Title: Partisanship and Public Health: Early Evidence from Belgium during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: We investigate how partisanship affects the authority of the executive branch by looking at the relationship between electoral support for the governing coalition and COVID-19 deaths across Belgian municipal districts. Applying spatial autoregressive modelling, we find that higher support for the party in the minority governing is associated with lower growth in coronavirus infections, although the cross-municipality divergence becomes less pronounced over time. These results persist after controlling for median income, population, population density, time and region fixed effects. After ruling out alternative explanation, such as a far-right effect, we suggest that public health measures, even in the context of a pandemic, may command less authority, at least initially, among opposition voters.

Data Description: This paper employs secondary data collected from Belgian official statistics department and Belgian Institute for Health. Data are aggregated at municipality-level.

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Keywords: Belgium; COVID-19; Partisanship; Social distancing


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