

Pandemics meet democracy: Experimental evidence from the COVID-19 crisis in Spain

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OECD Webinar Series. The Trust Divide: How COVID-19 Exposes
the Impact of Inequality on Citizen Confidence in Government

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Research Group

Motivation

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- 1 Between national and global management of the pandemics
- 2 Between health and individual freedom
- 3 Between party politics and technocratic governance

Research question: How citizens' political preferences have changed in the face of the COVID crisis?

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 - 1 a sizable increase in technocratic preferences
 - 2 a widely shared willingness to trade off individual freedom for protection against the virus.

Theoretical considerations

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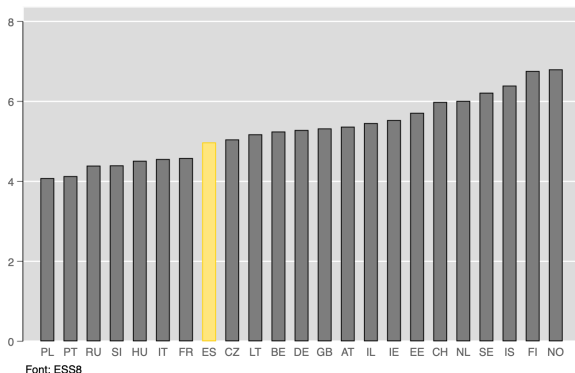
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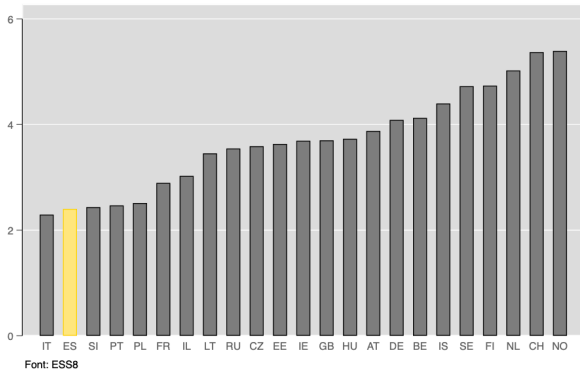
Spain in comparative perspective: Inter-personal trust

Inter-personal trust across countries (ESS, Round 8):



Spain in comparative perspective: Trust in politicians

Trust in politicians across countries (ESS, Round 8):



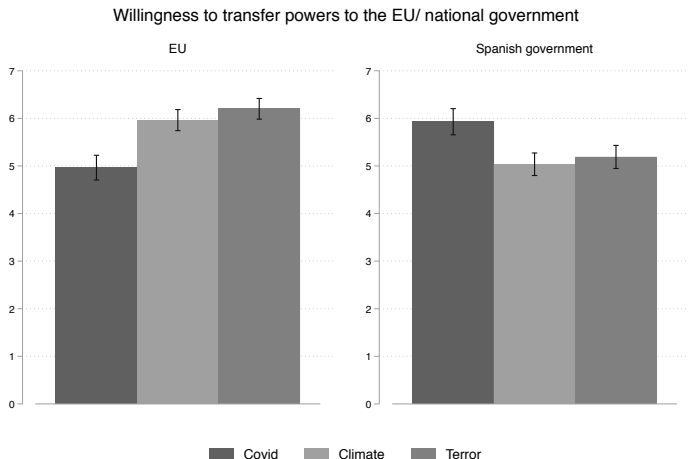
Data collection

- Panel survey fielded in late January (1st wave), late March 2020 (2nd wave) and June (3d wave). N=818
- Survey questions & experiments embedded in March wave (N=1,606)
- Survey questions & experiments embedded in June wave (N=1,350)
- Conjoint experimental design

Roadmap

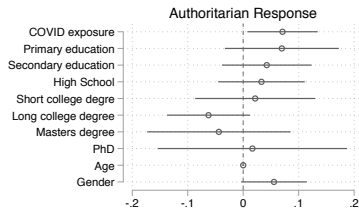
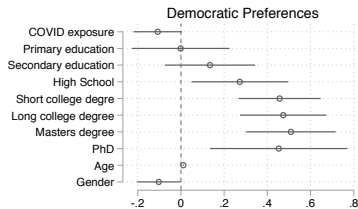
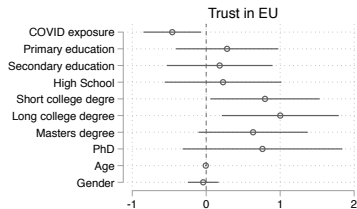
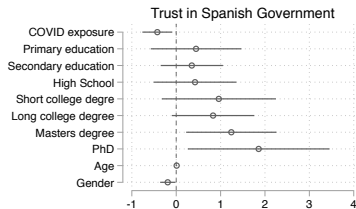
- 1 European versus national response
- 2 COVID exposure and political trust
- 3 Preferences for technocratic government
- 4 Civil liberties and strong leadership

Global crisis, national response



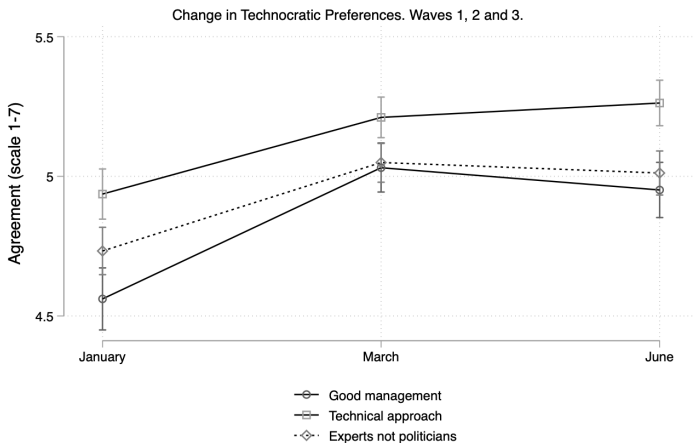
COVID exposure and political trust

Exposure to Coronavirus and Political Trust

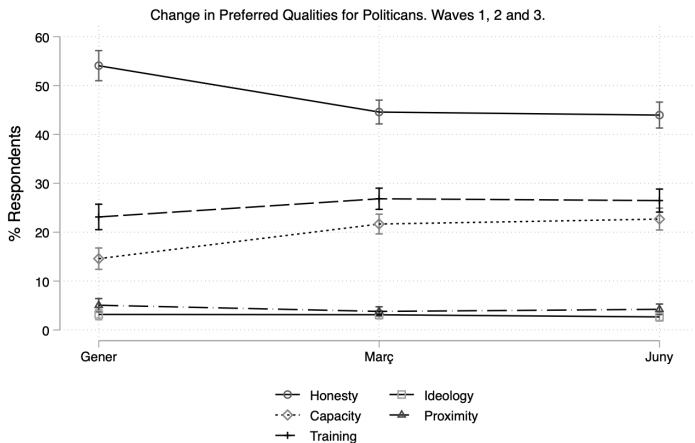


All models control for region FE. Standard errors clustered at the regional level. Education base category: no schooling.

Technocratic preferences: Attitudes

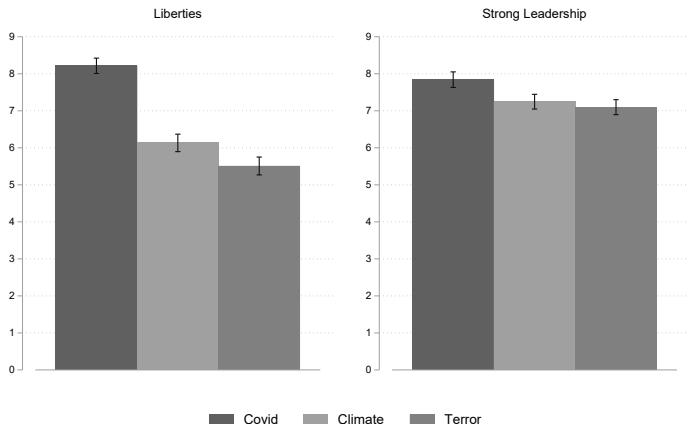


Technocratic preferences: Preferred Qualities for Politicians

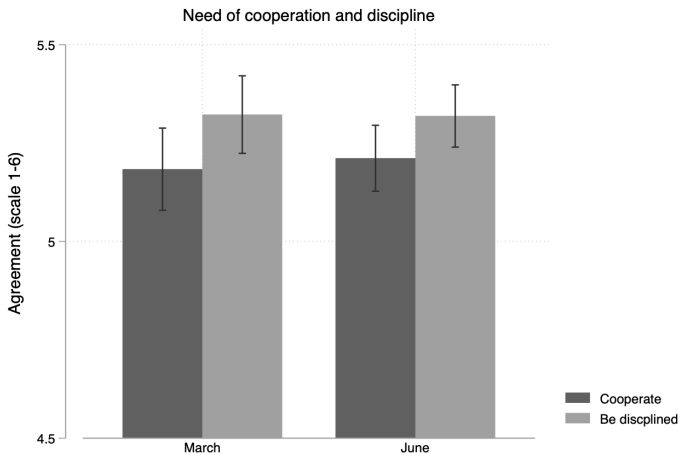


Strong leadership and rights and freedoms

Willingness to sacrifice individual liberties and union around strong leadership



Cooperation versus discipline

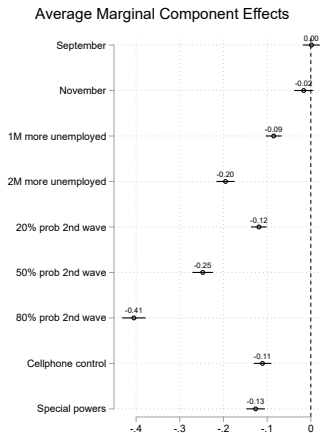
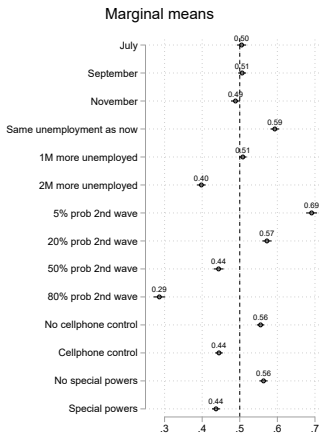


The trilemma: health, economy and freedoms

- Conjoint experimental design, to evaluate which attributes citizens value more:

Attributes	Levels
Return to normal activity	July September November
Unemployment by the end of 2020	Similar as before the coronavirus 1 million more unemployed 2 million more unemployed
Probability of 2nd wave	5% 20% 50% 80%
Control of population movements	The government WILL NOT have the right to track mobile phones The government WILL have the right to track mobile phones
Special powers	The government WILL NOT have special powers to pass laws The government WILL have special powers to pass laws

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- Strong preferences for a national response to the COVID crisis
- A negative correlation between (self-reported) exposure and political trust.
- A sharp increase in technocratic preferences, more pronounced among those most affected, and less informed.
- A widespread willingness to accept a strong leader and trade-off rights and freedoms for protection against the virus.

Implications

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- A direct channel, through a durable preference shift.
- Indirectly, providing a window of opportunity for would-be authoritarian and populist leaders.
- The crisis of the COVID can be a double-edged sword in terms of the sustainability of populist and authoritarian leaderships.

Thank you

Many thanks for your attention

- For further details, please check our paper here:
- <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/dkusw/>