1. Title
“Do Governors Lead or Follow? Timing of Stay-at-Home Orders”

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3. Abstract
I use daily Google search data on the keyword “Coronavirus” to track early resident interest in the novel Coronavirus pandemic. I ask whether governors are responding to heightened interest (i.e., following) or if their decisions are independent of citizen sentiment (i.e., leading). I show that Stay-at-Home orders are initiated sooner in states that saw early, heightened interest in the virus. This suggests that governors follow voters' opinions, preferences, and sentiments. Exploring potential heterogeneous effects, there is not a difference in the size of this effect between Republican and Democrat governors, nor is there a difference between those up for re-election in 2020 and those not. I do find that governor responsiveness is related to the state's economic freedom and the governor's approval rating just before the pandemic. In a novel environment without precedence, governors in the U.S. are setting policy in accord with voter interest.

4. Data description
I use daily Google Trends data for the number of searches for the keyword “Coronavirus” in each state from January 1, 2020 to April 23, 2020. My dependent variable is the date the governor of each state issued a Stay-at-Home order, obtained from public news sources. In the exploration of heterogeneous treatment effects, I use data from the Economic Freedom of North America index (most recent year = 2017) and Morning Consult’s publicly-available data on governor approval ratings (as of December 31, 2019).

5. JEL codes for the project
H12; D8; I1

6. Key-words
Coronavirus; Google Trends; governor; responsiveness; Stay-at-Home orders

The working paper can be found here: