THE ROLE OF COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE SHORT-TERM DISASTER RECOVERY PROCESS

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# ABSTRACT

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# DEDICATION

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FEMA…………………………………………………..Federal Emergency Management Agency

IRB……………………………………………………………………..Institutional Review Board

NACO…………………………………………………………...National Association of Counties

NHRAIC………………….….....Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center

NDRF..........................................................................…...National Disaster Recovery Framework

NGA……………………………………………………..………National Governor’s Association

PKEMRA…………………………………..…Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act

PDD…………………………………………………………..….Presidential Disaster Declaration

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study will explore the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery. The ultimate goal of this study is to explore the implications of county elected officials’ short-term recovery role for the discipline and practice of emergency management as a profession and within the distributed function. Specifically, this research will address the following question:

1. What is the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery?

## Background

Over the past three decades, emergency management has employed four functional phases (i.e., mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) as its primary organizing paradigm in both practice and scholarship (Britton, 1999; Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2007; National Governor’s Association [NGA], 1979; Neal, 1997; Britton, 1999). Of these phases, there is evidence that one in particular, namely recovery, remains neglected (Rubin 2009). Recovery is “the differential process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions” (Smith & Wenger 2006, p. 237).

As noted in the above definition, recovery is viewed as a dynamic process, meaning it has no distinct beginning or end (Alesch et al., 2009; Phillips, 2009; Quarantelli, 1998; Rubin, 1985, Smith, 2011; Sullivan, 2003). Recovery is comprised of many sets of separate but interrelated activities through which individuals, organizations, and communities move at different rates (Alesch et al., 2009; Phillips, 2009; Quarantelli, 1998; Rubin, 1985; Smith 2011; Sullivan 2003). It is understood that the recovery process varies both by and within stakeholder groups, meaning that individuals, neighborhoods, organizations, and communities will not all recover uniformly, have the same recovery needs, utilize the same recovery resources, and some may not recover at all (Alesch, et al., 2009; Bates & Peacock, 1989; Phillips, 2009; Quarantelli, 1998; Smith & Wenger, 2006). Moreover, recovery progress is influenced by a host of factors including pre-disaster conditions, the nature of the hazard event, accessibility and availability of resources, and the decisions and actions taken in the post-impact stage, among other factors (Alesch, Arendt, & Holly, 2009; Bolin and Stanford, 1991; Bolin & Trainer, 1978; Chappell, Forgette, Swanson, & Van Boening, 2007; Nigg, 1995; Olshansky, 2005; Passerini, 2000; Phillips, 1993; Quarantelli, 1998; Rubin, 1985; Smith, 2011; Smith & Wenger, 2006; Webb, Tierney, & Dahlhamer, 2003).

Much is at stake in this recovery process (Smith & Wenger, 2006). Potential negative outcomes of a poorly executed recovery process include “shoddy reconstruction, a loss of jobs, a reduction in affordable housing stock, missed opportunities to incorporate mitigation into the rebuilding process, and an inability to assist the neediest… ” (Smith & Wenger, 2006, p. 239) and a failure “…to return to their pre-disaster condition, or worse, actions [that] increase…exposure to hazards, worsen economic conditions, damage natural systems, or exacerbate racial and ethnic tensions” (Smith & Wenger, 2006, p. 239).

Future economic, political, environmental, and cultural conditions of communities hang in the balance during the recovery process (Smith & Wenger, 2006; Stehr, 2001; Rubin, 2009). But no one individual is responsible for avoiding the perils associated with the recovery process (Canton, 2007; Phillips, 2009; Rubin, 1985; Smith, 2011). Rather, averting potential negative consequences and securing the best possible recovery outcomes is a responsibility shared by the community (Canton, 2007; Phillips, 2009; Rubin, 1985; Smith, 2011).

Emergency management­­—including recovery—is a distributed function—many individuals, organizations, and government entities have a role in the completion of the activities related to emergency management tasks (Canton, 2007). Since recovery is “at once everyone’s job and no one’s job” (Jensen Bundy, Thomas, & Yakubu, e.d., p. 27), a critical part of understanding the complexities of disaster recovery is to identify how members of the many and diverse governmental and nongovernmental organizations that do the actual work associated with the recovery process fit into the disaster recovery picture.

Of particular importance to this recovery picture is the local government level. In the United States emergency management system, the local government bears the primary responsibility for recovery after a disaster (McLoughlin, 1985; Stehr, 2001; Smith, 2011; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). Although local government shoulders the majority of the recovery burden, the local government does not navigate this process alone. The federal government plays a part by making resources available when emergency or disaster declarations are made (Drabek, 1985; Rubin, 2007, Smith, 2011; Sylves, 2008). And, state government also provides limited support (Rubin, 2007). But, even with “the augmentations and specialized functions that are provided by state and federal agencies, especially during the recovery phases of many disasters, the first line of responsibility for public protection resides with local government” (Drabek, 1985, p. 85). Other entities, such as the private sector and non-profit organizations from both within and outside the disaster-stricken area also figure into the recovery picture by rendering assistance to a recovering community (Berke, Kartez, & Wenger, 1993; Phillips, 2009; Smith, 2011; Stehr, 2001). Yet, as Smith (2011) states, “regardless of the type, quantity, or duration of assistance provided by members of the disaster recovery assistance network, the local unit of government-city, county, or township, is ultimately held responsible for community-level recovery” ( p. 49). With the heavy burden of responsibility placed on local government, it is critical to have an understanding of how this responsibility is distributed within local government.

Yet, there is little empirical work to suggest just who is doing what and how in the recovery process at the local level. Since emergency management is the profession charged with “coordinating and integrating all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to…recover from…disasters” (FEMA 2007, p. 4)., researchers have suggested that the local emergency manager should be intimately involved in disaster recovery (Berke et al., 1993; Phillips 2009; Schwab, Topping, Eadie, Doyle, & Smith, 1998). However, recent literature suggests the current involvement of local emergency managers in recovery is minimal and restricted to administrative tasks such as paperwork (Jensen et al., e.d.). One has to wonder then if the local emergency manager does not play a significant role in disaster recovery (Jensen et al., e.d.), who within local government is coordinating and integrating this process?

Academia has made several suggestions, but offers little empirically based insight into how the recovery process plays out in local government. For example, local government departments such as planning, public works, and engineering are thought to be heavily engaged during recovery (Berke et al. 1993), particularly with respect to certain recovery tasks such as planning, debris management, damage assessment, restoration of utilities and services, and housing (Phillips, 2009). But exactly which departments are involved, how they go about accomplishing these tasks, the ways in which they interact with other members of the distributed emergency management function, and how they shape the process have yet to be documented.

Local government leaders, including elected officials, are also said to bear significant responsibility for the management of the recovery process (Phillips, 2009). As noted by Stehr (2001), “strategic choices made by local decision makers both before and after an event determine the success of both the immediate and long-term recovery processes” (p. 427). And local elected officials have significant authority to make decisions regarding a wide range of community matters. Much like democratically elected leaders at the national and state level, local elected officials represent constituents, control the public budget, make policy, and appoint and oversee other bureaucratic positions within their jurisdiction (Sokolow, 1993). Within their purview falls “agenda setting, resource allocations, staffing, training, and, ultimately, the effective implementation of a program designed to…recover from disasters” (Petak, 1985, p. 5). This broad span of influence potentially positions local elected officials to act as leaders in and drivers of the recovery process.

However, local elected officials have traditionally maintained an apathetic stance towards emergency management (Labadie, 1984). Beholden to the elected public, these elected officials tend to place greater emphasis on day-to-day administrative matters and issues of immediate concern that resonate more readily with the voting public (Labadie, 1984; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). As such, when a disaster strikes, these local elected officials may lack knowledge related to the emergency management issues and activities within their communities (Labadie, 1984). This knowledge deficit may compel elected officials to rely on other public officials to play a larger role during the recovery process (Vogelsang-Combs & Miller, 1999). Alternatively, local elected officials may serve simply as “rubber stampers” of the decisions or actions of others (Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). Or, local elected officials may become champions of citizen views, letting political pressures determine their areas of engagement in the recovery process (Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). Given that the effectiveness of political officials is often evaluated in terms of whether or not they get reelected (Vogelsang-Combs & Miller, 1999), local elected officials may understand satisfying the demands of the voting public in recovery to be their most critical function.

Local elected officials could play a pivotal role in navigating their communities through the disaster recovery process; or, the burden of leadership may fall elsewhere, leaving local elected officials with a purely administrative or decision-making function. The bottom line is that not much is known about just what local elected officials do in disaster recovery, the decisions they make, and their influence on the overall process.

In considering the recovery process at the local level, it is important to recognize that local government is not a singular entity. Rather local government can be broadly categorized into three basic forms: counties, municipalities, and special districts (Smith, Greenblatt, & Buntin, 2005). The distinction between local levels of government is not often recognized in emergency management literature, particularly research on disaster recovery. There are a few studies that examine a particular level of local government (see for example: Jensen et al., e.d.; Phillips & Neal, 2004). However, disaster literature regularly references local government generically when discussing its responsibilities, actions, or capabilities failing to specify which level of local government is being discussed or if differences exist between the different levels (see for example: Alesch et al., Berke et al., 1993; 2009; McLoughlin, 1985; Petak, 1985; Phillips, 2009; Rubin, 1985; Smith, 2011; Stehr, 2001; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1991).

This study will focus on the county government. To focus on the county level is not to dismiss the importance of emergency management at the municipal level of local government or to ignore the special districts within local government, such as school districts or water supply districts, that play a part in the distributed function of emergency management.

Rather, since growing service provision requirements and increasing political autonomy have led scholars to suggest “that county governments could become the local governments of choice—if not necessity—in the 21st century” (Benton, Byers, Cigler, Klase, Menzel, Salant, Streib, Svara, & Waugh, 2008), examining the county level of local government serves as a logical starting point from which to begin to further analyze disaster recovery at the local government level.

Recovery is a complicated process with a diverse array of governmental and nongovernmental organizations doing the work associated with it. And the consequences for a poorly executed process are significant (Smith & Wenger, 2006). There is much to lose if not done well. Despite the centrality of local governments to the recovery process, little is known about how these governments negotiate this process, particularly in terms of how the responsibility is distributed both across and within various local governments. This research intends to begin to address this shortcoming by concentrating on a primary player in the local government arena, the elected official. Specifically, this research will explore the role of the county elected official in short-term disaster recovery.

## Significance

Emergency management’s historical bias toward preparedness and response (Stehr, 2007) has meant that recovery has been largely ignored in both practice and research. In fact, recovery has been described as the least understood phase in emergency management by academics and practitioners alike (Berke, Kartez, & Wenger, 1993; Olshansky, 2005; Smith & Wenger, 2006; Rubin, 2009). Unlike preparedness and response, “scholars have yet to address fundamental questions [and] practitioners have failed to establish an integrated policy framework or utilize readily available tools to improve disaster recovery outcomes” (Smith & Wenger, 2006, p. 234). Yet, there is growing recognition in emergency management of the need to bridge this gap in knowledge related to disaster recovery (Olshansky, 2005; Smith & Wenger, 2006; Rubin, 2009).

The number of hazard events occurring each year in the United States has been increasing, as have been the impacts on individual communities and states and our nation at-large (Rubin, 2007). As such, the recovery process is increasingly being negotiated without the benefit of guidance from any real normative or empirical theory. Guidance would be helpful since the range of potential consequences from a poorly executed recovery process is more and more widely acknowledged by both practitioners and academics (Smith & Wenger, 2006). While findings related to recovery have accumulated over time, they have not done so to the same extent as findings related to preparedness, response, and even mitigation (Rubin, 2009). Valuable progress has been made, but now the academic community has a renewed interest in seeing the prior work on recovery built on and expanded (Rubin, 2009).

This study seeks to inform the discipline and the practice of the profession of emergency management by beginning the much needed process of understanding the role of county elected officials in short-term recovery. It is known that local governments are primarily responsible for executing disaster recovery within their communities (McLoughlin, 1985; Stehr, 2001; Smith, 2011; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). It is also known that local governments come in multiple forms, including counties, municipalities, and special districts (Smith et al., 2005). Yet, it remains unknown how this responsibility for recovery is distributed within and across local government. This research will begin to bridge this gap by focusing on one of the primary actors in local government, the local elected official, at a pivotal level of local government, the county level.

The findings of this study will provide initial insight into the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery, potentially identifying such elements as the tasks and activities they are involved in, the decisions they face, how they make those decisions, and factors that influence how their role in executed. While it is unclear at this point whether this study will result in the development of a grounded theory, the themes and concepts it discovers and any possible relationships, conceptual maps, or diagrams that result will be useful to future research, higher education, and practice. For instance, the themes and concepts generated from this research could be used as the foundation from which future quantitative research projects develop variables for testing to confirm or refine this role. Or, these themes and concepts may serve as the basis for prospective researchers to examine the roles of other stakeholders in the recovery process. The findings of this study will also potentially increase the theory and research literature available for educating students and faculty in emergency management higher education programs about the recovery process and the role of elected officials within it. Finally, this study’s findings will likely be of value to those currently practicing in the profession of emergency management within government at the local level, as well as those within the distributed function. Current emergency management professionals will be able use the findings of this research to evaluate the role of the elected officials within their jurisdiction. By analyzing what this study suggests the role is/should be, practitioners can better engage elected officials pre-disaster and provide local elected officials what they need (information, training, etc.) to be more successful in their role post-disaster. There are also benefits for those practicing in the distributed function who have a role in disaster recovery but are without clear guidance as to who does what in the process. At the very least, information will now be available as to what the elected official does in the recovery timeframe.

## Going Forward

Chapter Two will review the literature related to recovery tasks and activities, the county context, factors that influence recovery outcomes, and community change in the recovery period. Chapter Three will present the research methods for this dissertation.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two reviews the theoretical foundation for this study. The first section examines the tasks and activities associated with disaster recovery, including the differentiation between short-term and long-term recovery tasks. The second section highlights the diversity of county governments in relation to services provided, intergovernmental relations, populations served, organizational structure, and attitudes towards emergency management. The third section reviews the factors that affect the way recovery is approached and recovery outcomes at the local level, including stakeholder participation, integration, and community leadership that is based on a knowledge of to do and ability to act. The fourth section discusses the potential for positive community change as a result of the recovery process.

Since no empirical research has explicitly examined the role of the county elected official in short-term disaster recovery, the following review of the literature does not function as a means to demonstrate how this research fits into what is already known on the topic (Maxwell, 2005). Rather, this literature review strives to provide theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978), allowing the researcher to begin the project with an awareness of the subtleties that may be associated with the data collected. Specifically, the researcher seeks to demonstrate in Chapter Two an understanding of those contextual and background elements related to both disaster recovery and county government that may assist the researcher during the collection and analysis phases by providing needed insight, giving meaning to data, and helping detach relevant from irrelevant information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## Recovery Tasks and Activities

The literature has identified a variety of tasks that should be, or are, completed as part of the disaster recovery process. For instance, one of the most commonly identified tasks associated with disaster recovery is planning (see for example: Alesch et al., 2009; Berke & Campanella, 2006; Olshansky, 2006; Phillips, 2009; Schwab et al., 1998; Smith, 2011).

Planning is most effective when it occurs prior to a disaster, but the majority of recovery planning still happens in the post-disaster timeframe (Phillips, 2009; Smith, 2011). Regardless of when it occurs, planning can “provide some vision that serves as a beacon for decision makers and some framework within which decisions will be taken” (Schwab, et.al, 1998, p. 47). Recovery planning should include stakeholders from local government, state and federal government, the private sector, and voluntary agencies (Phillips, 2009; Schwab, et.al, 1998; Smith, 2011). Citizen participation can also bolster recovery planning and the perceptions of the recovery process (Alesch, et.al, 2009; Kweit & Kweit, 2004; Phillips, 2009). This type of planning can be an opportunity to outline a vision of the community for the future and can be strengthened by linking it to other planning initiatives such as the comprehensive plans and mitigation plans (Phillips, 2009; Schwab et.al, 1998). As the community’s constituency representatives, budgetary agents, and policy makers, it would seem that the involvement of local elected officials would be important to the recovery planning process and its ability to guide the community in both a socially desirable and fiscally feasible manner. However, it remains unclear if, and to what extent, local elected officials are involved in recovery planning either before or after a disaster.

Beyond planning, literature distinguishes two categories of tasks associated with disaster recovery: short-term and long-term. Generally speaking, short-term tasks can be understood as those linked to the phase transition from response to recovery and long-term tasks as those associated with reconstructing, rebuilding, or otherwise restoring various aspects of the community (Alesch, et.al, 2009; Phillips, 2009; Rubin, 1985; Schwab, et.al, 1998). Examples of short-term tasks include damage assessments, debris removal, temporary relocation and housing, restoration of utilities and public services, volunteer management, and donations management (Alesch, et.al, 2009; Phillips; 2009, Schwab, et.al, 1998). Examples of long-term tasks include housing recovery, business recovery, infrastructure repair, cultural and historic site restoration, public sector recovery, and social or psychological recovery (Alesch, et.al, 2009; Phillips, 2009; Rubin, 1985).

Given that local government shoulders the primary responsibility for community recovery, it would follow that the aftermath of a disaster would find localities accountable for the completion of myriad of tasks and associated activities associated with disaster recovery. Nothing in the literatures suggests that elected officials would be the actual “doers” of these recovery tasks (see for example: Alesch et al., 2009; Phillips, 2009, Smith, 2011); instead, the literature implies that the “doers” of the recovery tasks are distributed throughout officials in various departments and agencies of the jurisdiction, in concert with non-profit or private sector organizations (Alesh et al., 2009; Canton, 2007; Phillips, 2009). Yet, completion of each recovery task requires careful consideration of a variety of issues at each stage (i.e., before beginning, during, and post-completion) and most recovery tasks are associated with a wide range of activities that may involve elected officials.

There is a considerable body of scholarly work that explores the considerations and activities involved in each recovery task. This work suggests factors that facilitate and hinder task completion as well as how these items can be completed in a manner that makes communities more sustainable and/or resilient (see for example: Alesch et al., 2009; Al-Nammari 2009; Bates & Peacock 1992; Bolin & Stanford, 1991; Bolin & Trainer, 1978; Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2008; Comerio, 1997; Corey & Deitch, 2011; Haynes, Danes, & Stafford, 2011; Runyan, 2006; Webb et al., 2003). The actions of local elected officials could potentially shape several of these factors and influence how those who are doing the actual recovery tasks go about getting them accomplished and the subsequent effectiveness of those endeavors.

For example, empirical studies on long-term business recovery have observed a variety of factors linked to effective business recovery. Webb et al. (2003) note that businesses with a short duration of closure, less operational disruption, and less physical damage are more likely to successfully recover. Webb et al. (2003) also suggest that newer businesses, businesses with poor pre-disaster financial conditions, businesses with regional, national, or international markets, and businesses outside of the wholesale and retail industry are also in a better position to recover. Larger companies and businesses that own property versus leasing have also been shown to have a greater propensity for recovery (Phillips, 2009; Runyan 2006), as have businesses that undertook preparedness measures pre-disaster (Runyan, 2006), businesses who implemented loss containment measures (Phillips, 2009), and businesses with a feedback mechanism to the government (Chamlee-Wright, et.al, 2008). Haynes et al. (2011) indicate that small family businesses headed by women and those transferring more income from the business to the family are most likely to succeed in recovery efforts.

Conversely, research has also determined a number of barriers to recovery. Runyan (2006) notes that losing records during an event, inexperience with borrowing money, the onerous process to apply for financial assistance, the time lag between application for financial assistance and receipt of funds, the inability to assess damage, and a disrupted distribution network are all challenges that can negatively impact business recovery. A lack of customer base, lack of staff, lack of infrastructure, and a lack of information have also been identified as obstacles for businesses recovery (Corey & Deitch, 2011; Phillips, 2009), as has the zoning, permitting, and inspections processes (Chamlee-Wright, et.al, 2008; Phillips, 2009). In addition, pre-disaster regulatory schemes surrounding professional licensing, financing, and other hurdles businesses must overcome to achieve legal status may impede entrepreneurial efforts post-disaster (Chamlee-Wright et al., 2008; Runyan, 2006). And regime uncertainty, which “occurs when officials announce conflicting policies or make conflicting statements about the prospects for, or desirability of, the recovery of a particular community” (Chamlee-Wright et al., 2008, p. 10), can hinder the efforts of the businesses to recover as these businesses rely on clear signals from both the marketplace and community to make decisions in the recovery process (Chamlee-Wright et al., 2008; Runyan, 2006).

Although local elected officials cannot affect many of these facilitating and inhibiting factors, within this lengthy list there are areas where local elected officials could potentially have influence. For example, public meetings or hearings on business recovery that include businesses and business interest organizations could facilitate two-way communication, providing mechanisms for businesses to both provide feedback on the recovery process and their needs, while also allowing elected officials the opportunity to communicate information that can assist in making business decisions. Such interface could serve to minimize regime uncertainty. Local elected officials could also temporarily amend laws or suspend policies to allow for an expedited process for zoning, inspections, and permitting, as well as other regulations that may delay entrepreneurial efforts. In addition, local elected officials could also authorize funding for a public information campaign that publicizes which businesses are open, what services those businesses are provided, and a projected schedule for future business openings.

As noted above, within each of the tasks and activities associated with short-term and long-term recovery, there exists literature denoting facilitating and inhibiting factors over which the local elected official could effect, at least in part. This review would suggest that local elected officials could be playing a noteworthy role in the disaster recovery process related to recovery tasks and how they proceed, even if they are not actually doing the tasks themselves. However, it remains to be seen whether or not elected officials indeed maintain a significant role in influencing these recovery tasks and how they are accomplished.

## County Context

The ability of county elected officials to influence recovery tasks and how they proceed within their jurisdictions may be shaped by several contextual factors. Counties across the United States vary significantly from one to the next. The role that counties play in service provision in relation to other levels of government, the ability of counties to generate and implement policy, the number of constituents served by counties, the strength of the county government vis-à-vis other levels of government, the organizational structure of counties, and how counties view emergency management are very different from one county to the next. These contextual factors influence the environment in which the county elected officials operate, including the responsibilities associated with their position and the challenges they face in the fulfillment of those responsibilities. A review of the varying context of counties provides an important foundation for examining the role county elected officials’ play in disaster recovery.

### *Changing Role of County Government*

Counties are the basic geographic subdivisions of state government. Traditionally, county governments have also acted as administrative arms of the state, delivering functions and services mandated by the state government (see for example: Benton, 2003; Benton et al., 2008; Duncombe, 1977; Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2001; Martin, 1993; Smith et al., 2005; Streib & Waugh, 1991). These services have historically included administration of property taxes, administration of elections, judicial administration, provision of human and social services, road maintenance and construction, recording deeds and other legal instruments, and law enforcement, including jails run by county sheriffs (Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2001; Kemp, 2008; Smith et al., 2005; Streib & Waugh, 1991).

Increasing suburbanization after World War II led to a changing role for county government (Benton, 2003; Kemp, 2008; Martin, 1993; Streib & Waugh, 1991). The demographic shift from urban to outlying areas created an increasing demand for counties to provide services that previously fell to municipal governments, such as housing, mass transit, highways, parks, airports, water supply and sewage, planning, and zoning (Benton, 2003; Benton et al., 2008; Benton & Menzel, 1993; DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Kemp, 2008; Marando & Thomas, 1977; Smith et al., 2005). In acquiring the responsibility for increased service provision, many counties also sought greater autonomy from the state so as to have the flexibility to undertake the policy-making and administrative actions necessary to fulfill these demands (Benton, 2003; Benton et al., 2008; DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Duncombe, 1977; Kemp, 2008).

Yet, while counties wanted more autonomy in how they provided services within their geographic jurisdiction, counties have nevertheless faced several challenges that have made it difficult for them to be more independent from states. For instance, counties have struggled to obtain the fiscal capacity to support their expanded service functions (Benton, 2003; Benton et al., 2008; Berman & Lehman, 1993; Smith et al., 2005). Increasing revenue flexibility through changing the level or pattern of intergovernmental assistance, altering property tax laws and implementation, or revising user charges or fees can assist with bridging the financial gap (Benton et al., 2008; Cigler, 1993); yet counties have met with varying level of success in demonstrating this flexibility (Benton et al., 2008). Counties have also been confronted with the difficulty of using sophisticated financial management techniques associated with administering larger pools of money (Waugh & Streib, 1993).

In addition to concerns about financial capacity, many counties have not had the administrative and political capacity to provide expanded services (Lobao & Kraybill, 2005; Waugh & Streib, 1993). Administrative and political capacity refers to having the “knowledge and leadership skills related to the democratic political system” (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999, p. 199) that are required to accomplish what local officials want or need to do within their counties (Gargan, 1981; Vogelsang-Combs & Miller, 1999; Waugh & Hy, 1988; Waugh & Streib, 1993). Included in administrative and political capacity are elements such as local policy-making discretion, policy management aptitude, the ability to translate community values into a set of policy priorities and programs, sophistication of management techniques, and ability to integrate new technologies (Waugh & Streib, 1991; 1993). Waugh & Streib (1993) found significant variation in county governments across all three types of capacities—financial, administrative, and political—noting that “there are some counties delivering the most demanding services very effectively, and there are counties operating literally out of the garages and checkbooks of elected officials” (p. 52).

As noted by Martin (1993), “the proper role and responsibilities of county government in the local intergovernmental context remains a major unresolved issue” (p. 12). Tensions remain regarding the differing conceptualizations of the county as an administrative arm of the state and as a unit of local government providing day-to-day services (Berman, Martin, & Kajfex, 1985; Martin, 1993). The provision of municipal-like services has also brought county government into competition and conflict with municipalities regarding which services are most appropriate for the different level of government to provide to what citizens (Martin, 1993). Further, the evidence is unclear regarding the capacity of county governments to offer these services and to create and implement policies and programs capable of addressing constituent desires and needs (Waugh & Streib, 1991).

While the general role of county elected officials is to represent constituents, control the public budget, make policy, and appoint and oversee other bureaucratic positions within their jurisdiction (Sokolow, 1993; Vogelsang-Combs & Miller, 1999), the contextual factors described above may impact how they go about fulfilling this role (Berman & Lehman, 1993). County elected officials may be operating under very different state-county relationships and county-municipality relationships (Martin, 1993; Waugh & Streib, 1991, 1993). These relationships may have varying levels of conflict or collaboration depending on how well the county role in intergovernmental relations is established and agreed upon (Waugh, 1994). County elected officials may also have differing levels of responsibility and expectations for the fulfillment of services, as well as varying degrees of autonomy for making decisions in relation to these responsibilities (Benton, 2003; Berman & Lehman, 1993; Duncombe, 1977; Sokolow, 1993; Smith et al., 2005).

The contextual factors highlighted above could potentially influence how and the extent to which county elected officials play a role in the disaster recovery process. For instance, a county elected official in a county that serves more as an administrative agent of the state may have less of a decision-making and more of an administrative role in recovery than a counterpart in a more autonomous locale. Or, a county elected official operating in a more confrontational state-county or county-municipality environment may have to divert more time and energy towards delineating local versus state recovery responsibilities than a county elected official in a collaborative environment. And, a county elected official in a county lacking capabilities to fulfill service requirements may necessarily focus more on attaining those lacking capabilities from outside sources while a colleague in a county with higher capabilities may be able to put efforts elsewhere. Ultimately, however, the nature and degree of the impact of these contextual factors on the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery remains unknown.

### *County Diversity*

In addition to changing roles in the intergovernmental context, “the responsibilities, operation, and structure of counties vary with the laws and customs of each state and with their location on the rural-urban continuum” (Berman & Lehman, 1993, p. xiii). The preference for governing at the town and township level that developed during the colonial period has been retained in New England, meaning county governments have remained a relatively weak, and in some cases, non-existent, form of government in that region of the county (Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2003; Martin, 1993; Smith et al., 2005). Counties in Connecticut and Rhode Island have no government authority, but exist as geographic subdivisions only. And, Massachusetts to date has abolished eight of its 14 county governments (Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth). Conversely, county government has enjoyed prominence in the south and southeastern part of the United States (Berman & Lehman, 1993; Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2003; Martin, 1993; Smith et al., 2005). This enhanced standing may be attributed to the region’s historic rural character and low population density which has required a local government structure that could cover a large area (Dunscombe, 1977; Harrigan & Nice, 2003). In the middle and western parts of the country there is variation in the status of county government (Martin, 1993).

Counties also range considerably in physical size, population, and population density (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Arlington County, Virginia is the smallest county, covering only 42 square miles, while North Slope Borough, Alaska traverses 142,224 square miles of mostly uninhabited land (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The average population of all counties is 83,705, but county population size spans a vast range of 82 in Loving County, Texas to over 9.8 million in Los Angeles County, California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). And the most densely populated county, New York County, New York, has over 69,000 people living per square mile, while the least densely populated county, Lake and Peninsula County, Alaska, has less than one person living per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The wide variation in county size, population, and population density can be thought of as creating a rural-to-urban continuum along which counties can be placed (Berman & Lehman, 1993). Where a county is located on along this rural-to-urban continuum influences county government’s responsibilities and capabilities. Typically, more urban counties maintain governments that are more streamlined and active in the provision of services than their rural counterparts (Berman & Lehman, 1993; DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Lobao & Kraybill, 2005; Schneider & Park, 1989; Warner & Hefetz, 2002). Rural county government faces challenges because many rural elected officials are part-time or volunteer and have limited expertise or training in making resource decisions (see for example: Cigler 1993; Lewis, 1986; Voorslang-Combs & Miller, 1999). In addition, because the cost per taxpayer of providing services decreases as the population goes up, rural counties have difficulties affording the same level of services as their urban counterparts (Cigler, 1993). And, in general, these smaller governments find themselves with more limited revenue options, depending almost solely on property tax (Cigler, 1993).

County governments also differ in their forms of government. Most counties use a commission, or plural executive, form of county government, which consists of a melding of legislative and executive authority into an elected board of supervisors or county commission (DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2001; Shafritz, Russell, & Borick, 2009). Row officers, such as the county clerk, coroner, sheriff, treasurer, attorney, and tax assessor, may also be elected and share in the executive powers (DeSantis & Renner, 1993). A lack of a singular executive with responsibility for the operation of the entire county can “create tremendous fragmentation of the system, promoting chaos, inefficiency, and little centralized accountability” (DeSantis & Renner, 1993, p. 22).

Due to the perceived shortcomings of this traditional form of county government (Benton, 2003; Benton et al., 2008; DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Engel, 1999), more than 40 percent of counties have shifted to either the county administrator or the elected executive type form of government (National Association of Counties [NACo], 2012). Under the county administrator format, voters elect a legislative body who in turn appoint an executive responsible to this body to implement policies and oversee daily administration of the executive departments (DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2001; Shafritz et al., 2009). Under a county executive format, the county executive is elected at-large separately from the legislature and acts as the chief administrative officer of the jurisdiction, with veto power over legislative decisions made by a county board or council (DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Engel, 1999; Harrigan & Nice, 2001; Shafritz et al., 2009). These revised formats are intended to overcome the issues associated with the diffuse executive powers in the traditional form of county government, although the extent to which this is this case has received minimal scholarly attention (DeSantis & Renner, 1993).

The diverse nature of counties means that the type and scope of issues facing county elected officials may be vastly different depending on the county’s geographic location and placement along the rural-urban continuum (Berman & Lehman, 1993). And depending on the form of government employed in the county, both how and the way in which elected officials make decisions may be vastly different, although the linkages between forms of county government and their consequences for policy-making and decision-making have not been well explored in literature (Benton, 2002; Benton et al., 2008; DeSantis & Renner, 1993; Morgan & Kickham, 1999).

The extent to which the diversity among counties impacts the role of its elected officials in short-term disaster recovery has not been explored. A county elected official in a rural county may have a much different part to play in the recovery process than an urban counterpart. Likewise, the historic strength of county government may translate to a county elected official in New England finding himself or herself playing a much smaller role than a colleague in Alabama. And, it could be that the role of an elected county executive in recovery could be very different from that of an elected member of a county commission. Understanding the diversity of counties then may provide an important backdrop for evaluating the roles of county elected officials during the recovery process.

### *County Views of Emergency Management*

County government offices are thought to be the commonsense home of emergency management at the local government level because of their geographic proximity to environmental hazards, expanded resource base with respect to municipalities, position as local agents of state administration, close administrative ties to state agencies, and ability to represent local interests and maintain strong local identification (Waugh, 1994). But, despite the fact counties are acknowledged as the appropriate centerpiece for local emergency management, not all counties hold emergency management in high esteem (Labadie, 1984; Jensen et al., e.d.). In many cases, both elected officials and citizens regard other problems as more pressing and significant than issues associated with hazard events that may or may not occur (Labadie, 1984; Petak, 1985; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). And the political and economic costs associated with preparing for or mitigating an event that may or may not happen are often too great to translate to action on emergency management topics (see for example: Burby, Deyle, Goldschalk, & Olshanksy, 2000; Labadie, 1984; Petak, 1985; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). County elected officials then may have minimal involvement in and an apathetic attitude towards emergency management endeavors within their county day-to-day (Labadie, 1984).

However, there is growing scholarly recognition of the importance of emergency management within local government and the need to involve elected officials in emergency management activities, particularly in relation to planning activities (see for example: Burby, 2003; Burby et al., 2000; Canton, 2007; Pearce 2003; Smith, 2011; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). The inclusion of elected officials in training and exercise events has also been said to be required for effective emergency management (Perry, 2004; Perry & Lindell, 2003); however, the extent to which county elected officials are actually involved in planning, training, and exercise activities has not been empirically demonstrated.

It would make sense that county elected officials who place significant value on emergency management day-to-day and have been exposed to and involvement in emergency management activities may play a greater role in disaster recovery. When a disaster occurs, these elected officials may have knowledge related to the emergency management issues and activities within their communities that would allow them to be more active in the post-disaster timeframe. However, the influence of county elected officials’ perceptions of emergency management and/or their prior involvement in emergency management activities on their role in disaster recovery has not been explored through research.

## Factors that Influence Recovery

While these county contextual factors may influence the role that local elected officials play in disaster recovery, there may be additional considerations that could shape their involvement in and effect on the recovery process. There are a variety of factors identified in the disaster literature that may affect the way recovery is approached and recovery outcomes at the local level. Some factors, specific to the hazard involved (e.g., predictability, speed of onset, forewarning) and characteristics of the hazard event itself (e.g., duration, geographic scope) (Smith & Wenger, 2006; Stehr, 2001), drive the subsequent recovery needs of the community. The pre-disaster social, political, and economic conditions of communities are also known to strongly influence the recovery process (Alesch et al, 2009; Bolin & Stanford 1991; Passerini, 2000; Stehr, 2001; Smith & Wenger, 2007; Webb et al., 2002). County elected officials arguably have minimal control over the impacts and damages caused by the hazard event. And, while county elected officials could have considerable influence in shaping the pre-disaster conditions in their counties through their leadership, policy work, and budget decisions, the degree to which pre-disaster involvement in policy related to these issues would impact their role in the short-term recovery period has been unexplored through empirical work.

There are other factors recognized as shaping recovery approaches and outcomes over which elected officials may have influence, but the extent of this potential influence also remains unknown. For example, the literature suggests that recovery efforts are bolstered by involving all relevant stakeholder groups (see for example: Berke et al. 1993; Berke & Campanella 2006; Smith, 2011), including the participation of individual citizens and citizen groups (Kweit & Kweit, 2004). Berke et al. (1993) suggest that, along with stakeholder participation, community level integration, both horizontally and vertically, can also improve recovery efforts, while a lack of integration can result in an increased likelihood that external programs and assistance from other levels of government will not fit the needs of the local community. Horizontal integration refers to the “structural and functional relations among the community’s various social units and subsystems,” while vertical integration involves “the structural and functional relations of a community’s various social units and subunits to extra community systems” (Warren, 1963 as quoted by Berke et al., 1993, p. 101). In addition, recovery efforts are said to be enhanced when led by individuals at the community level who have the knowledge of what to do to accomplish disaster recovery, as well as the necessary resources to carry out recovery activities (Rubin, 1985). The following subsections include an in-depth discussion of these three factors that may affect recovery outcomes—stakeholder participation, integration, and leadership—and how county elected officials may affect these factors.

### *Stakeholder Participation*

Although local government has been charged with responsibility for disaster recovery, it is not the sole participant in the process. In disaster recovery, the local government could potentially receive recovery assistance from the federal and state government, quasi-governmental and nongovernmental organizations, nonprofit relief organizations, private sector organizations, the international community, or individuals and emergent groups (Smith, 2011). Assistance can be financial, technical, or policy-based (Smith, 2011). Any of these entities that offer assistance become participants in the recovery process and may seek to shape how that assistance is used based on their different general approaches to recovery and specific recovery goals (Egan & Tischler, 2010).

In addition to the potential involvement of various stakeholders with differing, and possibly conflicting, goals and approaches in the recovery process, individuals and businesses in the disaster-stricken area will have expectations of the local government based on their perceived needs during disaster recovery; and, these groups may exert significant pressure on localities to fulfill those expectations (Smith, 2011; Stehr, 2001). These individuals and businesses also then become participants in the recovery process.

Conflict amongst stakeholders is common in the recovery process. As noted by Stehr (2009), the recovery period “allows political, social, and economic pressures to build as individual property owners and affected communities compete over differing perceptions of ‘successful’ recovery and over scarce resources” (p. 420). Involving all stakeholders in the recovery process can serve to minimize this conflict by allowing communities to develop a shared vision for recovery, generate a shared understanding and agreement on problems and solutions, create a level of buy-in for recovery planning proposals, and minimize the mobilization of latent populations (see for example: Berke et al., 1993; Kweit & Kweit, 2004; Phillips, 2009; Phillips & Neal, 2004; Reddy, 2000; Smith 2011). Kweit and Kweit (2004) note “…that citizens had an effect on decisions and that cities which attempted to get citizens involved had a substantial effect on the overall evaluation of the success of the recovery” (p. 369).

County governments may be faced with a multitude of additional considerations, constraints, and/or pressures stemming from these various stakeholder groups during the recovery process. It would seem that county elected officials could potentially be involved in meeting and working with these various stakeholders groups on recovery issues in order to address considerations or minimize pressures. However, if and how these considerations and pressures from various stakeholder groups impact county elected officials in disaster recovery has yet to be considered by scholarly research. And the extent to which county elected officials are involved with or incorporate various stakeholder groups during the recovery process also remains unclear.

### *Integration*

As noted in the previous section, many stakeholders are involved in offering disaster assistance to affected communities. One challenge with this assistance is that it often fails to meet the needs of the local community (Berke et al., 1993; Smith, 2011; Stehr, 2001). However, Berke et al. (1993) suggest it is likely integrated communities will be able to use aid available to fit their needs whereas those communities that are nonintegrated may very well find their needs unmet despite aid being available. These authors have adopted a typology from the literature on disaster planning that identifies four different types of communities based on levels of horizontal and vertical integration (Berke, et al., 1993). Using this typology, a Type I community would have both strong horizontal and vertical integration, meaning that ties across individuals and organizations would be robust, allowing the community to exert influence on the recovery process, while also having access to external programs and resources, making it the best suited to accomplishing positive recovery outcomes (Berke et al., 1993). A Type II community would have strong horizontal integration, but weak vertical integration, meaning that it would have a workable local structure, but would lack knowledge and access to important external resources in recovery, which could hinder recovery (Berke et al., 1993). A Type III community would be an example of a dependent community, meaning that it has vertical ties to receive external aid, but lacks the strong local network needed to exert community concerns, needs, or values, so its recovery would be heavily influenced by outside forces (Berke et al., 1993). A Type IV community would lack access to external aid and resources due to lack of vertical integration, but would also be missing the horizontal ties important to recovery, placing it in the most precarious of positions in terms of achieving positive recovery outcomes (Berke, et al., 1993).

Berke et al. (1993) suggest that although integration patterns may be altered in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, such patterns typically revert to pre-disaster horizontal and vertical relationships during recovery, indicating the importance of establishing these pre-disaster relationships. Such sentiments have been echoed in other research on recovery (Nigg, 1995; Phillips, 2009; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1976; Rubin, 1985; Schwab, et al., 1998; Smith & Wenger, 2006; Smith, 2011; Wenger, 1978). However, this tendency to return to pre-disaster relationships does not mean that communities cannot improve their integration patterns during the recovery period. Communities have been shown to move from one type to another type in the aftermath of an event (Berke et al., 1993; Smith, 2011).

Achieving integration is particularly important in those disaster scenarios where the federal government is included in the web of assistance. Prior to 1950, federal assistance to states and localities in disaster recovery remained limited and undefined. Decisions to provide aid to lower levels of government were made on a case-by-case basis by Congress (Rubin 2007; Sylves, 2008). The first piece of general disaster legislation, passed in 1950, provided a standardized process for local and state governments to request specific types of aid and transferred decision making power from Congress to the President (Rubin, 2007; Sylves, 2008).

Since 1950, the federal government has seen its role in disaster recovery evolve dramatically. What initially entailed modest federal assistance in natural disasters to state and local governments has been significantly expanded. New disaster laws have been passed that address a broader range of needs across an extensive array of hazards resulting in the development and implementation of range of new disaster relief programs (Rubin, 2007; Sylves, 2008). The categories and types of assistance have also been expanded to provide aid in the forms of grants, loans, and/or other services directly to individuals and households, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations (Rubin, 2007; Sylves, 2008).

An expansive and complicated web of federal programs now exists. A major disaster or emergency declaration by the president triggers the availability of all or various parts of this labyrinth of programs (Rubin, 2007). These programs typically operate in isolation, both within and across federal agencies (Smith, 2011). Federal disaster assistance in recovery then can be characterized as a complex, confusing, and disconnected system (Smith, 2011).

This system of federal aid can add to the substantial challenges already associated with the recovery process. Hurricane Katrina exposed significant shortcomings of this aid system, including “duplicative efforts, the uncoordinated timing of assistance, counterproductive funding strategies, and a widespread failure to meet local needs following a disaster” (Smith, 2011, p. 37). Further, these prescriptive programs “hinder recovery efforts because local governments perceive that they have a limited set of options” (Smith, 2011, p. 39).

This failure of recovery programs during Hurricane Katrina spurred the federal government to begin to find solutions to these issues. In 2006, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), which required the federal government to develop a national recovery strategy. President Barack Obama ordered the formation of a Long-Term Disaster Recovery Working Group to begin to tackle recovery issues in 2009. This group’s work resulted in the release of the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) in 2011. The NDRF seeks to provide

guidance that enables effective recovery support to disaster-impacted States, Tribes and local jurisdictions. It provides a flexible structure that enables disaster recovery managers to operate in a unified and collaborative manner. It also focuses on how best to restore, redevelop and revitalize the health, social, economic, natural and environmental fabric of the community and build a more resilient Nation (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2011, p. 1).

While this document offers evidence that the federal government is placing a higher emphasis on reducing the disaster recovery challenges associated with the rigid nature of federal disaster recovery programs, the document does not “go far enough to operationalize specific policies, resource allocation strategies, and planning activities” (Smith, 2011, p. 380). While perhaps improved, Smith (2011) suggests federal assistance will continue to perform in an uncoordinated manner that does not fully take into account local needs in disaster recovery.

Efforts made both before and after a disaster to integrate a community horizontally and vertically could potentially help overcome the tensions created by the distributed nature of the assistance network, as well as the shortcomings of the prescriptive nature of current federal disaster recovery programs. County elected officials, often elected because “of who knows them and who they know” (Vogelsang-Combs & Miller, 1999, p. 200), could potentially play an important role in building the necessary relationships to integrate their communities both internally and externally. However, no research has been done that examines the extent to which county elected officials are involved in developing the horizontal and vertical ties that would lead to more positive recovery outcomes for their community.

### *Leadership*

Beyond stakeholder involvement and community integration, local leadership has also been shown to influence recovery outcomes (Rubin, 1985). Rubin’s (1985) model of community recovery indicates recovery can be thought of in terms of a combination of influences from the federal and state government, the local demands and context, as well as three variables controlled by the local level: leadership, knowledge of what to do, and ability to act. While the local community cannot directly impact the federal and state context, it can seek to influence these elements through positive intergovernmental relations (Rubin, 1985) and strong vertical integration as described in the previous section (Berke et al., 1993; Smith, 2011).

The local level has the most control over the three variables of leadership, knowledge, and ability to act, as well as how these variables relate to local demands. The three elements of leadership, knowledge, and ability to act are critical because they exist in all communities to a certain extent, can be manipulated, and interact in predictable ways (Rubin, 1985). While each of these variables is necessary individually no one is independently sufficient to assure recovery (Rubin, 1985).

In this model, leadership that is flexible, allows for creative problem solving, maintains a vision of the future community, sustains links to other decision-makers in the private and public sectors, and attracts motivated and competent assistants will facilitate positive recovery outcomes (Rubin, 1985). However, leaders in recovery may not be singular individuals in a disaster, rather “the leadership characteristics that are important to recovery often have been found in several individuals, each having a different role or set of responsibilities in the recovery process” (Rubin, 1985, p. 24). Rubin (1985) also notes that while leadership in recovery may come from elected or appointed individuals, holding a given office or position is not a prerequisite for being a leader in the recovery process.

Having the knowledge of what to do in recovery and the ability to act are crucial components of being able to effectively lead a community during disaster recovery (Rubin, 1985). Knowledge of what to do includes possessing both general emergency management and recovery-related knowledge, particularly regarding the types of external resources that might be available (Rubin, 1985). Ability to act includes having administrative, technical, and tangible resources, as well as public capacity, to carry out long-term recovery (Rubin, 1985). When these elements are grounded in community-based demands for action, more positive outcomes are associated with the recovery process (Rubin, 1985).

The extent to which county elected officials may exhibit leadership in a recovery scenario remains uncertain and may be a product of their knowledge of what to do and ability to act. As noted in Chapter 1, local elected officials have paid minimal attention to emergency management issues historically instead concentrating on more pressing community concerns (Labadie, 1984; Rubin, 1985; Wolensky & Wolensky, 1990). This dearth of attention toward emergency management could potentially translate to elected officials lacking sufficient knowledge of what to do and limit their leadership role in the short-term recovery process. In particular, a failure to understand the resource requirements associated with the recovery process, the external resources that may be available, how to garner those resources, and how to use those resources effectively could potentially limit the ability of county elected officials to act and therefore minimize their leadership role.

## Community Change in the Recovery Process

Communities with significant stakeholder involvement, strong vertical and horizontal integration, and robust leadership based on a solid knowledge of what to do and ability to act could potentially take advantage of a window of opportunity that exists in the recovery period to undertake mitigation activities or other actions that “both increase the community’s resiliency to future disasters and address ongoing community concerns such as urban decay, traffic, or non-conforming buildings” (Passerini, 2002, p. 68). Rather than simply rebuilding to the status quo, communities have the chance during this window of opportunity to relocate or rebuild in such a way as to improve the quality of life for residents, enhance environmental conditions, and boost local economies (Smith & Wenger, 2006). This notion of “sustainable recovery” (Smith & Wenger, 2006) has grown in popularity within the emergency management community (Passerini, 2001). However, studies suggest that more often than not, little change actually occurs in most communities during the post-disaster timeframe and most return to pre-disaster conditions (Mileti, 1999; Passerini, 2000, 2001).

Improving community resiliency through mitigation activities or advancing sustainability objectives often involves more costs than communities can afford or are willing to spend in the recovery period (Passerini, 2000). Communities, often seeking to revive pre-disaster patterns of culture and human interaction, are also resistant to any changes that may be socially disruptive (Passerini, 2000). In addition, decision-making in recovery occurs in a compressed timeframe, with public pressures to rebuild quickly limiting the time available to systematically evaluate recovery options (Mileti, 1999; Passerini, 2000; Stehr, 2001). Mileti (1999) also notes that “the lack of clear goals at federal, state, or local levels, the complexity of acting in concert with multiple entities, and the absence of institutional capacity brought about by advance planning all help undermine recovery targeted toward mitigation and sustainability” (p. 236).

Structural and cultural barriers may also exist that limit the feasibility of post-disaster community change (Passerini, 2001). For example, the creation of an ecological community with minimal automobile use would face significant structural and cultural barriers if residents are accustomed to driving their personal vehicles, if the community is without public transportation, or if lifelines (e.g., hospitals, schools, grocery stores) are only accessible by car (Passerini, 2001).

Despite the tendency not to see widespread adoption and application of the concepts of resiliency and sustainability after disasters, significant change does sometimes occur. For example, several small communities were relocated out of flood-prone areas after the 1993 Midwest floods (Mileti, 1999). And, the town of Greensburg, Kansas undertook a number of initiatives during its recovery from a destructive tornado that emphasized sustainability themes including energy efficiency and green development practices (Smith, 2011).

Successful post-disaster improvements are more likely when there is a preexisting plan for community improvement and outside funding is available to assist with the changes (Mileti, 1999). Reddy (2000) also suggests that the presence of strong local leadership, a positive link between well-established ways of doing things in a community and new policies, recognition of local rights, high stakeholder involvement in developing strategies, adaption to dynamic local conditions, and monitoring and compliance strategies tailored towards local conditions are all factors that may overcome some of these barriers to change and result in the inclusion of mitigation strategies during the recovery process. Thus, while planning and outside assistance are key components in the recovery process, locally based plans, leadership, and involvement are critical in helping communities achieve greater resiliency and sustainable through the recovery process.

Given the importance of the local level, county elected officials in disaster recovery have an opportunity to significantly influence the extent to which a community incorporates mitigation and sustainability measures during the recovery process. The ability of these elected officials to navigate the pressures associated with competing demands between the desire of a community to rebuild quickly and to rebuild in a more resilient and sustainable manner through the incorporation of mitigation and other measures (Berke & Beatley 1997; May, 1991; Passerini, 2000; Reddy, 2000; Stehr, 2001) could be essential to understanding community change during the recovery process. So too could the ability of these elected officials to identify and obtain outside funding be critical to understanding this change potential (Mileti, 1999). However, it is unknown the extent to which county elected officials are involved in discussions relating to sustainability, resiliency, and mitigation in the recovery period.

## Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that a lack of information exists on the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery. It suggested that county elected officials could be playing instrumental roles in the recovery period through influencing the factors that facilitate recovery tasks and activities, the factors that affect the way recovery is approached and recovery outcomes at the local level, and the factors that determine if a community incorporates mitigation and sustainability initiatives into the recovery process. Yet, as this chapter has also shown, the extent to which elected officials are acting in these various roles remains unknown and may be shaped by county contextual factors. Thus, this study stands to make important contributions to the discipline and the profession of emergency management by exploring the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery. By doing so, it will begin to fill the gap identified in the literature and inform the discipline and practice of emergency management. Next, Chapter Three will describe the research methods proposed for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter Three is organized into five sections. The first section details the methodological approach to this study. The second section outlines the study’s intended population and sampling process. The third section specifies the proposed data collection procedures. The fourth section explains the anticipated data analysis process. Finally, the fifth section discusses the limitations of this study.

Methodological Approach

This study intends to employ qualitative research methods to understand the role of county elected officials during short-term disaster recovery. Qualitative research methods recognize the importance of studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). The recognition that social reality is constructed around people’s frames of reference (Taylor and Bogdan 1998) makes a qualitative approach particularly useful in a study where the purpose is to understand individual’s perceptions of their own roles.

Qualitative methods are also “particularly well suited to exploring issues that hold some complexity and to studying processes that occur over time” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 5). Given the multifarious and temporal characteristics of short-term disaster recovery, it would follow that the roles of elected officials related to it would also be multifaceted and time-based. In addition, qualitative methods can “be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known” (Straus and Corbin 1990, p. 19). A qualitative approach is appropriate for addressing this study’s research question because there is little discussion of this issue in the academic literature and no empirical work on the topic. The study is necessarily foundational in nature. Qualitative methods are clearly the best research option for studying the role of county elected officials in short-term disaster recovery.

Grounded theory data analysis and techniques will be the underlying methodology driving this qualitative research. Although grounded theory has been modified and refined since its inception by Glaser and Strauss (1967) (see for example: Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1996; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a series of fundamental grounded theory components create the foundation of all the grounded theory variations. As articulated by Charmaz (2006), these basic premises include:

* Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
* Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deducted hypotheses
* Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
* Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
* Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
* Sampling aimed towards theory construction, not for population representativeness. (p. 5-6)

Grounded theory research seeks to derive theory from the data rather than imposing on it a predeterminedtheory or hypothesis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With the absence of any guiding theoretical frameworks, this type of research relies instead on the continual interaction between the researcher and the data and allows for reflection, questioning, and refinement of concepts and ideas through the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This continual interaction lends flexibility to the research design since researchers are able to explore questions as they arise and test ideas as they are formulated through the use of theoretical sampling or additional data collections strategies (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theorists posit that substantial contact with, and extensive contemplation of, the data collected, and testing theory as it develops makes it likely that the resultant theory is consistent with empirical reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory allows for the development of rich, descriptive, and explanatory theory rather than a static account of a given phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Since the nature of short-term recovery is dynamic and there is a dearth of empirical knowledge on the role of county elected officials during the recovery period, the most suitable place to begin a line of inquiry on this topic is immersion in detailed data provided by those with the most relevant experiences—namely county elected officials whose jurisdictions have undergone short-term recovery. From this starting point, the researcher can embark on a scholarly expedition, exploring the unknown and following where the intellectual paths lead to discover answers to the research questions at hand.

In addition to being the best methodology for this study, the use of grounded theory methodology is also important to the continued development of the emergency management discipline and theory (Phillips, 2002). With many of the scholarly contributors to the emergency management body of literature coming from other social and physical science disciplines, much of what is known about emergency management is viewed through the lens of the guiding paradigms, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies of the contributors’ respective fields (Jensen, 2010). While the synthesis and subsequent verification of the information gathered by these various disciplines is important to the advancement of the emergency management discipline (Jensen, 2010), it is also imperative that emergency management scholars do not rely solely on the strict importation of theories from outside disciplines. Rather, emergency management researchers must also seek to develop explanations and solutions unique to the discipline that reflect the realities of the emergency management field. Thus, while quantitative methods are appropriate on a large range of topics where initial research has been completed and emergency managers are pursuing verification of application to emergency management phenomenon, in instances where the topic is complex or little is known about it (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), it is necessary for emergency management scholars to set aside theoretical contexts and look to representational settings to provide data that can “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). This discussion should not be taken to suggest that connections to preexisting theory in public administration, political science, organizational behavior, management, sociology, and etcetera may not exist with the topic at hand. Yet, to advance emergency management theory, any relevant preexisting theories from other disciplines must be altered or adapted to the empirical realities of the emergency management field, and not vice versa. Thus, this researcher contends that the proper time for making these connections is upon the completion of a project such this one. Future researchers will have occasion to establish whether the findings from this research offer empirical evidence of existing theory that can be directly imported into the emergency management body of knowledge, suggest needed revisions of existing theory to make them applicable to explaining emergency management phenomenon, or form the foundation of an entirely original emergency management specific theory (Leifeld, 2007).

Population and Sampling

The population for this research study would technically include all county local elected officials in jurisdictions who have experienced a disaster resulting in a short-term disaster recovery process. As the emergency management academic community has yet to reach consensus on the definition of what constitutes a disaster (see for example: Jensen, 2010; McEntire, 2005; Quarantelli, 1998; Perry & Quarantelli, 2005), it becomes important for the purposes of this study to designate how it will be determined whether or not a jurisdiction has experienced one. Numerous means of making this distinction exist. However, due to considerations related to time and feasibility, this study will use receipt of a Presidential Disaster Declaration (PDD) as the threshold for establishing that a disaster occurred in a given county and delineating those counties whose elected officials will be invited to participate. Use of the PDD may well be an imperfect means of determining a disaster occurred due to the subjective and political nature of the PDD process (see for example: Downton & Pielke, 2001; Garrett & Sobel, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Sylves & Buzas, 2007); nevertheless, the request for assistance from the federal government by the county and the state in which it is located suggests that an event of sufficient magnitude has occurred to require subsequent short-term recovery endeavors at the county level.

This study will use a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques to build its sample. Purposive sampling units “are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 78). As this study is interested in the role played by county elected officials during short-term disaster recovery, it would follow that county elected officials would be apt to offer the most pertinent data surrounding that role. County elected officials would then be considered a “homogeneous sample”, or individuals “chosen to give a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon…this allows for detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, p. 79.). Counties undergoing a hazard event may be governed by an elected official or an assembly or board of elected officials. As noted in the literature review, some counties may have additional elected row officers such as such as a county clerk, coroner, sheriff, treasurer, attorney, and tax assessor. Again, due to time constraints and the number of elected officials that may be involved in short-term recovery with a county, not all elected officials located in a county where a PDD has been granted will be invited to participate in this study.

Convenience sampling will be used in combination with purposive sampling to identify a study sample that is realistic for this study. Convenience sampling suggests that a sample is chosen according to ease of access (Patton, 2002). Because, as noted previously, the number of elected officials that may potentially be involved in short-term recovery across counties is prohibitively large to allow for timely completion of this project, it is necessary to reduce this population to a more manageable sample frame. Thus, this study will target elected officials whose responsibilities include the overall supervision or administration of the county government’s operations. It is believed elected officials in these positions as county executives will play a more instrumental role in disaster recovery than those in row officer positions, who have more specific administrative duties.

This study will also look to select only one elected official in each county. Depending on the form of government employed in a county, elected officials in a chief supervisory or administrative position could either be elected county executives or members of an elected board. In those counties where an elected executive exists, that executive will be invited to participate in the study. In those situations where the county is governed by an elected board or other elected assembly of officials, the individual designated as chair or supervisor of the group will be invited to participate. If there is no designated chair, the member of the group with the most tenure in his/her position will be asked to participate.

In addition to limiting participation to one elected official in each county who has supervisory or administrative responsibility over all county operations, a time restriction will be placed on the date of an event. Namely, a county elected official will be invited to participate if his/her county has been granted a PDD between January 1, 2012 and July 15, 2012. Since short-term recovery is associated with the phase transition from response to recovery, the duration of the short-term recovery period remains relatively brief, generally spanning only the first months following a disaster event (Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center [NHRAIC], 2005; Phillips, 2009). Thus, it is anticipated that by the end of the third month after an event, communities will have completed short-term recovery efforts and transitioned into long-term recovery activities.

Using the above limitations on PDDs means that data collection will occur at least three months following any event, potentially allowing for the short-term recovery process to be accomplished. It also means that no event will have taken place more than 15 months prior to the interview, increasing the chances that the county elected official in place during short-term recovery remains in office at the time of data collection. It should be noted that if the current county elected official did not act in that role during short-term disaster recovery, that county will be removed from the sampling frame. It is also important to highlight that although there are two PDDs declared in the early part of July, the triggering disaster events occurred in mid-June, meaning three months will have passed between the date of the event and the anticipated data collection timeframe.

Using these criteria, county executives or board chairpersons from 155 counties would be eligible to participate in this study. These counties represent a geographically diverse area and have been involved with short-term recovery from various hazards. The researcher believes that, although purposive and convenient, this sample will provide meaningful and detailed information regarding the research questions for this study. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the counties that meet the specified criteria, detailing both the states in which the eligible counties are located, as well as the type of hazard event that occasioned the PDD. It should be noted that six counties in Massachusetts did receive a PDD during the designated timeframe. However, these counties were removed from the sampling frame because they have abolished their county governments, meaning they exist as geographic entities only (Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth).

Table 1

*Breakdown of counties that meet the selection criteria*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| State | Hazard Event | Counties Included |
| Alabama | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, And Flooding | 3 |
| Alaska | Severe Storm | 1 |
| Colorado | Wildfire | 2 |
| Florida | Tropical Storm | 34 |
| Hawaii | Severe Storms, Flooding, And Landslides | 2 |
| Indiana | Severe Storms, Straight-line Winds, and Tornadoes | 6 |
| Kansas | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding | 14 |
| Kentucky | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding | 23 |
| Minnesota | Severe Storm and Flooding | 15 |
| New Hampshire | Severe Storm and Flooding | 1 |
| Oklahoma | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding | 5 |
| Oregon | Severe Winter Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides | 12 |
| Tennessee | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding | 10 |
| Utah | Severe Storm | 1 |
| Vermont | Severe Storm, Tornado, And Flooding | 3 |
| Washington | Severe Winter Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides | 11 |
| West Virginia | Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Flooding, Mudslides, and Landslides | 12 |
|  | **Total** | 155 |

*Note.* Data from *Declared disasters*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 29, 2012, from Federal Emergency Management Agency: http://www.fema.gov/disasters.

To achieve sufficient breadth and depth of information while still respecting time constraints, it was determined that this project will target a sample of 50 interviews with county elected officials from the sampling frame. To achieve this desired number, systematic random sampling will be conducted on an alphabetically stratified list of all counties eligible for participation (Chambliss & Schutt 2006). Initially, 75 counties or county equivalents will be chosen using this sampling technique. Depending on response rate, additional samples of 25 counties may be drawn from the sampling frame until the desired interviews are achieved or the list of counties is exhausted.

Grounded theory would dictate that a stipulation be added to the above sampling discussion. In addition to the intended sample described above, grounded theory compels the use of theoretical sampling, meaning “seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate or refine categories in your emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 96). As interviews are conducted and themes or concepts begin to emerge from the data, it may be necessary to pursue additional interviews in relation to an emerging theme or concept. These interviews could potentially include other elected members of a county assembly or board, city level elected officials, county administrators, elected county row officers, emergency managers, or others with relevant knowledge who could offer significant insights related to the findings emerging from the data. Such decisions will be made as the project progresses and in consultation with the researcher’s dissertation advisor.

The intent of grounded theory research is to reach theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glauser, 1998, Glauser & Strauss, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical saturation can be understood as the point at which “no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). However, as noted by Strauss and Corbin (1998), attaining this theoretical saturation can be a challenge, as “new” dimensions or relationships will always emerge given enough energy directed toward so doing. As such, these authors suggest that “saturation is more a matter of reaching the point where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the ‘new’ that is uncovered does not add that much more to explanation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). Seidman (1991) suggests that, in addition to saturation, the notion of sufficiency can be used to determine when an appropriate amount of data has been collected. Sufficiency can be understood to mean that there are “sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experience of those in it” (Siedman, 1991, p. 45).

Given the foundational nature of this study, it is estimated that 50 interviews should be sufficient to cover the experiences of county elected officials located in a range of geographic locations and with a variety of disaster experiences, provide theoretical saturation in at least some categories, and take into consideration “the practical exigencies of time, money and other resources” (Siedman, 1991, p. 45). It is possible that theoretical saturation could be reached prior to the goal number of interviews being achieved. In this case, the total number of interviews could potentially be reduced. Any changes regarding the number of interviews to be completed as part of this project will be made in conjunction with the researcher’s dissertation advisor.

Data Collection

This study will follow Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory model both for data collection and data analysis. To generate strong grounded theory requires obtaining rich data, meaning information that is “detailed, focused, and full” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Therefore, grounded theory researchers adopt data collection strategies conducive to revealing “participants views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Intensive interviewing is one such strategy for achieving this level of in-depth exploration. Intensive interviewing is a particularly valuable data-gathering method for conducting a detailed investigation of a given topic with a person who has had the pertinent experiences because it asks “the participants to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Intensive interviewing then will be used in this study with the expectation that the opportunity to reflect on their short-term recovery experiences in a directed conversation (Charmaz, 2006) will allow county elected officials to provide unique and meaningful insights into the role they played during the short-term recovery process.

Research will commence immediately following the approval of the research proposal by the dissertation committee and approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. Data collection for this study will be conducted using telephone interviews. Interviews will take place throughout the fall of 2012 and, if necessary, into the winter of 2012. The researcher will contact potential participants via email to request their involvement in the project. An information sheet detailing the specifics of the project will be included as an attachment to the invitation email. See Appendix A for a copy of the invitation letter and Appendix B for a copy of the information sheet. Upon their consent to be interviewed, the researcher will schedule an appointment for a date and time convenient to the participant. It is anticipated that the interviews will last one hour or more depending on the participant’s availability and responses to questions.

An interview guide will be used to facilitate the interviews. In keeping with grounded theory methodology, broad, open-ended main questions have been created in order to allow county elected officials to respond in-depth based on their perceptions and understandings of their short-term recovery experiences (Charmaz 2006). The interview guide covers the following topics: background/experience as an elected official, description of the disaster event, and description of the evolution of short-term recovery. The open-ended nature of the questions allows for “ideas and issues to emerge during the interview and interviewers can immediately pursue these leads” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). Follow-up and probing questions will be used as a means to explore these leads. See Appendix C for a comprehensive list of questions and detailed information regarding the information sought for Institutional Review Board (IRB) purposes.

All interviews will be digitally recorded. Digitally recorded interviews will be uploaded to the researcher’s personal computer. The interviews will be transcribed and codes substituted for identifying personal characteristics. Only the researcher and dissertation advisor will have access to the audio files, transcriptions, and codes. Once transcribed, the interview recordings will be deleted from the researcher’s computer. And, once the transcriptions and codes are no longer relevant to this research, they too will be destroyed. In the final product, codes rather than identifying characteristics will be used.

Data Analysis

Pursuant to grounded theory methodology, data collection and analysis will occur simultaneously. This constant interplay between the researcher and the data will follow a set of analytical procedures that offer “a balance between science and creativity” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). More specifically, the proposed analytical steps will offer a level of standardization and rigor to the research process, while still allowing the researcher the flexibility to “extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme from masses of unorganized raw data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13).

Coding will be the critical link between collecting and organizing this mass of data into a meaningful scheme (Charmaz, 2006). Through coding, the researcher will “define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Coding will occur in two phases: initial and focused. The initial coding involves closely reading early data to extract “analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). For the purposes of this project, early data will be considered the data gathered through the first five to ten interviews, with the final number being dependent upon the information that emerges through this initial coding process. It is anticipated that the initial coding of between five and ten interviews will be sufficient to conduct the constant comparative analysis described in the paragraph below.

During the initial coding phase, the researcher will examine and code the data line-by-line. Although a line-by-line examination of the data may appear to be an arbitrary distinction given that not all lines may contain information of relevance to the research questions, such an exercise compels the researcher to “remain open to the data and see nuances in it” (Charmaz 2006, p. 50). Line-by-line coding may also yield insights that inform successive data collection, including both the need for new lines of inquiry for already identified participants, as well as the need to potentially identify additional participants through theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006).

The initial codes developed through the line-by-line coding process will then be examined using a constant comparative analysis, whereby the data will be compared within and across interviews in order to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006). It is anticipated that conducting a constant comparative analysis will yield a series of codes that appear significant and/or are repeated throughout the data set. These codes will then be evaluated through the second phase of coding, focused coding. The focused coding process involves comparing first data to later data to establish the adequacy of the initial codes (Charmaz 2006).

Once determined, these focused codes can then be used to sift and synthesize the information contained in a larger data set (Charmaz, 2006)—in this case, the remaining 40-45 interviews. By comparing the data to the codes, the process allows for the refinement of analytical categories, ensuring that the categories best represent the empirical data (Charmaz, 2006). It should be noted, however, that the coding process is not necessarily linear (Charmaz, 2006). As such, new insights can emerge at any point in this process which may necessitate a reevaluation of earlier data by the researcher to explore issues or topics that may have been initially overlooked (Charmaz, 2006).

Throughout the coding process, the researcher will rely on analytic memos to detail emerging categories, including their definition, scope, applicability, and potential linkages to other categories (Charmaz 2006). Once the analytical categories have been fully developed, these memos will be used to conduct theoretical sorting, a process which seeks to determine the theoretical links between categories by examining the relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006). Diagramming may also be a useful technique for developing these theoretical links, as it offers a visual representation of the categories and their relationships (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher may rely on diagramming in the analysis process if it appears beneficial to theory development.

The researcher ultimately aspires to use theoretical sorting and diagramming to develop an inductive model of county elected officials’ role in short-term disaster recovery that would outline and connect such elements as the tasks and activities they are involved in, the decisions they face, how they make those decisions, and factors that influence how their role in executed. However, it is possible that the analysis may stop short of this point if the data does not support the development of such a model. It is the researcher’s intention to, at a minimum, reason out these different elements and understand the implications of the findings for the profession and academic discipline of emergency management.

In navigating the grounded theory process, it is important to keep in mind that the ultimate goal of this project is to produce a quality final product. A number of criteria have been advanced by experienced grounded theory scholars for evaluating grounded theory research. Charmaz (2006) indicates that credibility of the research and researcher, the originality of the research and how it resonates with and beyond those studied, as well as the usefulness of the research’s interpretations to a discipline or practice, are all valuable criteria for determining research quality. Glaser (1978) notes that the criteria of fit, work, relevance, and modifiability are useful when determining how well the theory fits the collected data. Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest that the presence of dense, well developed categories, built in/explained variation, and new information or guidelines for action that explain phenomenon, direct future research, or guide programs, are all hallmarks of a sound grounded theory study. The researcher will keep these criteria at the forefront when conducting this study and make every effort to ensure that the criteria for a quality study are met when developing the final dissertation product.

Limitations

The results of this study will need to be viewed with caution because the sample was not random, meaning that the findings will not be generalizable to all county elected officials involved in short-term recovery (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Although it is hoped that the interviews conducted will be sufficient to develop an inductive model of the role of county elected officials in short-term recovery, such a model would require further testing to ascertain whether it would be applicable to all local elected officials facing a short-term disaster recovery scenario. This study will only suggest the implications for the discipline and profession of emergency management.

It is difficult to project an anticipated response rate for this project. Salience may be high among county elected officials due to the recent nature of the event, thereby increasing their desire to participate. However, elected officials may also still be in the process of dealing with long-term recovery issues. These issues may decrease the amount of time and energy they have to dedicate towards research. This situation could be problematic since “non-respondents are likely to differ systematically from those who take the time to participate” (Chambliss and Schutt 2006, p. 91).

Because researchers “construct grounded theories through past and present involvement and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10), it must be acknowledged that researcher bias and the researcher’s effect on participants may influence this study (Maxwell, 2006). However, the researcher intends to rely on the “checks” built into the grounded theory methodology as described by Charmaz (2006) to diminish the possibilities of misinterpreting the perspectives of participants. The researcher also anticipates soliciting feedback from the dissertation advisor during the analysis and writing process to assist in identifying any unrecognized bias or assumptions, as well as any flaws in logic (Maxwell, 2006).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the qualitative research methods that will be used for this study. Following Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory methodology, a pre-developed interview guide will be used to conduct telephone interviews with approximately 50 local elected officials at the county level who have experienced a recent disaster, as defined by the county receiving a PDD during the timeframe between January 1, 2012 and July 15, 2012. The grounded theory methodology used for data collection will also be used to code and analyzed the data collected.

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APPENDIX A: Interview invitation letter

NOTE: THIS INVITATION WILL BE SENT BY EMAIL. IT WILL LOOK AS FOLLOWS:

|  |
| --- |
| From: North Dakota State University  Center for Disaster Studies and Emergency Management  Dept. 2351  P.O. Box 6050  Fargo, ND 58108-6050  (701) 231-5595  Dear [*Potential Participant Name*],  I am writing to request your input for an exploratory study on the short-term disaster recovery process at the county level. Short-term recovery can be understood as the transition period between when initial life-saving efforts have concluded and when reconstruction, rebuilding, or otherwise restoring various aspects of communities have fully commenced.  I am exploring this issue because not much is known about short-term recovery at the county level, even while there is reason to believe that there are unique challenges faced by counties confronting a recovery scenario.  I am eager to hear about the recent disaster in your community and your experience in the recovery process. If you would be willing to participate in this project, please contact me to schedule a convenient time for a short phone interview. The interview should take approximately one hour.  Please take a look at the attached document with information about the project. Afterwards, should you have any questions, feel free to contact me by phone at 859-539-0537 or email at [sarah.j.bundy@my.ndsu.edu](mailto:sarah.j.bundy@my.ndsu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Jessica Jensen, who is assisting with this project, by phone at (701) 219-4293 or by email at [ja.jensen@ndsu.edu](mailto:ja.jensen@ndsu.edu).  I thank you in advance for your participation in this research project and look forward to speaking with you about your experiences.  Sincerely,  Sarah Bundy |

APPENDIX b: Information sheet

NDSU_logo.wmf

North Dakota State University

Department of Emergency Management

*Center for Disaster Studies and Emergency Management*

Department 2351

P.O. Box 6050

Fargo, ND 58108-6050

(701) 231-5595

“The Short-Term Recovery Process at the County Level”

INFORMATION SHEET

***Research Study***:

You are being invited to participate in an interview for a research project entitled “The Short-Term Recovery Process at the County Level.” This study is being conducted by Sarah Bundy from North Dakota State University, Department of Emergency Management.

***Purpose of Study***:

The purpose of this research is to explore the short-term disaster recovery process at the county level. Short-term recovery can be understood as the transition period between when initial life-saving efforts have concluded and when reconstruction, rebuilding, or otherwise restoring various aspects of communities have fully commenced.

***Basis for Participant Selection***:

You are being invited to participate in this research project because of your role as an elected official in a county that received a Presidential Disaster Declaration between January 1, 2012 and July 15, 2012.

***Explanation of Procedures***:

Should you choose to participate, we will arrange a time of your choice between September 23, 2012 and February 1, 2013 for an interview. The interview will take approximately one hour unless you have more time and information to share.

The interviews will be conducted over the telephone and will be recorded using a digital recorder to assure that I accurately use the information you provide.

***Potential Risks and Discomforts***:

There should be no potential discomfort or physical, social, psychological, legal, or economic risk to you due to your participation in this study.

***Potential Benefits***:

Not much is known about the short-term recovery process at the county level, even while there is reason to believe that there are unique challenges faced by counties confronting a recovery scenario.

Your participation in this project will increase the information available to educate students and faculty in emergency management higher education programs as well as practicing emergency managers, other local elected officials, and members of local government about the realities associated with short-term recovery from a disaster.

***Assurance of Confidentiality***:

There are several important considerations that will be given to those who participate. First, anything you share in an interview will not be shared with any other interview participants.

Second, the interviews will be digitally recorded. Digitally recorded interviews will be uploaded on to the interviewer’s personal computer. The sound file will then be transcribed and codes assigned for identifying personal and geographic characteristics. The researchers for this project will be the only people in possession of the interviews, paper listing the codes, and their link to participant information. Once the recordings, transcriptions, and codes are no longer relevant to this research, they will be destroyed.

In interview transcriptions, researcher notes, and the final product, codes rather than identifying characteristics (personal or geographic) will be used. Your personal information will be kept confidential. Your name and your jurisdiction will not be used in any reports. Aliases will be substituted instead (i.e. John Smith in County A).

***Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study***:

Your participation is voluntary and you may quit at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your present or future relationship with North Dakota State University or any other benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time.

***Offer to Answer Questions***:

You should feel free to ask questions now or at any time. If you have any questions, you can contact me, Sarah Bundy, at [sarah.bundy@my.ndsu.edu](mailto:sarah.bundy@my.ndsu.edu) or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Jessica Jensen, at (701) 231-5762 or [ja.jensen@ndsu.edu](mailto:ja.jensen@ndsu.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of human research participants, or wish to report a research-related problem or injury, contact the NDSU Institutional Research Board (IRB) Office at (701) 231-8908 or [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](https://webmail.ndsu.nodak.edu/squirrelmail/src/compose.php?send_to=ndsu.irb%40ndsu.edu).

Appendix c: interview guide

Local Elected Officials in Short-Term Recovery

**Interview Guide**

**Introduction Script:** *Before we begin, I want to make sure that you are comfortable with a few things. Are you comfortable with the fact that you have been selected for participation in this research due to your role as a local elected official; that your participation in this project is voluntary; that you can let me know if you want to stop participating anytime; that while your confidentiality is not guaranteed, your name and your county’s name will not be used in the final write-up of the data collected for this research; and, that our conversation is going to be digitally recorded? Do you have any questions before we begin?*

1. Tell me about your experience as a county elected official.

Information Sought:

* description of background, education, and political experience, including number of years in office, emergency management involvement; description of current position, including full-time or part-time position
* description of jurisdiction including demographics, scope of political power, community relationships, and the priority of emergency management in the community

1. Tell me about the [name of disaster event (e.g., 2011 flood)].

Information Sought:

* description of what occurred, extent of impacts/damages, who was involved

1. For the remainder of this interview, I would like to talk about the time period beginning when immediate life-saving measures concluded to three months after the disaster. Tell me about how the recovery efforts evolved in your community during this timeframe.

Information Sought:

* perception of recovery, tasks/activities being done; understanding of views on how recovery is evolving/should evolve
* perception of stakeholder roles in recovery including organizations/agencies/entities involved, level of their involvement, their responsibilities, their relationships with the elected official and desire to/ability of elected official to influence those stakeholders
* perception of degree and scope of elected official involvement in recovery, including view of recovery as within his/her purview, responsibilities within or outside job description, recovery activities pursued, and amount of time/effort spent on recovery issues

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| County Represented: | | | Interview Date: | | |
| State Represented: | | | Time Started: | | Time Finished: |
| Gender: | Education: | Experience: | | Background: | |

# appendix d: institutional review board approval