30/09/2023: Research outline

WP5: Legitimate Crisis Governance and Trust

Authors: Jakob Frateur, Peter Bursens, Susana Duarte Coroado, Patricia Popelier

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1 Introduction

At the University of Antwerp, we are working on two different analyses: an analysis of survey data and a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). The former is our main focus during the first year of the LEGITIMULT project (October 2022-December 2023), while the latter will be the main focus in the second year of the project (2024). Because of this timing, we are much further in the research design of the analysis of the survey data than of the QCA, which we will develop from January 2024 onwards.

In the following, we will discuss the research outline of both analyses before discussing the current state of our research. The research outline will consist of four parts: the research question(s), the theoretical discussion and hypotheses, the data collection and the methodological approach. We start with the survey, after which we will say something about the QCA.

2 Research design survey (phase 1: January – December 2023)

a. Research questions

The deliverable based on the survey aims to study the determinants of political trust in a context of crisis governance by looking at the level of government, the type of crisis governance and the mode of interaction between government levels. We want to study the following question: **how do the level of government, the type of measure and the mode of interaction between government levels affect citizens' trust in that government to take a particular measure?** Thus, in times of crisis, which level of government is better placed to take which kind of measure with regards to citizens' trust? And what role does intergovernmental cooperation play in crisis governance by various government levels? The findings of this WP will feed WP 2 that will discuss the trade-offs policy-makers face when deciding on and implementing legitimate crisis governance, trust being one element to consider next to rule of law and others.

b. Theoretical discussions, concepts and hypotheses

i. Theoretical discussion and concepts

Our research revolves around three variables, with political trust being the dependent variable, and crisis governance and multilevel governance contexts being the independent variables. Because these variables are so important, we first sketch shortly what we mean with these concepts, starting with political trust.

One of the most cited definitions of political trust is based on Easton's (1975) work on political support. He defines political trust as the belief of members of a political system "that their own interests would be attended to even if the authorities were exposed to little supervision or scrutiny" (Easton 1975). In similar veins, OECD guidelines define trust as a "person's belief that political institutions will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour" (Algan 2018), and Norris (2017) defines it as the reflection of "a rational or affective belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity" of a political institution. Political trust is thus characterized by a specific set of objects or trustees, namely political institutions, individual political actors or political systems (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017). Furthermore, following the abovementioned definitions, political trust is relational, in the sense that it entails a

subject/trustor that trusts and an object/trustee that is trusted, and situational, meaning that it is characterized by a "certain degree of uncertainty about the object's future actions" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017; Newton 1999; van der Meer 2016). Indeed, political trust is dependent on the actions by the object or the contexts in which the trust relation exists. As Hardin (2000) puts it, A trusts B to do X.

Multilevel governance systems are characterized by interdependent and interconnected governing institutions located at different levels of authority, both vertically and horizontally (Behnke et al. 2019). The EU is a prime example of such a system. It is a complex environment with multiple institutions (governments, parliaments, councils etc.) at multiple levels (local, regional, national supranational), and with multiple connections between the levels and the institutions. The EU is also a system in which citizens can participate in various ways, the best example being elections for various levels of government, and in which they are affected in various ways. MLG systems, like the EU, emerged mostly because of the disintegration of the national level, whose powers are increasingly eroded through processes of decentralisation and globalisation (Muñoz 2017). Indeed, some competences are decentralised to local and/or subnational levels (devolution), while others are integrated in supranational or international institutions (globalisation), sometimes both at the same time, which leads to a MLG structure in which various levels have different powers.

Crisis governance, finally, refers to the management of crises. We follow the definition of crisis of 't Hart (1993) who defines a crisis "as potentially undermining legitimate orders, as institutions, policies and leaders are seen to be failing to perform the core task of protection". Boin and Lodge (2016) note that crises are increasingly transboundary, meaning that they "revolve around threats that easily cut across geographical and/or policy boundaries". Indeed, crises are becoming increasingly complex, being different types of crises (health, economic, disasters, social…) at the same time. Furthermore, they need to be dealt with by more and more levels of government – local, subnational, national, supranational, international, global. One only needs to think about recent (COVID-19) or ongoing (climate change, energy) crises to observe the disruptive, transboundary and complex nature of present-day crises. The management or governance of crisis then refers to policies intended to ease or defuse a crisis. In our research, we focus on the governance of transboundary crises following the definition of Boin and Lodge (2016) by focusing on the Covid-19 crisis and its governance through focus on two types of policies: restriction and support measures.

ii.   Hypotheses

Our hypotheses are related to the three variables mentioned above – crisis governance, MLG and intergovernmental interaction – and their impact on political trust. We first explain the impact of the multilevel structure of the polity on citizens' political trust after which we discuss the hypothesized impact of different crisis-mitigating measures (restriction and support) and the possible influence of intergovernmental interaction preceding the adoption of such measures.

First, citizens seem to be able to distinguish between different levels of government, also in times of crisis (Proszowska 2021). Secondly, the literature on trust in MLG systems shows that lower levels of government, mostly local levels, are trusted more than higher levels of government such as the national or the supranational level (Stoker et al. 2023; Proszowska et al. 2022; Muñoz 2017). This is mostly driven by better performance evaluation of citizens in terms of responsiveness, participation and direct contact (Muñoz 2017). Based on this literature, that does not consider crisis governance, one could expect that lower government levels are trusted more to take particular measures in times of crisis. However, the

literature on trust in MLG systems in times of crisis is limited to the financial crisis in the EU and mostly focuses on the national and supranational level. An article by Proszwoska et al. (2022) is an exception to this. The article is focused on the financial crisis in the EU, but it also considers trust in the subnational level – local and regional level taken together. The authors found that trust in the subnational level stayed the same or slightly increased during the financial crisis while trust in higher levels decreased (Proszowska et al. 2022). One has to bear in mind, however, that the mitigation of the financial crisis was mostly done at higher levels of government and that they thus received the blame for austerity policies (Armingeon and Ceka 2014), while the subnational government levels did not participate in the governance of the financial crisis. This might be different during a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic in which various government levels, so the subnational levels as well, were involved in the mitigation of the crisis (Lynggaard et al. 2023; Hegele and Schnabel 2021) and thus possibly susceptible to lower trust because of blame attribution mechanisms.

Furthermore, as a counterhypothesis, one could argue that the extent or severity of a crisis matters for citizens' trust and that citizens therefore express more trust in higher government levels to take measures as these are believed to be more authoritative. Indeed, the national level is still often seen as the most salient level of government in that it is considered the most powerful level that can take the most meaningful measures (Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Cisterna et al. 2022). Looking at the literature on trust in MLG systems in times of crisis, trust in the national level is higher than trust in the supranational level as the former level is closer to citizens, in terms of knowledge, identity and perceived performance (Talving and Vasilopoulo 2021; Armingeon and Ceka 2014). Also, and especially during the financial crisis, the supranational level in particular was often blamed for the consequences of the governance of the crisis, which lead to lower trust levels (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). This might be different during a pandemic in which it is less clear who can possibly be blamed for the situation.

> *Hypothesis 1a: Citizens tend to express more trust in lower levels of government to take crisis-mitigating measures.*

> *Hypothesis 1b: citizens tend to express less trust in lower levels of government to take crisis-mitigating measures.*

While social restriction measures infringe citizens' fundamental rights, economic support measures are more positive in the sense that it does not put a burden on citizens' life, on the contrary. Though research suggests that, in an initial phase, social restriction measures like lockdowns generated more trust (Belchior and Teixeira 2021; Bol et al. 2021), after some time, such measures increasingly received critique because of their infringement of fundamental rights and the levels of political trust decreased (e.g., Weinberg et al. 2022). Furthermore, some authors even suggest that the measures themselves did not cause the increase in political trust, but rather an emotional response (mostly anxiety) is at the basis of the sudden increase (Schraff 2020). The increase in political trust following the lockdown thus gives a distorted view on the effect of social restriction measures on political trust. It is more plausible that citizens tend to trust a government level that takes an economic support measure more than one that imposes social restrictions. This is also supported by literature on outcome favorability which argues that the degree to which a decisions corelates with an individual preference is the main factor of decision acceptance (Esaiasson et al. 2016). As people are generally more likely to favor measures that support rather than restrict them (Oana et al. 2021), we expect citizens to accept the economic support measure more easily than the restriction measure. Therefore, we hypothesize that citizens will trust a government that takes economic support measures – in our case, the provision of budget to support businesses – more than a

government that takes restriction measures – in our research, a restriction of leaving the house unless necessary (a 'lockdown').

> *Hypothesis 2: citizens tend to express more trust in a government taking an economic support measure than when taking a social restriction measure.*

Cooperation might signal approval from other authorities, which also gives the impression that governments are willing to listen to other governments and take into account relevant expertise of those other levels. Furthermore, this can also be a sign of some deliberative activity in the decision-making process conferring the image that decisions are well-considered. As such, cooperation might increase citizens' perceptions of the effectiveness and importance of a measure. Grimes (2006; 2017) for example argues that perceptions of procedural fairness are related to higher political trust. In other words, if citizens believe that the decision-making process occurred in a fair way, they express more political trust. It is even argued that decision making structures shape citizens' satisfaction with democracy (Grimes 2017). It is therefore not unlikely that cooperation, seen as fair procedure in a decision-making process, may lead to higher political trust.

Also, literature on citizens' opinions regarding self-rule and shared rule in their regions suggests that a large majority of citizens is in favor of shared rule, meaning that they prefer engagement between regional and national governments (Schakel and Smith 2022; Schakel and Brown 2022). From this literature, it appears that most citizens prefer intergovernmental cooperation or at least interaction in some way between government levels when assessing the autonomy of their region (Schakel and Brown 2022). We opted for a scenario in which a government level consults the other government levels before taking a measure. Relating this to our study on the effect of intergovernmental interaction on political trust, we might expect that interaction leads to higher trust, especially among citizens living in cooperative federal systems (Schakel and Brown 2022).

> *Hypothesis 3: Citizens tend to express more trust in a government level to take a measure when it has done so after consultation of other levels.*

c. Data collection

To test our hypotheses, we relied on a survey of the University of Antwerp which was carried out by Bilendi in June 2023 as part of the LEGITIMULT project. The survey was conducted in six countries that differ in size, type of MLG system and composition (multinational or homogenous): Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Spain. Participants were selected through the online panels of Bilendi and representative sample based on age, gender and education of 1000 respondents per country was obtained through sampling methods employed by Bilendi. As a result, we obtained a high-quality sample of 6000 respondents across six diverse countries.

d. Methodological approach

The survey (see questionnaire in annex) consisted of a set of survey questions and a hypothetical scenario similar to the COVID-19 crisis. This was deliberately chosen to increase realism and the recognizability for respondents. The scenarios, which were the same for each country, depicted a situation in which a deadly virus affected the country of the respondent and a policy reaction to the spread of the virus. In one scenario, social restriction measures in the form of a lockdown were taken, while in the other budget was

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made available for economic support. This ties into the distinction between restriction and support measures that is often made in the literature. Following this scenario, respondents had to answer several questions with regards to their trust in various levels of government to take the measure and to decision acceptance. After these questions with regards to the scenario, the respondents received additional information, namely that the measure in the scenario was taken after consultation of other levels of government after which they needed to answer the trust question a final time, but only for two levels of government – the least and most trusted government. This way we want to test the effect of possible interaction between governments on citizens' trust in a government level to take a measure. All respondents got both scenarios.

Besides the scenario and the additional information, citizens also received questions on their general trust in and attachment to different levels of government (before the scenario), their news consumption and political interest, and a set of questions with regards to Covid-19. These questions mostly probe into the perceptions citizens had of decision-making procedures during Covid-19 and into the way Covid-19 impacted their lives and economic situation. The answers to these questions will mostly serve as extra layer of information with regards to the effect of the treatment. That way, we can study whether and why different groups of respondents react differently to the treatment. The survey will be analyzed using statistical methods that still need to be determined, though at this point mostly regressions on what determines trust in a certain level to take a particular measure are envisaged.

3 Research design QCA (phase 2: January – June 2024)

a. Research questions

After we measured the effect of several variables – type of measure, level of government and mode of cooperation – on individual citizens' trust in their governments to take certain measures in times of crisis, we will study in a second stage **which conditions determine political trust in MLG systems in times of crisis, and its governance, at an aggregated level**.

b. Theoretical discussions, concepts and hypotheses

This part still needs to be developed. We will delve into the literature from January 2024 onwards in order to be able to provide deliverable 5.4 on the deadline in November 2024. The drafting of hypotheses will also be helped by the results of the analysis of the survey data.

Possible hypotheses could be that citizens put more trust in government if central crisis governance is based on cooperative intergovernmental decision-making and that citizens put more trust in government when crisis governance measures are taken and implemented by lower levels of government. These preliminary hypotheses can be substantiated by the literature mentioned in the part on the research design of the survey. The mentioned research in part 2.b.ii shows for example that, in European countries, the local level is the most trusted level (Stoker et al. 2023) and that citizens prefer cooperation between the regional and the national level when assessing the autonomy of their region (Schakel and Brown 2022). We will of course refine these hypotheses through a more elaborate review of the existing literature.

c. Data collection

As QCA is in essence a method for comparison, we will compare up to fifteen European countries. The exact countries under study will be selected based on existing datasets, including the one that is constructed in WP1, datasets from OECD, IDEA and others. The type of multilevel governance – federal, regionalized or centralized systems – will be an important determinant for the case selection. The case selection will then further refine the conditions that will be included in the analysis. In contrast to the survey, we will not collect data ourselves, but we will rely on existing public datasets like the Eurobarometer surveys, the regional (RAI) and local (LAI) autonomy indexes, the Oxford COVID-19 government response tracker (Hale et al. 2021), International IDEA's COVID-19 global monitor and the like. As these do not contain a variable on trust in a government level to take a certain measure, the dependent variable in the scenario of the survey, we will focus on the political trust in different levels of government as dependent variable. This difference in dependent variables might be interesting for the final goal of the project with regards to legitimate crisis governance. The precise datasets that will be used, still need to be determined, but we will start looking for and exploring the possible datasets from November 2023 onwards.

d. Methodological approach

Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is a research method designed to compare cases without neglecting the complexity of the cases themselves (Rihoux and Ragin 2008). It does this by transforming complex cases into specific combinations of conditions that are linked to a certain outcome (= dependent variable, in this case political trust) (Rihoux and Ragin 2008). The core question then is which conditions are necessary and/or sufficient to produce an outcome (Rihoux and Ragin 2008), in our case high or low political trust in MLG systems in a context of crisis governance. We will thus be able to understand which combination(s) of conditions determine higher or lower political trust. The conditions (= independent variables) under study will be selected based on the relevant literature and on the database created in WP1. Possible conditions are the presence/absence of intergovernmental cooperation, the level of government that took most of the decisions or the kind of measures taken. The QCA output will tell us what kind of measures have been taken in what kind of multilevel structures that spur specific levels of citizens' trust in specific government levels.

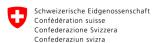## 4 Reflection on state of the research

We are currently (August-September 2023) analyzing the data of the survey that we obtained in July 2023. For the deliverable, we will work with colleagues of the University of Leiden and other consortium colleagues from Berlin, UNED and Bergen. From November 2023 onwards, we will start preparing the QCA so we can start working on it from January 2024 onwards.

We already presented our research (and the project) at two different occasions: the ECPR biennial conference on regulatory governance in Antwerp and the ECPR general conference in Prague. It will also be presented at the ICON-S BENELUX chapter in Maastricht at the end of October 2023.

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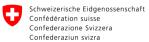
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6 Annex: questionnaire of the survey

This survey is carried out by Bilendi on behalf of researchers of the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in the context of a project supported by the European Commission. This project, called LEGITIMULT studies how citizens in different countries view their governments and their policies, as well as citizens' opinions on important political issues. We would therefore like to ask you some questions about politics/governance and to hear your thoughts on some policy scenarios.

This survey will be held in six different European countries. All data will be obtained anonymously and treated confidentially. The anonymous data might be used by researchers from other universities who are also part of the LEGITIMULT project.

At any point, you can terminate the survey without consequences. If you wish to terminate the survey, your data will not be used.

In total, the survey takes approximately 10-12 minutes. We would like to thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this survey.

I hereby confirm that I have read the above information about today's study and that I am cooperating in this study on a completely voluntary basis:

Yes – No

Block 1. Personal background

First, we would like to ask you some questions about your personal background.

1. What gender do you identify as?
   Male – Female – Other – Prefer not to say.

2. How old are you?
   18-29 – 30-39 – 40-49 – 50-59 – 60-69 – 70-79 – 80+ – prefer not to say.

3. What is your highest obtained educational degree?
   No degree – primary – secondary – bachelor or equivalent – master or equivalent – doctor – prefer not to say.

4. What is your current employment status?
   Employed full time – employed part time – self-employed – unemployed (looking for a job) – unemployed (not looking for a job) – student – retired – prefer not to say.

Block 2. Politics and trust in government

Now, we would like to hear your thoughts on some political and societal issues.

5. How much do you trust the following governments? (Adapted to country of respondent).
   a. The local government
   b. The regional government
   c. The national government
   d. The European Union
   Scale for each level from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

6. Do you think, in general, that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?
   Scale from "you cannot be too careful" to "most people can be trusted" (1-7).

7. How much do you feel attached to the following levels? (Adapted to country of respondent).
   a. The local level
   b. The regional level
   c. The national level
   d. The European Union
   Scale for each level from "not feeling attached at all" to "feeling very attached" (1-7).

8. How much do you think the following governments' actions have an impact in your life? (Adapted to country of respondent).
   a. The local government
   b. The regional government
   c. The national government
   d. The European Union
   Scale for each level from "no impact at all" to "lot of impact" (1-7).

Block 3. Scenario

The following scenario depicts a situation in your country and a response to this situation. Please carefully read this hypothetical scenario and answer the questions.

A highly contagious and possibly deadly virus is rapidly spreading throughout Europe. The virus has already been found in your country and multiple infections are reported in your region. Research in other countries, where infection rates are high, shows that it affects the whole population and that it spreads through the air. Reports say that there are already deaths that can be attributed to the disease.

In response to this, and to stop the spread of the virus, citizens are not allowed to leave their house unless it is absolutely necessary.

1. What is your willingness to accept this measure?
   Scale from "not willing at all" to "full willingness" (1-7).

2. How much would you trust the following governments to take this measure? (Adapted to country of respondent).
   a. The local government
   b. The regional government
   c. The national government
   d. The European Union
   Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

➔ **Questions on cooperation:**
3. Imagine that the [*least trusted government in Q2*] took the measure after consultation of other government levels. In that case, how much would you trust the [*least trusted government in Q2*] to take this measure?
   Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

4. Imagine that the [*most trusted government in Q2*] took the measure <u>after consultation of other government levels</u>. In that case, how much would you trust the [*most trusted government in Q2*] to take this measure?
    Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

Additional question

1. How severe do you think that the disease would be in the scenario?
    Scale from "not severe at all" to "very severe" (1-7).

Block 4. Political interest and news consumption

The following questions are about how often you follow the news and how interested you are in politics. Please indicate which answer option reflects your own personal situation most closely.

9. How often do you follow the news?
    Scale from "never" to "constantly" (1-7).

10. Are you actively interested in politics?
By active is meant that you at least talk about politics in closed circles. Other forms are amongst others: signing petitions, discussing politics on social media, attending demonstrations, involvement in social organizations or in political movements.

    Scale from "not active" to "very active" (1-7).

11. How satisfied are you with the economy in your country as a whole?
    Scale from "not satisfied at all" to "very satisfied" (1-7).

12. In politics people sometimes talk about left and right. When you think of your own political beliefs, where would you place yourself?
    Scale from "left" to "right" (1-7). "Prefer not to say"

13. Please indicate the option 'very negative'.
    Scale from "very negative" to "very positive" (1-7). "I do not know".

Block 5. Scenario

The following scenario depicts a situation in your country and a response to this situation. Please carefully read this hypothetical scenario and answer the questions.

A highly contagious and possibly deadly virus is rapidly spreading throughout Europe. The virus has already been found in your country and multiple infections are reported in your region. Research in other countries, where infection rates are high, shows that it affects the whole population and that it spreads through the air. Reports say that there are already deaths that can be attributed to the disease.

People have been unable to go to work because their work or business had to close. To compensate for economic losses caused by measures to fight the spread of the virus, budget for economic support was made available.

1. What is your willingness to accept this measure?
    Scale from "not willing at all" to "full willingness" (1-7).

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2. How much would you trust the following governments to take this measure? (Adapted to country of respondent).
   a. The local government
   b. The regional government
   c. The national government
   d. The European Union
      Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

➔ **Questions on cooperation:**

3. Now imagine that the [*least trusted government in Q2*] took the measure <u>after consultation of other government levels</u>. In that case, how much would you trust the [*least trusted government in Q2*] to take this measure?
      Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

4. Now imagine that the [*most trusted government in Q2*] took the measure <u>after consultation of other government levels</u>. In that case, how much would you trust the [*most trusted government in Q2*] to take this measure?
      Scale from "do not trust at all" to "trust completely" (1-7).

Block 6. Covid-19 related questions

Finally, we would like to know more about your experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Please indicate which answer option reflects your personal views most closely.

14. To what extent do you think governments followed the procedures as prescribed by law when adopting Covid-19 measures?
      Scale from "Followed not at all" to "followed all procedures" (1-7). "I do not know".

15. To what extent did you perceive the way in which Covid-19 measures were taken as transparent?
      Scale from "not transparent at all" to "very transparent" (1-7). "I do not know".

Please indicate which answer option reflects your own personal situation most closely.

16. To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic impact your life in general?
      Scale from "very negatively" to "very positively" (1-7). 4 = "no impact". "I do not know".

17. To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic impact your economic situation?
      Scale from "very negatively" to "very positively" (1-7). 4 = "no impact". "I do not know".

18. To what extent did you perceive the Covid-19 measures as responsive to your needs?
      Scale from "not responsive at all" to "very responsive" (1-7). "I do not know".

19. How satisfied were you with the government's support of the economy during the Covid-19 pandemic?
      Scale from "not satisfied at all" to "very satisfied" (1-7). "I do not know".

20. How satisfied were you with the government's support of households during the Covid-19 pandemic?

> Scale from "not satisfied at all" to "very satisfied" (1-7). "I do not know".

21. Finally, we would like to know which of the following values are the most important to you when you think about a government's management of a crisis? Pick the three values that are most important to you.

> Legality – transparency – proximity to citizens – benevolence – responsiveness – ability – fairness – integrity – accountability – I do not know.

Thank you for participating in this survey. The goal of this survey was to study the determinants of citizens' trust in their governments in times of crisis and to study how citizens respond to different crisis governance situations. We did not want to present this information to you at the beginning of the study as this might have spoiled the results of our survey experiment.

Based on this new information regarding our study, do you still consent to the use of your anonymous answers in this survey?

> Yes – No