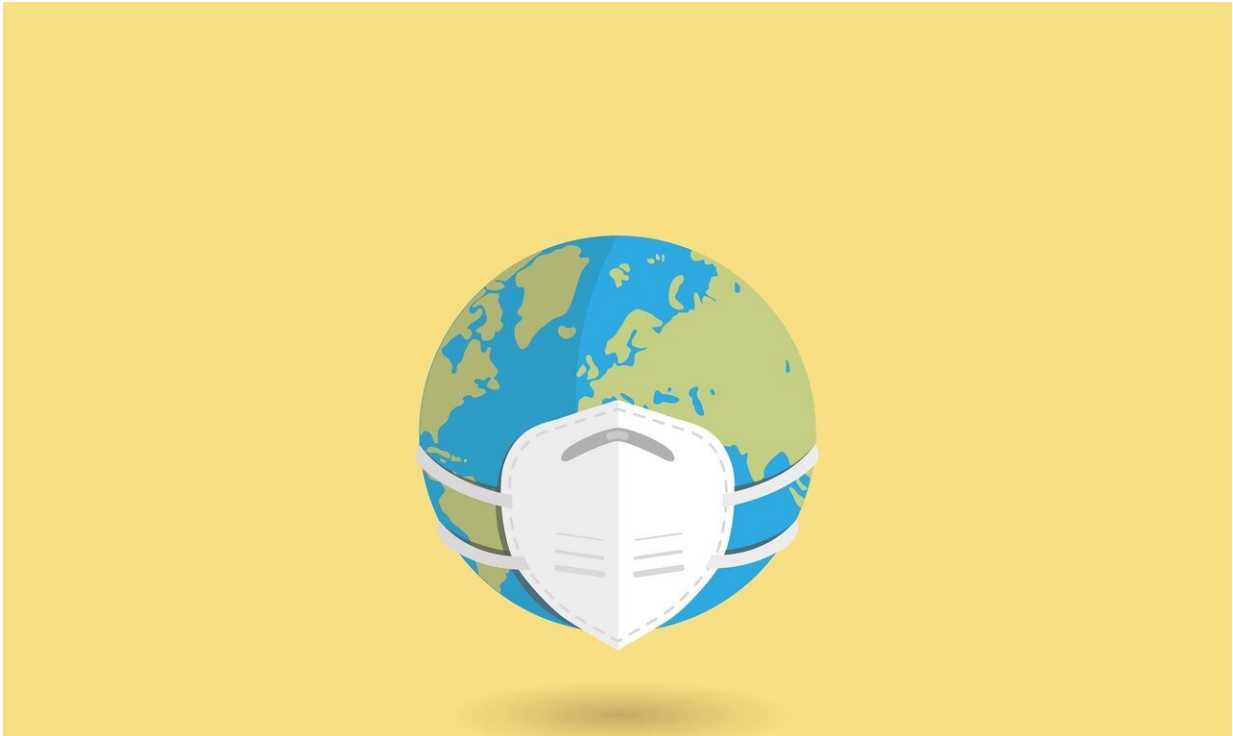


Partisan politics prolong pandemic

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Partisanship has eroded public trust in health agencies and exacerbated the spread of COVID-19, according to Christopher Kulesza, research analyst for the Child Health Policy program, and Quianta Moore, fellow in child health policy at the at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

"Partisan division is still severely inhibiting the United States' COVID-19 response 10 months after the pandemic began," the authors [wrote on the Baker Institute blog](#). "[As we discussed in our post last July](#), there were hints that governors and [federal authorities](#) recognized the positive impacts of social distancing and mask use. Yet we have witnessed further policy entrenchment from most Democratic and Republican officials. The health consequences of this political divide could not be clearer as the pandemic has grown beyond many experts' worst predictions."

Kulesza and Moore argue that political divisions have "transcended traditional policy disagreements" and done significant damage to [public trust](#) in government institutions—including [health agencies](#).

"A significant segment of the American public refuses to accept health advice from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to take the vaccine," they wrote. "[According to Pew Research](#), approximately 70% of Democratic voters plan on taking the vaccine compared to only 50% of Republicans, which is significantly lower than the 90% required to achieve herd immunity."

Partisanship is evident in state vaccine distribution as well, the authors argue. Without federal guidance, states have been left to plan distribution on their own—and [many are devising procedures that deviate from CDC recommendations](#).

"The present division is hindering nearly all meaningful progress on fighting the virus," they wrote. "We need a well-developed plan separated from political motivations to ensure that the vaccines are distributed efficiently and that businesses are not harmed further."

With "pandemic fatigue" making lockdowns increasingly unpopular, President-elect Joe Biden is forced to reject the idea of future

nationwide business closures, the authors argue.

Outside of lockdowns, the CDC says face masks are the best defense against COVID-19. With Republicans [much less likely to wear masks in public](#) and [many Republican-controlled state legislatures not mandating them](#), partisanship is increasing the spread.

"Until the vaccine is ready for improved distribution, policymakers may need to enact legal yet unpopular measures to reduce the current uncontrollable growth of COVID-19 cases," the authors wrote. "Yet politicians will not be motivated to do so until constituents hold them accountable for their unacceptable behavior."

Provided by Rice University

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