

Statement of Interest in Extreme Event Research

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While I am new to extreme event research, I am fascinated by the complexities involved in the characterization of the interaction between the decision agent and the dynamic environment which provides the context for decision making.

Each stakeholder living through an extreme event experiences a context which differs from that facing the others, not only defined by direct personal risks or specific possible outcomes, but also by the personal relevance of those risks. In short, the measure of vulnerability cannot only be a measure of economic risk, but must incorporate the idiosyncratic context and personal history of the individual in the situation.

For example, just as the asteroid hitting Jupiter is less of an extreme event than the same asteroid hitting Earth (Sarewitz and Pielke Jr., 2000), the loss of a house represents more or less an extreme event to different individuals, based on the presence or absence of insurance. In addition, while the event may represent a loss of property to an individual, it may represent a loss of face to a government agency. While scarcely discussed in the usual decision analytic or economic models, these symbolic associations guide the communication and implementation of policy in subtle ways.

To add complexity, the decision context is changing over time, and is responsive to social interactions between individuals and across agencies.

In summary, I am interested in how to model the symbolic and social processes which affect communication and implementation of policy in interactions between stakeholders, be they individuals or agencies involved in collective decision making over the time course of an extreme event.