Hurricane Sandy had a large and lasting impact on New Jersey politics and especially Gov. Chris Christie’s future as a politician, elevating a governor who had been among the most divisive in recent history to an icon of sorts, making his 2013 re-election inevitable and at the same time positioning him for the national stage. The Superstorm presented a type of “rally effect” for Christie that had never before been seen. Prior to Sandy, Christie’s favorability ratings hovered around 50 percent since taking office and his job grade around a ‘B’ or ‘C.’ But soon after Sandy hit, polling showed a dramatic increase in the number of voters with a favorable impression of Christie to 67 percent, up 19 points from before the storm—a trend Christie mostly sustained through Election Day 2013.

But after more than a year of unprecedented highs post-Sandy and a landslide re-election victory, Christie’s ratings dropped precipitously in the wake of multiple scandals: a traffic jam caused by mysterious local lane closures on the George Washington Bridge, misallocation of Sandy funding, withholding Sandy funds as political retribution, and other inappropriate dealings surrounding his re-election campaign. New Jerseyans have been highly skeptical and much more negative towards their governor in the aftermath of these controversies. Christie’s favorability, job grade, and job approval have all suffered double-digit declines. About half still do not believe Christie’s explanation of what happened with the GWB closures, and two-thirds say all of these allegations are serious for the governor.

**EXPLAINING THE RISE AND FALL OF CHRISTIE’S “RAILY ‘ROUND THE GOVERNOR” EFFECT**

- A new type of rally effect previously unexplored in the literature: does not pertain to a U.S. president but rather a state governor; spurred not by international crisis/foreign attack but rather an uncontrollable natural disaster (natural disasters are instead usually linked to blame and electoral repercussion in past research)
- Rally effect exemplifies both the classic patriotism explanation and newer explanations centered on the emotional components of rally effects typically applied only to presidents in times of war or foreign attack
- Presence/absence of Christie’s rally effect explained in part by the shifting importance of a mixture of positive and negative traits (smart, strong leader, reformer, independent, effective, trustworthy, fair, fighter, sincere, arrogant, self-centered, bully, stubborn, impulsive) and emotions (pride, enthusiasm, anger, worry) asked over time about Christie
  - Post-Sandy: strong leader, trustworthy, and pride become statistically significant for favorability; bully, reformer, and impulsive become insignificant, while multiple emotions (pride, worry, and enthusiasm) become significant for job grade
  - Post-Bridgegate: bully and fighter become statistically significant for the first time for favorability; strong leader becomes insignificant and arrogant becomes significant for the first time for job grade

**THE PERFECT POLITICAL STORM**

**BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER**

*prior to Sandy, take office, job grade around a ‘B’ or ‘C.’ But soon after Sandy hit, polling showed a dramatic increase in the number of voters with a favorable impression of Christie to 67 percent, up 19 points from before the storm—a trend Christie mostly sustained through Election Day 2013.*

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*All data collected by the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, part of the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University. All surveys conducted among both landline and cell phone households with live callers using a scientifically selected random (RDD) sample.*