

Political variables carried more weight than healthcare in government response to COVID-19

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Political institutions such as the timing of elections and presidentialism had a larger influence on COVID-19 strategies than the institutions organizing national healthcare, according to a research team led by a professor at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Olga Shvetsova, a [political scientist](#) at Binghamton University, and fellow researchers explored [policy](#) strategies on [public health](#) by the federal incumbents worldwide. Specifically, they looked at whether national incumbents led the charge as the pandemic unfolded or waited for the states (provinces) to enact the measures.

Multiple levels of government contributed to the COVID-19 policy response in federations and non-federations both. Decentralization in a country did not diminish the stringency of the overall government pandemic response. Early on, policies in federations were more stringent than those in non-federations.

"Our evidence shows that, by and large, the coordination among the federal and subnational governments in federations did not fail, and the incumbents in federations collectively managed to provide at least as much protection to their citizens as the incumbents in unitary states, though the balance of federal versus subnational policy contributions varied," said Shvetsova.

Still, different federations responded in different ways. The researchers discovered a large variation across federations, so significant that they believe it deserves an institutional explanation.

Specifically, scholars explored how "political incumbents' strategies in mitigating . . . the COVID-19 pandemic were influenced in federations by the constitutional/electoral and health-related [political institutions](#)."

"We developed conjectures about the institutional variables conducive to more stringent public health policies and about institutional determinants of greater involvement of the federal government in [pandemic](#) public health policies," Shvetsova said.

They found that political institutional variables influenced COVID-19 federal strategies, even to a greater extent than countries' healthcare institutions.

"Diffusion of executive accountability, such as in a multiparty executive and with more fragmented parliaments, possibly increased the willingness to engage in more stringent policy response to the virus," Shvetsova said.

The research found that presidential executives avoided making stringent policies if the next election date was closer. Also public health policies of Left national executives were on average more

stringent.

The paper, "Federal Institutions and Strategic Policy Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic," was peer reviewed and is in the process of being published in *Frontiers in Political Science—Elections and Representation*.

More information: Olga Shvetsova et al, Federal Institutions and Strategic Policy Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic, *Frontiers in Political Science* (2021). DOI: [10.3389/fpos.2021.631363](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.631363)

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