

Study: Political systems influenced how countries initially responded to COVID-19

October 5 2021

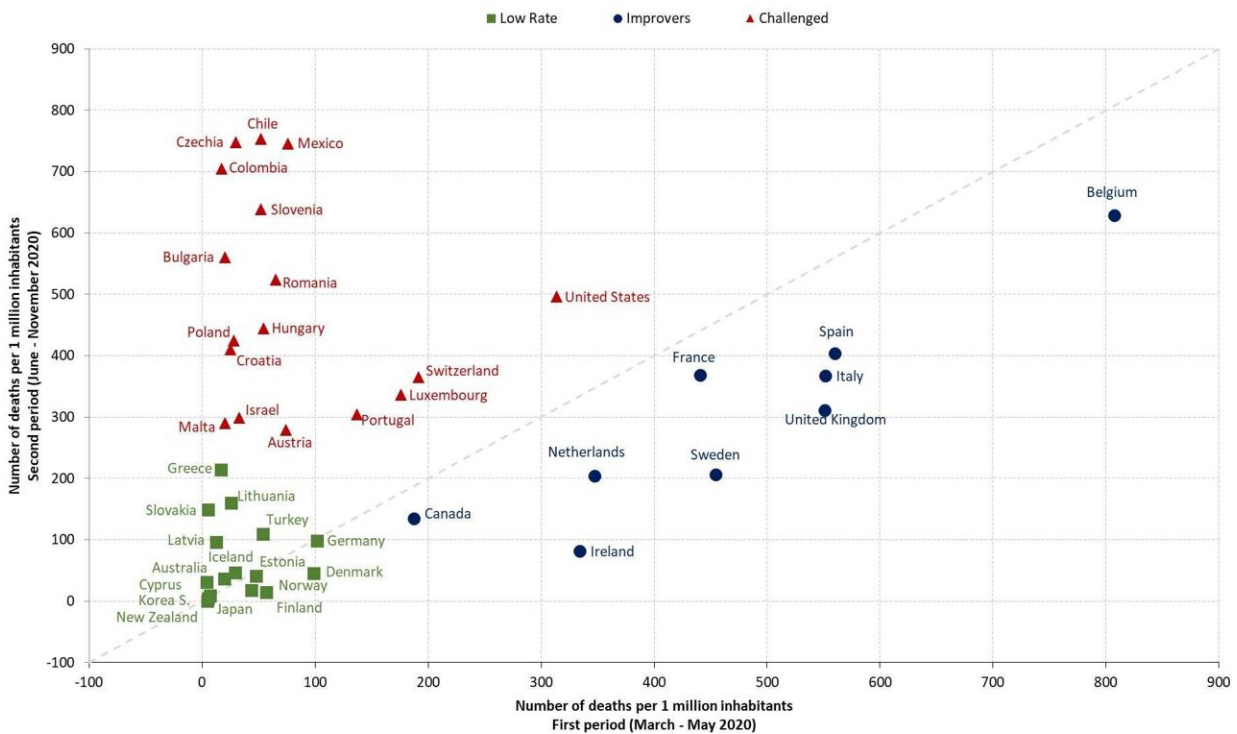


Fig 1. Cluster analysis of 42 countries' death rates from two time periods. Credit: DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0257757

An international study led by Keele University's Emeritus Professor Michael Rigby has assessed the factors that influenced how different countries' responses affected early control of COVID-19.

A new study, published in *PLOS ONE*, found that healthcare resources and spending had little impact on how well countries dealt with the pandemic. Instead, it was the countries that had a more empowering and open style of government that handled the situation better, along with those which were seen to respond to scientific advice and supported their people's societal awareness, such as by encouraging strong participation in higher education.

The pandemic hit the developed world in many different ways, and countries had to respond rapidly within existing resources, structures, and processes to manage totally new healthcare challenges.

The study was led by Emeritus Professor Michael Rigby and aimed to identify which pre-existing factors meant countries had better outcomes from the pandemic in the first nine months, despite different starting points.

The researchers looked at data from 42 countries to identify the characteristics of health systems and societal behavior which were most strongly identified with more successful initial pandemic control.

Proportional representation electoral systems, having a [coalition government](#), and being of medium [population](#) size also had strong positive links to how well countries fared in managing the crisis.

The findings from the study provide important information for pandemic and emergency preparations, by showing that it is not simplistic volume of resources or forcefulness of government, but informing and empowering the population and the health system, which have the biggest impact and influence on outcomes.

Professor Rigby led a team of fellow researchers from the Public Health Department, Medical University of Lublin, Poland and the Institute for

Research on Population and Social Policies from the Italian National Research Council.

Professor Rigby said: "The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented catastrophic phenomenon, which challenged not only every nation's health system capacity for diagnosis and active public health prevention as well as treatment, but also required major changes in national policies and societal behavior.

"The findings unexpectedly showed that total resources of health system, or good preventive [health](#) programs, had little effect on the outcome of handling of this disease; the key linkages were with open government and population participation in third level education. Countries' electoral systems, style of [government](#), and population size had strong correlations with how well they handled the crisis, as exemplified by the three countries most successful in restricting the growth of the [pandemic](#) after the initial three months—namely, New Zealand, Ireland and Finland."

More information: Michael J. Rigby et al, When Covid-19 first struck: Analysis of the influence of structural characteristics of countries - technocracy is strengthened by open democracy, *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0257757](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257757)

Provided by Keele University

Citation: Study: Political systems influenced how countries initially responded to COVID-19 (2021, October 5) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-political-countries-covid-.html>

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