

A THEORY OF EXPERTS' INFLUENCE EROSION OVER TIME: THE WANING HOLD OF EPIDEMIOLOGICAL PROJECTIONS' DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

In the face of protracted crises like climate change or pandemics, the influence of expert scientific projections on policy is crucial yet evolves over time. This study offers an empirical demonstration of a previously fragmented theory: the diminishing influence of scientific projections on policy over time. Leveraging a comprehensive mixed-method analysis, we study the interplay between expert projections, policy stringency, and public support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientific projections that put forward worst-case scenarios have a considerable impact on policies made in the early stages of a crisis. However, as these catastrophic projections instill a sense of fatalism as the crisis lasts, they inadvertently lead to diminished public support for both the policies and the scientific projections themselves. The implications of these findings for scientists and experts are discussed, highlighting the importance of adapting projections and knowledge communication strategies as the crisis unfolds.

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