COVID-19 Decision Making and Policy Design

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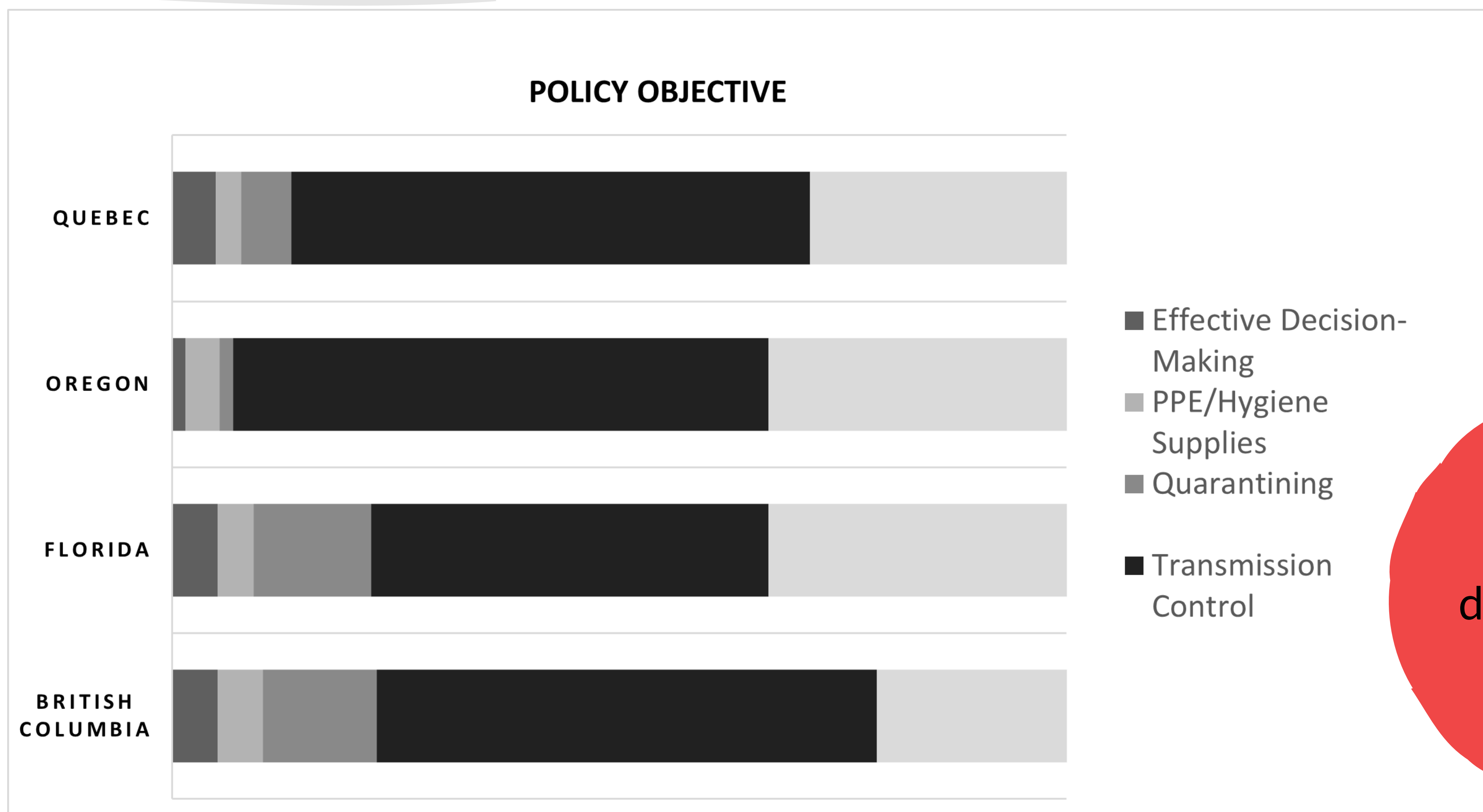Collaboration with
Dr. George Hoberg

Policy instruments are developed by government as a way to implement their policies and influence the behaviour of citizens and businesses (Bouwma et al 2012)

Are there observable trends of policy instrument design and timing between different jurisdictions?

Comparing all transmission reduction policies (492) by the governments of BC, Quebec, Oregon and Florida from March 1st - July 1st 2020
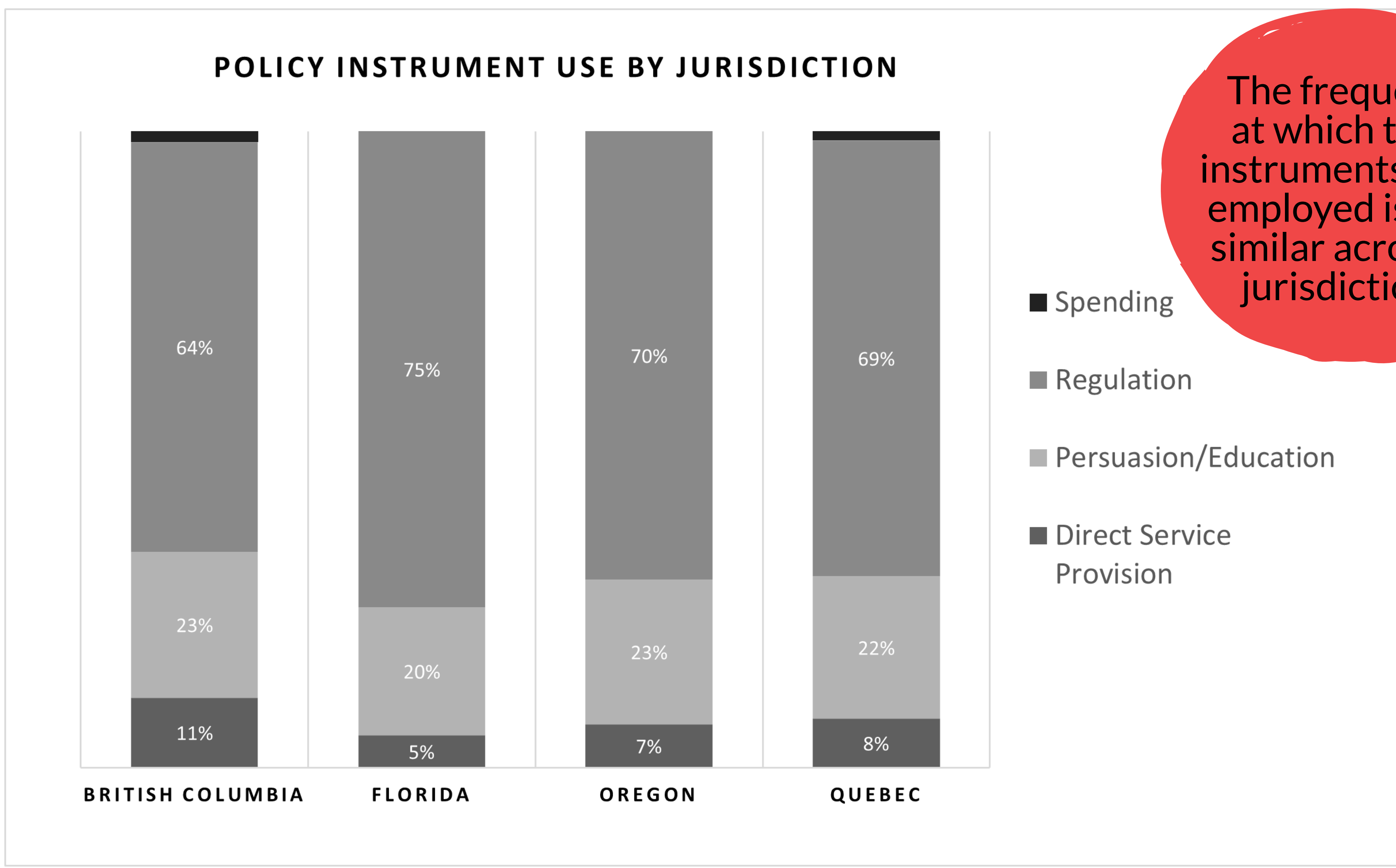

POLICY OBJECTIVE

Legend:
- Effective Decision-Making
- PPE/Hygiene Supplies
- Quarantining
- Transmission Control

(Jurisdictions: QUEBEC, OREGON, FLORIDA, BRITISH COLUMBIA)

Transmission control, and physical distancing were priorities between all jurisdictions.

Policy Instruments

- **Spending**
- **Persuasion/Education**
- **Direct Service Provision**
- **Regulation**

POLICY INSTRUMENT USE BY JURISDICTION

Jurisdiction	Values
BRITISH COLUMBIA	64%, 23%, 11%
FLORIDA	75%, 20%, 5%
OREGON	70%, 23%, 7%
QUEBEC	69%, 22%, 8%

Legend:
- Spending
- Regulation
- Persuasion/Education
- Direct Service Provision

The frequency at which the 4 instruments were employed is very similar across all jurisdictions.

Timeline

MR 15

QUEBEC
- Restaurants and cafes - **50% capacity** cap
- Buffets, bars, nightclubs, casinos, and game houses and sugar shacks – **full closure**

MR 17

BRITISH COLUMBIA
- Restaurants – minimum 1-2m **physical distancing** OR must move to take-out/delivery
- All liquor primary businesses – **full closure**

FLORIDA
- Restaurants - **50% capacity** cap physical distancing mandatory for **all restaurants**
- Employee screening for Covid-19 symptoms - **mandatory for all restaurant employees**
- Any business which derives 50%+ of its revenue from alcohol - **must move to take-out/delivery**

OREGON
- Restaurants and bars – **Full closure of dine in services**

MR 20

BRITISH COLUMBIA
- Restaurants and bars – **Full closure of dine in services**

FLORIDA
- Restaurants and bars – **Full closure of dine in services**

MR 22

QUEBEC
- Restaurants and bars – **Full closure of dine in services**

The design and setting, when it came to full closure were quite similar. This is not all that surprising, as **regulating the closure of a specific activity does not have much room for nuance and complexity.**

The variance comes out in the phased closure, as some jurisdictions opted for a capacity-type setting, while others focused on the ability or inability to maintain physical distancing.

The reopening of restaurants and bars reveals a similar trend. Some jurisdictions like Quebec, Oregon, and Florida used a geographically phased approach, while BC employed a province-wide phased approach. Similarly, BC took a unique path to its reopening of restaurants and bars, mandating that they have a transmission mitigation plan, but providing few actual mandates. Florida reopened much like they closed, allowing first 25% capacities, then 50%, then full capacity with restrictions.
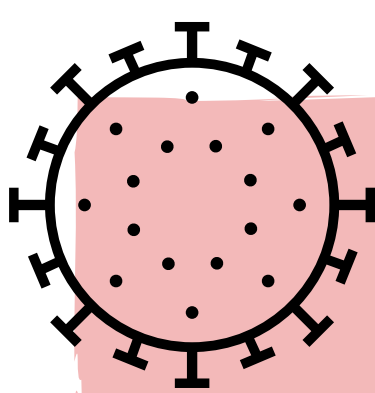
Covid-19 Impact

In conclusion, when comparing the policy design between the four jurisdictions, we had anticipated greater divergence that would speak to their unique context, values, attitudes toward policy/the state, case counts, etc.

Instead, we found this surprising level of convergence in terms of the type of instrument used, target behaviour and actor. However, they differed most in their setting.

In short, despite the straightforwardness of something like restrictions on in-person dining, the policy design and setting between jurisdictions reveals complexity and variance. Sometimes, as in the case of our study, the variance only exists in the minutiae.

When comparing the policy design of four jurisdictions, we had anticipated greater divergence that would speak to their unique context, values, attitudes toward policy/the state, case counts, etc. Instead, we found this surprising level of convergence in terms of the type of instrument used, target behaviour and actor. They differed most in their setting. Therefore, the differences in Covid-19 transmission must be attributed to factors beyond that of solely policy design.

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