



States can handle disasters better than FEMA, Cato study finds

By [Mark Tapscott](#)

November 20, 2014

Congress should abolish the Federal Emergency Management Agency because it has politicized and bureaucratized how the nation responds to major disasters like Hurricane Sandy, according to a new [think tank study](#).

“The large amount of federal disaster aid that is potentially available to the states has created a political dynamic that has pushed up federal costs. After even small, local disasters, governors, state politicians and congressional delegations often lobby the White House to declare the event a ‘major disaster’ so a state can access federal aid,” the Cato Institute’s Chris Edwards writes in a study made public Wednesday.

“As a consequence, the number of disaster declarations has soared in recent decades. The annual average number was 51 in the 1970s, 29 in the 1980s, 74 in the 1990s, 127 in the 2000s, and 139 so far in the 2010s,” Edwards says.

As a result, “there has been more than one disaster declaration every three days, on average, in recent years,” he says.

The process of securing disaster declarations which are followed by federal tax dollars in the form of FEMA grants has come to depend more on political influence than human need.

“Politics infuses the process. Studies find states that are politically important to the president have a better chance of receiving a disaster declaration, and also that states with a member of Congress serving on the House committee overseeing FEMA typically receive more funding,” Edwards says.

State and local officials can easily handle relief efforts in most disasters, the Cato author says, citing a recent Government Accountability Office estimate “that in recent years, 60 percent of

federally declared disasters had a cost of less than \$25 million. Even the smallest state could easily find the money to pay for a disaster of that size.”