

Unexpected effects of national social insurance on support for county-level public health policies

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Research funding: The University of Oregon Department of Economics, a University of Oregon COVID-19 Research Innovation Award, the continuing support of the R.F. Mikesell Foundation

Introduction

Background

- Significant political polarization in US
- Major disagreement over the role of government in providing for those in need
- Pandemic policies affect employment rates, increasing reliance on social safety net
- Extent of social safety net may affect support for pandemic mitigation strategies

Introduction

Research question:

How does national social safety net affect support for local pandemic policies?

Method:

Choice experiment with randomized pandemic scenarios and policies

Significance:

Political polarization has no end in sight. The next pandemic may be just around the corner.

Federal benefits

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The debate

Coronavirus: GOP Senators object to help for unemployed

Congress is working for pass a \$2T stimulus package

[Mercury News - March 25, 2020](#)

The debate

Coronavirus: GOP Senators obje

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Mercury News - March 25, 2020

“Anytime you’re using federal money, it **shouldn’t disincentivize the ability to work**,” McCarthy said in a separate interview on “Sunday Morning Futures.” “We made a mistake when we overpaid on unemployment insurance where now it’s hard for people to come back to work because **they’re making more on unemployment than they can working**. So we’ve got to straighten that out as we move forward.”

Washington Post - July 20, 2020

The debate

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Hannity challenges Mnuchin on coronavirus bill: Expanding unemployment benefits 'angers my audience'

The Hill - March 26, 2020

The debate

Coronavirus:

Conspiracy theorists

Hannity claims coronavirus unemployment audience

The Hill - March

Ron Johnson

Stated on August 2, 2020 in a TV interview:

“Depending on which study you look at, either 68% or 5 out of 6 individuals ... are making more on unemployment than they did on the job.”

Politifact - August 13, 2020

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The debate

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Coronavirus: \$600 Unemployment Benefits Are ‘Disincentivizing’ Work, Says Ron Johnson

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“Depending on who you talk to, it’s either a disincentive to work or it’s not. I think it’s a disincentive to work.”

For Many, \$600 Jobless Benefit Makes It Hard To Return To Work

May 26, 2020 · 10:14 AM ET

SCOTT HORSLEY 

NPR · May 26, 2020



The image is a composite of several news snippets. At the top right, a quote from a separate interview is shown: "Anytime you're using federal money, it **shouldn't disincentivize the ability to work**," McCarthy said in a separate interview on "Morning Futures." "We". Below this, a headline from the New York Times reads "Coronavirus: \$600 Unemployment Benefits Are 'Disincentivizing' Work, Says Ron Johnson". A box highlights a statement by Ron Johnson: "stated on August 2, 2020 in a TV interview: **“Depending on who you talk to, it’s either a disincentive to work or it’s not. I think it’s a disincentive to work.”**". Below this is another headline: "For Many, \$600 Jobless Benefit Makes It Hard To Return To Work". A photo of Scott Horsley is shown with his name and a Twitter link. At the bottom, a snippet from NPR dated May 26, 2020, is displayed. To the right of the news snippets is a "Politifact Truth-O-Meter" graphic, which is grey with a green button and the text "MOSTLY TRUE" and "POLITIFACT TRUTH-O-METER".

The debate

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NPR - May

New Study Finds Expanded Jobless Benefits Don’t Reduce Employment

July 31, 2020 · 4:10 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

NPR - July 31, 2020

The debate

Coronavirus: \$600 Jobless Benefits

Hannity claims

For Many, \$600 Jobless Benefits Hard To Replace

Millions of unemployed in US face hardship under Republican benefit cuts

The Guardian - May 21, 2021

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Biden administration unable to continue \$300 weekly pandemic

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CNN - May 21, 2021

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The other debate



The other debate



Are these preferences related?

Stated choice experiment

- Before the consent screen...
 - Basic demographic information
 - Qualtrics passively collects lat/long, device type and date & time
- Survey instrument
 - Short update on county and national covid conditions
 - Description of choice task
 - Referendum-style vote on hypothetical pandemic policies
- 993 participants from Washington, Oregon and California, collected Jan 13 - Feb 16
- Policies described in terms of:
 - Context: duration and federal safety net
 - Reduction in cases, deaths
 - Restrictions on 10 categories of businesses/activities
 - Increased unemployment and resulting loss in income

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 - **Increased unemployment and resulting loss in income**

Instructions to respondents

Respondents did not get to vote on Federal UI payments:

Assume that any Federal unemployment benefits, as described, will be in place regardless of any pandemic rules that apply in [respondent's] County.

We emphasized that costs/unemployment would be uncertain, unequal, and related:

These “Average \$/month lost” because of a policy are mostly a RESULT of unemployment and lost business earnings. They are not an extra cost on top of that.

Before a policy is adopted, we don't know exactly who will bear costs that are higher or lower than the average. **Your own household's actual cost per month will be uncertain.**

Choice task: preamble

12:00 PM
oregon.qualtrics.com

Please consider all features of each policy:

- Its **duration**;
- Baseline **cases and deaths** likely during that time, if no rules are imposed (on the left);
- The cases and deaths the policy would **prevent** (on the right);
- The policy's **mix of rules** on businesses or activities that your household may care about;
- The economic **cost of the policy**, as measured by
 - **Unemployment** (the share of workers unable to find jobs), or
 - **Average \$/month lost** for households in your county.

Remember, if the information in the table is not detailed enough, you can **click on the name of each feature** to review explanations.

The **Average \$/month lost** for Policy A takes into account **\$200/week in extra unemployment benefits** from the Federal government for those who are eligible.

Vote at the bottom of the screen, just as you would if this were a secret ballot in a real referendum. The policy would apply to the 368,882 people in Lane County. Be sure to think carefully about *whether your household could live with the policy's costs*. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. No one will be able to connect your choices in this survey to you as an individual.

Choice task: alternatives

Mail 11:54 AM 81% oregon.qualtrics.com

Policy:	A
Duration in months	2
13,988 cases, reduced by	7,415
147 deaths, reduced by	70
Strictness of rules:	
Grocery, essential retail	
Non-essential retail	
Schools, daycare	
Universities, colleges	
Parks, outdoor sports	
Gyms, indoor sports	
Theaters, concert halls	
Restaurants, bars, clubs	
Meetings, religious services	
Assisted living facilities	
Measures of cost:	
Unemployment	25.6%
Average \$/month lost	\$150
Policy:	A

Choice task: alternatives

The image displays two screenshots of a mobile Qualtrics survey interface, showing two different policy alternatives, A and B.

Screenshot 1 (Policy A):

- Policy:** A
- Duration in months:** 2
- 13,988 cases, reduced by:** 7,415
- 147 deaths, reduced by:** 70
- Strictness of rules:**
 - Grocery, essential retail: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Non-essential retail: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Schools, daycare: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Universities, colleges: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Parks, outdoor sports: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Gyms, indoor sports: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Theaters, concert halls: 3 bars (all green)
 - Restaurants, bars, clubs: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Meetings, religious services: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Assisted living facilities: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
- Measures of cost:**
 - Unemployment: 25.6%
 - Average \$/month lost: \$150
- Policy:** A

Screenshot 2 (Policy B):

- Policy:** A
- Duration in months:** 2
- 13,988 cases, reduced by:** 7,415
- Policy duration (months):** The length of time for the policy
- Strictness of rules:**
 - Non-essential retail: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Schools, daycare: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Universities, colleges: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Parks, outdoor sports: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Gyms, indoor sports: 3 bars (all pink)
 - Theaters, concert halls: 3 bars (all green)
 - Restaurants, bars, clubs: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Meetings, religious services: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
 - Assisted living facilities: 2 bars (1 green, 1 pink)
- Measures of cost:**
 - Unemployment: 25.6%
 - Average \$/month lost: \$150
- Policy:** A

Choice task: pop-ups

Policy: A

Duration in months 2

13,988 cases, reduced by 7,415

Grocery stores, other essential services ×

■■■ = All open, minimal restrictions

■■■■ = Masks required

■■■■■ = Masks required, limited occupancy

■■■■■■ = Delivery or curbside pickup only

Restaurants, bars, clubs ■■■■

Meetings, religious services ■■■■

Assisted living facilities ■■■■

Measures of cost:

Unemployment	25.6%
Average \$/month lost	\$150

Policy: A

Policy: A

Duration in months 2

13,988 cases, reduced by 7,415

Non-essential retail stores, and personal services ×

■■■ = All open, minimal restrictions

■■■■ = Masks required, distancing, no waiting indoors

■■■■■ = Masks required, limited occupancy (clients only), wellness assessment required

■■■■■■ = Delivery or curbside pickup only, online consultations where feasible

Measures of cost:

Unemployment	25.6%
Average \$/month lost	\$150

Policy: A

Choice task: vote

In a vote about whether to adopt Policy A, or to set no pandemic rules, I would choose:

Policy A with its cost and its mix of rules (reduces cases by 7,415 and deaths by 70)

No pandemic rules, and just accept the 13,988 cases and 147 deaths expected if we let everyone decide for themselves what to do

Selection correction

Placeholder slide.

Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Cost (fed UI = \$0)	-0.284***	-0.301***		
Cost (fed UI > \$0)				
Cost (fed UI = \$100)	0.125	0.088		
Cost (fed UI = \$200)	0.131	0.105		
Cost (fed UI = \$300)	0.665***	0.659***		
Cost (fed UI = \$400)	0.166	0.194		
Unemp (fed UI = \$0)	0.097**	0.098**		
Unemp (fed UI > \$0)				
Unemp (fed UI = \$100)	-0.028	-0.017		
Unemp (fed UI = \$200)	-0.001	0.001		
Unemp (fed UI = \$300)	-0.079***	-0.083***		
Unemp (fed UI = \$400)	-0.015	-0.014		
Status quo	-2.008***	-2.552***		

Models (1) and (3) treat business restrictions as continuous controls. Models (2) and (4) use indicator variables for business restrictions. All models include cases, deaths, and de-

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Models (1) and (3) treat business restrictions as continuous controls. Models (2) and (4) use indicator variables for business restrictions. All models include cases, deaths, and de-