Title - "State-Wide Stay at Home Orders: Science-Based, or Ideologically Driven?"

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3. Abstract

Beginning in mid-March, 2020, the majority of governors in states across the U.S. began issuing stay-at-home orders to protect their citizens from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to hopefully aid in “flattening the curve.” But the rates at which these stay-at-home orders were issued varied, with some states (eight in all) never issuing blanket orders at all. This paper explores this variability with two hypotheses: that the variation in policy response was driven by scientific evidence, including infection rates and recommendations by epidemiologic experts, and that the orders were ideologically driven, with political factors including governor’s political party and percent of the state voting for Trump in 2016 affecting the time to response in issuing a stay-at-home order. Of course, both sets of variables could have some effect on the final time to response, but in discovering which set of factors matter more, and where, it could inform future policy responses to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to predict policy responses to similar health crises in the future.

4. Data description

We have gathered a host of political variables (including governors’ political party, and % of the electorate in each state that voted for Trump in 2016), scientific variables (date of first COVID-19 patient infection per state, # of science fairs per state), and demographic variables (% urban, population density, education, per capital GDP), and our dependent variable is time to response in issuing a stay-at-home order, from March 1, 2020.

5. JEL codes for the project: H7, I1

6. Key-words: pandemic, social distancing, state public policy, epidemiology, health crisis