

Natural Disasters or Entrepreneurs: An Analysis of the 117th Congress

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01. Introduction

- Climate change is becoming more and more serious
- The only people who can make a real difference are legislators
- Increasing polarization within Congress has made passing any legislation harder
- Are legislators using natural disasters to push their preferred policy?

02. Hypotheses

- Democratic Members of Congress use the natural disaster to push their agenda on Climate Change, while Republican members use the natural disasters to push their agenda against the controlling party of the legislature and the executive administration.
- Democrats are more likely to use their time on the floor to sponsor new policies, where Republicans are more likely to revise old policy to fit conservative standards.

03. Methods

- Primary data sources include all congressional records that mention natural disasters (n=1,245) and the unit of analysis is individual speeches yielded by Member of Congress.
- Descriptive analysis between ideology, age, and party with what types of environmental policies are advocated for on the floor.
- Analysis of what Members of Congress mention in their testimony the term 'climate change' or 'climate disaster'.

CALIFORNIA'S DROUGHT

(Mr. VALADAO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Speaker, for the last six weeks, I was working in my district, meeting with constituents and local officials. The top issue of concern was overwhelmingly centered around California's drought. But this is not a concern to my community alone.

Our farmers cannot continue to grow food for the American families without water. The consequences of this drought and for our entire Nation cannot be understated. Even leaders outside of California are taking notice.

House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Bruce Westerman, as well as USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, visited the Valley in August to witness the absolute disaster at hand. It is critical that the House majority follow the lead of those who have seen the suffering firsthand and act immediately by supporting legislation such as my bills, the RENEW WIIN Act and the NEED Water Now Act.

Figure 1. Example of data set

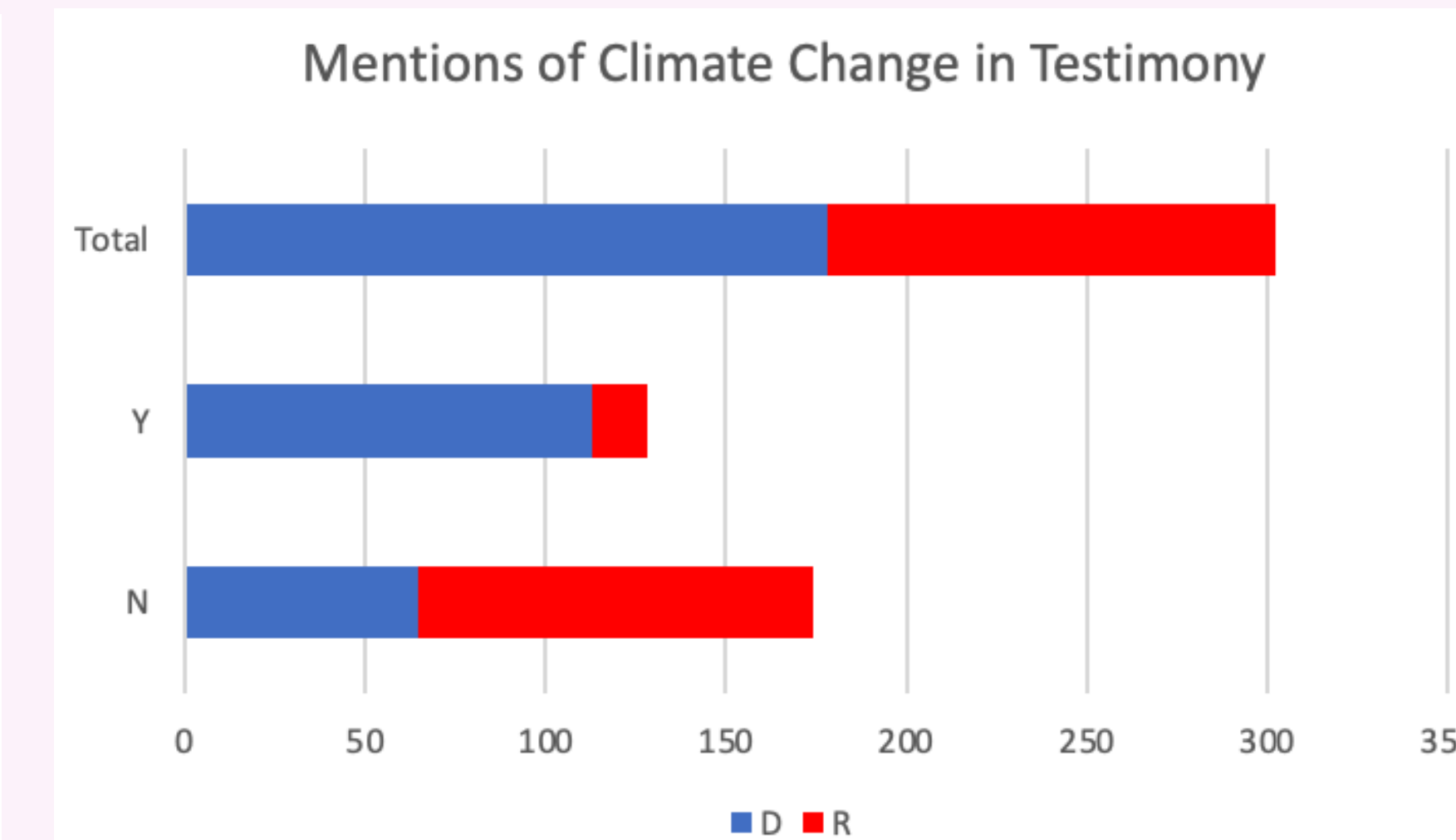


Figure 2. Mentions of climate change terminology when addressing the floor

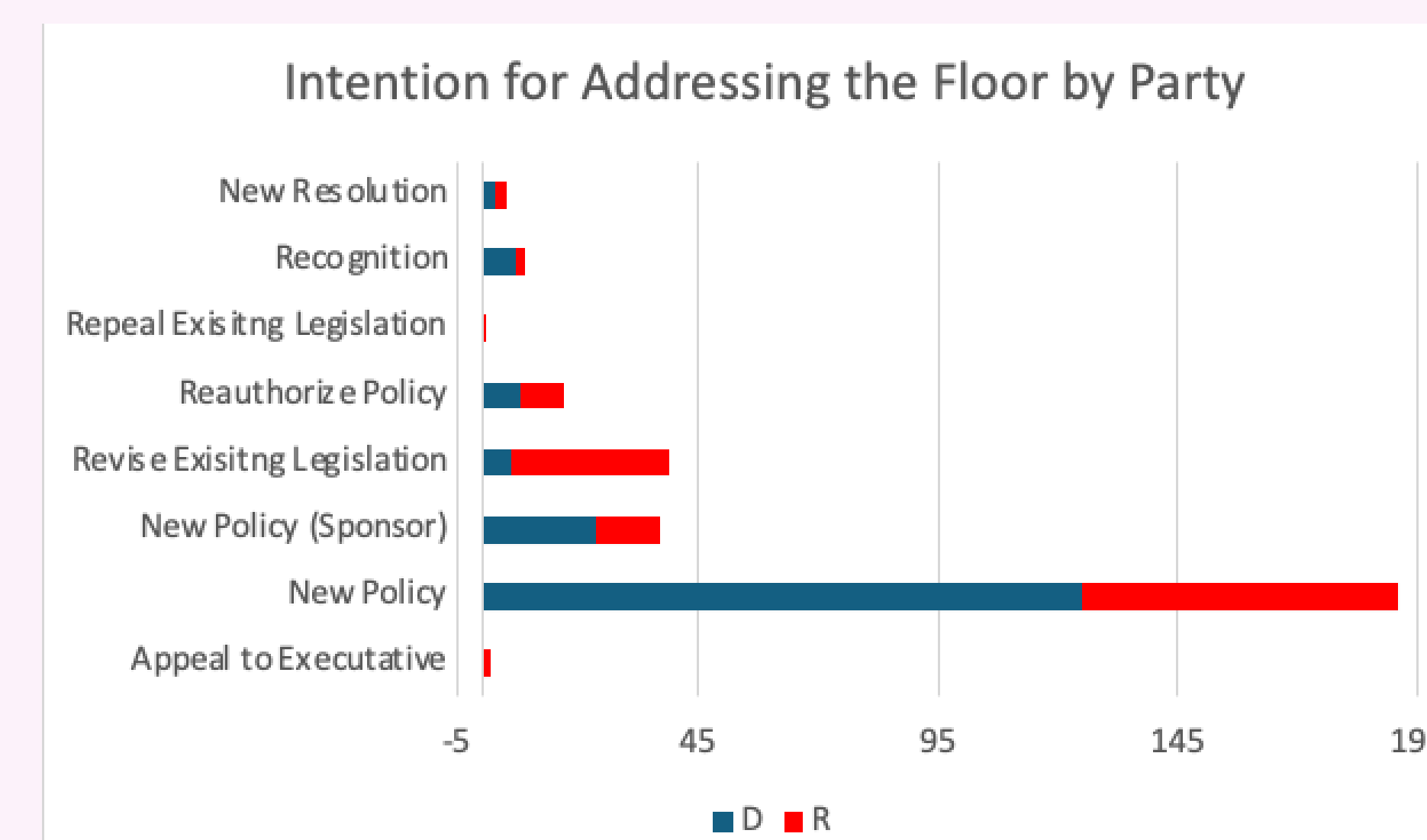


Figure 3. A legislators intention when addressing the floor, by party

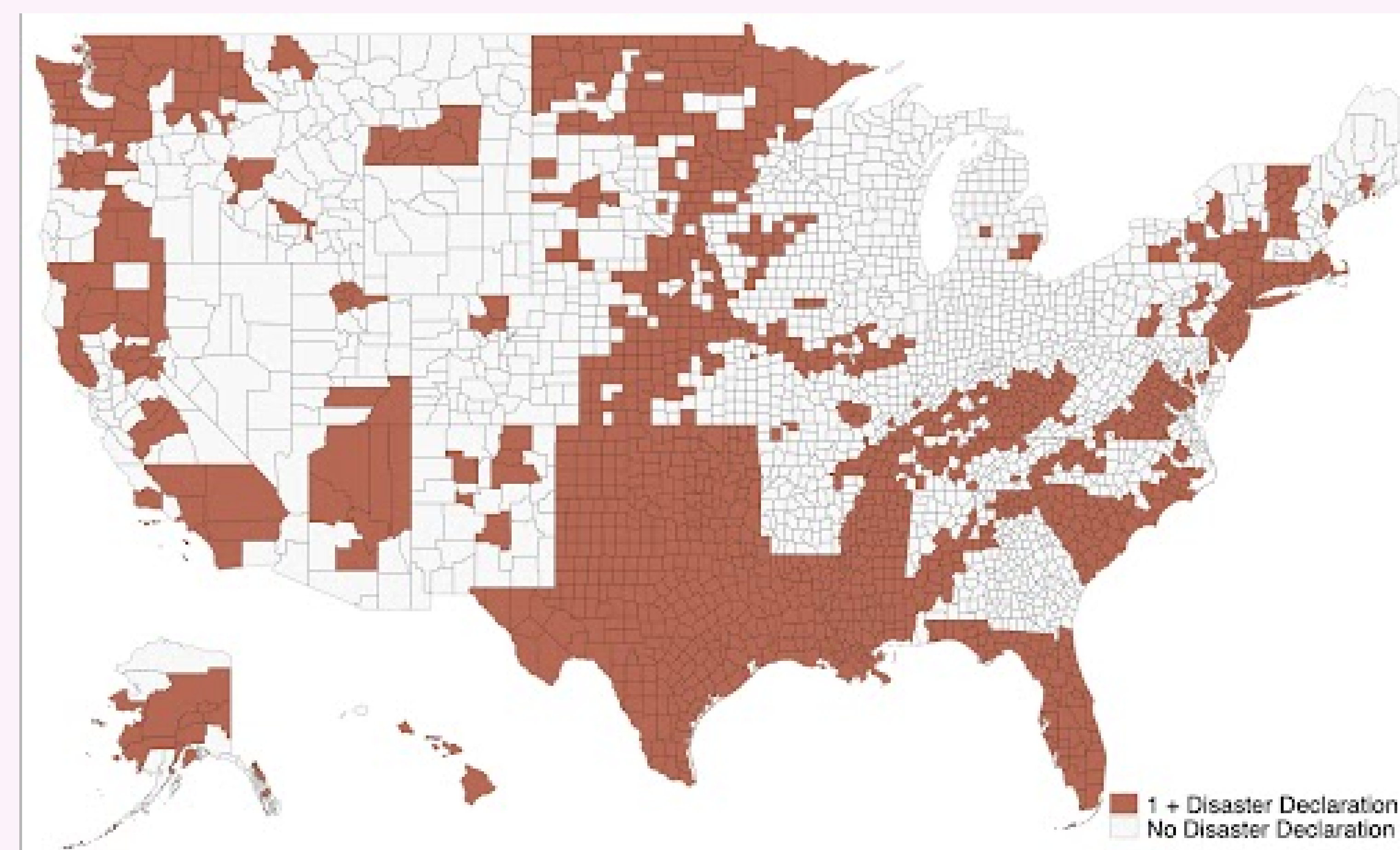


Figure 4. Map of FEMA declared natural disasters during the 117th Congressional session

04. Results

- Democrats are more inclined to speak on natural disasters and environmental related issues, even without a FEMA-declared disaster in their district. Where Republicans are more likely to utilize the disaster to speak on issues of the environment.
- Democrats utilize testimony to support new policies that address climate change while republicans use natural disasters to support revising existing legislation.

05. Conclusion

- Everybody is a policy entrepreneur - but this looks different between partisans.
- Democrats push Democratic ideals and agenda - including new climate change legislation. They are more likely to sponsor new environmental policies.
- Republicans do the same for their party, where they push more anti-climate change policies and remain conservative.