Abstract Template

Abstract Title: Bureaucratic Discretion as Key to Local Government Policy Innovation on Climate Change and Natural Hazards Management

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Abstract (not more than 300 words)

In federal systems, the challenges for local governments in managing natural hazards generally, and addressing changes in hazard vulnerability due to a changing climate in particular, are significant. Standard collective action problems suggest constraints on proactive engagement on hazards, especially regarding climate change issues. Likewise, classic delegation problems as explained by principal agent theory should also apply in the relationship between local elected officials and bureaucratic personnel and thereby complicate efforts to reduce climate change-related risk. However, in spite of these potential constraints, a number of cities in the United States have initiated a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation innovations and programmatic efforts. This paper demonstrates that constraints on proactive risk reduction efforts, such as collective action and principal agent problems, are effectively resolved by bureaucratic policymaking where administrators are supported by elected officials, who reflect broad consensus on climate issues in their local community. That is, elected officials sometimes act jointly with implementing agents to promote policy innovation and change through broad grants of discretionary authority. To assess this proposed explanation of hazards management innovation, I examine whether bureaucratic discretionary autonomy is greater in local governments where climate issues are addressed directly, along with the broader question of what factors determine discretion in this domain. I use evidence from a national survey of local government administrators (administrators randomly sampled from 115 cities and counties across the United States) on the topic of community hazard management practices, including the issue of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The evidence points to greater discretionary autonomy being contingent on hazard specificity and elected principals' policy preferences. The implication of the analysis presented here is that meso-level bureaucrats in the United States function as key agents of policy innovation and change on hazards management broadly and on climate change issues specifically.

Keywords—*Climate change, governance, hazards management, policy innovation*

Professional Biography (100-150 words)

Brian J. Gerber, Associate Professor, Arizona State University, is Director of the MA in Emergency Management and Homeland Security program and Co-Director of a research center in the same area. His research interests, publications and external funding pertain to disaster policy and management, homeland security policy, and environmental regulation. He has lead catastrophic incident planning projects, has designed, led or facilitated various

emergency exercises, and has conducted program evaluations and policy analyses on topics ranging from large-scale disaster evacuations to pandemic preparedness. These efforts have included working partnerships with federal, state and local government agencies, along with numerous nonprofit organizations. He has received research grants from the *National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and the Colorado Department of Public Safety*, among others.



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Any Comments: