



INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS IN THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES

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Challenges

- Intergovernmental relations are key to understand the delivered of public policy and response to public problems (Phillimore 2013; Agranoff, 2004).
- Intergovernmental relations connect the different levels and can increase the capacity of public administrations to respond more effectively to multi-level challenges (Balme and Ye 2014; McGuire and Silvia 2010).
- Literature have been limited and many unanswered questions have permeated the literature and practice over the decades (Kincaid and Steinberg 2011; O'Toole and Meier 2004).
- Emerging challenges have required a much stronger coordination among governments and civil society at the different levels: to immigration integration (Adam and Hepburn, 2019), global environment (e.g., climate change) and regional integration (e.g., European Union),
- Multi-level governance approach (Happaerts et al. 2012).
- Efforts to understand and coordinate better intergovernmental activities in practice have also failed, such as in the recent history of the United States (Kindcaid and Steinberg 2011) and the current COVID-19 crisis.

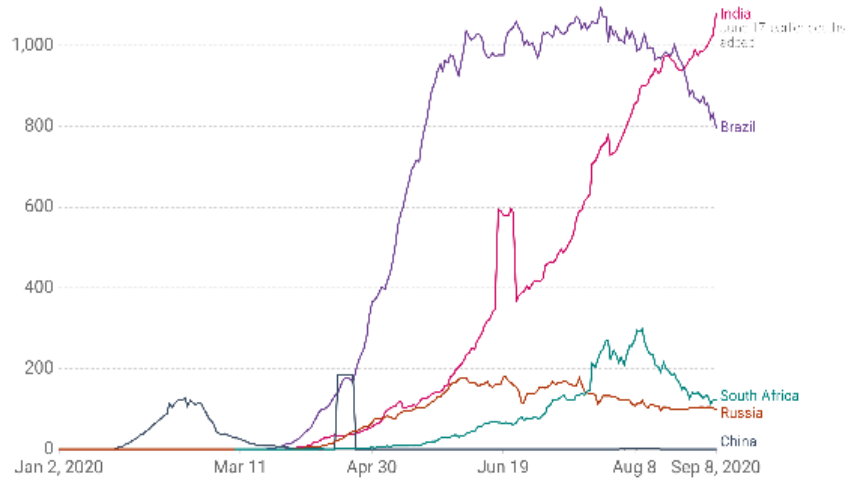
Intergovernmental Relations (IRs) and Policy Responses

- As institutions in public administration evolve, they become more depend on intergovernmental relations.
- The policy environment has become more complex, and politics more dividing,
- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS): , approximately 26% of the Earth's land mass (39.1 million square km), 42% of the world's population (3.1 billion inhabitants), 33% of the global economy in GDP per capita PPP (USD 44.1 trillion) (UNEDESA, 2019; IMF, 2019).
- BRICS were protagonists in the Covid-19 crisis and had different responses
- This research examines the role of intergovernmental relations in shaping the responses of countries to wicked problems, in this case the COVID-19, using the responses from the BRICS countries.

COVID-19 situation and government responses in the BRICS (source: Our World in Data, 2020)

Daily confirmed COVID-19 deaths, rolling 7-day average

Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from COVID-19.

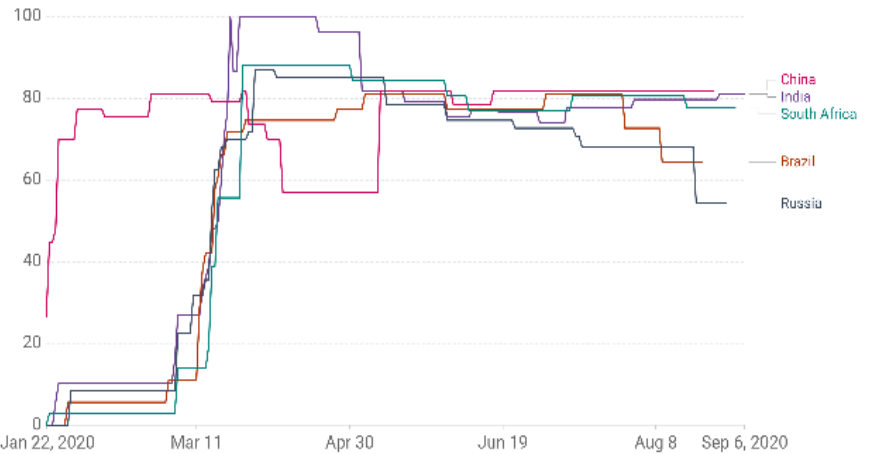


Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 8 September, 12:34 (London time)
 Note: The rolling average is the average across seven days – the confirmed deaths on the particular date, and the previous six days. For example, the value for 27th March is the average over the 21st to 27th March.
 OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY



COVID-19: Government Response Stringency Index

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.

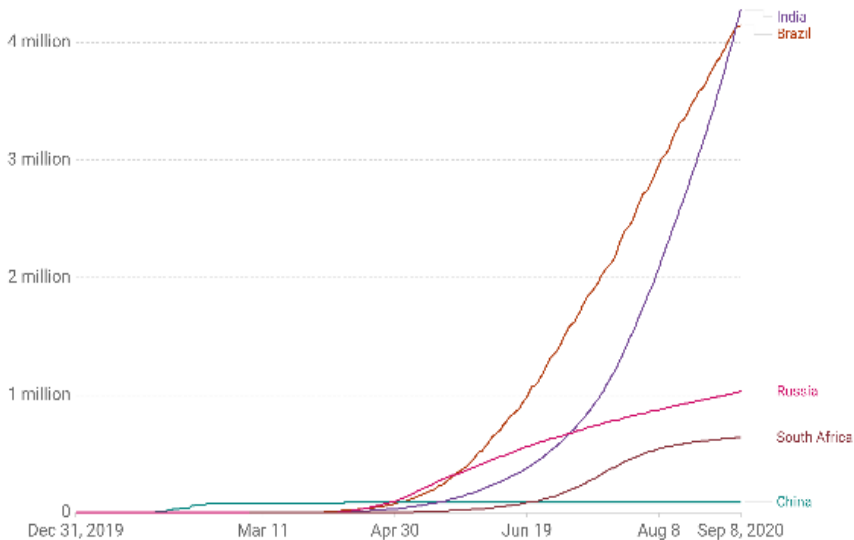


Source: Hale, Webster, Petherick, Phillips, and Kira (2020). Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker – Last updated 9 September, 02:00 (London time)
 Note: This index simply records the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response.
 OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY



Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.

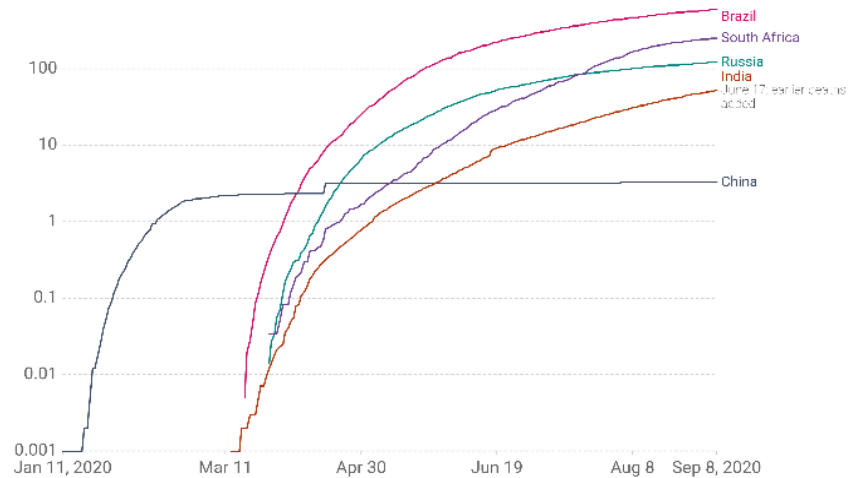


Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 8 September, 12:34 (London time) CC BY



Total confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people

Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true total number of deaths from COVID-19.



Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 8 September, 12:34 (London time)
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Method

Area	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Intergovernmental system	Brazil is a federation with three levels of government (Federal, 27 States and 5,570 Municipalities), decentralized, although the budget is concentrated in the federal government. States can exercise a considerable degree of autonomy from federal government and municipalities from the states.	Russia is a federation with three levels of government: Federal, 85 Regions (States) and municipalities (more than 19,000 rural settlements, ~1,800 municipal and ~600 city districts and urban areas.	India is a model for a federal state where powers are equally distributed between the State and national governments in the constitution. Center would always have a upper hand if a contradictory law is passed by both the State and the Center.	China is a unitary system of governance led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) with six layers of governance: Central, provinces, municipality, county, township, and self-governed entities (e.g.; villages, urban committees).	South Africa is a multi-party democracy with a three-tiered system of government, national, provincial, and local. Although it has some features of federalism, constitutionally the state is a unitary one.
Capacity of the government at different levels	Responsibilities assigned to states and to municipalities are the same irrespective of their size. The capacity of subnational governments varies according to resources and management.	There is some redundancies in the three-tier system. Capacities are very different among municipalities.	State governments have the responsibility and significant level of capacity in health, but has to work with local governments. Central government could offer resources and expertise.	China is very heterogenous country. Despite having a centralized government, capacities of the different provinces and other subnational entities are very different.	The capacity of the government is variable in all of its three tiers. Local government is the weakest of the three levels. Many of them are dysfunctional.
Decisions and actions over health	National government just advise and give some support for those state/cities in need (to buy equipment, funds to hire medical equipment), subnational governments, particularly the states take action.	Federal Government is the main stakeholder of health system regulation. The resources of the Regions are quite limited despite every Regional Administration has its own department of health. The transferring of resources to the Regions as the response to COVID-19 crisis.	State governments have their independence and authority in the health-related issues. However, in situations like COVID-19, central government needs to help.	According to the Emergency Response Law, the county governments are responsible for emergencies. But national government can interfere.	Health policy is determined at national level and it is the function of provincial governments to execute this. Budgetary transfers can be made to provincial health departments from the central government.
Coordination among levels	Very little coordination. Many states disagree from the federal and have their own initiatives. Many municipalities disagreed from the states. Sometimes three different policies in one place.	Strong coordination with a leading role of Federal level. Evaluation of the effectiveness of regional governments according to the criteria of their economic and social activity. The COVID-19 crisis lead to the more independence of regional decision-making.	Despite the differences, apart from states such as West Bengal and Kerala, all other states have a cordial relationship with the central government and they actively take part in deliberations with the central government.	Very centralized system coordinated from the top. Sometimes information gaps can exist to coordinate resources and responses.	Coordination between different levels of government has been variable, not because of resistance to central government policy but as a consequence of an endemic lack of capacity and weak administration.
Collaborative governance	Civil society got on surprise, not much mobilization because of the social distancing. Many initiatives from the private sector trying to help building hospitals and working together with states and municipal governments.	Civil society actions to help in the area of food and medicine masks, gloves distribution. Mostly it is not very active position of civil society groups. The political civic activity is near zero right now.	The active roleplayed by the civil society is enormous in terms of aiding the migrants to get proper food.	Governments at different levels interact with each other to innovate and make improvements in the provision of municipal services, sometimes with the support of civil society organizations.	Taken as a whole, there has been collaboration between the different tiers of government although, for the reasons mentioned above, the effectiveness of this has varied.
Trends in decentralization	As the federal government decided not to impose any tight policies. States and municipalities had to decide since the beginning what to do. The federal government support some actions but not all.	Some kind of decentralization in the decision-making to prevent disease dissemination, but finances are distributed from Federal level.	Decentralization is the key to contact tracing and breaking the chain, states taking some lead on that.	Central Leading Group on Responding to the Novel Coronavirus Disease Outbreak was created and demanded a task force for the State Council inter-agency to coordinate the response.	A feature of the lockdown has been a centralization of authority. This has included central government intervention in local governments to provide basic services such as water.

Key Factors to Understand the Dynamics of IRs (for Covid-19 Response)

- Political and state system,
- Formal and informal processes and
- Political alignment.

Political and State Systems

- The difference in the political (democratic versus authoritarian) and state systems (unitary versus federation)
- In unitary more centralized kinds of government, such as China, Russia and South Africa, the hierarchical system makes the discussions on political alignment and informal process in intergovernmental relations less relevant, as the higher level of government can control the lower level when needed.
- The political system can have an influence in the adoption of certain policies responses across the different levels of government, particularly when they involve sensitive issues such as political freedoms or individual privacy.

Formal and informal institutions

- Intergovernmental relations are composed of formal and informal institutions and process and is fundamentally important to effective policy responses (Phillimore 2012).
- In the federations, the formal processes are often determined by the constitution and laws, but the informal processes are determinant in moving forward many aspects of intergovernmental relation.
- the federal system in India have worked quite smoothly despite of the political differences between the federal government led by Mr. Modi and states controlled by diverse political parties.
- Where clear definitions of responsibilities do not exist in the constitution or are spread among the different levels, such as the health system in Brazil, coordination is not straightforward and depends on the informal processes of negotiation when a more complex issue comes up, such as a health crisis. Informal processes can take time and resources and not always have a predictable outcomes.

Political alignment

- Political alignment shapes intergovernmental relations and the effectiveness of policy responses. T
- The political system mediates public policy decisions, and can respectively help or hinder trust and capacity to manage public crisis, such as in the case of COVID-19.
- The interaction among the different actors are dependent on the formal and informal relations that they may have, including contracts, and often political relations (Nice 1987).
- Higher levels of government generally have higher discretion as they often have more power and resources than subnational entities. Thus, political relations are critical to determine the cooperative behavior between levels of governments.
- In four of the BRICS countries, cooperation among the different levels of governments seems not to be influenced by politics, either because political alignment existed among most of the entities (Russia and China) or politicians restrained their political differences for fighting the crisis as they had similar policy views on the issue (South Africa and India). In Brazil, politics played an important role to have an uncoordinated response among the various levels of government.

Closing Remarks

- First, there is no silver bullet to the COVID-19 response as they vary among the countries and countries with different systems have been able to tackle the virus effectively.
- Second, COVID response depends on how well the intergovernmental relations work, independently from the country and system, as almost all countries have subnational government with different responsibilities. The effective responses have to hit the ground where the contagious and treatment happens, and will depend on the subnational response and its relations with higher levels of government, as most of them have nor the full responsibility to all sectors that affect the COVID-19 neither the resources.
- Third, the formal relations and clear responsibilities among the different levels of government are important to a swift response. Countries, like Brazil, which have multi-level responsibilities for health and depend on informal relations to build the intergovernmental links to deliver response tend to fail.
- Fourth, political alignment may help in the swift responses, but if the response is not effective can lead to failure. On the other hand, in a lack of political agreement the administrative systems at the different levels need to function in coordination.
- The COVID-19 brought new challenges to governments around the world. Intergovernmental relations seem to have been an important factor to design an effective response to the crises, as the responses needs to be multi-sectoral and multi-level. This paper shed light on the initial response of the BRICS, but further analyses need to be made in the future, as we are far from over a definitive response to the crisis.

- Obrigado! Thank you!
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