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### **WHEN DISASTER MEETS RELIEF: PARTISAN MODERATION OF CRISIS AND AID EFFECTS IN THE 2020 ELECTION**

How do voters respond when a national crisis imposes harm but also delivers federal aid? The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique test of what considerations voters bring to bear in response to both loss and relief. We theorize that federal spending can mitigate the political costs of disasters, but only under certain partisan and contextual conditions. Specifically, we hypothesize that the electoral effects of pandemic costs and relief will be interactive, and their effects will vary across partisan subgroups depending on whether each factor reinforces or conflicts with partisan priors. Drawing on county-level data and nationally representative survey evidence from the 2020 U.S. presidential election, we find that pandemic costs and relief had the greatest effects on vote choice among independents who lacked strong partisan priors. Among partisans, exposure to pandemic costs was most influential among Republicans and localized relief was most influential among Democrats. Relief spending also shaped the 2020 election outcome indirectly by mobilizing Republican turnout and changing the composition of the electorate. Finally, we find strong evidence that the effects of pandemic costs and relief on political behavior are interactive, with the influence of each varying on the level of the other and across partisan subgroups. These findings advance theories of retrospective voting and distributive politics by demonstrating how crisis exposure, partisan identity, and economic relief jointly shape the electoral consequences of national emergencies.

#### **TIME**

**Monday, October 6, 2025  
12:10PM-1:30PM**

#### **LOCATION**

**INTS 1113**