# The Political Scar of Epidemics

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# This paper

- Builds on impressionable years hypothesis (i.e. exploit variation across cohorts in exposure to epidemics in early adulthood):
- across conorts in exposure to epidemics in early adultnood):

  suggests that attitudes and behavior are durably formed in what psychologists refer to as the "impressionable" late-adolescent and early-
- Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2014) show that individuals who experienced a recession when young believe that success in life depends more or but the affect expect more comment redeficit ution.
- We present the first large-scale evidence that experiencing an epidemic causes individuals to vest less trust in their government

#### Main findings (1)

- Individuals who experience epidemics in their impressionable year (ages 18-25) display less confidence in political leaders governments and elections
- Effects are large: high exposure is associated with 5 percentage points less confidence in government (relative to mean of 50%).
- Effects are persistent: they last for 2 decades.
- Effects are specific to communicable diseases for which a timely and effective public policy response is key.
- No effect on non-communicable diseases.

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### Main findings (2) - Mechanisms

- Effect is largest when individuals experience epidemics under weak governments, which are least capable of effectively responding to epidemics (we document this point directly).
- Individuals exposed to epidemics in their impressionable years are less likely to have confidence in the public health system.
- We substantiate this conjecture by considering the role of government strength in the context of COVID-19: governmen strength is associated with improvements in policy (i.e. NPI response time.

# How do we identify the effect?

Imagine a single country at a single snapshot (as of 2020):

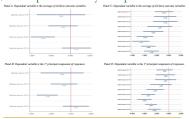
Ca	lendar yea	ars					
	2007	2007	2007	2007	2007		
	2008	2008	2008	2008	2008	Ages: 26 27 28 29 30	
	2009	2009	2009	2009	2009	450	
	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010		
	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011		
	2012	2012	2012	2012	2012		
	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	Treatment effect:	
	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	(Orange + Red + Purple) - (Blue + Gree	n)
	2015	2015	2015	2015	2015		
	2016	2016	2016	2016	2016		
	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017		
	2018	2018	2018	2018	2018		
	2019	2019	2019	2019	2019		

#### Main Results

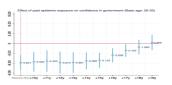
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Outcome 4	Have	Have	Approval of the	Approval of the	Have	Have
	confidence in	confidence in	Leader	Leader	confidence in	confidence in
	national	national			honesty of	honesty of
	government.	payerrer ent			elections	elections
Exposure to Epidemic (18-25)	-1.592	-0.508	-1.957	-0.583	-2.258	-1.101
	(0.262)	(0.219)	(0.330)	(0.118)	(0.339)	(0.273)
The number of people affected H	0.740		0.120	_	-3.625	
	(3.452)		(2.712)		(2.182)	
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Age group fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual income	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic characteristics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
income decile fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labor market controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country*Age trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cohort fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country*Year fixed effects	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	760099	760099	719742	719742	735679	736679
R <sup>2</sup>	0.145	0.182	0.133	0.182	0.146	0.178
Mean of outcome	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51

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## Are impressionable years special?



## The Effects Persist about Two Decades



Focus on the subsample of individuals closest to their impressionable years (that is, age 26 to 35). Check how the coefficients change as we increase the distance between the age of the epidemic exposure and the age at which they were surveyed.

The effect of exposure to an epidemic is more than twice as large if the epidemic is experienced under a weak governmen

Outcome →	(1) Have confidence in national government	(2) Approval of the leader	(3) Have confidence in honesty of elections	
Exposure to epidemic (18- 25)*BottomQuartileGov.Strength	-3.578""	-2.027***	-4.643""	
25) Bottom quantile Cost-Onlingin	(0.748)	(0.542)	(0.521)	
Exposure to epidemic (18-25)	-1.289 (0.889)	-2.657*** (0.640)	-1.373° (0.800)	
BottomQuartileGov.Strength	-0.000	0.040)	-0.002	
Bottom Quartile Gov. Strength	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.008)	
Observations	422523	394323	412051	
R2	0.136	0.115	0.136	

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