

Rick Scott has a major power problem on his hands



Analysis by [Chris Cillizza](#), CNN Editor-at-large

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(CNN) — Hurricane Irma has left Florida. But it's left behind a massive logistical -- and potentially political -- problem for Rick Scott.

More than 15 million people are without power in the state, according to the Department of Homeland Security -- to put that in perspective, the state of Florida's population was 20.61 million in 2016. That is a stunning number. And it represents a massive challenge for Florida Power & Light as well as Scott.

"I've had phone calls all day long about nursing homes and assisted living that don't have their power," Scott said Monday. "We've got to work hard to get them their power back."

We know from past history that natural disasters can have significant political consequences -- positive and negative -- for the people (usually presidents and governors) tasked with dealing with them. George W. Bush and Hurricane Katrina. Barack Obama and the BP oil spill. How you handle these things matters. When people are hurting, they look to the government to help. And they never forget if you don't help -- or don't help quickly enough.

To date, Scott has generally won plaudits for his handling of Irma. In the days leading up to the storm, he was all over television -- warning that this storm was very serious and making sure the full assets of the state and federal government were deployed well in advance to deal with it.

But that positive perception is tenuous due to the massive power outages in the state. A few days without power is understandable given the size of Irma and the scope of the damage. But if days turn into weeks, things could get far dicier for Scott politically.

...them to a lesser extent, after we lost power for a full week following Hurricane Gloria in 1985 --

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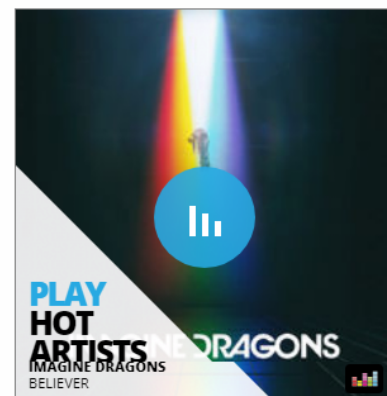
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you know how maddening it is. You can't charge your phone. Or keep the food in the refrigerator or freezer from spoiling. Or, for folks on well water, flush your toilet or take a shower.

Also, it might be September but it's still hot in Florida. It's 88 degrees with 65% humidity right now in Miami. It's 85 with 67% humidity in Naples.

Not having power for a few hours can be exasperating in that sort of heat and humidity. Not having power for a week or more can make people crazy -- and crazy angry.

Florida Republican consultant Mac Stipanovich downplays the likelihood that that anger would be directed at Scott. "The onus for extended post-hurricane power outages usually falls on the utility and local government more than the governor," he said, adding: "If power restoration is too slow, (Scott) can hold important meetings with utility CEOs and scowl a lot, but as long as he does not seem unaware or uncaring, he should not be blamed for power problems, which everyone thinks of as local."

Fair enough. And totally reasonable!

Of course, people aren't always totally reasonable. Especially when they haven't showered in days, are laboring in the heat and have no access to their phones. (Don't underestimate the phone frustration; walk around outside for five minutes and notice how many people are just staring at their phones. it's probably around 95%. Relatedly: Read "[Super Sad True Love Story](#)" by Gary Shteyngart.)

And, the most visible person in the state right now isn't the head of Florida Power & Light. It's Rick Scott. Which means he will probably get more credit than he deserves if power gets restored quickly. And more blame if it, well, doesn't.

How Scott emerges from all of this isn't a theoretical conversation. He is widely seen as a potential candidate against Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson next fall. President Donald Trump, who counts Scott as a personal friend, [has been vocal about his hopes that the governor runs for Senate](#). (In May, [Scott said that he didn't "feel any pressure to get in,"](#) noting that voters don't like long races.) A recent [Florida Atlantic University poll](#) showed the race close -- 42% for Nelson, 40% for Scott.

No matter how Scott's power problem turns out, it will have a major effect on how he is perceived in the state -- and what his chances are against Nelson.

In short: Scott's got a whole lot riding on getting the lights turned back on for Florida.



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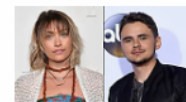
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