problems, encountered difficulties working with one another, etc. In other words, routines and protocols can only do so much in ensuring that problems are effectively managed on a multi-level interagency basis. It is equally if not more important that actors comprehend and are prepared to perform to the standards that routines and protocols set for them.

3 Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341-342.

4 Clarke, 1999.

5.3.4 *Assessing FEMA's hurricane preparedness prior to 9/11*

While FEMA was essentially a civil defence agency throughout much of the 1980s, the agency nevertheless succeeded in building up a number of capabilities, certain forms of expertise (mass evacuation and mass sheltering, for instance), and close working relations with other federal, state and local partners that were useful in dealing with other threats, not least hurricanes. The early 1990s marked a clear break from the agency's Cold War past. Under President Clinton's pick as FEMA director, James Lee Witt, the agency embraced the all-hazards approach to preparedness, a move that we could reasonably expect served to further enhance the agency's natural disaster preparedness. Furthermore, Witt enjoyed the support of both the president and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, not to mention the FEMA rank-and-file. As a result, morale at the agency improved and staff turnover rates fell dramatically, enabling FEMA for the first time in years to retain core competencies and experience. When viewed in this light, the Clinton years marked a period of relative organizational calm at FEMA. All the while, however, the agency was under pressure to take on more responsibility for terrorism preparedness, though there is little to suggest that FEMA's focus shifted in any meaningful way as a result. In summary then, all indications are that the FEMA that the Bush Administration inherited in 2001 was better positioned to manage a major hurricane than it had been when Andrew came ashore in 1992, let alone during the 1980s, when it was preoccupied with civil defence.

In his first months in office, Joe Allbaugh, George W. Bush's first pick as FEMA director, implemented a number of policy changes that in one way or another arguably reduced the agency's hurricane preparedness. Foremost among these, a number of FEMA's long-standing preparedness and mitigation programmes were either shut down or reduced in size. Assuming that preparedness in a federal system is dependent on good inter-organizational relations, one might argue that the limitations imposed on FEMA's ability to collaborate with state and local counterparts on a regular basis, and not just in responding to the occasional emergency/disaster, influenced the agency's hurricane preparedness negatively. Changes were also made to the agency's hiring policy, thus once again opening up certain senior positions to political appointees, some of whom had little if any emergency management experience. These decisions rankled with many civil servants at FEMA, who felt that the Bush Administration's policy choices risked in one way or another undermining many years of good work that had strengthened the nation's preparedness for major disasters. In the years to come, many veteran FEMA employees opted to leave the agency, taking a fair share of the agency's institutional memory and experience with them.

Having considered FEMA's preparedness up to 2001 from different theoretical angles, it is possible to cautiously predict how FEMA might have performed had Katrina struck then and not four years later. Despite having painted a rather dismal picture of the situation at FEMA in the months leading up to 9/11,

I nevertheless maintain that the agency maintained a higher state of hurricane preparedness than at any earlier point in its history bar perhaps the very late 1990s. After all, the agency had by 2001 been in existence over two decades, had developed good working relations with its federal, state and local counterparts, and retained most of its staff from the Witt years.

5.4 Hurricane preparedness at FEMA after the 9/11 attacks

We now turn our attention to the period stretching from 9/11 to mid-August 2005, just days before Katrina made landfall. In this section, I consider to what extent the major institutional change that took place in the wake of the 9/11 attacks compelled FEMA to behave in ways that served to raise, lower, or leave unchanged the agency's preparedness for hurricanes. In other words, we should be able to see what implications the 9/11 attacks had for FEMA's ability to prepare for Katrina.

5.4.1 *Inter-organizational relations*

The rearrangement of federal policy priorities and the accompanying reorganization of the federal bureaucracy after 9/11 involved numerous federal departments and agencies, not least FEMA. In this section, we will examine how these changes altered FEMA's relations with the White House, members of Congress, certain key actors within DHS, other federal departments and agencies, and, finally, state and local authorities.

The White House

Initially at least, the Bush Administration resisted congressional pressure to reform the federal bureaucracy after the 9/11 attacks. The president assumed (wrongly, it turned out) that members of Congress would be placated by the creation of a small office for homeland security in the White House. In the end, policymakers agreed to create an entirely new department, DHS, into which FEMA was subsequently absorbed. Going forward, information that FEMA hoped to pass on to the White House would need to pass through different functions within the DHS organization, including the DHS secretary's office and the relevant deputy secretary's office. Staff at FEMA reportedly worried that the new chain of command would hamper the agency's ability to provide early warning to the White House and risked slowing down the presidential emergency/disaster declaration process.

The record suggests that it would take a considerable amount of time for FEMA officials to accept the state of play that emerged after 9/11. Indeed, there is substantial evidence to suggest that senior officials in fact routinely circumvented the new chain of command once it was in place starting in 2003. In one

particularly striking departure, the FEMA director himself attempted to go through the White House rather than the DHS leadership in coordinating key elements of the federal response to the 2004 hurricane season in Florida. Brown and other members of his staff ultimately accepted the new DHS hierarchy, albeit grudgingly. Nevertheless, this dynamic had lasting implications for FEMA-DHS 'front office' relations, which are discussed in more detail below.

Congress

So as to speed up the creation of DHS, policymakers in Washington opted to forego the fraught process of renegotiating the individual operating authorities for most of the federal agencies and programmes destined for the new department. As a result, as many as eighty-eight different congressional committees and subcommittees exercised some form of oversight authority over different agencies and programmes within DHS – including those that FEMA shared deep interdependencies with. This situation served to further complicate FEMA's relations with Congress, but also with its partners elsewhere within DHS. In addition, FEMA was expected to reconcile those directions that it received from Congress with those that came from the DHS leadership. Just as during the pre-9/11 years, different interests continued to pull the agency leadership in different directions.

DHS and other federal departments and agencies

The DHS leadership faced a number of challenges in merging over twenty federal agencies from across government into a new department with a single overarching mission, namely homeland security. While certain agencies that came under the DHS umbrella successfully redefined their pre-9/11 missions as part of homeland security, other agencies, including FEMA, took a more contrarian stance, arguing that the homeland security mission was a distraction from other, more pressing missions. According to Foley and Rudman, the intra-departmental tension that emerged as a result served to '[preserve] rivalries and cultural barriers that the creation of [DHS] was intended to eliminate'.⁵ The DHS leadership found itself in a difficult position, cast between certain actors that were proving resistant to the policy directives handed down by policymakers, and the policymakers themselves, who expected to see the post-9/11 reforms implemented quickly and as they had intended.

The relationship between DHS and FEMA specifically illustrates some of the problems facing the new department during the start-up phase. Initially at least, the FEMA director, Michael Brown, appeared to toe the proverbial party line (that the DHS reorganization was vital to the task of enhancing the nation's safety and security). In public, he predicted that FEMA would be a stronger,

5 Foley and Rudman, 2004.

more capable agency as part of DHS. There is in fact some evidence to suggest that he actually believed this. After all, Brown was part of the DHS transition planning team, meaning that he had at least some influence over and ownership in FEMA's future within DHS. That being said, Brown later claimed that he had in fact harboured serious reservations concerning the move to DHS, but reasoned that he could best defend FEMA's interests as a player in the reorganization process. Regardless of what Brown actually believed, it is important to recognize that the DHS reorganization presented opportunities for significant career advancement. Brown's full-throated public support for DHS may have been part of an ultimately unsuccessful bid to curry favour with the new DHS leadership as they went about filling top spots within the department.

Any optimism Brown might have felt concerning the reorganization began to fade by late 2003, when he reported recognizing that the FEMA 'brand' was under attack and that its preparedness programmes were being defunded so as to render them ineffectual. However, first DHS Secretary Ridge and then his successor, Michael Chertoff, quickly grew tired of Brown's repeated and impolitic resistance to these policy changes. In the months and years to come, a sense of victimization appears to have set in at FEMA, not least within the director's office. In this climate, relations between DHS and FEMA reportedly deteriorated.

Finally, the decision to move FEMA to DHS had implications for the agency's ability to coordinate other federal departments and agencies. Whereas the agency once had relatively unfettered access to other federal actors up to and including the president, FEMA was now required to go through the DHS bureaucracy. According to Harrald, this was true both on a day-to-day basis and in responding to emergencies/disasters: 'Federal coordinating officer[s in the field] had to communicate through [the head of the federal response (the Principal Federal Official (PFO))], the National Response Coordination Center [(NRCC)], the Homeland Security Operations Center [(HSOC)], and the DHS secretary to pass time-sensitive information to the White House'.⁶

State and local authorities

Like their federal counterparts, state and local emergency management officials felt compelled to act in ways that conveyed that they too were doing all that they could to prepare for a possible terror attack in their communities. However, while some officials fully supported the pivot toward terrorism, others worried that it served to distract them from other, more pressing issues. Even so, it would prove difficult to ignore the sizeable federal terrorism preparedness grants that were being made available. After all, this was 'free money' that many state and local authorities could use to fund their operations and procure new equipment (so long as it was primarily intended for use in the event of a terror attack). For

6 Harrald, 2007: 180.

its part, FEMA intensified its cooperation with officials in areas of the country that were considered to be particularly at-risk to terror attack. Meanwhile, the frequency of the agency's contacts with state and local officials elsewhere around the country was reduced. That being said, FEMA continued throughout this period to offer support to state and local officials in Louisiana working to prepare a regional catastrophic hurricane plan. In fact, the agency was able to scrounge together funding for large portions of the 2004 Hurricane Pam exercise.

Much to the disappointment of many at FEMA and in the wider emergency management community, the post-Second Stage Review (2SR) ordered by the DHS secretary in late 2004 prompted all of FEMA's remaining preparedness programmes to be moved to the Preparedness Directorate. In doing so, the DHS leadership violated a cardinal rule of emergency management – that the whole of the emergency management cycle should be managed by a single agency for the simple reason that the same people that prepare together should respond and then recover from disruptive events together. While FEMA retained responsibility for response and recovery in the post-2SR period, the loss of its preparedness programmes reduced its ability to build and maintain lasting relationships with state and local partners.

5.4.2 Threat identification/prioritization

I have argued that the sheer scale of the 9/11 attacks brought intense elite and popular attention to bear on terrorism, an issue that would go on to dominate the national policy agenda throughout the period leading up to Katrina. When policymakers were not discussing how best to prepare for another attack on the home front, they were occupied by the global War on Terror launched by the Bush Administration. In the political climate that existed at the time, there was little room for federal departments and agencies to discuss, let alone question the homeland security missions that had been assigned to them. The case at hand suggests that those who did choose to speak out were perceived as out of step with the nation's priorities and risked being sanctioned as a result. Perhaps the national conversation might have taken on another form had something gone seriously wrong in the years between 9/11 and Katrina. The 2004 hurricane season, one of the worst in contemporary modern American history, certainly had such potential. As it was, though, FEMA's apparent success in managing the situation that arose in Florida only reinforced the belief among policymakers that the national emergency management system had been strengthened by the post-9/11 reforms. Unbeknownst to them, however, certain key capabilities that FEMA would need in order to effectively manage Katrina had shown signs of deterioration as the hurricane season wore on.

5.4.3 Routines and protocols

The emergency management system that was in place on the morning of 11 September 2001 that was described in the FRP was generally regarded to be well-functioning (though there was always room for improvement, as the Hart-Rudman Commission had pointed out). With the creation of DHS, debate emerged over whether the FRP should simply be revised to reflect the new government order, or if a new plan was more appropriate. Ultimately, the Bush Administration chose the latter option. Even so, debate persisted over just how much of the FRP should be retained in the new plan. For instance, FEMA worried that starting from the ground up would require a massive retraining programme and would probably impact the nation's preparedness negatively, at least in the short term. The DHS leadership, on the other hand, preferred that the NRP be developed from scratch. Responsibility for developing a first draft of the new plan was handed to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), another agency under the DHS umbrella. The NRP was for numerous reasons developed on a relatively short timeline, allowing planners little time to collect comments from stakeholders before it was introduced in 2004. Many of the complaints that they heard in the months and years to come (that the NRP was far too long, too detailed, too focused on terrorism) were to be addressed during the next scheduled plan revision cycle.

The relevant departments and agencies at every level of government, as well as some private businesses and non-profit organizations with a designated role to play in responding to disruptive events, were required to harmonize their own plans with the NRP. Understandably, this process would take time. There is considerable evidence to suggest that while most of those actors involved in the response to Katrina had updated their plans by August 2005, few had administered trainings aimed at familiarizing staff with the new plan.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the onset of major institutional change prompted organizational change that rendered existing routines and protocols obsolete. While the creation of a new plan, the NRP, was certainly effective in signalling to stakeholders that changes to the nation's emergency management system had been made since 9/11, the eagerness of policymakers to see it introduced as quickly as possible may have played a part in reducing the nation's overall readiness to respond to disruptive events, especially events that required coordination on a multi-level interagency basis.

5.4.4 Assessing FEMA's hurricane preparedness after 9/11

The 9/11 attacks were so sudden and on such a scale so as to bring sustained elite attention to bear on the nation's ability to if not prevent then to respond to terror attacks on the home front. In the years to come, policymakers would take a number of dramatic steps aimed at addressing many of the weaknesses in the

nation's homeland security apparatus that past studies (like the Hart-Rudman Commission) and the 9/11 attacks themselves revealed. However, the simple fact that terrorism dominated the policy agenda does not necessarily mean that FEMA was any less prepared to deal with other threats, including hurricanes, in the years to come. Indeed, certain circumstances in the post-9/11 environment would suggest that FEMA was in fact better equipped to manage such events than ever before. First of all, homeland security, which emergency management policy writ large had arguably been absorbed within, enjoyed significant elite engagement in the immediate post-9/11 period. Second, FEMA now operated within DHS, which brought together a large number of federal agencies under a single organizational roof so that they might achieve better inter-agency coordination in preparing for and dealing with all manner of threats, including terrorism. Third, much more funding was available to FEMA (though most of these resources were earmarked for terrorism preparedness activities of different kinds).

However, the reality was that in fact the new focus on terrorism had a detrimental effect on the agency, at least over the short term. Among other things, the traditional emergency management issues that FEMA was most vested in received little attention in the new homeland security milieu. Meanwhile, FEMA's role within DHS was poorly defined. Though the agency did receive additional funding for terrorism preparedness, the agency budget was otherwise cut. For these reasons, morale fell and the agency struggled to retain qualified staff. At the same time, relations between FEMA and the DHS leadership worsened, reaching their nadir following DHS Secretary Chertoff's decision to move the totality of FEMA's preparedness and mitigation programmes, a central element of the agency's *raison d'être*, from the agency. Chertoff's decision reflected a policy shift that ran counter to some of the most deeply rooted ideas guiding contemporary emergency management philosophy and practice. No matter how frustrated long-serving FEMA employees were with these developments, the agency found itself in a relatively weak position from which to defend its interests. Among other things, the agency apparently had relatively few particularly strong political backers in Congress, at the White House, or elsewhere within DHS who could effectively represent the agency's views in the policy debate that ensued after 9/11. For this reason, the FEMA director and his staff were forced to defend the agency's interests on their own. Unfortunately for FEMA, the strategy that they chose appears to have been ineffective, if not downright counterproductive. The FEMA leadership would expend a substantial amount of time, energy and political capital in hopes of minimizing the perceived damage that belonging to DHS was inflicting on the agency's sense of self and capabilities. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the agency was a less-than-fully integrated part of the department heading into Katrina.

But what, if anything, did the situation FEMA found itself in after 9/11 mean for the agency's preparedness to manage hurricanes? Simply put, it is hard to say, given that the years leading up to Katrina provide us with few opportunities to evaluate the agency's actual state of preparedness. That said, the evidence that

is available suggests that the agency's hurricane preparedness was diminished, at least when compared to the pre-9/11 period. While it is impossible to know for certain, this research suggests that FEMA would likely have responded more satisfactorily to the worst-case New Orleans scenario had it taken place prior to the 9/11 attacks, not after.

In the section that follows, the four research hypotheses are evaluated. The insights gained through assessing FEMA's hurricane preparedness over time are central to this task.

5.5 Evaluating the research hypotheses

One of the central aims of this study is to identify any benefits that different streams of neo-institutionalism might have in helping us better understand why organizations and individuals behave as they do, but also the nature of organizational preparedness and how organizational preparedness is influenced by major institutional change. In this section, we shall discuss the extent to which each hypothesis is confirmed or rejected on the basis of the case. In so doing, we should begin to see how the different streams of neo-institutionalism help us come closer to answering these questions. We should also be able to see what real-world implications they have for practitioners tasked with preparing for foreseeable complex problems.

5.5.1 Hypothesis 1

The claim made here is that *the more deeply entrenched the norms, rules, routines and values that constrain and enable FEMA's behaviour, the less likely the agency will be to alter its mission and the focus of its activities in the event that priorities change on the policy agenda*. The evidence at hand appears to bear out this claim. The first decade of FEMA's existence was a turbulent one marked by the inevitable growing pains that any new organization goes through, but also poor leadership, scandal and at times intense congressional scrutiny. Through it all, though, the agency remained squarely focused on civil defence. With it, a deep-seated security culture emerged at the agency. This study demonstrates just how difficult it was later for FEMA to shake the legacy of the Cold War following the collapse of the Soviet Union. While some policymakers would have FEMA begin addressing other threats (like natural disasters), others argued that the agency should retain its focus on civil defence. In my view, Hurricane Andrew revealed serious deficiencies in the Federal Government's capabilities in managing natural disasters, thereby putting the debate over FEMA's immediate future to rest, at least for a few years.

Under James Lee Witt, FEMA began slowly shifting focus from civil defence to all-hazards preparedness. In the process, a loyal cadre of civil servants holding strong convictions as to how things were to be done (what was appropriate) at

the 'new' FEMA emerged. Normative institutionalism helps us see how by the mid-1990s, FEMA had developed a distinct all-hazards culture that coloured its members' preferences. As time went on and these preferences became more and more entrenched, it became increasingly difficult for the agency to change its behaviour in the event that elites expected it. As an example, the push for FEMA to take on more responsibility for terrorism preparedness during the mid- to late 1990s had many at FEMA, not least Witt himself convinced that it risked undoing, or at the very least undermining the agency's generic approach to all manner of threats.

In many respects, the 9/11 attacks constitute essentially a third act in FEMA's history. Whereas FEMA was preoccupied with civil defence during the 1980s and was working to implement the all-hazards approach during the 1990s, it found itself expected to focus on terrorism during the first half of the 2000s. Initially at least, the pressures to shift focus manifested themselves in small ways (with the creation of the ONP in early 2001), only to grow more significant as time went on (when the agency was forced to join DHS, for instance). Crucially, the changes that were underway ran counter to the norms, rules, routines and values that had defined the agency during the Witt years. This might explain why FEMA under Michael Brown resisted many of the pressures compelling it to realign its priorities as change occurred elsewhere in the institutional environment.

In conclusion then, we see that the normative institutional assumption – that the presence of deeply entrenched norms, rules, routines, and values defining appropriate behaviour within organizations makes them resistant to pressures to change – is supported by the case at hand. This is particularly apparent after the 9/11 attacks, and to a lesser degree following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Hurricane Andrew.

5.5.2 Hypothesis II

Whereas normative institutionalism explains organizational resistance to change as a consequence of entrenched norms, rules, routines and values, historical institutionalism emphasizes instead the role that exogenous, usually rather sudden events play in creating institutional forces that compel organizations to deviate from longstanding institutional patterns of behaviour. That being said, the hypothesis that has been tested here also accounts for the possibility that major change can occur more gradually: *The greater and more sudden the emergence of pressures for change in the institutional environment, the more likely FEMA will be to alter its priorities concerning what threats it prepares for.*

The case at hand demonstrates that policymakers' attention to policy areas with bearing on FEMA's operations spiked to one degree or another on at least seven separate occasions between 1979 and 2005. These occasions include:

- The return of civil defence to prominence on the policy agenda during the Reagan years;
- The collapse of the Soviet Union, prompting a reduction in the risk for all-out nuclear war between the superpowers;
- The failed response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992;
- A series of terror attacks during the 1990s (the first World Trade Center attack, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the US Embassy bombings in Africa);
- The release of the Hart-Rudman Commission's findings in the late 1990s;
- The 9/11 attacks in September 2001; and,
- The 2004 hurricane season in Florida.

All of these events served to generate momentum that in one way or another created pressures compelling FEMA to reassess and in some instances realign its threat priorities. Some were more in keeping with FEMA's own perceptions of itself and its mission. For instance, though FEMA viewed itself as primarily a civil defence agency during much of the 1980s, the agency responded solely to incidents not involving nuclear war. In other words, while the agency did not champion the all-hazards approach during this period of time, it was certainly behaving like one. In practice then, the fall of Soviet Union saw FEMA being asked to formally broaden the scope of its operations in ways that reflected the spectrum of threats that it was in fact already sensitized to and that it spent much of its time dealing with. While achieving this shift in priorities proved difficult for many long-serving 'cold warriors' at the agency to accept, it was nevertheless much easier to accomplish than forcing the agency to deemphasize (at least temporarily) the all-hazards approach in favour of a single threat (terrorism) after the 9/11 attacks. Clearly, predicting the likelihood that organizations will readily shift focus in the face of elite pressure requires understanding just how dramatic the proposed change in fact is and how it is likely to be perceived by the organization's members.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the likelihood that power imbalances will exist between and among different policy elites, thereby giving certain players more sway over the setting of the policy agenda than others. Which players hold sway will shift over time. In this case, we see that while the FEMA leadership was formally accountable to the White House, the DHS leadership (as of 2003), and members of Congress, the agency was typically more responsive to the White House than any other stakeholder. This dynamic should be taken into account when gauging the pressures exerted on different actors, from whence these pressures stem, and whether or not their sources enjoy legitimacy/relevance in the eyes of the target actors.

In conclusion, the hypothesis inspired by historical institutionalism appears to be supported by the available data. The case shows that the stronger the institutional forces compelling actors to change their behaviour in one way or another,

the more FEMA's priorities, organization and modes for operating were likely to shift in corresponding fashion. Furthermore, the case illustrates the extent to which forces for potential change are omnipresent in the environment in which actors operate, and that these vary in intensity, endurance and shape. More often than not, however, these forces will only prompt minor forms of gradual change that are sometimes difficult to detect.

5.5.3 Hypothesis IIIa

Hypothesis IIIa states that *the more individual leaders at FEMA work to ensure that the agency is prepared to manage threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda (by acting as (or at least being perceived to be) 'good agents'), the more likely they will be to achieve their own interests.* This claim is inspired by rational choice institutionalism, which sees individuals as rational actors guided by the logic of consequentiality who seek advantage by belonging to organizations that serve to constrain and enable their behaviour through formal rules, incentives and sanctions, for instance. Unfortunately, comparatively little empirical data was available concerning the behaviour of individual members of the FEMA leadership during the first two decades of the agency's existence. For this reason, my assessment of the validity of Hypothesis IIIa is based solely on the behaviour of Michael Brown and, in certain rare instances, other members of his leadership team. With this in mind, the case appears to bear out the claim that there is a correlation between shifts in the overarching policy agenda and the behaviour of individual leaders.

It much less clear which interests motivated Brown and other members of his team to behave in the ways that they did. For instance, Brown initially supported the post-9/11 reforms. On the one hand, Brown's support might have been driven by a desire to be a dutiful administrator or his own personal conviction that moving FEMA to DHS was in fact the 'right' thing to do given the circumstances. On the other hand, Brown might have seen personal gains to be had where he was perceived to be a good agent. What is clear is that by 2004, Brown's view on the post-9/11 reforms had soured and he was reportedly contemplating an exit from the agency. This might explain his increasingly impolitic approach in opposing, first, pressures to focus more on terrorism and, later, the decision to remove the preparedness and mitigation missions from FEMA.

In conclusion, I argue that Hypothesis IIIa can be confirmed using particularly data-rich portions of the case. That being said, the task of confidently confirming or rejecting similar such hypotheses in future would benefit from more refined techniques with which to identify what motivates individuals to behave as they do in different situations. While the case at hand certainly supports the rational choice institutionalists' claim that individuals seek to maximize benefit and hope to avoid being sanctioned, we are left wondering what exactly lies behind their actions.

5.5.4 Hypothesis IIIb

Hypothesis IIIb supposes that *if members of the FEMA leadership have a political or administrative background, they will be more likely to act (and direct the agency they lead to act) in accordance with change in the institutional environment. Meanwhile, individuals with a technical background are less likely to be responsive to institutional change unless it corresponds with what they believe to be appropriate based on the technical standards of their profession.* In order to validate this set of claims, we must first assign the individuals under study with professional profiles (political-administrative or technical) that accurately capture and reflect their professional backgrounds and experience. We then need to establish that a correlation exists between institutional change and the behaviour of individuals with different professional profiles in response. The case at hand provides numerous observations on the behaviour of different FEMA directors over the past few decades, giving us many opportunities to evaluate this hypothesis. That being said, I have chosen to focus on those individuals that figure most prominently in the historical record, namely Louis P. Giuffrida, James Lee Witt and Michael Brown.

Louis P. Giuffrida was a career army officer who would go on to head a police training facility in California before becoming FEMA director in 1980. We might assume that Giuffrida's time in the army served to familiarize him with the 'technicalities' of war fighting. However, my assumption is that he became increasingly involved in the administration of the military bureaucracy as he advanced through the ranks. While the available record provides numerous colourful anecdotes concerning Giuffrida's leadership style, they reveal little concerning Giuffrida's engagement in either the technical or political-administrative sides of FEMA's operations during his time as director. As such, I suggest that more insights into Giuffrida's background and professional experiences are required if we are to assign him a professional profile, never mind determine how responsive he was to any shifts in institutional attention that occurred during his time at the agency.

Unlike Giuffrida, James Lee Witt had little if any military experience. Witt entered into private enterprise early in life, starting a construction company at the age of 24 before becoming a county judge. Thanks to his political and business connections, Witt was subsequently chosen by then-Governor Bill Clinton to head the Arkansas Office of Emergency Services and then FEMA in 1992. Clinton, who had looked on from the wings as Hurricane Andrew undid the Bush presidency, made it clear to Witt that he was determined to avoid ending up in a similar situation. Witt's apparent success in reinvigorating FEMA, revitalizing its 'brand', and shifting the agency's focus away from civil defence appears to have been as much due to his grasp of the technicalities associated with emergency management as it was his ability to work with and meet the expectations of the White House, members of Congress, and FEMA's state and local partners. Just as in Giuffrida's case, it is not obvious that Witt fits any one profile particularly well, though the political-administrative profile would appear

to be a better fit than the technical one, even though he did demonstrate a good technical knowledge of key emergency management issues.

Of the three FEMA directors profiled here, Michael Brown is perhaps most easily assigned the political-administrative profile in light of his professional background and experience. Brown was a trained lawyer who, among other things, worked in administration, served briefly in local politics, ran unsuccessfully for the US Senate, and worked as a commissioner for an Arabian horse association before coming to FEMA to serve as general counsel. While his background certainly appears to have equipped Brown to detect and respond to shifts in the institutional environment (of which there were many in the post-9/11 years), there are indications that other individual-level characteristics left him poorly equipped to effectively defend FEMA's interests within DHS. Indeed, Brown appears to have been a somewhat polarizing figure who struggled to cultivate and maintain political alliances that could be used to mitigate the effects of the changes underway at FEMA. In other words, the Brown example suggests that there is at best a weak correlation between having political-administrative qualifications and responding to institutional change in ways that satisfy stakeholders. (Of course, it is impossible to know if any other individual could have defended FEMA's interests any better than Brown in the climate that existed in the post-9/11 years.)

The discussion above suggests that the professional profiles proposed here are insufficiently specified, thereby making it difficult to employ them effectively in characterizing individual leaders, let alone predict how they will behave in the face of institutional change. More refined criteria pertaining to each profile are needed if we are to confidently categorize leaders in this way. Any future research on this subject should address the fact that leaders may have long careers behind them that include both technical and managerial training and experience. Equally so, it is important to recognize that a single employer, like the military, for instance, may provide a combination of both technical and political-administrative experience, making it difficult to render judgement concerning which profile fits best on this basis alone. Finally, this study illustrates the importance of taking into account personality when attempting to predict how individual leaders will respond to institutional change.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have been able to confirm that the 9/11 attacks set in motion events that prompted an unprecedented amount of institutional change in the institutional environment that FEMA operated within. The pressures for change that the attacks generated disrupted the historically determined patterns of behaviour that FEMA and so many other actors at every level of government had long been guided by. Having confirmed the validity of the independent variable, it was then possible to assess the state of FEMA's preparedness to manage a major

hurricane before and then after the 9/11 attacks. I found that FEMA's preparedness to manage a major hurricane had begun to deteriorate in the years after 2001 as various conditions in the agency's institutional environment changed and the agency was obligated to respond. For instance, the analysis reveals that FEMA's relations with many of its longstanding partners were weakened or disrupted entirely. Meanwhile, the agency struggled to build up good working relations with its new partners. As with many of its counterparts after 9/11, much of FEMA's operations were guided by unfamiliar and untested routines, like the NRP, for instance. Furthermore, the agency was obligated to dedicate more of its attention to terrorism, which meant reallocating resources from other missions, not least the agency's longstanding preparedness programmes. In short, the prospects for dealing with a major disruptive event in future were by all appearances not good, or at least worse than they had been before 9/11. The analysis suggests that the agency was much better positioned to manage an event on par with Katrina in the years prior to the attacks. By confidently asserting that FEMA's capacity to manage hurricanes was diminished as a result of changing institutional conditions after 9/11, we are able to answer the research question in the chapter that follows.

In this chapter we have also evaluated the four research hypotheses, finding that the majority of the claims were substantiated by the empirical data, albeit in some instances with more certainty than in others. While I was unable to draw any definitive conclusions concerning Hypothesis IIIb on the notion of professional profile, it remains an interesting idea that deserves further consideration by other researchers.

This analysis provides a basis for the discussion in the chapter that follows. Here, I will draw conclusions of a more general nature that have implications for theory and practice alike.

Chapter 6: Findings

6.1 Introduction

Besides contributing to the existing body of knowledge on Katrina, other natural disasters, and developments in emergency management policy and practice in recent US history, a central aim of this study has been to make theoretical contributions to the fields of preparedness, emergency management, crisis studies, political science, public administration, and neo-institutionalism. These contributions are presented thematically in the sections that follow.

Among other things, this chapter addresses the central research question that this study set out to answer, certain methodological considerations, and the generalizability of the findings to other cases. This is followed by focused discussion concerning the study's implications for: neo-institutionalism and certain specific streams of neo-institutional thinking; bureaucracies; the notion of foreseeable complex problems; preparedness; and emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs). As with every research projects, some questions remain unanswered while new questions have emerged along the way. In section 6.8, I propose a modest programme for further research that, among other things, can be used in designing future studies of preparedness and/or that draw on neo-institutionalism as a theoretical basis. Of course, this study has certain practical implications that bear noting. In section 6.9, I provide a number of recommendations to policymakers and senior administrators who are involved in one way or another in the process whereby elite policy is developed and then handed down to the bureaucracy to be implemented. The chapter ends with a presentation of a draft diagnostic model for use in gauging organizational preparedness.

6.2 Answering the research question

I set out in this study to identify those conditions that promoted change in the behaviour of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) necessary to generate (or prevent the generation of) high levels of hurricane preparedness. Viewing the case through three different neo-institutional lenses has been useful to the task of detecting the presence of various institutional forces (norms, rules, routines and values) that influenced FEMA's behaviour over time in ways that rendered the agency well-suited in managing certain complex problems and less so in managing others. Though FEMA's history is defined by many major events that could conceivably have brought about dramatic institutional change, the 2001 terror attacks alone prompted reforms on such a scale and of such an intensity so as to dramatically alter the institutional landscape in which foreseeable threats, not least hurricanes, were planned for and managed. Among other things, FEMA was subsumed within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the emergency management domain that FEMA had long been a central player in was subsumed within the newer and much larger homeland security domain. Seemingly overnight, FEMA saw its priorities downgraded on the policy agenda, while its standing as the Federal Government's 'hub' for emergency preparedness and emergency management was undermined somewhat by its loss of independent status.

Much of the popular and academic work on Katrina that has been published since 2005 tends to emphasize the circumstances mentioned above in attempting to explain FEMA's failure to respond satisfactorily to the storm. But do these explanations suffice? Does the simple fact that terrorism dominated the policy agenda, or that FEMA was no longer an independent agency adequately explain FEMA's preparedness ahead of Katrina? In my view, the answer is no. The institutional perspective on preparedness presented in Chapter 2 helps us see that these were changes to the institutional context in which FEMA operated, not explanations in and of themselves for why FEMA performed as it did in August 2005. While the popular narrative suggests that FEMA was preoccupied with terrorism in the lead-up to Katrina, the various neo-institutional lenses allow us to see that the norms, rules, routines and values that defined FEMA's own reason for being, the focus of its attention, and how things were done prior to 9/11 were deeply ingrained and proved highly resistant to quick change, no matter how much elites expected it. For this and other reasons that might have stemmed from personal motivations, all indications are that the agency and its members, not least key members of the agency leadership, chose to expend considerable energy actually opposing the new terror tasking and the parameters imposed on the agency by virtue of DHS membership. In the process, the agency's capabilities in managing other threats, the ones that much of its staff articulated a clear preference that they be allowed to remain focused on, suffered.

In the following section, specific methodological issues that have arisen in carrying out this study are discussed.

6.3 Methodological issues

The single-case case study methodology was arguably suited to the task of capturing the complexity and empirical richness of the case. By allowing for many observations on the dependent variable over time, process tracing provided a robust basis on which to test different theoretical assertions, while at the same time addressing the risk for measurement error, one of the main weaknesses typically associated with this type of methodology. That being said, it is important to recognize the disproportionate amount of data that exists concerning FEMA's activities during certain periods of time (mostly during and immediately after major disruptive events). Nevertheless, I argue that we are able to draw valid conclusions in all instances but one that is addressed in more detail in section 6.4.

One significant challenge in dealing with a case as large as this one involves managing instances where key actors were incorporated into other organizations, or where they simply disappeared. The most obvious example is at the point where major organizational reforms were made in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, where FEMA was organized within DHS and certain FEMA programmes were moved to other directorates within the new department. While I note the departure of these programmes from FEMA and the response to their removal by FEMA itself, I have chosen not to apply process tracing to these programmes in their new organizational homes. While I argue that this decision was appropriate in light of the study's focus on FEMA in particular, it is important not to exclude the admittedly unlikely possibility that other DHS directorates conducted hurricane preparedness activities of their own between late 2004 and August 2005.

Furthermore, the analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrates the need to account for intra-organizational relations when attempting to explain why actors behave as they do in their interactions with one another. For instance, we see that the FEMA leadership's behaviour was constrained, enabled or otherwise influenced at different points in time by the norms, rules, routines and values, not to mention the interests of specific factions *within* the agency. This finding obligates us to reconsider the assumption made in Chapter 3 that the FEMA leadership's behaviour is determined by prevailing organization-wide norms, rules, routines and values. Rather, it is important to recognize that different factions invariably exist within organizations and that leaders will be inclined for different reasons to favour certain factions over others. Equally so, we should recognize the possibility that organizational leadership units may only be slightly influenced by organizational norms, rules, routines and values, if at all. Indeed, it may be the case that at the highest levels of public administration, the behaviour of at least some individual leaders is steered not by what organization-wide ideas as to what is appropriate, but instead by what is most likely to benefit their own individual interests. In other words, some career civil servants, like politicians, may well be guided by the logic of consequentiality.

Finally, the core leadership group at FEMA was initially seen as being the agent in the principal-agent equation, insofar as it was charged with implementing policy handed down by elites. However, this study provides certain evidence to suggest that agency heads in particular may be allowed to play a meaningful role in the policy development process and, thus, could in some instances be considered to be part of the policy elite. Future studies should consider both the methodological and theoretical implications that such a choice might entail.

6.4 Neo-institutionalism

6.4.1 Introduction

Though not all of the research hypotheses could be proven using the case at hand, insights from the different streams of neo-institutionalism that they stem from nevertheless contribute to our understanding of how FEMA prepared for different threats and how it responded to major institutional change. In this section, we shall reflect on the implications that these and other related findings have for the existing body of neo-institutional theory.

6.4.2 Normative institutionalism

Of the three streams of neo-institutionalism considered here, normative institutionalism provides a particularly compelling explanation as to why major institutional change occurred in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in particular, and not at any other point in FEMA's history. Though the nation had certainly been faced with terror attacks and other major disasters in the past, none were as sudden, as unexpected, or as unacceptable as the 2001 attacks. Wrong or not, the conclusion that most stakeholders drew at the time was that deep changes needed to be made in order to protect the nation from similar such attacks in future. The ensuing policy response saw policymakers take sweeping action in numerous policy realms. Rather than start from scratch, most of these policy choices were if not drawn directly from then were inspired by pre-existing strategic policy prescriptions found in the Hart-Rudman Commission's reports, for instance.

That this was the case would seem to support Cohen, March and Olsen's garbage can theory, which suggests that actors with limited amounts of resources, not least time, are apt to draw on pre-existing and available sets of standard responses over crafting new policy responses.¹ In the example involving the 9/11 attacks, for instance, the pressures to 'do something' were so great that policymakers could ill-afford to initiate the processes necessary to identify a new set of policy solutions. That being said, while garbage can theory provides a plausible explanation concerning where actors typically turn for policy solutions, I feel that

1 Peters, 1999: 37.

it fails to explain why they choose the solutions they do. Whereas garbage can theory emphasizes the extent to which the policy selection process is an exercise in elites 'satisficing', Allison's organizational process model serves to problematize the process by which the bureaucracy goes about implementing the policy that elites select from the proverbial garbage can.² This study demonstrates just how difficult it is for policy elites to predict with any degree of certainty how effectively their policy choices will in fact be implemented.

Though different forces compelled much of the federal bureaucracy to focus their energies on issues related to terrorism in the years after 9/11, the record suggests that the FEMA leadership fought to retain its focus on all-hazards preparedness instead. When seen through a normative institutional lens, the new terror-centric order that emerged after 9/11 failed to conform to the agency's own deep-seated notions concerning the appropriate ways and means by which to prepare for and deal with different threats, be they antagonistic or natural in origin. In certain respects, FEMA's opposition to the new order is hardly surprising. As much as normative institutionalism emphasizes the role that policy failures play in bringing about major institutional change, it fails to recognize the likelihood that different actors will feel more or less culpable for 'what went wrong', and that this might influence how receptive they are to the policy prescriptions that come as a result. In this case, FEMA had no role to play in any work that might have prevented the 9/11 attacks in the first place, and it responded effectively to events as they unfolded in New York City, Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania. From the agency's perspective, then, it might have felt unfair that FEMA should be forced to undergo change as a result of a policy failure not of its own doing.

As Goldman points out, normative institutionalism would benefit from a clearer notion of appropriateness and how it can be observed in organizations. Like norms and values, appropriateness is a somewhat vague concept that I have struggled to identify in FEMA and other organizations that appear in this study.³ Generally speaking, I found that the larger the organization, the more difficult it was to confidently identify a single logic of appropriateness that guided its members. Instead, several different, sometimes conflicting logics appeared to be at play. According to Christensen and Røvik, however, the existing literature on normative institutionalism provides limited guidance to researchers faced with such situations.⁴ Even so, it is clear that the researcher should be prepared to dissect individual actors down into smaller subunits, but especially where this is likely to reveal the presence of different, sometimes conflicting institutional forces that may pull a given organization in different directions.

2 March and Simon, 1958.

3 Goldman, 2005.

4 Christensen and Røvik, 1999.

Finally, normative institutionalism theory suggests that individuals are motivated to participate in organizations not by the prospects for personal gain, but because they are committed 'to the goals of the organization, or at least [accept] the legitimate claims of the organization (or institution) for individual commitment'.⁵ However, we find few specific suggestions in the literature concerning how we can observe or go about measuring said commitment. This issue, which has significant practical implications for hiring practices, for instance, also deserves additional attention.

6.4.3 Historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism supposes that major institutional change is most likely in the event of a major focusing event capable of overcoming persisting, historically determined patterns of behaviour. While the case at hand provides considerable evidence of gradual institutional change during the late 1980s and much of the 1990s both within FEMA and in the broader policy landscape relating to emergency management/homeland security, the scale and pace of these changes pales in comparison to those that came about after the 9/11 attacks. Given the role that focusing events play as motors of institutional change, more work is needed in order to better understand and predict under what circumstances focusing events are likely to occur, what mechanisms are at play in compelling institutions to deviate from their historically determined paths, and who/which interests they are likely to mobilize.⁶ Furthermore, the Federal Government's experiences in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrate the need to distinguish between different types of focusing events. While the 9/11 attacks focused attention on obvious deficiencies in the government's capabilities, the fall of the Soviet Union did the opposite – it, a 'defocusing' event, allowed policymakers for the first time in many years to wonder what policy domains other than national defence/civil defence could be elevated on the policy agenda.

6.4.4 Rational choice institutionalism

Rational choice institutionalism is intentionalist insofar as it portrays individuals as being in control of the process of creating and then running organizations in ways that optimize their chances of achieving their aims. At the same time, though, it recognizes that these same actors are forced to contend with organizational norms, rules, routines and values that serve as checks on their otherwise unbounded behaviour. However, critics argue that no matter how hard they try, actors are incapable of exerting the necessary levels of control, and certainly do not have access to all the information required, to participate in institutions

5 Peters, 1999: 27.

6 Birkland, 1998: 53; Stone, 1989: 299.

that fully maximize their utility. Of the three streams of neo-institutionalism considered in this study, rational choice institutionalism certainly goes furthest in acknowledging the tension that exists between the individual's drive to maximize utility and those constraints on individual behaviour that organizational membership inevitably entail. According to William H. Riker, the challenge lies in determining the 'relative significance' of individual interests and institutional forces in explaining behaviour. 'Very probably', Riker argues:

Both are necessary and neither is alone a sufficient condition for outcomes. [...] One fundamental and unresolved problem of social science is [...] to learn to take both [preferences] and institutions into account.⁷

My view is similar to Riker's – the nature of the relationship between institutional forces and interests is different in every given situation, and should for this reason be approached on a case-by-case basis.

The notion that individuals are driven by unique sets of interests underpins the notion that they can be assigned different professional profiles that can be used to predict how they will behave in different situations. While this idea is certainly an intriguing one in theory, there are certain practical hurdles that need to be overcome before it can be applied to other studies. For instance, we need to more clearly stipulate which types of education, training and/or professional experience are most closely associated with the political-administrative and technical profiles. Otherwise, it is difficult to assess what environment and responsibilities a given individual's background best prepares them for. For instance, what are we to make of individuals with long military experience? Does this type of professional experience provide technical competence, a keen understanding of the political-administrative context in which policymakers interact with senior administrators, or some combination of the two?

One of the unexpected benefits of exploring certain FEMA officials' professional backgrounds and behaviour in the face of institutional change has been to reveal the role that personality plays in determining how effective an individual is in pursuing his or her own interests. While a considerable amount of research exists concerning the intersection between personality and leadership style, and also on what role leadership style plays in managing crises, much less has been done on the role that personality plays in determining how individuals develop and implement strategies for achieving their own aims and/or those of the organizations under them, let alone how effective these different strategies ultimately show themselves to be.⁸ As Fred Greenstein, writing from the field of political psychology, argues, a more systematic approach to this question is needed.⁹

7 Riker, 1980: 432.

8 Boin, et al., 2010; Sylves, 2006.

9 Greenstein, 1992.

6.4.5 The actor-centric institutional environment

The notion that every organization exists within its own unique institutional environment has proven useful in conceptualizing and capturing the institutional forces that were at play in influencing FEMA's behaviour within the scope of the case. On the other hand, the assumption that every actor exists in its own unique 'sphere' arguably requires a fair degree of diligence on the part of the researcher hoping to fully grasp the relevant contextual factors. Among other things, this may require systematically mapping out the different formal and informal contacts/relationships that a given organization maintains with other actors. Only then is it possible to hypothesize concerning where, if at all, different constellations of actors share common norms, rules, routines and values. Needless to say, mapping exercises such as this risk being arduous ones. Closely defined parameters are needed so as to limit the number of actors to manageable levels.

Just as it is important to account for the influence that external actors are likely to exert on the formation and evolution of a single actor's own norms, rules, routines and values, we also need to account for different factors at the intra-organizational level that influence how actors relate to those around them. For instance, this study demonstrates that FEMA consisted of several distinct 'factions' that maintained sometimes very different ideas concerning what kind of organization FEMA should be and what it should be particularly well-prepared for. Without first accounting for such intra-organizational dynamics, it is impossible to know with any certainty exactly whose norms, rules, routines and values are guiding the agency's behaviour in its interactions with others. Based on my reading of the existing literature and the findings from this case, the larger the organization, the more likely it is that different sets of norms, rules, routines and values will exist. Needless to say, it behoves the researcher to determine which set has primacy at any given point in time. The use of different methodologies derived from the field of anthropology may be useful to this end.¹⁰

6.4.6 Conclusion

Neo-institutionalism clearly has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the environment in which actors behave and respond to change, be it independently or in collaboration with others. Beyond serving to reinforce other scholars' findings concerning the utility of neo-institutionalism, the outcomes of this study strongly suggest that the organizational preparedness literature in particular stands to benefit where a neo-institutional lens of analysis is applied. That being said, further refinements are necessary, the most obvious of which are discussed in more detail in section 6.8, where I propose a programme for further research.

¹⁰ Hudelson, 2004.

6.5 Foreseeable complex problems

Foreseeable complex problems are defined as problems that are predictable, necessitate engagement from actors from different jurisdictions and/or different levels of government, and have severe negative consequences where they are not dealt with effectively. The primary challenge facing the relevant actors tasked with responding to such problems lies in achieving effective coordination in what tend to be complex, actor-dense environments. The decision to conceive of the hurricane threat in particular as a complex problem that actors foresee and then attempt to manage arguably enhances the generalizability of the findings to other cases where constellations of actors operating in complex multi-level systems (federal and non-federal (unitary) alike) set out to manage problems.

This study shows that the system of government in which actors operate provides the fundamental parameters within which they are able to coordinate (or not) with one another. For instance, the federal system that the relevant actors in the case at hand operated in provided the framework that determined how they would interact with one another and which unique responsibilities/competencies they each had or were expected to have. As much as such arrangements might be sensible ways to allocate responsibility for preparing for and managing different threats, this case also demonstrates that federalism has the potential to contribute to inter-organizational conflict (over who should fund preparedness work for different threats, for instance) that somewhat ironically risks in fact weakening overall levels of preparedness. The likelihood that this type of conflict is likely to arise is presumably somewhat smaller in other systems of government. In unitary states, for instance, the central government is supreme and there is less room (or need) for debate over cost-sharing, for instance. However, as tempting as it is to view federalism as a factor that impedes or at the very least makes it all the more difficult to achieve high levels of preparedness, there is little to suggest that problems in unitary systems are not still complex ones requiring close inter-organizational collaboration across jurisdictional lines. Obviously, this issue deserves more attention in future.

Generally speaking, the notion of foreseeable complex problems has been useful in framing disruptive events in terms of what they are challenges to and not in terms of what their consequences are or are likely to be. That being said, this study raises questions concerning the utility of viewing certain problems as being foreseeable. In fact, every problem that actors working in the field of emergency management/homeland security might be faced with is theoretically foreseeable. Insights from the warning response literature and cognitive-institutionalism, for instance, demonstrate how a combination of cognitive, bureau-organizational and agenda-political factors collude to create situations where individuals and organizations alike fail to detect problems that are imaginable and foreseeable. Clearly, any future work on this definition should be more explicit concerning how narrowly or broadly the notion of foreseeability is to be defined. It may

well be the case that there is in fact little to be gained by conceiving of problems in this way – if all problems are foreseeable, what then distinguishes foreseeable complex problems from other problems that actors confront? Ultimately, it may well be more helpful to speak in terms of *foreseen* complex problems and then examine how the relevant actors address them.

6.6 Preparedness

6.6.1 *Defining preparedness*

Preparedness has been defined in this study as the ability for organizations to build up and maintain capabilities so as to effectively respond to problems in conjunction with other actors that exist in complex multi-level systems. Unlike many other definitions that exist in the literature, this one emphasizes the challenges inherent in managing problems in complex institutional environments. This definition has been useful in this instance, given the focus on foreseeable complex problems. That being said, it is important to point out that the application of a generic concept of preparedness like this to cases where actors pursue threat-specific preparedness raises certain methodological issues that need to be addressed. If nothing else, it is important to recognize that the appearance of high levels of preparedness for a given threat or set of threats does not necessarily mean that the organization enjoys high levels of preparedness for other specific threats, let alone generally.

6.6.2 *Primary indicators of preparedness*

I argued in Chapter 2 that organizational preparedness could be gauged by examining prevailing conditions within three specific thematic areas, namely inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols. The decision to structure the framework for analysis in Chapter 5 around these indicators was intended to provide a basis for evaluating just how much they in fact revealed about FEMA's state of preparedness over time. While the case certainly reveals a considerable degree of interdependency between these indicators, it appears that inter-organizational relations – the relationships but also the inevitable power dynamics (imbalances) that exist between different actors who are expected to prepare for and manage different problems – structures the processes by which threats are prioritized on the policy agenda and appropriate routines and protocols are developed. The various neo-institutional lenses help us see why inter-organizational relations are good in some instances and poor in others. For instance, where FEMA's relations with other stakeholders were good, it was relatively easy to reach consensus concerning what needed to be done and to develop the rules and routines required to guide the different actors in carrying out the required work in joint fashion. On the other hand, as relations soured,

it grew increasingly difficult to accomplish these same tasks. The case suggests that inter-organizational relations appear to be dominant over the other two indicators, and for this reason is considered to be a particularly strong indicator of organizational preparedness. As much as working threat prioritization mechanisms and workable plans are necessary elements of any preparedness strategy, they are nothing without effective inter-agency relations.¹¹

This study reveals other factors that also appear to influence levels of organizational preparedness in ways that were initially unforeseen. One example is intra-agency relations. Indeed, we see in the case of FEMA during the late 1980s and early 1990s and then again during the early to mid-2000s an agency consisting of different factions, each with its own view concerning FEMA's core mission and purpose. The conflicts that arose as a result hampered operations and complicated the agency's relations with other partners. We might reasonably assume that actors that are able to demonstrate intra-agency cohesiveness and a common sense of purpose are also capable of effectively coordinating their activities with others.

As the discussion in section 6.4.4 illustrates, certain factors at the individual level also appear to influence organizational preparedness. For instance, we see that the FEMA leadership, like senior administrators everywhere, had an important role to play in receiving and interpreting elite direction, translating it into specific taskings to the relevant component or components of the agency, following up on this work, and then reporting back to policymakers. They were also charged with spearheading work aimed at building up and maintaining relations with agency counterparts. However, there are strong indications that certain individuals in the agency's history were better suited to this set of tasks than others, be it for their professional background and experience, their personality, or some combination thereof. Where individual members of the FEMA leadership served as effective bridges between policymakers and the agency bureaucracy, we see indications that the agency enjoyed relatively high levels of elite support, adequate funding, a strong sense of common purpose, high morale, and good working relations with other key stakeholders. On the other hand, where they did not, levels of elite support fell off, funding dried up, morale suffered, and interagency relations deteriorated. Obviously, shifts like this are apt to influence agency performance positively or negatively and for this reason should be considered when examining just how prepared organizations are for different eventualities.

In conclusion, the results of this study support the claim that there exist a number of primary indicators of preparedness. That being said, there appear to be at least five different indicators, including: inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols; intra-agency relations; and leadership relations with both the policy elite and the organizations that they

11 Government Accountability Office, 2006c.

lead. Furthermore, there are grounds to claim that a dependent relationship exists between the indicators, with inter-organizational relations dominant over some if not all of the remaining four. All five indicators have in one way or another been incorporated into the draft diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness, which is presented at the end of this chapter.

6.6.3 The political-administrative and technical dimensions of preparedness

The study's findings appear to support the claim that states of organizational preparedness are influenced by developments in two distinct dimensions, one technical and the other political-administrative. While the behaviour of actors operating in the technical dimension is typically determined by what is considered to be appropriate behaviour within the organization, the players in the political-administrative dimension, but particularly elected officials and political nominees to government bureaucracies, are at least somewhat more likely to be guided by the logic of consequentiality as they go about trying to identify the limits of what is possible (and not sanctionable) behaviour. As the study of different FEMA directors shows, some individuals may find themselves forced to reconcile the pressures that the two opposing logics sometimes generate.

We see in this case that developments in the political-administrative dimension significantly impacted the nature of work in the technical dimension (where funding cuts put forward and approved by policymakers disrupted on-going agency projects, for instance). This study reveals few if any examples of the opposite being true. Future studies of organizational preparedness would arguably benefit where they distinguish between these two dimensions and then consider the implications that developments in one dimension have on the other, but also for organizational preparedness writ large.

6.7 EPMA's

This study provides us with numerous opportunities to theorize on the role, organization and staffing of EPMA's, which have certain defining characteristics that set them apart from other government bureaucracies.

First of all, EPMA's play a crucial role in facilitating multi-level interagency coordination prior to, at the onset of and after disruptive events. Second, EPMA's tend to be comparatively small organizations, meaning that they may encounter resistance to being coordinated from larger, better resourced actors with more political clout. In order to successfully coordinate the efforts of such actors, EPMA's need to be sensitive to their interests and motivations, but at the same time maintain close ties with policy elites that can support them if/when interagency conflict arises, for instance by levying different forms of sanctions compelling them to cooperate.

There are strong indications that how organizations are organized in relation to one another plays a significant role in determining who they have regular contact with, in which situations these contacts occur, and, as a result, the nature of the norms, rules, routines and values that emerge as a result and that constrain and enable their behaviour, but also their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities. Furthermore, organizational placement has implications for how their members view themselves, but also how others view them. This study suggests that one potential way of strengthening the coordinative capacity of EPMA's is by organizing them within the executive branch, as was the case with FEMA until 2003. Doing so has many advantages, but also some drawbacks. First of all, the executive branch would seem to offer a natural platform for inter-departmental coordination, while at the same time providing relatively direct access to key decision-makers, not least the office of the executive and departmental heads. Furthermore, it is a way to signal to the public, policymakers, and other elements of the government bureaucracy that emergency management is an executive priority. On the other hand, being close to the executive entails a greater risk of being compelled to behave ('used') in ways that benefit members of the executive politically. For instance, FEMA was regularly accused of providing disaster assistance to state and local jurisdictions on the basis of what was good politics for the sitting president. Furthermore, EPMA's within the executive branch may be rendered toothless where they lack a strong congressional mandate to coordinate the activities of other elements of the government bureaucracy. Clearly, the question of where EPMA's are best located deserves additional attention. In my view, there are grounds to revisit certain elements of the 'old' institutionalism, which may offer insights concerning the role that formal organizational arrangements play in determining how and how well organizations behave.¹²

Emergency management is by turns fraught with political risks and opportunity. As we have seen in this case, for instance, Hurricane Andrew demonstrated to the incoming Clinton Administration how important competently responding to disasters is to any president's election/re-election strategy. So long as this is the case, EPMA's are likely to find themselves at the centre of political storms, but especially when things go badly. Regardless of where they find themselves organized, EPMA's also appear to be particularly susceptible to reorganization in the wake of policy failures – even in instances where they are not at fault. No matter how much policymakers believe that such reforms will strengthen the bureaucracy's capacities and prevent similar such failures from occurring in the future, major reforms are almost always disruptive events that disturb established processes and upset long-standing relationships. For this reason, the reform process may in fact weaken the EPMA's capabilities over the short term,

12 Commons, 1910; Cooley, 1930; Krier, 2009: 395-397; Mitchell, 1935; Veblen, 1948.

only to improve again as time goes by. Obviously, this has implications should the EPMA be expected to respond to disruptive events that occur during the reform implementation period.

Following the 9/11 attacks, elites within DHS shifted responsibility for preparedness and mitigation, two central phases in the emergency management cycle, from FEMA to other directorates within the department. These moves were an affront to many FEMA employees who held deeply held beliefs about what emergency management is and how it should be carried out. One such belief was that the same agency should be charged with managing all four phases in the emergency management cycle. (After Katrina, the US Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA). Among other things, the Act returned the preparedness and mitigation taskings to FEMA.¹³) In my view, there are numerous strong arguments for assigning EPMA with overarching responsibility for the entirety of the emergency management cycle. That being said, we should certainly look to other cases in other contexts to see if other arrangements are equally workable.

Finally, all indications are that EPMA requires a combination of subject matter experts tasked with carrying out different operational tasks and individuals that understand the interplay that exists between the agency leadership and policy elites. In my view, there is considerable evidence to support the claim that EPMA (and all government agencies for that matter) are best led by senior administrators who understand the needs of and possess the ability to relate to policymakers. Suitable candidates are likely to have a political or administrative background, though this in no way precludes individuals with a technical background from having the requisite experience.

6.8 A programme for further research

While the institutional perspective on preparedness that was used in this study goes a good way in enhancing our understanding as to how organizations prepare for complex problems, many questions still remain or have emerged over the course of the study. The programme for further research that is proposed here aims to answer these questions, not least by enhancing our understanding of organizational preparedness.

First of all, the programme calls for the development of more coherent, testable definitions of key neo-institutional notions (foremost among them norms, values and appropriateness) and additional work aimed at refining normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism, all of which have been helpful to the task of understanding why organizations behave as they do. With regard to normative institutionalism, it remains unclear

13 Chertoff, 2005a; Government Accountability Office, 2013.

whether like-minded individuals are drawn to organizations that share their values, or if instead the organizations that they belong to shape their values over time. Hopefully, further study may allow us to come down on one side of this important issue, which has obvious practical implications for organizational hiring/leadership recruitment practices. Meanwhile, historical institutionalism holds that major institutional change is most likely where punctuated equilibrium precipitated by some form of focusing event occurs. Despite the amount of work that exists on this subject, certain gaps in our understanding remain. For instance, where do focusing events stem from? And is it possible to predict what their effects are likely to be when they do manifest themselves? Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union provides a useful example of an event that, rather than focusing attention on a single policy area, serves to create a space for contests over multiple policy areas instead. Does the existing literature fully explain 'de-focusing' events like these? Finally, rational choice institutionalism would benefit from additional work that aims to explain the role that individuals' backgrounds and experiences play in influencing their preferences and, thus, their likely behaviour in different situations. Needless to say, any such findings could be useful in further refining the notion of professional profiles introduced in this study.

The literature on neo-institutionalism seldom makes an explicit distinction between public and private sector or non-governmental organizations, though my impression is that it is primarily interested in and extracts observations from cases in the public sector. For this reason, it may be worthwhile to apply the theory to cases involving organizations operating in non-public sectors. Doing so may help us confirm (or disconfirm) that neo-institutionalism's central tenets are applicable to organizations operating in different sectors. In a related vein, it is unclear that neo-institutionalism is equipped to account for the increasing privatization of heretofore government services and the bureaucracy's growing reliance on contractors. These parallel trends would appear to alter the traditional dynamics by which common organizational norms, rules, routines and values emerge within organizations and institutional environments more generally. Also, we should recognize the increasing decentralization of organizations, many of which allow their employees to work outside the confines of a common physical space. Does neo-institutionalism in its current state account for the process by which norms, rules, routines and values are created (or not?) in such an environment?

The second area of focus pertains to the notion of foreseeable complex problems, which should be applied to additional cases where organizations work to prepare for and manage problems. Among other things, doing so promises to provide additional insights on the notion of foreseeability, the conceptualization of preparedness used in this study, the idea that there exist two distinct but inter-related dimensions of preparedness, and the revised set of primary indicators of preparedness, presented above.

This study clearly illustrates the role that politics plays dramatically influences both the conditions under which EPMA's operate, their relations with key stakeholders, and their behaviour in preparing for and managing different threats. In this, the final area of focus, the aim is to ensure that the existing body of theory satisfactorily reflects and accounts for the highly politicized environment in which EPMA's operate. While a substantial amount of scholarly attention has been given to politics as it relates to crisis/emergency/disaster responses, much less exists on the politics of preparedness. Is more work in this vein needed? Furthermore, this study suggests that organizational placement may have significant real-world implications for the ability of EPMA's to effectively collaborate with others. Future studies might study any correlation that exists between where EPMA's are located organizationally and their ability to manage complex problems.

According to King, 'The conclusions of single case studies are much stronger if they can be compared with other studies'.¹⁴ Researchers looking to replicate this study might consider applying the institutional perspective on preparedness to other US federal agencies that were joined within DHS, like the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Alternatively, one could study FEMA's hurricane preparedness activities between Katrina and Hurricane Sandy in 2012, by which point the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA had presumably implemented the post-Katrina reforms mandated by the Congress in 2006.¹⁵ As mentioned elsewhere, a substantial number of private and non-governmental actors have taken on key responsibilities in the contemporary emergency management system in the United States (for sheltering, animal care, certain rescue services, etc.). Among other things, the application of the institutional perspective to cases involving these actors as they go about preparing for and responding to disruptive events presents an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the existing body of theory on neo-institutionalism is in fact relevant to organizations operating outside the public sector.

6.9 Practical recommendations to policymakers and senior administrators

The study has generated a number of insights that can be translated into practical recommendations to policymakers and senior administrators involved in one way or another in the process whereby elite policy is developed and then handed down to the bureaucracy to be implemented. Some of these recommendations are general in nature, while others are related specifically to preparedness.

This study shows that major disruptive events have the potential to quickly focus stakeholders' attention to bear on specific policy areas. In such instances,

14 King, et al., 1994: 208-211, in George and Bennett, 2005: 220.

15 National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, 2013.

policymakers may feel that they are compelled to 'do something', oftentimes in short order. Policy elites would do well to recognize that the policy solutions that they generate under such conditions, while well-intentioned, may nevertheless engender uncertainty and inter-organizational conflict that actually serve to temporarily weaken, not strengthen, the affected bureaucracies' capacities in dealing with different problems. This bears keeping in mind when executing major policy reforms, but especially in domains like emergency management/homeland security, where bureaucratic underperformance can have serious real-world implications.

The record on emergency management in the United States since the late 1970s reveals a tendency for elites to select senior administrators not on the basis of their professional qualifications and experience, but rather on the basis of what makes sense politically. Policy failures may prompt scrutiny of these appointments. As much as it might make be politically advantageous to reward allies with well-paying jobs in government, policymakers should recognize that appointments like these may have serious practical implications for the performance of the agencies that they are expected to lead, but also for their credibility and reputation.

Policymakers are understandably interested to know that the administrators that they appoint are equipped to implement policy as intended. In other words, policymakers have a preference for so-called good agents. However, this study suggests at best a weak correlation between being a good agent and the agency's ability to effectively manage problems. After all, good agents may be handed 'bad' policy that puts them and the organizations under them at a disadvantage in managing certain types of problems. For this reason, it is important that elites encourage agents to freely voice any concerns that they might have concerning the effects that different policy choices have/may have on organizational operations. Otherwise, elites may only hear what they want to hear, at least until actual events overwhelm the bureaucracies under them, thereby impugning their policies.

My final recommendation to policymakers concerns the content of the policy direction that they provide to agents. In this case, we see that conflicting policy directions from different interests in Congress created intra-organizational conflict at FEMA and even weakened the agency's operational effectiveness. Clearly, the agency would have benefited from a more harmonized oversight environment. However, achieving such a state is easier said than done. Among other things, policymakers must be willing to work to solidify elite consensus on a piecemeal basis around those issues that are relevant to the bureaucracy in question. Alternatively, they should be willing to reduce the number of actors with oversight authority over it. However, doing so entails significant political risks that policymakers may be reluctant to take. Those that are up to the challenge may well be voted out of office before they have time to push through the necessary reforms.

What advice then can we offer senior administrators charged with implementing elite policy? First of all, it is clear that organizations benefit by having leaders who are attuned to developments in the political-administrative environment. While some individuals are certainly better suited to this role than others, all leaders suffer from bounded rationality to one degree or another. The trick is to put in place mechanisms aimed at minimizing this problem as much as possible. One solution is to task other members of the organization with monitoring developments in the environment that they might otherwise miss. (In the United States, for instance, many federal agencies maintain congressional relations functions that allow senior administrators to both follow developments in and maintain relations with Congress.)

Senior administrators operate somewhere between policymakers and the rank-and-file tasked with translating elite policy into practice. Unsurprisingly, their decisions sometimes fail to satisfy both constituencies. Unwinnable situations like these are particularly likely to arise in the event of major institutional change, where policy elites may expect senior administrators to implement changes that are anathema to existing organizational norms, rules routines and values. For instance, the changes that the FEMA director was forced to implement after 9/11 seriously damaged staff morale and turned many long-serving employees against both him and the department that the agency now belonged to. This example demonstrates that no matter how much leaders strive to address employee concerns in times of reform/change, they cannot possibly satisfy everyone, but especially those individuals with particularly strong ideas about 'how things should be done'. Such individuals may constitute so-called veto points within the organization that may slow the pace of policy implementation/change.

Finally, while the literature on bureaucracies suggests that organizations are inclined to avoid contact with one another, successful emergency management requires that organizations do just the opposite – that they actively seek out and maintain contact with one another in order to build up their own individual preparedness as well as their preparedness on an inter-organizational basis. Clearly, senior administrators have a vital role to play in building such relationships across interagency boundaries and between levels. Besides strengthening the organization's own ability to effectively respond to problems in future, bridge-building of this kind also serves to deepen the pool of allies that can be mobilized when administrators seek to, say, lobby elites in coordinated fashion.

6.10 Toward a diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness

I argued at the outset that this study makes a major contribution to our understanding of how organizational preparedness can be measured empirically. This is a task that has long vexed researchers working in the fields of emergency management, crisis management and preparedness. In this section, I propose

a first draft of a diagnostic model for use in quickly and inexpensively gauging organizational preparedness in bureaucratic organizations, including EPMAs. While the model has been developed particularly with the US federal system of government in mind, it should be applicable to organizations operating in other governmental settings as well. The model is intended to be used in its own right or as a complement to other, more costly validation activities that bureaucracies typically use to test their own preparedness (such as full-scale exercises, for instance). As I say, however, this is a first draft. Reading on, it quickly becomes clear that additional refinements are required before the model can be tested.

In its present state, the model (presented in Table 1 below) consists of a set of 15 indicators that in one way or another capture evidence to suggest a certain state of preparedness for disruptive events. In developing each indicator, I have drawn on insights from the fields of emergency management, organizational theory, governmental politics, and neo-institutionalism. The model incorporates in one way or another the revised set of primary indicators of preparedness (inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, routines and protocols, intra-agency relations, leadership relations with policy elites and the organizations under them), as well as the notion that there exist two distinct dimensions of preparedness, one technical and the other political-administrative. For instance, the first three indicators included in the model actualize issues that pertain to the political-administrative level. These indicators say little if anything about how organizations prepare. Instead, they tell us about what policy elites expect organizations to be prepared for. The remaining 12 indicators address either the technically oriented work that organizations carry out in pursuit of a specific form and/or level of preparedness, or various qualities in organizations that influence their ability to pursue their work in an effective manner.

It is important to recognize that many organizations use various forms of capability assessment tools in order to gauge preparedness. Whereas these tools are typically intended to gauge organizational capabilities in narrowly defined spheres or with regard to certain missions or tasks (say, logistics support or crisis communication) and rely on objectively measurable criteria, the model proposed here is interested in a number of decidedly less tangible indicators of organizational preparedness that are inspired by the literature on neo-institutionalism and certain findings related specifically to this study. In their current form, each indicator is to be answered on a 'yes/no' basis. That being said, it is important to emphasize that organizational preparedness is actually something that exists to one degree or another. Future work aimed at refining this model or models like it should aim to develop a scaled system with which to assess each criterion. Without such a system, it is difficult to draw conclusions concerning the *degree* to which a given organization is prepared, let alone what it is prepared for. Despite this caveat, I expect that the model in its current form is capable of providing a general picture of how prepared an organization is, with the organization that meets every indicator arguably better prepared than the organization that only

meets a few. For this reason, a suitable first test of the model might entail contrasting levels of preparedness within two or more organizations and then comparing these outcomes with how they actually responded to the same disruptive event.

Table 1. A diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness

Indicator	Comment/clarification
<p>Policy elites are attentive to and have vested interests in the organization and/or the mission that the organization is responsible for.</p>	<p>Elite attention to the organization and its activities may indicate political support for the organization and its mission. Organizations that enjoy elite support are presumably able to secure various forms of support that are needed to effectively carry out their missions. On the other hand, elite attention might also suggest dissatisfaction with the organization and/or its performance.</p>
<p>The organization's leadership interacts with policy elites such that the organization's interests are competently represented both on a day-to-day basis and in the event of a disruptive event.</p>	<p>In order for organizations existing in complex, multi-tiered systems of actors to execute their missions, they must effectively communicate with policy elites in order to secure various forms of support, be it financial or political. This task falls to the organization's senior leadership. A situation in which the leadership lacks the ability to effectively interact with policy elites has implications for the organization's ability to attract the funding and political support necessary in order to maintain a high level of organizational preparedness.</p>
<p>The organization's leadership is involved in or at least has a good understanding of the organization's operations, including those aimed at enhancing the organization's preparedness for different eventualities.</p>	<p>A good understanding of how the organization works and the salient threats/vulnerabilities facing it is critical if leaders are to be effective proponents of the organization vis-à-vis policy elites. The engagement of the leadership with organizational preparedness activities specifically may signal to employees that preparedness is a leadership priority.</p>
<p>The organization's structure and scope of work are formalized.</p>	<p>Organizational formalization is manifested through structures, routines, and protocols that define specific areas of responsibility, the scope of work within each, appropriate working methods, etc. Furthermore, there may be a correlation between levels of formalization and preparedness – the more defined the organization is, the more capable the organization is to systematically work to enhance its own preparedness.</p>
<p>The organizational culture is one that acknowledges the need for improvised responses to problems, particularly ones that are unforeseen.</p>	<p>Gillespie and Streeter argue that high levels of preparedness are likely in organizations that are prepared to deviate from existing routines and protocols where they are ill-suited to the problems that they are faced with.¹⁶</p>

16 Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 157.

Indicator	Comment/clarification
Formal exchanges take place on a regular basis between the organization and other actors in the same policy domain.	The assumption here is that frequent formalized exchanges (depicted in common plans, mutual aid agreements, partnership arrangements, etc.) between actors expected to work with one another in dealing with a given problem effectively lowers transaction costs in times of emergency.
Mechanisms intended to facilitate the identification of organizational vulnerabilities exist on an organization-wide basis.	According to Reason, organizations may host potential latent failures or vulnerabilities that reduce their ability to effectively respond to threats, both independently and in conjunction with other actors. ¹⁷ The organization that is able to detect latent vulnerabilities and then feels confident in sharing these with other actors is all the more likely to enjoy relatively high levels of preparedness.
Inter-organizational mechanisms aimed at identifying and assessing issues that may hamper effective inter-agency responses to common problems are in place.	Given the interdependencies inherent in the field of emergency management, the extent of organizational preparedness is arguably higher where organizations jointly identify and address issues that might prevent them from effectively coordinating with one another.
The organization's priorities are in line with those in the overarching policy arena/held by members of the policy elite.	Organizations whose priorities are in line with those of policy elites are likely to enjoy relatively high levels of material and symbolic support, providing them with the means with which to prepare. That being said, the priorities in the overarching policy arena may not accurately reflect the actual spectrum of threats 'out there'. Indeed, it may well be that policy elites set the policy agenda in such a way that serves to enhance organizational capabilities to deal with one set of threats while reducing their capabilities in dealing with others that may be more likely and/or more disruptive.
Organizational preparedness activities are aimed at building up generic capabilities. At the same time, they account for those threats that are prioritized on the policy agenda and/or that the organization itself finds salient.	Organizations that work to build up generic preparedness capabilities are likely to be better prepared to manage threats than those who are focused on establishing a narrow set of threat-specific capabilities.
Organizational preparedness activities engage all members of the organization in one way or another.	The greater the number of members of an organization who are actively involved in various forms of preparedness activities, the more likely the organization is to be prepared for different eventualities.

17 Reason, 2006: 247, 249. See also Gillespie and Streeter, 1987: 155.

Indicator	Comment/clarification
The organization seeks to engage in joint preparedness activities with other relevant actors.	Joint preparedness activities, including trainings and exercises, enable the establishment of common understandings, heightened inter-organizational familiarity, and the identification of potential problems that can hamper effective inter-organizational coordination.
The organization's members have previous experience managing disruptive situations or situations that deviate from the norm.	Past experience of managing disruptive events arguably provides individuals with a better capacity to cope with and find solutions to similar such events in future.
Mechanisms intended to facilitate the documentation and implementation of lessons learned exist at all levels within the organization.	Organizational mechanisms for learning include hotwashes, debriefings, after-action reviews and other forms of internal review processes. Mechanisms should also exist to ensure that lessons learned are subsequently implemented within the organization.
Organizational morale is high throughout the organization.	Where organizational morale is low, the productivity of the employees may decrease and the quality of their work may suffer, not least any work aimed at enhancing organizational preparedness.

It may well be that future research on this model or other models like it will show that tools like this should include fewer, not more indicators of preparedness. The question then is which criteria reveal the most about a given organization's actual preparedness for different threats. It might also be the case that certain indicators are missing. One indicator that has not been included in the draft model is organizational placement. Is the location of the bureaucracy in the government (as part of a larger department, within the executive branch, as an independent agency of government) a factor in determining how prepared it is for different contingencies? If so, how? Furthermore, the model in its current form approaches every indicator equally. No claims are made concerning the possibility that some indicators are more telling indicators of preparedness than others. That said, future research may well demonstrate that certain indicators should be 'weighted' more heavily than others.

Executive summary

Why do organizations sometimes fail to manage foreseeable problems?

Besides causing billions of dollars in damage, Hurricane Katrina flooded a major American metropolis and killed 1,800 people along the US Gulf Coast in August 2005. The sluggish, poorly coordinated government response to the storm led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) came despite sweeping post-9/11 reforms to the nation's homeland security arrangements, not least the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which brought over 20 pre-existing federal agencies, including FEMA, under one organizational roof. Proponents argued that this move enhanced the Federal Government's capabilities to effectively manage all manner of threats, including both future acts of terrorism and natural disasters. Katrina presented one of the first opportunities to put these claims to test. While state and local level officials were responsible for a number of decisions that served to leave hundreds of thousands of people stranded in greater New Orleans before Katrina made landfall, FEMA for its part proved incapable of effectively coordinating assistance to overwhelmed state and local authorities as the scale of the disaster grew over the hours and days to come. The Katrina response appeared to suggest that the Federal Government's capabilities in managing the hurricane threat had not been improved since 9/11. In fact, there are indications that it may actually have deteriorated instead.

According to Donald Kettl, 'Democracies don't prepare well for things that have never happened before'.¹ This implies that they are better suited to manage predictable, regularly recurring events, or what I refer to in this study as foreseeable complex problems. Hurricanes are one such example of this type of problem. Once a reluctant player in emergency management, the Federal Government has

1 Kettl, 2007: 100.

become a central actor in a highly standardized multi-level interagency emergency management system that is guided by thoroughly developed plans, routines and protocols that ensure the disruptive events are managed in similar fashion no matter where they occur around the country. As such, we would expect FEMA to be particularly well-suited to manage particularly those threats that are predictable and occur on a regular basis. Herein lies the puzzle that drives this study. If we accept that Hurricane Katrina was a foreseeable complex threat that the Federal Government maintained standardized routines to deal with and that homeland security was a policy priority in the post-9/11 period, why were many elements of the Katrina response orchestrated by FEMA found to be lacking?

If we take a step back, we see that the Katrina example is hardly unique. Governments at every level around the world routinely fail to respond to regularly recurring problems in ways that conform to the relevant stakeholders' expectations. This dissertation, which uses the American experience in preparing for major hurricane events as a backdrop, aims to provide us with a better understanding as to why this is the case. While the existing literature on Katrina certainly goes a fair way in explaining FEMA's flawed response, it does only so much to depict the unique institutional environment that FEMA operated within in the years leading up to the storm. By capturing relevant elements of the agency's institutional environment, this study aims to identify the spectrum of forces/pressures that compelled FEMA and those partners that it shared interdependencies with to behave in certain ways and, in turn, what influence, if any, such behaviour had on their ability to manage different threats, not least hurricanes, over time. Formulated another way, this study aims to answer the following research question:

What are the conditions that promoted change in FEMA so as to generate (or prevent the generation of) high levels of preparedness in managing hurricanes?

The growing body of neo-institutional theory provides the theoretical underpinnings required to answer this question. While different streams of neo-institutionalism might have different theoretical pedigrees, they all share the view that norms, rules, routines, and values serve in one way or another to constrain and enable the behaviour of actors in all that they do. While neo-institutionalism has been used extensively to study crisis/emergency/disaster responses in recent decades, it is employed far less often to study cases of organizational preparedness. In this study, the Federal Government's work in preparing for hurricanes in the years leading up to Hurricane Katrina is considered using three particularly well-developed neo-institutional perspectives, namely normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism. Besides understanding the Katrina response better, the decision to approach the case from different theoretical angles should provide us with a better understanding as to what preparedness is and how it can be measured in organizations, how organizations go about preparing, what they are likely to prepare for, and just how prepared they in fact become as a result of their efforts.

This study seeks to make contributions to the fields of preparedness, emergency management, crisis studies, political science, public administration, and neo-institutionalism. Furthermore, certain outcomes are likely to have practical implications for both policy elites and senior administrators who are charged with overseeing and leading those government bureaucracies that look for, prepare ahead of and then manage disruptive events of different kinds. At the conclusion of the study, a draft diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness is presented.

An institutional perspective on preparedness

In order to answer the research question stated above, I have developed what I refer to as an institutional perspective on preparedness that draws on insights from the literature on preparedness, emergency management, crisis studies, political science, public administration and neo-institutionalism. Using this perspective, we should be able to contextualize the environment in which policymakers and practitioners engage in different processes aimed at identifying, prioritizing and then preparing for different threats. This institutional perspective consists of four central components, the first of which aims to define and situate foreseeable complex problems in relation to other terms that regularly appear in the preparedness and emergency management literature in particular (disaster, emergency, catastrophe, crisis and, most recently, mega-crisis, to name a few). This is followed by a brief discussion on the nature of preparedness, how organizations typically prepare, and the different roles that policymakers and practitioners play in this regard.

One of the central themes of this study is that complex systems of government (like the federal system in the United States) entail interdependencies between actors on both a multi-level and an interagency basis. Among other things, the second component of the institutional perspective seeks to illustrate these complexities insofar as they relate to preparedness. Using the shared governance model developed by Sandra K. Schneider, we shall see the process by which determinations are made in federal systems concerning how and for what bureaucracies operating at different levels of government prepare. We then deconstruct the notion of preparedness into what I argue are two separate and distinct dimensions, one political-administrative and the other technical. Whereas the political-administrative dimension of preparedness is a space inhabited by policy elites and senior administrators charged with making determinations of different kinds concerning what the relevant government bureaucracies should expend their finite resources preparing for, the technical dimension primarily involves the work that practitioners carry out aimed at implementing elite policy insofar as it relates to preparedness. This component also includes a brief discussion on

the nature of organizations, bureaucracies, and the unique subset of organizational bureaucracies tasked with preparing for and managing disruptive events (emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs)).

The third component sets out three primary indicators of preparedness that can be used to reveal just how prepared organizations are for different eventualities. These indicators include inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols. Assuming their relevance is borne out by the case, these indicators will be used as a foundation for the draft diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness that is presented at the end of the study.

The different streams of neo-institutionalism that are applied in this study – normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism – are introduced in the final component of the institutional perspective on preparedness. Each stream offers a different perspective on the nature of the mechanisms that serve to constrain and enable the behaviour of actors. Taken together, the three streams provide a basis for a number of research hypotheses regarding the relationship between major institutional change and preparedness, each of which will be tested in this study.

Investigating the case using process tracing

In this study, we shall examine FEMA's work from its inception in 1979 to August 2005 (when Katrina made landfall) in preparing for a single type of foreseeable complex problem, namely a major hurricane. To this end, we are particularly interested in the behaviour of the agency's core senior leadership group consisting of a small number of political appointees and civil servants charged with contributing in different ways to the policy formation process and then ensuring that it is implemented as intended. Besides being able to accommodate complex, empirically dense cases like this one, the single-case case study methodology that is used in this study permits us to approach the case at hand from several different theoretical angles informed by the three streams of neo-institutionalism described above. Using an adapted version of process tracing, we should be able to confirm the existence of any causal mechanisms that might exist between the independent variable – change in the institutional environment in which FEMA operated – and the dependent variable – the agency's preparedness in managing the complex and foreseeable hurricane threat. The different streams of neo-institutionalism offer different predictions as to how such change might affect the agency's preparedness. The conditions necessary to confirm the different research hypotheses are set out and discussed at this stage in the study.

A wide variety of sources have been used in order to piece together the case. These include media reports; popular historical accounts; government reports and reports published by think tanks, interest groups, and private companies; academic works; and personal interviews.

Analyzing FEMA's hurricane preparedness from 1979 to 2005

The description of FEMA's work on hurricane preparedness from 1979 to 2005 is divided into three distinct periods – one from 1979 to Hurricane Andrew in 1992, one from Andrew to 9/11, and, finally, from 9/11 to Katrina. Dissecting the case in this way allows us to see that the 9/11 attacks, and not Andrew or some other event in FEMA's history, prompted major institutional change within the field of emergency management/homeland security during the time period under study. By confidently identifying a single instance of major institutional change, we are then able to establish the validity of the independent variable set out in this case (change in FEMA's institutional environment), demonstrate that various potential errors in inference have been addressed, and, perhaps most importantly, evaluate the different research hypotheses.

The agency's work in preparing for hurricanes before and then after the 9/11 attacks is analysed using three different analytical angles (inter-organizational relations, threat identification/prioritization, and routines and protocols) that stem from the primary indicators of preparedness that make up one component of the institutional perspective on preparedness. By approaching the case in this way, we should be able to see the effects that major institutional change after the 9/11 attacks had on FEMA's preparedness for different types of threats, not least hurricanes, but also just how useful each primary indicator is to the task of gauging organizational preparedness more generally.

The analysis of the case concludes with a discussion of the various research hypotheses related to the different streams of neo-institutionalism, the aim being to establish which streams are borne out by the case and which are not. We see here that the central claims of normative institutionalism and historical institutionalism are supported by the available empirical data. Meanwhile, the notion that actors behave as 'good agents' as proposed by proponents of rational choice institutionalism is confirmed, but only on the basis of a relatively small amount of supporting data. On the other hand, I was unable to either confirm or reject the second set of claims inspired by rational choice institutionalism, namely that individual leaders can be assigned so-called professional profiles and that these can be used to predict future behaviour. As it was, the proposed professional profiles were shown to be insufficiently specified, making it difficult to confidently assign them to individual leaders, let alone predict how individuals are likely to behave in the face of major institutional change.

Answering the research question

What then were the conditions that promoted change in FEMA so as to generate (or prevent the generation of) high levels of preparedness in managing hurricanes? Seeing the case at hand through different neo-institutional lenses has been helpful in revealing the presence of different kinds of institutional forces

that influenced FEMA's behaviour in ways that left the agency well-prepared to manage some complex problems and less so others. Though many disruptive events have occurred over the course of FEMA's history, the 2001 terror attacks alone prompted reforms on such a scale so as to dramatically alter the institutional landscape in which threats were identified, prioritized, planned for and managed. The different streams of neo-institutionalism demonstrate the role that norms, rules, routines and values, but also the interests of the individuals that populated FEMA, played in determining how the agency responded to this institutional change and how prepared it left the agency to manage different eventualities, not least hurricanes. While the popular narrative suggests that FEMA was preoccupied with terrorism in the lead-up to Katrina, viewing the case through a neo-institutional lens reveals the truth to be at least somewhat more complicated. While FEMA was certainly 'distracted' (like so many other agencies of government at the time) by the 9/11 attacks and the newfound attention that they brought to terrorism writ large, we also see that the FEMA organization was highly resistant to change. All indications are that the agency and its members, including key members of the agency leadership, expended a considerable amount of time, energy and political capital opposing the post-9/11 changes, but particularly the new terror tasking, limitations inherent in the new DHS framework, and the DHS secretary's decision to remove responsibility for preparedness and mitigation from the agency. In other words, the apparent deterioration of FEMA's preparedness for hurricanes in particular in the years leading up to Katrina was as much a result of shifting elite priorities and strategic-level decision-making as it was the agency's own ultimately unsuccessful efforts to stave off these changes. Among other things, these efforts proved a drain on FEMA's resources and at the same time hurt the agency's working relations with other key players within the Federal Government, not least within DHS.

Reflections on neo-institutionalism

This study demonstrates that neo-institutionalism clearly has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the sometimes highly complex environment in which actors operate and respond to change, but also how preparedness is achieved in organizations. That being said, certain refinements to the body of theory are in order. Of the three streams of neo-institutionalism that have been considered in this study, normative institutionalism provides a particularly compelling explanation as to why major institutional change occurred in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and not at any other point in FEMA's history. When viewed from the normative institutionalists' perspective, FEMA's subsequent opposition to changes in policy can be understood to stem from the belief among many of its members that the agency's way of doing things – the all-hazards approach – remained the most 'correct' approach to managing disruptive events around the country. That being said, the notion of appropriateness and how it manifests itself in organizations remains elusive. Furthermore, given the centrality of the idea to

normative institutionalism, additional guidance and practical tools are needed in order to better gauge the commitment of individuals to organizational goals.

Meanwhile, historical institutionalism supposes that major institutional change is most likely in the wake of focusing events capable of overcoming persisting, historically determined patterns of behaviour. Given the centrality of focusing events to this stream of thought, more work is needed in order to better understand and predict under what circumstances focusing events are likely to occur, what mechanisms are at play in compelling institutions to deviate from their historically determined paths, and who/which interests such events are likely to mobilize. Researchers might also explore the possibility that different kinds of focusing events exist. Besides 'traditional' focusing events – those that serve to bring attention to a given issue – there is a case to be made for what I refer to as 'defocusing events' – events that serve to deemphasize threats or problems around which there exists relative consensus, thereby effectively opening up space for debate over which other threats deserve attention. Such was arguably the case following the collapse of the Soviet Union, for instance.

Unlike the other two streams of neo-institutionalism considered here, rational choice institutionalism is intentionalist insofar as it portrays individuals as seeking control of the process of creating and then running organizations in ways that optimize their chances of achieving their aims. At the same time, though, they are forced to contend with organizational norms, rules, routines and values that serve as checks on their otherwise unbounded behaviour. Of the three streams, rational choice institutionalism certainly goes furthest in acknowledging the role that institutional forces and individual interests play in constraining and enabling behaviour. That being said, the theory contained in this stream of thought stops short of making any claims concerning the primacy of one type of force over any of the others. While my own view is that the relationship between institutional forces and interests will vary from situation to situation, this question certainly deserves more attention.

The centrality of individual interests to rational choice institutionalism inspired the idea in this study that individuals possess and can be assigned different professional profiles that can be used to predict how they will behave in different situations, not least in the event of major institutional change. As noted earlier, however, this notion requires further fleshing-out, for instance by specifying which types of education, training and/or professional experience are most closely associated with the political-administrative and technical profiles.

Finally, the idea that every actor operates within its own unique institutional environment has proven useful in conceptualizing the institutional forces that were at play in influencing FEMA's behaviour over time. That being said, this study demonstrates the possible benefits of thoroughly mapping out the intra-organizational environment before proceeding to define the actor's relations with others. In so doing, the researcher should be able to see which organizational norms, rules, routines and values are at play in guiding the organization's behaviour in its interactions with other actors.

Foreseeable complex problems

The notion of foreseeable complex problems has proven particularly useful insofar as it emphasizes those interdependencies that exist on a multi-level interagency basis, but also how they both enable and hamper effective coordination in dealing with disruptive events. Perhaps the single most obvious weakness inherent to the term, however, is its emphasis on foreseeability. Insights from the warning response literature and cognitive-institutionalism demonstrate how a combination of cognitive, bureau-organizational and agenda-political factors creates situations where individuals and organizations alike fail to detect problems that are technically foreseeable. For this reason, it may be more useful to study organizational preparedness ahead of *foreseen* problems instead.

Preparedness

The outcomes of this study suggest that organizational preparedness can be gauged by examining prevailing conditions within not three but fully five specific thematic areas, namely: inter-organizational relations; threat identification/prioritization; routines and protocols; intra-agency relations; and individual leadership qualities. Furthermore, there are signs that a dependent relationship exists between these indicators, with inter-organizational relations seemingly dominant over most if not all of the remaining four. Additionally, states of organizational preparedness would appear to be influenced by developments within two distinct dimensions, one technical and the other political-administrative. Conceiving of preparedness as something that stems from conditions in two distinct spheres involving different kinds of actors and different types of activities helps us gain a better understanding of what is otherwise an elusive quality in organizations. Future studies of organizational preparedness would arguably benefit where they distinguish between these two dimensions and then consider the implications that developments in either dimension have on the other, but also on organizational preparedness writ large.

Emergency preparedness and management agencies (EPMAs)

While EPMAs are structured and operate in much the same way as other government bureaucracies, we see that they have certain defining characteristics that nevertheless set them apart in important ways. First of all, EPMAs have a central role to play in facilitating multi-level interagency coordination of effort prior to, at the onset of and after disruptive events. Second, EPMAs are apt to encounter resistance to being coordinated from larger, better resourced actors. In order to successfully coordinate the efforts of such actors, EPMAs need to acknowledge their interests and motivations, while at the same time maintaining close ties with policy elites that can conceivably support them if/when interagency conflict arises. Furthermore, there are strong indications that how organizations

are organized in relation to one another plays a significant role in determining who they have regular contact with, in which situations these contacts occur, the nature of the norms, rules, routines and values that emerge as a result and that constrain and enable their behaviour, but also their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities. Additional research is needed if we are to make any definitive recommendations on this last point in particular, though it is clear that certain elements of the 'old' institutionalism may be useful to this end. Furthermore, this study suggests that policymakers would do well to assign EPMA's with overarching responsibility for the entirety of the emergency management cycle, and not just for responding to disruptive events. Finally, it would appear that EPMA's (and all bureaucracies for that matter) are best served by senior administrators who have an understanding for and possess the ability to effectively work with policy elites responsible for handing down policy.

A programme for further research

While the institutional perspective on preparedness goes a good way in helping us understand how organizations prepare for foreseeable complex problems, a number of questions still remain or have emerged over the course of the study. For this reason, I propose a modest programme for further research that is intended to enhance our understanding of how organizations prepare for and manage complex problems like hurricanes. First of all, the programme calls for additional work aimed at refining certain key tenets of normative institutionalism, historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism. Furthermore, this study raises certain questions concerning the applicability of neo-institutional theory in its current form to different kinds of organizations operating in the private and non-governmental spheres, let alone public sector organizations that increasingly rely on private companies and contractors to carry out their missions. This trend would appear to alter the traditional dynamics by which common organizational norms, rules, routines and values emerge within organizations. Finally, we need to explore whether neo-institutionalism in its current state is able to account for the increasing decentralization of organizations, many of which allow their employees to work outside the confines of an office.

The second area of focus pertains to the notion of foreseeable complex problems, which should be applied to additional cases where organizations work to prepare for and manage problems. Among other things, we should gain additional insights on the notion of foreseeability, the nature of preparedness, the idea that there exist two distinct but interrelated dimensions of preparedness, and the revised set of primary indicators of preparedness that was presented earlier.

In this study, we see that politics dramatically influences both the conditions under which EPMA's operate and their behaviour in different situations. The final component of the research programme is concerned with whether the existing theory adequately accounts for the politicized environment in which

emergency management/homeland security work is carried out. The question of where EPMA's are best situated in the organizational bureaucracy should also be examined more closely here.

Practical recommendations to policymakers and senior administrators

The study has generated a number of insights that can be translated into practical recommendations to policymakers and senior administrators involved in one way or another in the process whereby elite policy is developed and then handed down to the bureaucracy to be implemented. Some of these recommendations are general in nature, while others pertain to preparedness specifically.

A diagnostic model for gauging organizational preparedness

The task of accurately measuring organizational preparedness has long vexed researchers working in the fields of emergency management, crisis management and preparedness. The results of this study arguably bring us at least a little closer in this regard. By drawing on the outcomes of this study and insights from the literature on emergency management, organizational theory, governmental politics and neo-institutionalism, I have developed a draft diagnostic model consisting of 15 indicators that is intended to be used to quickly and inexpensively gauge organizational preparedness in bureaucratic organizations. The model is intended to be used either as a stand-alone tool or as a complement to other, more costly validation activities that bureaucracies tend to use to test preparedness and to identify organizational capability gaps (full-scale exercises, for instance). In its current form, the model is intended for application to all types of government bureaucracies, including EPMA's, operating in federal and non-federal settings alike.

Key words: crisis management, emergency management, homeland security, hurricanes, inter-governmental relations, leadership, natural disasters, neo-institutionalism, organizations, preparedness.

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Waarom slagen organisaties er soms niet in om te voorziene problemen op te vangen?

De orkaan Katrina veroorzaakte in augustus 2005 voor miljarden dollars aan schade, overstroomde een grote Amerikaanse stad en maakte 1.800 slachtoffers aan de Golfkust. De reactie van de overheid, gecoördineerd door de Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), was traag en slecht gecoördineerd, ondanks grote hervormingen op het gebied van binnenlandse veiligheid na de aanslagen van 11 september 2001, zoals de oprichting van het Department of Homeland Security (DHS), dat meer dan twintig bestaande federale organisaties omvatte, waaronder de FEMA. Voorstanders beweerden dat deze verandering de capaciteit van de federale overheid om allerlei soorten dreigingen effectief te beheersen zou verbeteren, zoals toekomstige terroristische aanslagen en natuurrampen. Katrina was een van de eerste situaties waarin deze beweringen op de proef gesteld zouden worden. Hoewel ambtenaren op staats- en federaal niveau verantwoordelijk waren voor een aantal beslissingen waardoor honderdduizenden mensen gestrand raakten in New Orleans voordat Katrina aan land kwam, bleek dat de FEMA op zijn beurt niet in staat was om de hulp aan overweldigde staats- en lokale autoriteiten op effectieve wijze te coördineren naarmate de omvang van de ramp begon toe te nemen. De reactie op Katrina leek te suggereren dat de mogelijkheden van de federale overheid om de dreiging van orkanen te beheersen sinds 11 september niet verbeterd waren. Sterker nog, er waren indicaties dat ze juist verslechterd waren.

Volgens Donald Kettl bereiden democratieën zich niet goed voor op zaken die nog nooit gebeurd zijn.¹ Dit impliceert dat ze beter geschikt zijn om

1 Kettl, 2007: 100.

voorspelbare, vaak voorkomende gebeurtenissen te beheren, of wat ik in dit onderzoek te voorziene complexe problemen noem. Orkanen zijn een voorbeeld van dit type probleem. De federale overheid, ooit een terughoudende speler in rampenbestrijding, is een centrale speler geworden in een zeer gestandaardiseerd rampenbestrijdingssysteem dat uit meerdere niveaus en instanties bestaat en dat gestuurd wordt door grondig ontwikkelde plannen, routines en protocollen die ervoor moeten zorgen dat ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen op dezelfde wijze beheerst worden, waar in het land ze ook plaatsvinden. Daarom verwachten we dat de FEMA bijzonder geschikt is om met name die dreigingen te beheren die voorspelbaar zijn en regelmatig voorkomen. Hierin ligt het vraagstuk dat de drijfveer vormt voor dit onderzoek. Ervan uitgaande dat de orkaan Katrina een te voorziene complexe dreiging was waarvoor de federale overheid gestandaardiseerde routines had opgesteld en dat binnenlandse veiligheid een prioriteit was na 11 september, waarom waren zo veel elementen van de reactie van de FEMA op Katrina dan ondermaats?

Als we een stap terug nemen, dan zien we dat de situatie rond Katrina niet uniek is. Overheden op elk niveau en over de hele wereld reageren regelmatig niet op terugkerende problemen op manieren die aansluiten bij de verwachtingen van de relevante belanghebbenden. Dit proefschrift, dat de Amerikaanse voorbereiding op een grote orkaan als achtergrond gebruikt, heeft tot doel om ons beter inzicht te geven in waarom dit het geval is. Hoewel de bestaande literatuur over Katrina al diep ingaat op het verklaren van de falende reactie van de FEMA, wordt maar beperkt ingegaan op de unieke institutionele omgeving waarin de FEMA opereerde in de jaren voorafgaand aan de storm. Door relevante elementen van de institutionele omgeving van de instantie te identificeren heeft dit onderzoek tot doel om het spectrum van krachten/druk te identificeren dat de FEMA en zijn partners ertoe dwong om op bepaalde manieren te handelen, en vervolgens welke eventuele invloed dergelijke handelingen hebben gehad op hun mogelijkheid om verschillende dreigingen, niet in de laatste plaats orkanen, te beheersen. Dit onderzoek probeert de volgende onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden:

Wat zijn de omstandigheden die ten grondslag lagen aan de verandering binnen de FEMA die geleid heeft tot (of niet geleid heeft tot) een hoog paraatheidsniveau voor het beheersen van orkanen?

Neo-institutionalisme vormt het theoretisch kader vereist om deze vraag te beantwoorden. Hoewel verschillende stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme verschillende theoretische achtergronden hebben, delen ze allemaal het inzicht dat normen, regels, routines en waarden op enigerlei wijze het gedrag van spelers beperken of faciliteren in alles wat zij doen. Hoewel het neo-institutionalisme veel gebruikt is om de reacties op crises/noodsituaties/rampen te bestuderen, is het niet vaak gebruikt om gevallen van organisatorische paraatheid te bestuderen. In dit onderzoek bekijken we de voorbereiding op orkanen van de federale overheid in de jaren voorafgaand aan de orkaan Katrina aan de hand

van drie neo-institutionele perspectieven, namelijk normatief institutionalisme, historisch institutionalisme en rationele-keuze-institutionalisme. Naast het feit dat dit bijdraagt aan het begrijpen van de reactie op Katrina, draagt de beslissing om de casus uit verschillende theoretische perspectieven te benaderen bij aan een beter begrip van wat paraatheid is en hoe dit concept gemeten kan worden in organisaties, hoe organisaties zich voorbereiden, waar ze zich waarschijnlijk op zullen voorbereiden en hoe paraat ze daadwerkelijk worden.

Dit onderzoek heeft tot doel bij te dragen aan de onderzoeksgebieden organisatorische paraatheid, rampenbestrijding, crisisonderzoek, politicologie, bestuurskunde en neo-institutionalisme. Bepaalde uitkomsten hebben mogelijk praktische implicaties voor zowel politici en bestuurders die verantwoordelijk zijn voor het overzien en leiden van deze bureaucratische overheidsorganisaties, die op zoek zijn naar en zich voorbereiden op verschillende soorten ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen om ze vervolgens te beheersen. Aan het einde van het onderzoek wordt een concept van een diagnostisch model gepresenteerd voor het meten van organisatorische paraatheid.

Een institutioneel perspectief op paraatheid

Om de hierboven gestelde onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden, heb ik een wat ik een institutioneel perspectief op paraatheid noem ontwikkeld, dat gebaseerd is op inzichten uit de literatuur over paraatheid, rampenbestrijding, crisisonderzoek, politicologie bestuurskunde en neo-institutionalisme. Met behulp van dit perspectief zou het mogelijk moeten zijn om de omgeving waarin beleidsmakers en uitvoerders processen uitvoeren gericht op het identificeren, prioriteren en voorbereiden op verschillende dreigingen in de context te plaatsen. Dit institutionele perspectief bestaat uit vier centrale componenten. De eerste component heeft tot doel om te voorziene complexe problemen te definiëren en in te kaderen in relatie tot andere termen die regelmatig voorkomen in met name de literatuur over paraatheid en rampenbestrijding (ramp, noodsituatie, catastrofe, crisis en recentelijk, megacrisis, om er maar een paar op te noemen). Dit wordt gevolgd door een korte discussie over de aard van paraatheid, hoe organisaties zich over het algemeen voorbereiden en de verschillende rollen die beleidsmakers en uitvoerders in deze context op zich nemen.

Een van de centrale thema's van dit onderzoek is dat complexe overheids-systemen (zoals het federale systeem in de Verenigde Staten) onderlinge afhankelijkheden met zich meebrengen tussen spelers, zowel tussen verschillende niveaus als tussen instellingen. De tweede component van het institutionele perspectief probeert onder andere deze complexiteiten te illustreren voor zover deze gerelateerd zijn aan paraatheid. Met behulp van het *shared governance model*, ontwikkeld door Sandra K. Schneider, zien we de processen op basis waarvan in federale systemen wordt vastgesteld hoe bureaucratieën die op verschillende overheidsniveaus opereren zich voorbereiden en waarop ze zich voorbereiden.

Vervolgens ontleden we het begrip paraatheid tot wat naar mijn mening twee aparte en gescheiden dimensies zijn: een politiek-administratieve dimensie en een technische dimensie. Waar de politiek-administratieve dimensie van paraatheid het terrein is van politici en bestuurders die verschillende soorten beslissingen moeten nemen over waar de relevante overheidsinstanties met beperkte middelen zich op moeten voorbereiden, gaat de technische dimensie over het werk dat uitvoerders doen om het beleid uit te voeren voor zover dit gerelateerd is aan paraatheid. Deze component bevat ook een korte discussie over de aard van organisaties, bureaucratieën en de unieke subset van organisatorische bureaucratieën, belast met de voorbereiding op en beheersing van ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen (rampenbestrijding en hulpdiensten).

De derde component behelst drie primaire indicatoren van paraatheid die gebruikt kunnen worden om te ontdekken in welke mate organisaties voorbereid zijn op verschillende mogelijke gebeurtenissen. Deze indicatoren omvatten relaties tussen organisaties, het vaststellen/prioriteren van dreigingen, en routines en protocollen. Ervan uitgaande dat deze indicatoren relevant zijn voor deze casus, worden ze gebruikt als basis voor het concept van het diagnostische model voor het meten van organisatorische paraatheid dat aan het einde van dit onderzoek gepresenteerd wordt.

De verschillende stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme die toegepast worden in dit onderzoek – normatief institutionalisme, historisch institutionalisme en rationele-keuze-institutionalisme – worden geïntroduceerd in de laatste component van het institutionele perspectief op paraatheid. Elke stroming biedt een ander perspectief op de aard van de mechanismen die het gedrag van spelers beperken of faciliteren. Tezamen vormen de drie stromingen een basis voor een aantal onderzoekshypothesen omtrent de relatie tussen grote institutionele verandering en paraatheid die getest worden in dit onderzoek.

De casus onderzoeken met behulp van process tracing

In dit onderzoek bestuderen we het werk van de FEMA sinds zijn oprichting in 1979 tot augustus 2005 (toen Katrina aan land kwam) voor de voorbereiding op één type te voorzien complex probleem, namelijk een grote orkaan. We zijn vooral geïnteresseerd in het gedrag van de groep belangrijkste senior leidinggevenden van de instantie, bestaande uit een klein aantal door de politiek aangestelde personen en ambtenaren die belast zijn met het op verschillende manieren bijdragen aan het beleidsvormingsproces en de daadwerkelijke implementatie van het opgestelde beleid. Naast dat het geschikt is voor complexe, empirisch compacte casus zoals deze, is het mogelijk om met de in dit onderzoek gebruikte onderzoeksmethodologie de casus in kwestie vanuit meerdere theoretische perspectieven te benaderen op basis van de drie hierboven benoemde stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme. Met behulp van een aangepaste versie van process tracing zouden we het bestaan moeten kunnen bevestigen van mogelijke causale mechanismen

tussen de onafhankelijke variabele – verandering in de institutionele omgeving waarin de FEMA opereerde – en de afhankelijke variabele – de paraatheid van de instantie omtrent het beheersen van de complexe en te voorziene orkaan-dreiging. De verschillende stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme bieden verschillende voorspellingen over hoe een dergelijke verandering van invloed kan zijn op de paraatheid van de instantie. De omstandigheden die nodig zijn om de verschillende onderzoekshypothesen te bevestigen, worden in deze fase van het onderzoek uiteengezet en besproken.

Er is een groot aantal bronnen gebruikt om een goed beeld te krijgen van de casus. Dit omvat berichten uit de media, historische verslagen, overheidsrapporten en rapporten van denktanks, belangenorganisaties en particuliere bedrijven, academische studies en interviews met betrokkenen.

Analyse van de paraatheid van de FEMA voor orkanen van 1979 tot 2005

De omschrijving van het werk van de FEMA omtrent voorbereiding op orkanen tussen 1979 en 2005 is verdeeld in drie aparte periodes: van 1979 tot orkaan Andrew (1992), van Andrew tot 11 september 2001 en van 11 september tot Katrina. Door de casus op deze manier te ontrafelen, kunnen we vaststellen dat de aanslagen van 11 september, en niet Andrew of een andere gebeurtenis in de geschiedenis van de FEMA, een grote institutionele verandering teweegbracht op het gebied van rampenbestrijding/binnenlandse veiligheid in de onderzochte periode. Door één duidelijk geval van grote institutionele verandering te identificeren, kunnen we vervolgens de validiteit bepalen van de onafhankelijke variabele binnen deze casus (verandering in de institutionele omgeving van de FEMA), aantonen dat verscheidene mogelijke meetproblemen opgevangen zijn, en, misschien nog wel het belangrijkste, de verschillende onderzoekshypothesen evalueren.

De voorbereiding van de instantie op orkanen voor en na de aanslagen van 11 september is geanalyseerd vanuit drie verschillende analytische hoeken (relaties tussen organisaties, vaststellen/prioriteren van dreigingen, en routines en protocollen), die voortkomen uit de primaire indicatoren van paraatheid die samen een van de componenten van het institutionele perspectief op paraatheid vormen. Door de casus op deze manier te benaderen, zouden we de belangrijkste effecten die de grote institutionele verandering na de aanslagen van 11 september had op de paraatheid van de FEMA omtrent verschillende soorten dreigingen, niet in de laatste plaats orkanen, moeten kunnen zien, en ook hoe geschikt elke primaire indicator is voor het meten van organisatorische paraatheid meer in het algemeen.

De analyse van de casus sluit af met een discussie over de verscheidene onderzoekshypothesen gerelateerd aan de verschillende stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme, met als doel om te bepalen welke stromingen uit de casus naar voren komen en welke niet. We zien hier dat de centrale stellingen van

normatief institutionalisme en historisch institutionalisme ondersteund worden door de beschikbare empirische data. Het idee dat spelers zich gedragen als 'goede spelers', zoals gesteld door voorstanders van rationele-keuze-institutionalisme, wordt bevestigd, maar slechts op basis van een relatief kleine hoeveelheid ondersteunende data. De tweede set beweringen voortkomend uit rationele-keuze-institutionalisme, namelijk dat individuele leiders zogenaamde professionele profielen toegewezen kunnen worden en dat deze gebruikt kunnen worden om toekomstig gedrag te voorspellen, kon ik echter bevestigen noch verwerpen. De voorgestelde professionele profielen waren niet voldoende gespecificeerd, waardoor het moeilijk was om ze toe te wijzen aan individuele leiders, laat staan om te voorspellen hoe mensen zich waarschijnlijk gaan gedragen tijdens grote institutionele veranderingen.

De onderzoeksvraag beantwoorden

Wat waren dan de omstandigheden die ten grondslag lagen aan de verandering binnen de FEMA die geleid heeft tot (of niet geleid heeft tot) een hoog paraatheidsniveau voor het beheersen van orkanen? Door deze casus vanuit verschillende neo-institutionele perspectieven te bekijken, zijn er verschillende institutionele krachten ontdekt die van invloed zijn geweest op het gedrag van de FEMA, waardoor de instantie goed voorbereid was op sommige complexe problemen, maar niet op andere. Hoewel er veel ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen hebben plaatsgevonden in de geschiedenis van de FEMA, hebben de terroristische aanslagen van 11 september tot hervormingen op een dergelijk grote schaal geleid dat het institutionele landschap waarin dreigingen werden geïdentificeerd, geprioriteerd, opgevangen en beheerst, dramatisch veranderde. De verschillende stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme onderstrepen de rol die normen, regels, routines en waarden, maar ook de belangen van de mensen binnen de FEMA, speelden bij het bepalen van de reactie van de instantie op deze institutionele verandering, en in welke mate de instantie voorbereid was op de verschillende mogelijke gebeurtenissen, niet in de laatste plaats orkanen. Hoewel vaak het beeld wordt geschetst dat de FEMA in de aanloop naar Katrina te druk bezig was met terrorisme, blijkt de werkelijkheid iets gecompliceerder te zijn als we de casus vanuit een neo-institutioneel perspectief bekijken. Hoewel de FEMA wel degelijk 'afgeleid' was (net als veel andere overheidsinstanties in die tijd) door de aanslagen van 11 september 2001 en de hernieuwde aandacht voor terrorisme in brede zin, zien we ook dat de FEMA niet openstond voor verandering. Alles wijst erop dat de organisatie zijn leden, onder wie belangrijke leden van het management, uitzonderlijk veel tijd, energie en politieke wil staken in het tegenwerken van veranderingen als gevolg van 11 september, en dan vooral de nieuwe verantwoordelijkheid voor terrorismebestrijding, de beperkingen inherent in het nieuwe DHS-raamwerk en de beslissing van de secretaris van de DHS om de verantwoordelijkheid voor paraatheid en bestrijding weg te nemen van de

instantie. Met andere woorden, de ogenschijnlijke afname van de paraatheid van FEMA voor orkanen, vooral in de jaren voorafgaand aan Katrina, was evenzeer het gevolg van verschuivende prioriteiten en strategische beslissingen als van de uiteindelijk mislukte pogingen van de instantie zelf om deze veranderingen tegen te gaan. Deze pogingen bleken onder andere een aanslag te zijn op de middelen van de FEMA enerzijds en de werkrelaties met andere belangrijke spelers binnen de federale overheid anderzijds, niet in de laatste plaats de DHS.

Beschouwingen over neo-institutionalisme

Dit onderzoek toont aan dat neo-institutionalisme duidelijk de potentie heeft om bij te dragen aan ons begrip van de soms zeer complexe omgeving waarin spelers opereren en reageren op veranderingen, maar ook aan ons begrip van hoe organisaties paraatheid trachten te. De bestaande theorie moet echter op meerdere vlakken worden bijgeschaafd. Van de drie stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme die in dit onderzoek gebruikt zijn, biedt normatief institutionalisme een bijzonder overtuigende verklaring voor waarom er net in de nasleep van de aanslagen van 11 september een grote institutionele verandering plaatsvond en niet op een ander moment in de geschiedenis van de FEMA. Bekeken vanuit het perspectief van normatief institutionalisme wordt duidelijk dat de daaropvolgende weerstand van de FEMA tegen de beleidsveranderingen voortkwam uit de overtuiging onder veel leden dat de manier van werken van de instantie – de “all-hazards approach” – de correcte benadering bleef voor het beheersen van ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen in het land. Het begrip gepastheid en hoe dit tot uiting komt in organisaties blijft echter ongrijpbaar. Gezien de centrale rol van het idee achter normatief institutionalisme zijn verdere begeleiding en praktische tools vereist om de toewijding van mensen aan organisatorische doelen beter te meten.

Historisch institutionalisme veronderstelt dat grote institutionele veranderingen meestal plaatsvinden in de nasleep van ‘focusing events’ die aanhoudende, historisch bepaalde gedragspatronen doorbreken. Gegeven de centrale plaats die *focusing events* innemen in deze gedachtegang, is meer onderzoek vereist om beter te begrijpen en voorspellen onder welke omstandigheden focusing events waarschijnlijk plaatsvinden, welke mechanismen een rol spelen bij het aanmoedigen van instanties om af te wijken van hun historisch bepaalde paden, en welke belangen dergelijke events waarschijnlijk mobiliseren. Onderzoekers kunnen ook de mogelijkheid onderzoeken dat er verschillende soorten focusing events bestaan. Naast ‘traditionele’ focusing events – die de aandacht richten op een bepaald issue – valt er wat te zeggen voor wat ik ‘defocusing events’ noem: events die tot doel hebben om dreigingen of problemen weg te nemen waar relatieve consensus over bestaat, wat ruimte vrijmaakt voor discussie over andere dreigingen die aandacht verdienen. Dit was waarschijnlijk het geval na de val van de Sovjet-Unie.

In tegenstelling tot de andere twee hier besproken stromingen binnen het neo-institutionalisme, is rationele-keuze-institutionalisme intentionalistisch voor zover het stelt dat mensen proberen controle te krijgen over het proces van het oprichten en runnen van organisaties op manieren die hun kans van slagen vergroten. Ze zijn tegelijkertijd echter gedwongen om om te gaan met organisatorische normen, regels, routines en waarden die fungeren als remmen op hun anders ongebreidelde gedrag. Van de drie stromingen gaat rationele-keuze-institutionalisme zeker het verst in het erkennen van de rol die institutionele krachten en individuele belangen spelen in het beperken of faciliteren van gedrag. De theorie binnen deze gedachtegang doet echter geen uitspraken over welke van deze twee soorten krachten het belangrijkste is. Hoewel naar mijn mening de relatie tussen institutionele krachten en belangen per situatie zal verschillen, verdient deze vraag zeker meer aandacht.

Uit de centrale rol die individuele belangen spelen in rationele-keuze-institutionalisme kwam in dit onderzoek het idee naar voren dat mensen verschillende professionele profielen hebben en toegewezen kunnen krijgen, die gebruikt kunnen worden om te voorspellen hoe zij zich in verschillende situaties zullen gedragen, niet in de laatste plaats gedurende grote institutionele verandering. Zoals eerder echter al opgemerkt vereist dit idee meer onderzoek, bijvoorbeeld door te specificeren welke soorten onderwijs, training en/of professionele ervaring het meest geassocieerd zijn met de politiek-administratieve en technische profielen.

Tot slot, het idee dat elke speler opereert binnen zijn eigen unieke institutionele omgeving bleek van pas te komen bij het conceptualiseren van de institutionele krachten die het gedrag van de FEMA beïnvloedden. Dat gezegd hebbende toont dit onderzoek de mogelijke voordelen van het grondig in kaart brengen van de omgeving binnen organisaties voordat de relaties van de spelers met anderen worden gedefinieerd. Op deze manier zou de onderzoeker moeten kunnen zien welke organisatorische normen, regels, routines en waarden een rol spelen bij het richting geven aan het gedrag van de organisaties in zijn omgang met andere spelers.

Te voorziene complexe problemen

Het begrip te voorziene complexe problemen bleek bijzonder nuttig voor zover het onderlinge afhankelijkheden benadrukt die op meerdere niveaus bestaan tussen instanties, en hoe deze effectieve coördinatie mogelijk maken, maar ook verhinderen, tijdens het beheersen van ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen. Misschien wel zijn grootste zwakte is echter de nadruk die de term legt op voorspelbaarheid. Inzichten uit de literatuur over reacties op waarschuwingen en cognitief institutionalisme tonen aan hoe een combinatie van cognitieve, bureau-organisatorische en agenda-politieke factoren situaties creëren waarin zowel mensen als organisaties voorspelbare problemen niet herkennen. Het is daarom misschien nuttiger om organisatorische paraatheid te onderzoeken in relatie tot problemen die daadwerkelijk voorzien zijn.

Paraatheid

De uitkomsten van dit onderzoek suggereren dat organisatorische paraatheid gemeten kan worden door heersende omstandigheden te onderzoeken binnen niet drie maar vijf thematische gebieden: relaties tussen organisaties, vaststellen/prioriteren van dreigingen, routines en protocollen, relaties binnen instanties en individuele leiderschapskwaliteiten. Verder zijn er aanwijzingen dat er een afhankelijke relatie bestaat tussen deze indicatoren; relaties tussen organisaties lijkt te domineren over de meeste of alle andere indicatoren. De mate van organisatorische paraatheid lijkt beïnvloed te worden door ontwikkelingen binnen twee aparte dimensies: een politiek-administratieve dimensie en een technische dimensie. Door paraatheid te zien als iets wat voortkomt uit omstandigheden in twee aparte dimensies met verschillende soorten spelers en verschillende soorten activiteiten, krijgen we meer inzicht in iets wat anders een ongrijpbare eigenschap van organisaties blijft. Toekomstig onderzoek naar organisatorische paraatheid zou erbij gebaat zijn om onderscheid te maken tussen deze twee dimensies en vervolgens rekening te houden met de gevolgen die ontwikkelingen in de ene dimensie hebben voor de andere, maar ook voor organisatorische paraatheid in brede zin.

Rampenbestrijding en hulpdiensten

Hoewel hulpdiensten op dezelfde manier opgebouwd zijn en op dezelfde manier opereren als andere overheidsinstanties, beschikken zij over enkele kenmerkende eigenschappen die hen uniek maken. Ten eerste spelen hulpdiensten een centrale rol in het faciliteren van de coördinatie van activiteiten tussen instanties op meerdere niveaus voorafgaand aan, tijdens en na ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen. Ten tweede zullen hulpdiensten waarschijnlijk op weerstand stuiten tegen coördinatie door grotere spelers met meer middelen. Om de activiteiten van dergelijke spelers op juiste wijze te coördineren, dienen hulpdiensten hun belangen en motivaties te erkennen en tegelijkertijd nauwe banden te onderhouden met beleidsmakers die hen kunnen ondersteunen indien en wanneer er conflicten optreden tussen instanties. Verder zijn er sterke aanwijzingen dat de wijze waarop de organisaties onderling met elkaar in verband staan een significante rol speelt in het bepalen met wie zij regelmatig contact onderhouden, in welke situaties dit contact plaatsvindt, de aard van de normen, regels, routines en waarden die hieruit voortkomen en die hun gedrag beperken en faciliteren, maar ook de mate van effectiviteit waarmee zij hun activiteiten uitvoeren. Verder onderzoek is nodig als we definitieve aanbevelingen willen doen over dit laatste punt. Het is echter duidelijk dat bepaalde elementen van het 'oude' institutionalisme hierbij van pas kunnen komen. Verder suggereert dit onderzoek dat beleidsmakers hulpdiensten maar beter de verantwoordelijkheid kunnen geven over de gehele cyclus van rampenbestrijding en niet alleen over het reageren op

ontwrichtende gebeurtenissen. Tot slot lijkt het zo te zijn dat hulpdiensten (en alle andere bureaucratieën) het meeste baat hebben bij senior bestuurders die verstand hebben van en de mogelijkheid hebben om effectief samen te werken met beleidsmakers die verantwoordelijk zijn voor het opstellen van het beleid.

Programma voor verder onderzoek

Hoewel het institutionele perspectief op paraatheid ons goed helpt bij het begrijpen van hoe organisaties zich voorbereiden op te voorziene complexe problemen, zijn sommige vragen nog niet beantwoord en zijn er nieuwe vragen ontstaan gedurende dit onderzoek. Daarom stel ik een bescheiden programma voor verder onderzoek voor, dat bedoeld is om ons begrip te vergroten over hoe organisaties zich voorbereiden op te voorziene complexe problemen zoals orkanen en hoe ze deze beheersen. Ten eerste pleit het programma voor verder onderzoek om bepaalde belangrijke principes van normatief institutionalisme, historisch institutionalisme en rationele-keuze-institutionalisme verder te verfijnen. Ook roept dit onderzoek bepaalde vragen op over de toepasbaarheid van de neo-institutionele theorie in zijn huidige vorm op verschillende soorten organisaties die actief zijn in de particuliere en niet-gouvernementele ruimtes, maar ook over organisaties in de publieke sector, die steeds vaker aangewezen zijn op particuliere bedrijven en aannemers voor de uitvoering van hun taken. Deze trend wijzigt de traditionele dynamiek van het ontstaan van gedeelde organisatorische normen, regels, routines en waarden binnen organisaties. Tot slot dienen we te onderzoeken of neo-institutionalisme in zijn huidige vorm een verklaring kan bieden voor de toenemende decentralisatie van organisaties, die hun werknemers vaak de mogelijkheid bieden om buiten het kantoor te werken.

Het tweede aandachtsgebied gaat over het begrip 'te voorziene complexe problemen', dat toegepast dient te worden op meer casus van organisaties die zich voorbereiden op problemen en deze beheersen. We hebben onder andere meer inzicht nodig in het begrip voorspelbaarheid, de aard van paraatheid, het idee dat er twee aparte maar gerelateerde dimensies van paraatheid bestaan, en de aangepaste primaire indicatoren van paraatheid die eerder ter sprake zijn gekomen.

In dit onderzoek zien we dat de politiek een grote invloed heeft op zowel de omstandigheden waarin hulpdiensten opereren als hun gedrag in verschillende situaties. De laatste component van het onderzoeksprogramma houdt zich bezig met de vraag of de bestaande theorie voldoende verklaring biedt voor de gepolitiseerde omgeving waarin de activiteiten van rampenbestrijding/binnenlandse veiligheid worden uitgevoerd. De vraag waar hulpdiensten zich zouden moeten bevinden binnen de organisatorische bureaucratie zou hierbij ook aan bod moeten komen.

Praktische aanbevelingen aan politici en bestuurders

Het onderzoek heeft geleid tot een aantal inzichten die vertaald kunnen worden naar praktische aanbevelingen aan politici en bestuurders die op enigerlei betrokken zijn bij het opstellen en opleggen van beleid. Sommige van deze aanbevelingen zijn algemeen van aard, terwijl andere specifiek over paraatheid gaan.

Een diagnostisch model voor het meten van organisatorische paraatheid

Het nauwkeurig meten van organisatorische paraatheid is lang een lastige taak geweest voor onderzoekers die actief zijn op het gebied van rampenbestrijding, crisisbeheer en paraatheid. De resultaten van dit onderzoek bieden enige duidelijkheid op dit gebied. Aan de hand van de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek en inzichten uit de literatuur over rampenbestrijding, organisatietheorie, overheidsbeleid en neo-institutionalisme heb ik een concept van een diagnostisch model ontwikkeld bestaande uit vijftien indicatoren, dat bedoeld is om de organisatorische paraatheid van bureaucratische organisaties snel en goedkoop te meten. Het model is bedoeld om gebruikt te worden als een op zichzelf staande tool of als een aanvulling op andere, duurdere validatieactiviteiten die bureaucratieën vaak gebruiken om paraatheid te testen en organisatorische tekortkomingen te identificeren (grootschalige oefeningen, bijvoorbeeld). In zijn huidige vorm is het model bedoeld om toegepast te worden op allerlei soorten overheidsbureaucratieën, waaronder hulpdiensten, die actief zijn in zowel federale als niet-federale contexten.

Sleutelwoorden: crisismanagement, rampenbestrijding, binnenlandse veiligheid, orkanen, relaties tussen overheden, leiderschap, natuurrampen, neo-institutionalisme, organisaties, paraatheid.

Abbreviations

CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CBRN	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear
CDA	Civil Defense Act
CEMP	Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CoG	continuity of government
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DoD	Department of Defense
DoE	Department of Energy
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoT	Department of Transportation
EMERCOM	Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations
EOC	emergency operations centre
EPMA	emergency preparedness and management agency
EP&R	Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FCDA	Federal Civil Defense Administration
FCO	federal coordinating official
FDAA	Federal Disaster Assistance Administration
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FRP	Federal Response Plan
GAO	Government Accounting Office/Government Accountability Office
GSA	General Services Administration
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
HRO	high-reliability organizations
HSOC	Homeland Security Operations Center
HSPD	Homeland Security Presidential Directive
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
IEMS	Integrated Emergency Management System
IRTPA	Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004
LOHSEP	Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

NAPA	National Academy of Public Administration
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NEMA	National Emergency Management Association
NGO	non-governmental organization
NHP	National Hurricane Program
NHSA	National Homeland Security Agency
NOAA	National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
NP	National Preparedness Directorate
NRCC	National Response Coordination Center
NRP	National Response Plan
NRS	National Response System
NWS	National Weather Service
OCD	Office of Civil Defense
OCDM	Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization
ODM	Office of Defense Mobilization
ODP	Office of Domestic Preparedness
OEP	Office of Emergency Planning
OHS	Office of Homeland Security
OHSPS	Office of Homeland Security and Public Safety
PFO	Principal Federal Official
PKEMRA	Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act
PPA/CA	Performance Partnership Agreement/Cooperative Agreement
PSA	public service announcement
SEDU	Swedish Defence University
SEMA	Swedish Emergency Management Agency
SLPS	State and Local Preparedness and Support Directorate
SOP	standard operating procedure
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USAR	urban search and rescue
USCG	US Coast Guard
USCIS	Citizenship and Immigration Services
USFA	US Fire Administration
USSS	US Secret Service
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
2SR	Second-Stage Review

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The following individuals were interviewed as part of my own previous research on the management of Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav between 2006 and 2008. While these interviews have certainly been useful in contextualizing the circumstances immediately leading up to and surrounding the management of the two storms, they fall beyond the scope of the case at hand.

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Brown, Michael. Former FEMA Director. Private meeting. Stratford-on-Avon, England. 19 October 2007.

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Cavanaugh, Cup. Resource Leader, Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.

Chatelain, Myron. Manager, Louisiana Nursing Home Association. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.

Christian, Tom. Logistics Chief, Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.

Curtis, Glenn. Task Force Commander, Louisiana National Guard. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 14 November 2008.

Dabadie, Stephen. Deputy Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 14 November 2008.

D'Aquin, Colleen. Director of Emergency Management, Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of New Orleans. Interview. New Orleans, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.

Donchess, Joseph, A. Executive Director, Louisiana Nursing Home Association. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.

Guidry, Jimmy. State Health Office, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 12 November 2008.

Gustafsson, Lynne. Chief Planner, Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.

Hamlin, William. Movement Coordination Chief, Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.

Henderson, Davis. Chief Executive Officer, Greater Houston Area Red Cross Chapter. Interview. Houston, Texas. 30 October 2006.

Jowers, Malcolm. Operations Chief, Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.

Kasofsky, Jan. Executive Director, Capital Area Human Services District, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 12 November 2008.

Kazmierzak, Michael J. Public Affairs Officer, Office of the Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 14 November 2008.

Kilgore, Nicole R. Crisis Response Division, Louisiana State Police. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 13 November 2008.

Lacaze, Keith. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 8 November 2006.

Lambert, Loretta. Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Interview. New Orleans, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.

Lambert, Thomas C. Houston METRO. Interview. Houston, Texas. 30 October 2006.

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Mosgrove, Veronica. Communications Director, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 13 November 2008.

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- Peterson, William. Region 6 Regional Administrator, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 13 November 2008.
- Prats, Rosanne. Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 12 November 2008.
- Rankin, Guy. Chief Executive Officer, Harris County Housing Authority. Interview. Houston, Texas. 30 October 2006.
- Rigney, Heather J. Disaster Coordinator, Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Interview. New Orleans, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.
- Robinson, George. Region 6 Disaster Assistance Director, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 13 November 2008.
- Rodi, Rachel. Deputy Lead, Products and Strategic Messaging, New Orleans TRO, FEMA. Interview. New Orleans, Louisiana. 14 November 2008.
- Roemer, Gloria. Spokesperson, Harris County. Interview. Houston, Texas. 30 October 2006.
- Savage, Michella. Warm Cell, FEMA. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 10 November 2008.
- Scheibe, Gary. City of Houston Police. Interview. Houston, Texas. 30 October 2006.
- Shirley, Anne L. Communications Director, Louisiana Nursing Home Association. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.
- Siegmund, Kevin. Emergency Operations Coordinator, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 12 November 2008.
- Smith, Chuck. Team Leader, FEMA Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 3 November 2006.
- Staton, David. Crisis Response Division, Louisiana State Police. Interview. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 13 November 2008.
- Wilkins, Kay. Chief Executive Officer, American Red Cross, Southeast Louisiana Chapter. Interview. New Orleans, Louisiana. 11 November 2008.
- Zuschlag, Richard. Chief Executive Officer, Acadian Ambulance Service. Interview. Lafayette, Louisiana. 6 November 2006.

Curriculum vitae

Christer Brown is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Christer holds an MA in political science from Uppsala University in Sweden. He has previously worked as an analyst at the National Center for Crisis Management Research and Training (CRISMART) at the Swedish Defence University and as a humanitarian/human rights monitor and occasional reporting officer with the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. Following a brief stint as training director at CRISMART in 2011, Christer joined the Swedish civil service, where he remains today.

The 2005 Hurricane Katrina response failure

Seeing preparedness for foreseeable complex problems through a neo-institutional lens

History is rife with cases where governments fail to manage complex foreseeable problems to the satisfaction of stakeholders. While it might be easy to understand why they struggle to deal with the novel or unforeseen, it is much more puzzling where governments fail to meet widely recognized and deeply understood threats. This study, which examines the Federal Emergency Management Agency's, FEMA's, capacity to manage the very foreseeable hurricane threat using an institutional perspective on preparedness, aims to explain why this is so often the case.

This study shows that complex systems of government create deep interdependencies that pose major challenges to multi-level interagency coordination in dealing with problems, even those that are foreseeable. When viewed through a neo-institutional lens, the case reveals the role that norms, rules, routines, values, and individual interests played in determining how FEMA responded to major change in the institutional environment and what implications this had for the agency's preparedness for hurricanes. We also see that the apparent deterioration of FEMA's preparedness ahead of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was as much a result of elite over-attentiveness to terrorism as it was FEMA's own resistance to change. This served to weaken the agency's ability to garner political support and its readiness to partner with other stakeholders. More generally, this study provides insights concerning how and for what organizations prepare, but also how we might go about more accurately gauging organizational preparedness in future.

Christer Brown is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Christer holds an MA in political science from Uppsala University in Sweden. Before joining the Swedish civil service in 2011, Christer worked for several years at the Center for Crisis Management Research and Training (CRISMART) at the Swedish Defence University and as part of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia.

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