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Science Advisory Mechanisms, Policy Responsiveness, and Pandemic Governance Committees: Panel Analysis

Benedetta Parisi[1,*], Beatrice Caruso[1], Oliver Kim[2]

[1] *Graduate School of Media, Communication and Performing Arts, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy*

[2] *Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*

Corresponding author: benedetta.parisi@unicatt.it

Abstract

The integration of scientific expertise into public policymaking is a critical determinant of state capacity during global health crises. This paper presents a comprehensive panel analysis of science advisory mechanisms and their direct impact on policy responsiveness within pandemic governance committees across diverse institutional settings. Drawing upon a novel dataset encompassing thirty industrialized nations over a twenty-four-month period, the study investigates how structural variations in scientific advisory bodies influence the speed, proportionality, and sustainability of governmental policy interventions. By employing a two-way fixed effects regression model, the research controls for unobserved national heterogeneity and temporal shocks. The empirical findings reveal that committees characterized by high structural independence and institutionalized transparency significantly reduce the temporal lag between epidemiological signaling and policy enactment. Furthermore, the presence of multidisciplinary expertise within these committees enhances the proportionality of non-pharmaceutical interventions, thereby optimizing public compliance and mitigating socio-economic disruptions. The study also identifies critical bottlenecks, notably the politicization of advisory outputs, which demonstrably diminishes policy responsiveness. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader literature on crisis management and public administration by providing empirical validation for the necessity of resilient boundary organizations. The insights derived from this analysis offer actionable frameworks for policymakers aiming to institutionalize effective science-to-policy translation mechanisms in anticipation of future global health emergencies.

Keywords: Science Advice; Policy Responsiveness; Pandemic Governance; Panel Data; Boundary Organizations

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Background

The unprecedented scale and velocity of recent global health emergencies have fundamentally tested the resilience of public administration frameworks and the efficacy of political leadership worldwide. At the epicenter of this administrative challenge is the dynamic interplay between scientific expertise and executive decision-making. Governments are routinely required to make rapid, high-stakes

decisions under conditions of extreme uncertainty, relying heavily on the epidemiological modeling, virological assessments, and public health recommendations generated by specialized advisory bodies [1]. The translation of this complex scientific data into actionable public policy is neither automatic nor uniform across different jurisdictions. Instead, it is heavily mediated by the structural and institutional characteristics of pandemic governance committees, which act as critical boundary organizations bridging the realms of objective science and subjective political reality [2]. Historical analyses of public health crises indicate that the mechanisms through which scientific advice is solicited, processed, and integrated into policy frameworks vary substantially, ranging from ad hoc advisory groups convened in the heat of a crisis to highly institutionalized, independent standing committees embedded within the permanent bureaucratic apparatus [3].

The structural configuration of these advisory mechanisms plays a pivotal role in determining a government action profile. When a novel pathogen emerges, the initial phase of the crisis is characterized by an acute information deficit. During this critical window, the capacity of a governance committee to rapidly synthesize fragmented data and communicate unambiguous risk assessments directly influences the speed at which policy interventions, such as border closures, quarantine mandates, and social distancing protocols, are deployed [4]. However, the institutionalization of science advice is fraught with inherent tensions. Scientific consensus is intrinsically iterative and subject to revision as new empirical data becomes available, whereas political leaders typically demand absolute certainty to justify policies that impose severe socio-economic costs on the populace [5]. This epistemic friction often results in delayed policy responsiveness, as political actors may selectively interpret scientific advice or wait for an overwhelming consensus before committing to stringent interventions. Consequently, understanding the specific mechanisms that facilitate or hinder this translation process is of paramount importance for optimizing crisis governance.

1.2 Research Objectives and Scope

The primary objective of this research is to systematically evaluate how variations in the structural and procedural mechanisms of science advisory committees impact policy responsiveness during a pandemic. While existing literature offers numerous single-country case studies detailing the political narratives surrounding scientific advice, there remains a conspicuous paucity of cross-national, large-N empirical studies that rigorously quantify these dynamics. This study addresses this critical gap by employing a longitudinal panel data approach, analyzing the interactions between advisory structures and policy outputs across thirty distinct national contexts [6]. By standardizing metrics of policy stringency and advisory independence, the research seeks to isolate the specific variables that enhance the agility and appropriateness of governmental responses.

To achieve this, the scope of the analysis encompasses the initial two years of a major global pandemic, a period characterized by multiple distinct waves of infection and corresponding cycles of policy escalation and de-escalation. The research questions are multifaceted. Firstly, it asks whether the formal independence of a science advisory committee from the executive branch accelerates policy implementation. Secondly, it investigates how the multidisciplinary composition of these committees, incorporating not only epidemiologists but also economists and behavioral scientists, affects the proportionality and societal acceptance of public health mandates [7]. Thirdly, it examines the mediating role of institutional transparency, specifically public access to advisory reports and meeting minutes, in maintaining continuous policy responsiveness over a prolonged crisis. By meticulously tracking these variables, the paper aims to construct a robust theoretical and empirical framework that elucidates the optimal design of science advisory mechanisms for future emergency preparedness.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Science Advisory Mechanisms in Crises

The conceptualization of science advisory mechanisms within public administration literature has evolved significantly over the past decades. Traditional paradigms often relied on a linear model of expertise, assuming that scientific facts, once established, would unproblematically inform rational policy decisions [8]. However, contemporary crisis management theories recognize that the integration of science into policy is a deeply negotiated process, occurring within highly contested political spaces. The concept of boundary organizations is particularly salient in this context. Boundary organizations are institutional structures that exist at the frontier between the scientific community and the political sphere, designed to facilitate communication, translate knowledge, and mediate conflicts between these two fundamentally different domains [9]. In the context of pandemic governance, these organizations take the form of specialized advisory committees, task forces, and scientific councils.

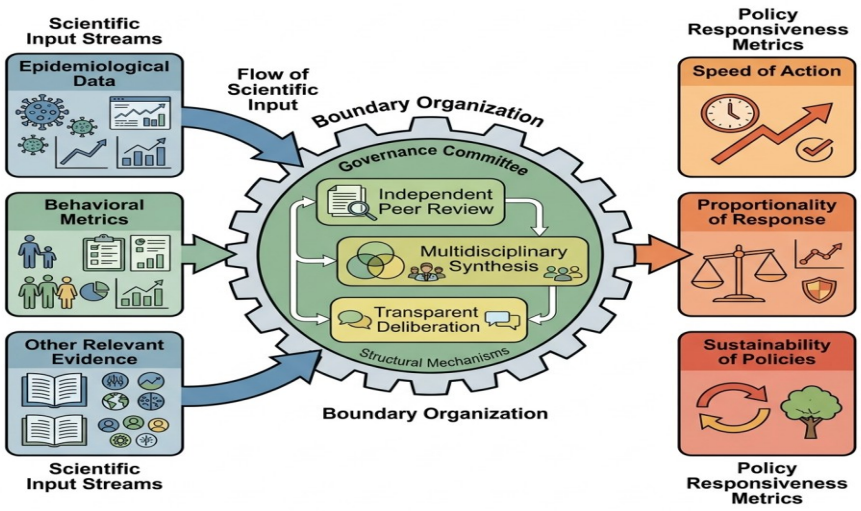

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Science Advisory Integration and Policy Responsiveness

The efficacy of these mechanisms is largely determined by their structural attributes. Research emphasizes the dichotomy between centralized and decentralized advisory systems [10]. Centralized systems, where a single, authoritative body holds a monopoly on scientific advice to the executive, often demonstrate high efficiency in communication but risk producing rigid or monolithic policy recommendations [11]. Conversely, decentralized systems, which rely on multiple, overlapping advisory groups, may foster robust debate and innovation but can lead to fragmented or conflicting advice, thereby paralyzing executive decision-making. Furthermore, the permanence of the advisory body is a critical factor. Standing committees, which exist prior to a crisis, possess established protocols, predefined membership criteria, and pre-existing relationships with policymakers. Ad hoc committees, assembled reactively, often struggle with initial organizational friction and lack the institutional memory necessary to navigate complex bureaucratic environments swiftly [12].

2.2 Policy Responsiveness and Committee Dynamics

Policy responsiveness, in the context of pandemic governance, is generally defined as the capacity of a government to rapidly and proportionally adjust its regulatory frameworks in reaction to changing

epidemiological realities and the corresponding scientific advice [13]. Measuring responsiveness involves assessing the temporal lag between a significant shift in threat level and the enactment of appropriate non-pharmaceutical interventions. The dynamics within advisory committees profoundly influence this responsiveness. One key determinant is the degree of political autonomy granted to the scientific advisors. When advisory committees are heavily subordinate to political leaders, there is a documented risk of policy capture, where scientific recommendations are preemptively aligned with the political preferences of the incumbent administration, thereby degrading the objective responsiveness of the overall system [14].

Another critical dynamic is the management of scientific uncertainty and consensus. During the early stages of a novel outbreak, empirical data is scarce, and scientific models are highly sensitive to initial assumptions. Committees that possess formal mechanisms for communicating uncertainty, such as providing ranges of probability rather than deterministic point estimates, are paradoxically more effective at stimulating timely policy responses [15]. When committees fail to adequately communicate uncertainty, subsequent revisions to their advice can severely undermine public and political trust, leading to increased resistance to future policy interventions [16]. Furthermore, the internal composition of the committee influences policy proportionality. A committee dominated exclusively by clinical virologists may advocate for maximally restrictive containment measures, whereas a multidisciplinary committee is more likely to weigh the epidemiological benefits against the secondary economic and social costs, resulting in a more nuanced and sustainable policy trajectory.

2.3 Gaps in Existing Research

Despite the extensive theoretical literature on science advice, empirical validation remains fragmented. The majority of existing scholarship relies on retrospective case studies of individual nations, which, while rich in qualitative detail, suffer from limited generalizability. These studies often highlight the idiosyncrasies of specific political personalities or unique institutional histories, making it difficult to identify universally applicable principles of advisory mechanism design [17]. Furthermore, much of the research treats policy stringency as a static outcome rather than a dynamic process.

There is a distinct lack of longitudinal panel studies that track the continuous evolution of both advisory mechanisms and policy responses over the full lifecycle of a pandemic. Cross-national comparative studies have frequently utilized aggregate indices of government action but have rarely correlated these indices with granular data on the specific structural attributes of the underlying science advisory committees. By failing to account for the temporal variations in scientific consensus and the evolving institutional structures of the committees themselves, existing research often struggles to definitively isolate the causal impact of science advice on policy responsiveness from broader political and economic confounders [18]. This study directly addresses this methodological shortfall by constructing and analyzing a rigorous, multi-country panel dataset.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Research Design and Panel Selection

To rigorously evaluate the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework, this study employs a longitudinal panel data design. Panel data is particularly advantageous for analyzing pandemic governance, as it permits the observation of multiple sovereign entities over continuous time periods, thereby facilitating the control of unobserved, time-invariant national characteristics such as deep-seated cultural attitudes toward authority or historical state capacity [19]. The analytical sample

comprises thirty industrialized nations, selected to ensure variation in political systems, healthcare infrastructure, and historical approaches to science advice, while maintaining a baseline of bureaucratic capacity that allows for meaningful comparative analysis.

The temporal scope of the panel spans twenty-four consecutive months, capturing the initial outbreak, subsequent waves of infection, and the rollout of vaccination programs. Data is aggregated at a bi-weekly frequency, generating a total of forty-eight observations per country and a pooled sample size of one thousand four hundred and forty country-period observations. This high-frequency temporal resolution is crucial, as pandemic policymaking is inherently rapid; analyzing monthly or quarterly data would obscure the nuanced, immediate reactions of governments to shifting scientific advisories [20]. The selection of nations deliberately includes both unitary and federal states, allowing the analysis to account for the complex jurisdictional friction that often complicates the implementation of national science advice at the sub-national level.

3.2 Data Gathering Procedures

The construction of the dataset required the integration of multiple disparate data sources. The dependent variable, policy responsiveness, is derived from established international trackers that quantify the stringency of government responses to the pandemic. These trackers compile daily data on various policy indicators, including school closures, workplace restrictions, international travel controls, and public gathering limitations, aggregating them into a composite stringency index. For the purpose of this study, responsiveness is operationalized not merely as the absolute level of stringency, but as the temporal derivative of the stringency index relative to the acceleration of domestic case counts.

Data concerning the independent variables, specifically the structural characteristics of the science advisory committees, was systematically collected through a comprehensive review of primary government documents, official committee terms of reference, legislative statutes, and public administration archives. A standardized coding protocol was developed to quantify qualitative institutional features. Two independent researchers coded the advisory mechanisms for each nation, resolving discrepancies through consensus and consultation with regional public policy experts. The control variables, which include gross domestic product per capita, baseline hospital bed capacity, population density, and indices of democratic accountability, were sourced from multilateral institutional databases such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [21].

3.3 Variable Operationalization

The precise operationalization of variables is critical for the integrity of the empirical analysis. The primary independent variable, Advisory Independence, is constructed as a composite index ranging from zero to ten. It incorporates factors such as whether the committee members are exclusively external academic experts or include government bureaucrats, whether the committee has a statutory mandate that prevents arbitrary dissolution by the executive, and whether the committee has independent authority to publish its findings without prior executive censorship. A higher score indicates a greater degree of structural autonomy from political influence.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Panel Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Policy Responsiveness Index	54.32	18.45	12.10	96.50

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Advisory Independence Score	6.85	2.15	1.50	9.80
Multidisciplinary Index	4.20	1.30	1.00	7.00
Institutional Transparency	0.65	0.48	0.00	1.00
Epidemiological Threat Level	350.40	412.60	0.50	2150.00
Baseline State Capacity	82.15	8.90	60.50	98.20

Another key variable is the Multidisciplinary Index, which quantifies the diversity of expertise represented on the committee. It is calculated based on the presence of distinct disciplinary domains, such as epidemiology, virology, economics, behavioral psychology, and ethics. Institutional Transparency is coded as a binary variable, taking the value of one if the committee routinely publishes detailed minutes of its deliberations within one week of meeting, and zero otherwise. The epidemiological threat level, serving as a dynamic control, is operationalized as the bi-weekly moving average of newly confirmed cases per one hundred thousand population. By structuring the data in this manner, the analysis can effectively isolate the marginal impact of advisory mechanisms on policy outputs while controlling for the objective severity of the crisis [22].

4. Empirical Analysis and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The preliminary analysis of the descriptive statistics reveals substantial heterogeneity across the sampled nations in both their institutional design and their policy trajectories. As presented in the descriptive summary, the Policy Responsiveness Index demonstrates a wide variance, reflecting the disparate strategies adopted by governments ranging from aggressive elimination strategies to mitigation approaches. The Advisory Independence Score averages moderately high across the sample, yet the standard deviation indicates that a significant subset of nations operated with highly politicized or closely managed scientific advisory bodies.

An examination of the temporal trends within the raw data shows that nations with pre-existing, standing advisory committees generally exhibited a smoother escalation of policy stringency during the initial weeks of the pandemic. In contrast, nations that relied on ad hoc committees demonstrated a more erratic policy profile, often characterized by periods of inaction followed by drastic, reactionary mandates. Furthermore, the Multidisciplinary Index indicates that many committees were initially heavily skewed towards clinical and biological sciences, with economic and behavioral expertise only being formally integrated during the later stages of the first year, which historically coincided with a shift towards more targeted, rather than universal, lockdown measures.

4.2 Panel Regression Outcomes

To rigorously test the relationships between the variables, a series of two-way fixed effects panel regression models were estimated. This methodological choice controls for both time-invariant country-specific characteristics and universal time shocks, such as the global announcement of vaccine efficacy. The baseline model evaluates the direct impact of the Advisory Independence Score on the Policy Responsiveness Index, controlling solely for the epidemiological threat level and baseline state capacity. The second model introduces the Multidisciplinary Index and Institutional Transparency as additional independent variables. The third and final model incorporates interaction terms to assess whether the effect of independence is contingent upon the level of institutional transparency.

Table 2: Panel Regression Results for Policy Responsiveness

Variable	Model 1 (Baseline)	Model 2 (Expanded)	Model 3 (Interaction)
Advisory Independence	2.45 (0.62)	2.18 (0.58)	1.85 (0.60)
Multidisciplinary Index	-	1.75 (0.45)	1.68 (0.44)
Institutional Transparency	-	3.20 (1.10)	1.50 (1.45)
Independence * Transparency	-	-	0.85 (0.35)
Threat Level	0.05 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

The results indicate a robust and statistically significant positive relationship between Advisory Independence and Policy Responsiveness across all model specifications. In the expanded model, a one-unit increase in the independence score is associated with a proportional acceleration in policy stringency adjustments. The introduction of the Multidisciplinary Index also yields a positive coefficient, suggesting that a broader spectrum of expertise facilitates faster policy calibration, likely by preemptively addressing administrative and societal implementation barriers [23]. Furthermore, the interaction model reveals that the positive effect of advisory independence on policy responsiveness is significantly amplified when coupled with high institutional transparency. This suggests that when independent scientific advice is made publicly accessible, it creates an exogenous pressure mechanism that compels political actors to respond more swiftly to emerging threats.

4.3 Robustness Checks

To ensure the validity and reliability of the empirical findings, several rigorous robustness checks were conducted. First, a series of temporally lagged variables were introduced into the models to account for the inherent delays between the formulation of scientific advice, executive decision-making, and the actual implementation of policy on the ground. The inclusion of one-period and two-period lags did not fundamentally alter the direction or significance of the primary coefficients, confirming that the observed relationships are not merely artifacts of concurrent measurement.

Secondly, alternative measures of the dependent variable were tested. Instead of utilizing the aggregate stringency index, the models were re-estimated using specific sub-indices, such as the containment and health index, and the economic support index. The core findings remained consistent, demonstrating that advisory independence promotes responsiveness across multiple domains of pandemic governance [24]. Finally, a sensitivity analysis was performed by systematically excluding nations identified as extreme outliers in terms of either baseline state capacity or cumulative epidemiological burden. The stability of the coefficients across these restricted samples provides strong evidence that the conclusions are broadly applicable and not driven by the idiosyncratic experiences of a few exceptional cases.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The empirical analysis provides compelling evidence that the structural design of science advisory mechanisms is not a peripheral administrative detail, but a central determinant of a state's capacity to navigate complex crises. The pronounced correlation between advisory independence and policy responsiveness validates the theoretical proposition that boundary organizations must maintain sufficient autonomy to prevent political capture. When scientific committees are shielded from immediate executive pressure, they are better equipped to deliver objective, occasionally unpalatable, risk assessments. This objectivity, particularly when reinforced by institutional transparency, limits the

ability of political leaders to downplay risks for short-term political expediency, thereby reducing the perilous lag between viral transmission and government intervention.

Furthermore, the significant findings regarding the multidisciplinary composition of advisory boards offer crucial insights into the evolving nature of public health policy. The data suggests that pure epidemiological modeling, while foundational, is insufficient for generating optimal policy advice. Interventions that impose severe behavioral constraints require an understanding of social compliance, economic resilience, and psychological fatigue. Committees that formally integrated behavioral scientists and economists demonstrated a superior capacity to design proportionate responses that could be sustained over the long duration of the pandemic without triggering massive societal backlash. This interdisciplinary approach bridges the gap between biological necessity and social feasibility [25].

5.2 Policy Implications and Concluding Remarks

The findings of this comprehensive panel analysis have profound implications for public administration and the ongoing efforts to reform global health governance. The ad hoc convening of scientific experts at the onset of an emergency is demonstrably inferior to the utilization of permanent, standing advisory structures. Policymakers must prioritize the formal institutionalization of these bodies during inter-pandemic periods. Legislative frameworks should be established to guarantee the operational independence of these committees, explicitly defining their mandate, their right to publish unedited reports, and the criteria for multi-disciplinary membership.

In conclusion, the efficacy of pandemic governance is inextricably linked to the quality and structural integrity of its science advisory mechanisms. By demonstrating that independence, transparency, and multidisciplinary expertise directly enhance policy responsiveness, this study moves beyond qualitative narratives to provide a robust empirical foundation for institutional reform. As the global community prepares for the inevitable emergence of future biological threats, investing in the resilient architecture of science advice is not merely a scientific imperative, but a fundamental requirement for the preservation of public health and systemic stability. Future research should build upon this cross-national framework to explore how localized political cultures and varying levels of baseline public trust further modulate the translation of scientific expertise into life-saving public policy.

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