

THE ROLE OF TRUST IN INDIVIDUAL COVID-19 COMPLIANCE

Overview

This project is designed to test the relationship between citizens' trust in authorities, their fear of the coronavirus, and their compliance with government advice or regulations relating to behaviour around the coronavirus. The intention is to identify whether the effects of trust and fear on individual compliance change over time as people become accustomed to the virus. The results of the project are likely to shed clearer light on whether, when, and for which individuals, people's trust in government is important for their compliance with collective rules.

Hypotheses

The specific hypotheses the project aims to explore are as follows:

H1: The impact of political trust on compliant behaviour is attenuated when perceptions of personal risk from coronavirus are taken into account.

H2: Over time, the impact of political trust on compliant behaviour will rise, as perceptions of personal risk from coronavirus decrease.

H3: The impact of political trust on compliant behaviour will be greater for people for whom the costs of compliance are higher (eg. low socio-economic status individuals).

Approach

The project aims to model the over-time impact of trust and risk perception on compliant behaviours in different countries. Previous studies have shown that the impact of factors such as political trust on compliant behaviours is variant between national populations (Jorgenson et al, 2020). The project therefore aims to assess the relationships on data collected from national populations in Austria, Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom (the accessibility of individual-level data from Austria has already been secured; data from the other three countries is currently being explored).

Variables

The dependent variable will be compliant behaviour, either measured through individual survey items (eg. reported mask wearing/staying at home/avoiding crowds) or composite measures of such items. The principal independent variables will be trust in central authorities (government, health department) and perceived individual risk from the coronavirus (eg. reported worry about the virus, personal likelihood of contracting coronavirus, perceived severity of coronavirus). A moderating factor is personal economic situation, which will be measured through variables such as personal economic status, employment status or a surrogate such as educational level.

To avoid biased results from omitted variables, the models will include measures of demographic features identified in previous studies to shape Covid-19 compliance (Kooistra and van Rooij, 2020) and which also have been shown to shape the key independent

variables, or might be thought likely to do so. Controls will therefore be included for individual age (particularly important, since older people are more vulnerable to illness and mortality as a result of coronavirus), gender and education.

Analysis

A series of multivariate regression models (one per survey wave) will be constructed for each study country. These models will enable the project to determine any variation in the magnitude of the effects between variables (test of H1), over time (test of H2) and among different groups within the population (test of H3).

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References

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Kooistra, Emmeke B and Benjamin van Rooij (2020) 'Pandemic Compliance: A systematic review of influences on social distancing behaviour during the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak'