

Trust via disasters: the case of Chile's 2010 earthquake

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Abstract

Chile has a long-standing history of natural disasters and, in particular, earthquakes. The latest big earthquake hit Chile on 27 February 2010 with a magnitude of 8.8 on the Richter scale. As an event that had a profound impact on significant portions of the population, the earthquake could theoretically have served to build trust by promoting new trust networks through the enhancement of distant family ties and the interaction between affected neighbours. This study offers an empirical analysis of this theory in the Chilean case. It finds that if initial social capital is very low (thus allowing for post-disaster looting and violence), then the impact of the trust-increasing effect is smaller. It also shows that the effect of the disaster was not transitory, but that it persisted and actually increased over time.

Keywords:

- Chile's 2010 earthquake;
- disaster;
- economics of disasters;
- resilience;
- sociology of disasters;
- subjective well-being;
- trust