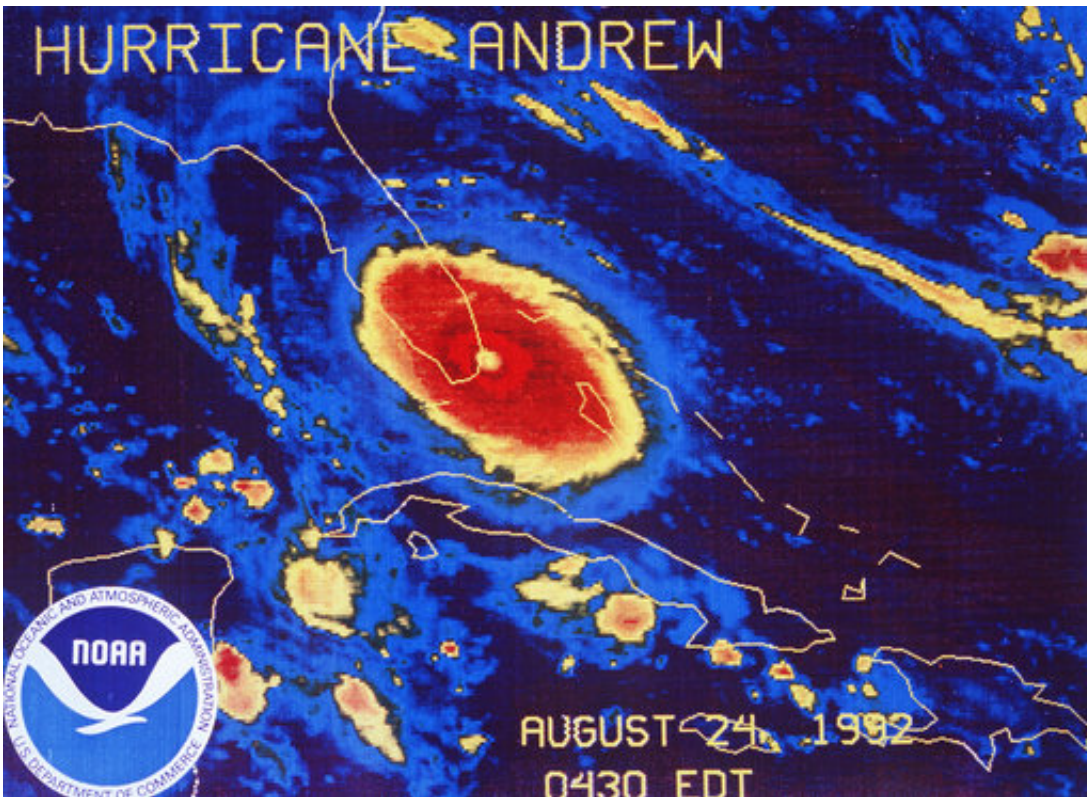


# Andrew was a monster; Irma could blow it out of the water

September 8 2017, by Seth Borenstein

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This Aug. 24, 1992 file image provided by NOAA shows a NOAA GOES-7 thermal infrared geostationary satellite image of Hurricane Andrew approaching landfall south of Miami. For an entire generation in South Florida, Hurricane Andrew was the monster storm that reshaped a region. Irma is likely to blow that out of the water. Bigger and with a 90-degree different path of potential destruction, Irma is forecast to hit lots more people and buildings than 1992's Andrew, said experts, including veterans of Andrew. (NOAA via AP, File)

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At the time, Andrew was the costliest hurricane in U.S. history with damages of \$26.5 billion in 1992 dollars (about \$50 billion in current dollars), according to the National Weather Service.

"The effect of Irma on the state of Florida is going to be much greater than Andrew's effect," said Weather Channel senior hurricane specialist Bryan Norcross, who was a local television meteorologist hailed as a hero during Andrew. "We're dealing with an entirely different level of phenomenon. There is no [storm](#) to compare with this. Unless you go way back to 1926."

Kate Hale, Miami-Dade's emergency management chief—who grabbed national attention during Andrew by beseeching "where the hell is the cavalry on this one?"—said by nearly every measure Irma looks far worse.

"Nobody can make this up. This storm. This track at this point," Hale told The Associated Press on Thursday. Between Hurricane Harvey's record weeklong flooding, devastating Western wildfires and Irma, which was nearing record-levels for the longest time at Category 5 strength, she called the effects on the national economy "potentially staggering."

Both Andrew and Irma started as wisps of unstable weather off Africa and chugged across the Atlantic as ever-intensifying Cape Verde storms.

And while they may both end up in the same general area, meteorologists said that's where the similarities disappear.

Andrew a quarter century ago was an unusually compact major storm that roared east-to-west almost in a straight line and hit just south of the core of Miami. Months after its August 23, 1992, landfall, meteorologists upgraded it to a Category 5 hurricane with 167 mph (268 kph) winds at one point and 17-foot (5-meter) storm surge in another. The storm killed 65 people, according to the National Hurricane Center's report.



In this geocolor GOES-16 satellite image taken Thursday, Sep. 7, 2017, at 11:15 a.m. EDT, shows the eye Hurricane Irma just north of the island of Hispaniola. The fearsome Category 5 storm cut a path of devastation across the northern Caribbean, leaving at least 10 dead and thousands homeless after destroying buildings and uprooting trees on a track Thursday that could lead to a catastrophic strike on Florida. (NOAA-NASA via AP)

Andrew's hurricane force winds were only about 30 miles (50 kilometers) wide and so was its swath of utter destruction.

It was like "an incredible buzz saw giant tornado of a hurricane that hit metropolitan Southeast Florida," Norcross said. Yet outside that area damage was minimal, more like a Category 1 storm.

And the place it hit with its massive winds was on the southern tip of Dade County and any place else would have caused far more damage, Norcross and Hale said.

"As bad as it was, it was as good as it could have been," Norcross said.

Andrew's path also took it straight out of South Florida at relatively high speeds of about 18 mph (29 kph).

The National Hurricane Center's forecast path for Irma is from the south, hitting Miami and perhaps its highly developed and expensive central region, then up through affluent Broward and Palm Beach counties and further north, threatening the entire peninsula instead of just its tip.

For disaster officials trying to rescue people and clean up, that's a big difference.

"Everything north of us was functioning and safe," said Hale, now an emergency manager in Virginia. "This time everything north of them is going to be in bad shape as well."





In this Aug. 25, 1992, file photo, rows of damaged houses sit between Homestead and Florida City, Fla., after Hurricane Andrew struck. After a catastrophic Hurricane Andrew revealed how lax building codes had become in the country's most storm-prone state, Florida began requiring sturdier construction. Now, experts say a monstrously strong Hurricane Irma could become the most serious test of Florida's storm-worthiness since the 1992 disaster. (AP Photo/Mark Foley, File)

Andrew intensified to a Category 5 hurricane just before hitting land, while Irma has been a Category 5 storm for days and is forecast to fluctuate in intensity in the next couple days and could hit as a strong Category 4. But forecasts of a weakening storm are somewhat iffy, meteorologists said.

Another huge factor is Andrew was so small, while Irma is already a normal size storm and likely to grow bigger with up to 100 miles (160 kilometers) wide of Category 5 [hurricane](#) force winds, triple Andrew's

girth, according to Jeff Masters, meteorology director at the private Weather Underground.

Irma "is going over a much bigger population," Masters said. "Andrew missed like four-fifths of the Miami-Dade population centers."

About 1.9 million people lived in Miami-Dade County when Andrew hit. Now about 6 million people live in South Florida's three counties and another 4 million people live in threatened Orlando and Jacksonville.

Irma's forecast track keeps shifting, Thursday afternoon's track puts Irma's power—the northeast quadrant—over Miami and later Jacksonville with the storm directly over Orlando. However the margin of error is still so big it encompasses the entire Florida peninsula.

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