



Will Obama's luck with natural disasters continue?

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In what can only be described as a remarkable run of luck (and contrary to the global warming zealots), President Barack Obama has spent the last seven years mostly free from large-to-catastrophic natural disasters.

Other than Tropical Storm Sandy — by the time it reached the shores of New York–New Jersey, it was no longer a hurricane — which did a number on the five Boroughs of New York and northern New Jersey, President Obama has not had to deal with a major earthquake or hurricane. In fact, a category 3 or higher hurricane has not hit America [in over 10.5 years](https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/major-hurricane-us-landfall-drought-study) (<https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/major-hurricane-us-landfall-drought-study>), and the continental US has not experienced an earthquake above 7.0 on the Richter Scale since the [7.1 Hector Mine earthquake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_earthquakes_in_the_United_States) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_earthquakes_in_the_United_States) in October 1999.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/RTR3RKBO_obama_fema-e1462989311953.jpg)

Barack Obama at a briefing at FEMA's National Response Coordination Center in Washington, May 30, 2014.
REUTERS/Larry Downing.

Through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), presidents issue three types of declarations to requests made by governors: Major Disaster (the most severe), Emergency, and Fire Management/Suppression. While the federal government can provide unique emergency response capabilities to natural disasters, encouraging states to rely on the federal government for support during routine natural disasters disincentives them from investing in their own capabilities, and brings in a non-local player that, while well-resourced, is not necessarily the most attuned to the needs of disaster-stricken communities.

Nevertheless, with [predictions of an above-average hurricane season](https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/2016-hurricane-season-forecast-atlantic-the-weather-channel) (<https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/2016-hurricane-season-forecast-atlantic-the-weather-channel>) starting on June 1 and geological reports that the [San Andreas fault is way overdue](http://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2016/05/08/san-andreas-fault-brink-devastating-earthquake/#32204b9f5e44) (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2016/05/08/san-andreas-fault-brink-devastating-earthquake/#32204b9f5e44>) for a tension-releasing earthquake, 2016 may turn out to be a challenging year. When it comes to natural disasters, President Obama has a mixed record on the federalization of events that historically received no federal support, as states and localities were more than capable of dealing with the annual floods, fires, storms, and tornadoes that occurred in America so far under his term.

Initially, the Obama administration continued the federalization of disasters started by President Bill Clinton. President Obama actually surpassed President Clinton's single-year record of 75 major disaster declarations set in 1996 (and tied in 2008 by President George W. Bush) when he issued 99 major disaster declarations in 2011. President Obama also exceeded President Clinton's FEMA declaration total of 158 in 1996 by issuing a stunning 242 FEMA declarations in 2011. Keep in mind, these records were set absent any hurricanes or major earthquakes striking America (or volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, or major terrorist attacks).

Whether due to the [barrage of criticism](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/05/fema-s-refusal-to-reform-congress-and-the-federalization-of-natural-disasters) (<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/05/fema-s-refusal-to-reform-congress-and-the-federalization-of-natural-disasters>) and/or the steady hand of FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, who had served as Florida Governor Jeb Bush's emergency management director, FEMA has cut back on its activities over the last few years. Though the president's yearly average of 117 FEMA declarations is only slightly below President Bush's yearly average of 129.6,

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President Obama's second term total of 289 FEMA declarations is below President Clinton's first term total of 311 FEMA declarations. It is likely President Obama will surpass that total over the next nine months, but he will remain well below the presidential term record of 577 FEMA declarations.

Nonetheless, it is somewhat reassuring that America will see the first reduction in FEMA declarations during a presidential term since President Ronald Reagan's first term when he cut FEMA declarations by 42%. The more we can get FEMA and the federal government out of the routine natural disasters that befall America every year, the better, as it will incentivize states and localities to reinvest in their own capabilities instead of putting their hand out to Washington.

Learn more: [Giving states and localities a voice in Washington](http://www.aei.org/publication/giving-states-and-localities-a-voice-in-washington/)
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