# Too much polarization may kill you

#### Trust, Polarization, and Excess Mortality for COVID-19 across European regions

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Expert recommendations to control the spread of the virus (e.g. social distancing, staying at home)

have been adopted to a far larger extent by *some governments* than others, and followed more by *some societies* than others.

# Why some territories have performed better than others in the fight against COVID-19?

- Caveat: Too early to call (we focus on the 1st wave)
- What is "performance"?
- Most research focused on **government outputs**
- e.g. anticontagion measures, such as school and workplace closures, restrictions on mobility, cancellation of public events, or public information campaigns (Cheibub, Hong and Przeworski 2020, Hsiang 2020, Sebhatu et al. 2020)
- Our paper = **outcomes**
- Dependent variable = total deaths by region in 2020 between weeks 1 and 22 (until end of May) in comparison with the average deaths by region for the years 2015-2019 in 153 European regions



# Existing explanations: Importance of Trust

- Until effective medicines & vaccines, key variable = human behavior
- 1) Social Trust: social responsibility of citizens (e.g. Bartscher et al. 2020, Borgonovi and Andrieu 2020, Frey, Chen, and Presidente 2020)
- Strong Association between Social Trust and higher adoption of Health and Prosocial Behaviors (e.g. early reduction of mobility, more social distancing)
- 2) Trust in Government (Fukuyama 2020)
- Some: Association between Trust in Government and higher adoption of Health and Prosocial Behaviors (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020, Han et al. 2020)
- Others: unimportant for predicting voluntary compliance (Clark et al. 2020)

- Not so much Levels of Trust, but Variations in Trust within the population
- Not how much people trust government, but **How different people** (e.g. Democrats vs Republicans) trust government differently

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- 1) Mass polarization = differences in institutional trust between government supporters and nonsupporters
- 2) Elite polarization = exacerbated ideological differences among political parties
- Mechanisms:
- A) Lack of Opposition Support for tough measures
- In pandemics, governments need the support of opposition to take unpopular measures

# State of emergency in Spain

 "After Europe's strictest lockdown, Spain rushed its release. The pp joined Catalan and Basque nationalists in refusing to support the renewal of the state of emergency under which the government could restrict activity. Rebuffed, Mr Sánchez handed control of the pandemic to the regions" (The Economist, Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>)

#### Worst in class

New daily confirmed covid-19 cases, 2020 Per 100,000 population, seven-day moving average



- 2) Elite polarization = exacerbated ideological differences among political parties
- Mechanisms:
- A) Lack of Opposition Support for tough measures
- B) Governments give priority to core constituencies' short-sighted interests
- Instead of following scientific advice on what is better for the society as a whole, governments may prioritize the (narrower) interests of core constituencies

# Thousands march in Spain on women's day despite coronavirus fears

By Elena Rodriguez

2 MIN READ



MADRID (Reuters) - Thousands of women across Spain marched on Sunday against gender inequality to mark International Women's Day, despite concerns the gatherings could help the spread of coronavirus.









Three Spanish government ministers who led the women's rally later tested positive for the virus, as did Mr. Sánchez's wife and mother (NYT)



Ms Díaz Ayuso opposes any new regional lockdown, saying it will be "death to our community"

Given the importance of bars and restaurants to the Spanish economy....On June 8 the region said it would reopen the interiors of bars and restaurants. The Madrid hospitality association declared itself "very satisfied"

Financial Times

Under Andrew Cuomo, New York governor, the state has been stubborn about lifting restrictions on indoor dining — a policy that has suppressed the virus but at a huge cost to businesses.

"Certainly, the governor and [New York City] mayor [Bill de Blasio] have erred in the direction of favouring the health over the economic side of the crisis," says Kathryn Wylde, president of the Partnership for New York City, a group of business and civic leaders. *Financial Times* 



#### "A Tale of Two Cities"

#### Madrid came out of lockdown much more rapidly than New York

Number of people traveling to cafés, restaurants, retail and leisure venues, or to their usual place of work, as a % of baseline\*



© FT



New confirmed cases of COVID-19 between March and September in



https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page

100

80

https://cnecovid.isciii.es/covid19/#ccaa

- 2) Elite polarization = exacerbated ideological differences among political parties
- Mechanisms:
- A) Lack of Opposition Support for tough measures
- B) Governments give priority to core constituencies' short-sighted interests
- C) Governments politicize neutral, scientific-based bureaucratic agencies fighting against the pandemic. Imposition of populist measures over experts criteria

The New York Times

PLAY THE CROSS

Opinion

# WHEN SCIENCE IS PUSHED ASIDE BY JENEEN INTERLANDI

This article is part of a special Sunday Review: End Our National Crisis.



# Politicization in the US

- F.D.A: officials were "forced" by Trump to authorize unproven coronavirus treatments that Trump champions but that scientists advise against
- e.g. malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, convalescent plasma (NYT)
- C.D.C: Political appointees have prevented scientists at the agency from publishing a range of crucial guidelines and edicts meant to shepherd the nation through the pandemic.
- E.g. "decisions across the country about school openings and closings, testing and mask-wearing have been muddy and confused, too often determined by political calculus instead of evidence" (ibid.)

### Politicization in Madrid

No less than 15 high-rank officials in health care have resigned or being fired since May 2020





Dirección General de Salud

CONSEJERÍA DE SA

#### ANÁLISIS DE SITUACIÓN DE LA COMUNIDAD DE MADRID EN RELACIÓN AL DESCONFINAMIENTO

Madrid, 05 de mayo de 2020

En el presente informe se hace un análisis pormenorizado de la situación epidemiológica de la Comunidad de Madrid referente al COVID-19 así como modelos predictivos en función de datos reales de las curvas del pico pandémico en Madrid.

En base al análisis de dicha información se llega a las siguientes conclusiones:

En la actualidad existe una circulación moderada de SARS-CoV-2 en la Comunidad de Madrid, a expensas fundamentalmente de casos secundarios que se están generando en el medio

# Hypotheses

SOCIAL DIVISION:

- MASS POLARIZATION H1: The higher the Difference in Institutional Trust between government and nongovernment supporters in a region, the higher the excess mortality in the region.
- SOCIAL TRUST: H2: The lower the level of **Social Trust**, the higher the excess mortality in the region.

POLITICAL DIVISION:

- POLARIZATION: H3: The higher the level of Ideological Polarization among the political parties in a region (in Left-Right, and in Party Fragmentation), the higher the excess mortality in the region.
- POPULISM: H4: The higher the level of **Populism**/anti-experts politics in a region (proxy: the higher TAN), the higher the excess mortality in the region.

### H5: Institutional trust among citizens reduces the negative effects of political polarization on excess mortality

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	baseline	Social trust	Institutional Trust
Ave. life Exp.	2.418***	1.907**	2.388***
	(0.786)	(0.866)	(0.725)
GDP (log, PPP)	-1.133	1.757	0.978
	(5.050)	(6.852)	(6.512)
Pop. Dens. (log)	2.905*	2.786*	3.029**
	(1.394)	(1.566)	(1.361)
EQI 2013	-0.465	1.366	0.491
	(1.800)	(1.740)	(2.727)
Institutional trust mean			-1.947
			(3.607)
Institutional trust diff			3.869**
			(1.718)
Social trust mean		-4.101**	
		(1.777)	
Social trust diff		0.672	
		(1.397)	
Observations	159	152	152
	0.000	155	100
K <sup>4</sup>	0.263	0.266	0.288
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.244	0.236	0.258
F test	10.18	13.94	12.57



	H1	H2
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Standard errors, clustered at the national level, in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

	Hypotheses 3	Hypotheses 3	Hypothesis 4
VARIABLES	Ideological polarization	Ideological polarization	Populism/Anti-experts
	Left Right	Fragmentation	GAL-TAN
Ave. life Exp.	2.728***	2.985***	3.531***
<u>-</u>	(0.879)	(0.765)	(0.812)
GDP (log, PPP)	4.314	5.369	1.653
021 (109,111)	(5.761)	(6.513)	(6.550)
Pop. Dens. (log)	3.423**	2.378**	3.217**
	(1.279)	(0.973)	(1.254)
EQI 2013	0.771	1.760	0.457
	(3.329)	(2.935)	(2.955)
Institutional trust mean	14.292	32.909*	15.284
	(9.527)	(17.936)	(10.376)
Institutional trust diff	3.994**	5.138**	4.154**
	(1.611)	(1.916)	(1.510)
Left Right max diff	11.166**		×
	(4.955)		
Institutional trust mean*LR max diff	-2.556*		
	(1.176)		
Party fractionalization		<mark>217 734*</mark>	
Tarty fractionalization		(103.534)	
Institutional trust mean* Party		_ <i>1</i> 7 395*	
fractionalization		+7.575	
nactionalization		(22, 509)	
Gal-tan mean		(22.30))	<mark>15 804**</mark>
			(6.921)
Institutional trust mean* Gal-tan mean			-3.309*
			(1.654)

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Party fractionalization		217.734*	
Institutional trust mean* Party fractionalization		(103.534) -47.395*	
Gal-tan mean		(22.509)	<mark>15.804**</mark>

<mark>(6.921)</mark> -3.309\*

Institutional trust mean\* Gal-tan mean