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Trust in the National Government and in the European Union During COVID-19: Can Strictness of Lockdown Measures and COVID-19 Cases Explain the Differences in Trust in the Two Political Institutions Between European Countries?

Bachelor Thesis Sociology

Abstract. This study focusses on the effect of strictness of lockdown measures and reported COVID-19 cases in a country on trust in the national government and in the European Union (EU) within the 27 EU member states. Studies report that the public show their support to political institutions when they are satisfied with the legislations implemented during the pandemic. Therefore, it is expected that the stricter the lockdown measures, the higher the trust in both the national government and in the EU. Furthermore, as a result of unsatisfaction by the public, higher reported COVID-19 cases is expected to lower the trust in both political institutions. A multiple linear regression is performed to test the effect of the determinants on both trust in the national government and in the EU. As was expected, the results show a positive effect of strictness on trust in the national government as well as in the EU. However, there is only a negative effect found for the effect of COVID-19 cases on trust in the national government. There is no effect found of COVID-19 cases on trust in the EU. This means that stricter lockdown measures in a country lead to higher reported trust in both political institutions. While on the other hand, higher reported COVID-19 cases only lead to lower trust in the national government.

Keywords. National Government, European Union, COVID-19, Trust, Lockdown Measures

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Introduction

It has been over a year since the world has been faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the moment the outbreak was introduced, national governments in Europe as well as the European Union (EU) have focused on the prevention of the spread of the virus. One of the first implementations were the restrictions of border movements, ensuring medical provision, being transparent in the spread of information and the promotion of research to this virus (Goniewicz, Khorram-Manesh, Hertelendy, Goniewicz, Naylor & Burkle, 2020). Yet, till this day, one of the most affected countries by the coronavirus remain European countries (Elflein, 2021). Russia, The United Kingdom, France and Spain have been most affected by the pandemic since the outbreak in early 2020. On the other hand, the European countries that have reported low coronavirus cases are Finland, Kosovo, Malta and Iceland. Interestingly, there is a great discrepancy regarding the number of coronavirus cases between different European countries (Stewart, 2021).

During these hard times, following the lockdown measures implemented by political institutions is crucial in order to have control over the pandemic. Trust in these political institutions is therefore important for citizens to be willing to comply with the measures taken by the government and other institutions (Lalot, Heering, Rullo, Travaglino & Abrams, 2020). In order to fulfil basic tasks and needs within society, political institutions are dependent on the support received from the public (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Political trust is therefore a very critical element for the effectiveness of governing. Citizens are likely to agree on and follow legislations if they see political institutions as trustworthy (Levi & Stoker, 2000). So, the higher the levels of trust, the greater the benefit to political institutions (Hetherington, 1998). This is not only the case for national governments because the citizens of different European countries are also governed by a supranational power, namely the EU. The public attitudes towards the EU are crucial for the future of European integration (Harteveld, Meer & Vries, 2013). Interestingly, trust in the EU and its institutions has been rather irregular over the years. For more than half of the EU member states the decrease has been around 20/30 percent between 2004 and 2016 (Boda, Medgyesi, Fondeville & Özdemir, 2018). However, in the Standard Eurobarometer survey of summer 2020 it shows that, in general, the trust in the EU has remained stable since 2019. The majority of the citizens within member states have reported seeing the EU as trustworthy. Countries such as Ireland, Denmark, and Lithuania have reported the highest levels of trust in the EU, while the countries that have shown the lowest levels of trust are Italy, France and Greece (European Commission, 2020). Interestingly, a publication by Eurofound revealed that trust in the EU has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic whilst

the trust in the national government has declined (Ahrendt, Cabrita, Clerici, Hurley, Leončikas, Mascherini, Riso & Sandor, 2020).

A couple of studies have researched the mechanisms that could influence trust of the public regarding political institutions. The study of Muñoz, Torcal & Bonet (2011) has reported that trust in national governments is correlated with the amount of trust citizens have in the EU. If citizens see any institutional level as trustworthy it is more likely that this trust spills over to other levels of institutions. However, trust resulted to be lower in other institutions rather than the national ones. At the same time, if trustworthiness of the national government is questioned by its citizens, trust in the EU increases. Another interesting finding concerns the study of Hooghe & Kern (2015), which tested the linkage between party closeness and political trust. The feeling of closeness with a political party is positively correlated with political trust, which means that the closer an individual is towards a political party, the greater the trust in political institutions.

However, the aim of this study is to research the effect of a current issue that the world is faced with: the COVID-19 pandemic. Herewith specifically focusing on the strictness of implemented lockdown measures that were taken by the government and the reported COVID-19 cases in these countries. As mentioned earlier, the reported cases can differ significantly between different European countries as well as the lockdown measures that are taken over the past year. During this period of time, political trust is a crucial element (Lalot et al., 2020). Taken together, this study will focus on understanding the relation between strictness of lockdown measures and the reported cases, and trust in political institutions. In this vein, the study's main research question is *'to what extent do strictness of lockdown measures and reported COVID-19 cases explain the differences in trust in the national government as well as in the European Union between European countries?'*.

In order to answer the main research question, the following data will be analyzed. To determine the trust citizens have in the government and the EU, data from the Eurobaraometer survey wave 93.1 will be used. This is an annual survey conduct by the European Commission in 32 different European countries. In order to display the implemented lockdown measures data will be used from the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker. Furthermore, to get insight in the reported cases within countries, statistics from Our World in Data will be examined.

Several studies have researched the relation between the pandemic and political trust. Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen (2020) stated that the measures taken by governments regarding the pandemic are in relation to the trust citizens have in their national institutions. The reason

behind this trust is the appreciation of the government taking action in protecting its citizens from the virus. Therefore, citizens see importance in showing support and trust towards institutions as a reward for the decisions taken by the governments. On the other hand, Schraff (2020) saw a greater importance in the anxiety experienced by citizens due to the pandemic, as a factor which influences political trust, instead of the lockdown measures implemented within the country. The study showed that, indeed, the intensity of the COVID-19 cases is affecting the political trust greater instead of the implemented legislations. However, this is only the case in the beginning phase of the pandemic because after lockdown measures have been implemented, the cases decrease (Alfano & Ercolano, 2020). Subsequently, trust increases as a result of citizens being satisfied with the actions of their government (Bol et al., 2020).

Both the studies of Bol et al. (2020) and Schraff (2020) focused on trust in national institutions. This study will contribute by increasing the knowledge gap by focusing on the effect of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the implemented lockdown measures on trust in the EU. Building legitimacy is one of the priorities for the EU because it is an important factor for the process of European integration. Trust from the public is crucial for the existence of the EU and therefore the knowledge of determinants of this trust is of real importance (Arnold, 2012). As described above, the study by Muñoz et al. (2011) concluded that trust in national institutions can 'spillover' to European institutions. For these reasons, this study will both include explaining the differences in trust in the national government as well as in the EU and whether this 'spillover effect' is actually present.

In addition, Bol et al. (2020) have concentrated their research on several Western European countries, whereas Schraff (2020) based his research on Dutch survey data, but neither of them focused on different EU member states. This study will contribute to the scientific field by using data from different EU member states and see whether the difference in trust between the countries can be explained. Previous research of Hudson (2016) has reported that there are differences in trust between several European countries and that different determinants are the cause of that. Again, only regarding national institutions. However, the current issue of the outbreak of the pandemic has not been researched as a determinant for differences in trust in the EU between European countries before. In short, several studies have investigated topics focusing on COVID-19, institutional trust, different political institutions and between European countries merely uniformly, but not including all these concepts together within one study.

Interestingly, as mentioned before, trust in institutions is reflected in the spread of the virus. So, the opposite relation exists, which makes the study in political trust more of importance to investigate in depth. The study of Lalot et al. (2020) concluded that people are more willing to

comply with the restrictions during the virus because of the trust they have in institutions which implement these restrictions. This makes that trust is an important determinant for governments to make sure citizens follow and accept legislations implemented by them. As mentioned by Brück, Ferguson, Justino & Stojetz (2020), the knowledge on the trust in institutions during the pandemic shows which countries will likely recover more slowly or rather faster than countries in which citizens report different attitudes towards institutions. Again, related to the willingness of complying to restrictions given by institutions. For these several reasons, this study will be of great importance for the scientific field as well as for societal and political processes.

Theory

As reported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are several dimensions that influence political trust. One of them is responsiveness, to provide or regulate public services to its citizens. In the case of the pandemic, this means providing online education, healthcare needs and emergency services. Another dimension is reliability, which means anticipating change and to protect citizens. This is also an important feature during the pandemic because during a crisis citizens experience much fear and anxiety. Knowing that the government is doing everything in its power to protect citizens will lead to a greater level of trust. Especially when it is focused on the collective interest. Openness is another important factor during such unpredictable and unclear times. Providing citizens with clear explanations about the situation, especially when implementing lockdown measures, creates more trustworthiness among political institutions (Sibley, 2020). Hence, the way the government operates and answers to the needs of its public can be expected to influence peoples' perspective on political institutions.

A study by Karlsson, Åström & Adenskog (2020) showed that Estonian citizens who were dissatisfied with the way the government was operating and how the democracy was working in times of crisis, reported a decrease in trust in their political institutions. This shows the possibility that citizens see importance in the actions of the government when facing a crisis. Besides that, Amat, Arenas, Falcó-Gimeno & Muñoz (2020) stated that citizens in times of crisis prefer stronger leadership in order for them to feel protected. Thus, there is a fine line between facing a crisis, in this case the pandemic, and the need for protection from the government to eventually improve the situation. Political trust closely lies with the way the government can satisfy its citizens with the given implementations during these situations (Bechtel, 2012). This could mean that when lockdown measures have been implemented by governments with the approval from the public and with a sense of understanding, the trust

could increase. For example, countries that have received financial support during the pandemic have shown more trust in their government as well as the EU (Eurofound, 2020). Looking back at the economic crisis in Greece during 2002-2011, the study of Ervasti, Kuovo & Venetoklis (2019) showed that citizens were disappointed in the work of politicians during the crisis. The trust in politicians and institutions severely declined because the country still suffered from various issues as a result of the crisis, such as unemployment and worsening health care. In times of the pandemic, the economy is an important factor that citizens are mainly worried about. For example, a case study in France showed that the French public preferred the nation's economy above public health, implying that their interest lies in less strict lockdown measures in order to prevent unemployment and bankruptcy (Ferragina & Helmeid, 2020).

However, if governments took all of the publics' needs into consideration and implemented in a way that would be most preferably by their public, it could lead to a win-win situation. In Australia for example, citizens mostly prefer economic stability provided by the government during the pandemic and are mainly fearing a decline in the economic situation as a result of COVID-19. Until now, the government has managed this in a way which is preferred by citizens and therefore an increase in political trust has been shown. In order to maintain this trust, the government needs to focus on the demands and needs of its citizens (Evans, Valgarossen, Jennings & Stoker, 2020). As mentioned before, Bol et al. (2020) concluded that during the pandemic citizens appreciate the way the government is doing everything in its power to provide protection to its citizens from the pandemic. The lockdown measures taken, and the level of strictness of it were seen as something positive by citizens. Taken together, this means that citizens closely observe the actions of their government during crisis' and evaluate them based on their own preferences. When a situation improves, citizens reward the government by providing support and trust. Therefore, it can be expected that during the pandemic citizens prefer stricter lockdown measures because this will eventually lead to the improvement of the situation. For these reasons, this study expects that the strictness of lockdown measures affects the way citizens perceive political institutions and to what extent trust prevails. Therefore, the following hypothesis will be considered:

> *H1a: The stricter the lockdown measures in a country, the more trust its citizens have in their national government.*

For the reason that I am also interested in the differences in trust in the EU, it is expected that the same relation is present within this political institution. This relation is expected as the result

of the possibility of a spillover effect: trust in the national government can 'spill over' to other institutions (Muñoz et al., 2011). A study by Ares, Ceka & Kriesi (2017) stated that the relation between the satisfaction with the national government and European institutions depends on the political context, meaning that the evaluation of the political institutions is depending on whether the national government and the EU are dependent of each other. Therefore, for example, if there is a crisis, the national government and the EU are dependent on each other in a sense that they have to work together during the crisis. This means that during these times, the satisfactory of citizens concerning the actions taken by the government is in relation to the satisfactory citizens have in institutions who are closely connected with the government. When situations like this occur, the 'spillover effect' of trust in the national government and European institutions is more present. Therefore, I expect that during the pandemic the trust in the national government is reflected to the trust in the EU. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is suggested:

> *H1b: The stricter the lockdown measures in a country, the more trust its citizens have in the European Union.*

Followed up on the theory that the improvement of the situation during a crisis could affect political trust, the upcoming hypothesis is focused on the reported COVID-19 cases in a country. The study of Brück et al. (2020) stated that when people are exposed to the current pandemic with a great number of cases, especially being in contact with ill people, it negatively influences the way they trust political institutions. This is linked to the fear citizens experience as a result of the high reported cases.

However, there is a possibility that the perceived anxiety could also lead to higher trust as a result of depending on political institutions during a crisis. A study by Mueller (1970) has introduced the concept of a rally-round-the-flag effect, which indicated that trust in political leaders increases in times of great crises. In order for this effect to occur, a great crisis must meet the requirements. This means that the event needs to be international and affect the country and president directly, and it must be specific, sharply focused and dramatic. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic meets these requirements and therefore can be seen as such crisis. Schraff (2020) researched that the rally-round-the-flag effect is indeed present when COVID-19 cases increase within the Netherlands. This is the direct effect of perceiving the pandemic as a threat, which results in anxiety among citizens. This leads to the collective need to trust the political institutions in order to feel protected and reduce their anxiety. This is crucial because

the pandemic has led to many mental illnesses, especially anxiety (Newby, O'Moore, Tang, Christensen & Faasse, 2020). On top of that, the risk to get infected is obviously high but not knowing when the pandemic will end leads to more frustration among citizens and the intensity of their political trust (Rubin, Amlôt, Page & Wessely, 2009).

Nevertheless, this is only the case in the first stage of the pandemic because this is the moment citizens are introduced to a new threat and therefore are faced with an unknown situation. As mentioned by Schraff (2020), citizens lean on their government in such situations when anxiety is at its highest and when it is expected for the government to improve the situation (Amat et al., 2020). In this case, it can mean that if eventually the COVID-19 cases decline after proper measures have been taken, the trust in the government would increase. Interestingly, the effectiveness of lockdown measures is not the highest at the beginning phase of the pandemic but rather after an amount of time has passed. After implementing different response measures, the reported cases show the highest decline (Haug, Geyrhofer, Londei, Dervic, Desvars-Larrive, Loreto, Pinior, Thurner & Klimek, 2020). As stated before, if situations improve as a result of good governance, citizens reward this by showing their support for its government leading to the increase in trust. It can therefore be expected that political trust increases when citizens experience a decline in reported COVID-19 cases. A study by Kay & Hwang (2021) in South-Korea showed that crisis management done properly by the government has led to the increase in trust from the public. This is linked to the improvement of the situation as a result of the actions taken by the government. Following from these findings, it is expected that during the first stages of the pandemic (early 2020) the trust in political institutions increases as a result of an unfamiliar situation and anxiety but will increase even more when governments have taken the right actions to improve the situation. Meaning that trust could increase when coronavirus cases are high in the beginning phase, but after implementing enough lockdown measures and the cases decrease, the trust will keep increasing. For this study, data is collected during the midst of the pandemic, when a couple of lockdown measures already have been implemented by governments. Therefore, it is expected that in this case low reported coronavirus cases will lead to greater reported levels of trust in political institutions. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2a: The lower the reported COVID-19 cases in a country, the more trust its citizens have in their national government.

Again, in relation to the first hypothesis, I expect the relation to be present in the context of the EU on the basis of the 'spillover effect'. Therefore, the next hypothesis will be used:

> *H2b: The lower the reported COVID-19 cases in a country, the more trust its citizens have in the European Union.*

Data and methods

Three data files will be used for this study, which will be merged together into one file including 23964 respondents of 27 European member states. Only these 27 countries will be incorporated from all three data files in order to research the trust in the EU (see Appendix A). Variables that will be used are trust in the national government, trust in the EU, strictness of lockdown measures and reported COVID-19 cases. Furthermore, a respondents age and state of employment is included in the analysis in order to examine if these factors can be seen as alternative determinants of trust in the two political institutions.

Trust in the national government and in the EU

The data that will be used to determine the trust citizens from European member states have in their national government as well as in the EU is reported in the Standard Eurobarometer survey wave 93.1, which is published by the GESIS data archive. This survey is requested and coordinated by the European Commission in 32 different European countries during the summer of 2020 (July-August) and includes some countries that are not members of the EU. This survey, which is carried out every year, aims to provide insights on the public's opinion about different topics regarding political institutions and its performances (Europees Parlement, n.d.). The sample consists of 33059 respondents between the ages of 15 and 99. The method for sampling was a mixture of probability and non-probability sampling. Firstly, a stratified sample was performed by using 'administrative regional units', which are groups that represent an area within a country. Secondly, respondents were sampled at random within those regional units. Herewith data was collected by having face-to-face interviews, computer-assisted surveys and self-administered questionnaires. However, because of the pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not always possible and therefore different modes were used (European Commission, 2020). The response rates differed between the countries with a range of 12,5 percent in Finland and 65,9 percent in Sweden (see Appendix B).

The variables that will be used for this study are the reported trust in the national government and in the EU. The question was proposed and stated whether the respondent tends

to trust the institution or not. Different political institutions were put in a matrix with the response categories (1) 'tend to trust', (2) 'tend not to trust' and (3) 'don't know' behind it. 'Don't know' has been assigned as a missing variable. After filtering out respondents with this missing the total N changes from 26681 to 23964 respondents. As mentioned earlier, the only political institutions relevant are the national government and the EU.

Strictness

The data regarding the strictness of lockdown measures is used from the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, provided by the Oxford University. Within this tracker, information is shared about the lockdown measures during COVID-19 of countries and are ranked by the level of strictness. The data consists of 20 response measure indicators, which again are divided into four different categories. These are 'containment and closure policies', 'economic policies', 'health system policies' and 'miscellaneous policies'.

The stringency index for display will be used as a variable which assigns the degree of strictness in a specific country, calculated on the basis of the 9 variables of lockdown measures indicators. The included variables are 'school closing', 'workplace closing', 'cancel public events', 'restrictions on gatherings', 'close public transport', 'stay at home requirements', 'restrictions on internal movement', 'international travel controls', and 'public information campaigns'. The assigned numbers for the degree of strictness range from 0 to 100: the higher the number, the stricter the lockdown measures in the country. With the use of this variable, the strictness of lockdown measures can be easily compared between countries. Only the variables' information on a specific date, which is July 9th, will be included. By choosing this date, the data corresponds with the data from the Eurobarometer survey, as this date is just before the survey started.

COVID-19 cases

As for the number of coronavirus cases within the European countries, data from Our World in Data is utilized. The data on reported cases is daily updated from the COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University for all the countries in the world. The datafile also consists of other topics related to the coronavirus, which are retrieved from different institutions (Roser, Ritchie, Ortiz-Ospina & Hasell, 2020).

This study will use the variable of the total cases per million and the date to identify the time stamp of the total cases. The total cases per one million inhabitants is used because this

makes comparisons between countries more accurate. The numbers will be divided by 100 to make interpretation pleasant. In relation to the previous independent variable, only the total cases just before the survey was conducted, which is again July 9th, is included.

Control variables

To see whether other factors could be assigned as alternative effects on trust in both the national government and the EU, two control variables will be included. These are age and employment. Age could give interesting results because elderly could have a different perspective or are more sensitive about the pandemic and its consequences than younger people. Moreover, elderly could better understand the way political institutions operate than younger people, which could affect their opinion of the actions of these institutions. Based on these two assumptions, it could be expected that there is a difference in the way people from different ages tend to trust political institutions based on their different perspectives. The variable for age consists of ages between 15 and 99 as can be seen in Table 1. Furthermore, whether the respondent is employed or not can also show interesting results. This is because people who are employed or unemployed could have different views on the role of the government during the pandemic based on their daily activities and work situations. Hence, the respondent's employment status could show an effect on trust. The variable that will be used consists of 18 different options for occupations for which a dummy variable is made with '0' as unemployed and '1' as employed (see Appendix C).

The descriptive statistics of the variables are shown in Table 1. As shown, the level of strictness varies great between countries, with a difference of 48.61 between the lowest and highest reported countries. Likewise, to the total COVID-19 cases which range from 3.390 cases to 75.386 cases.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

		Total *(N = 23964)*		
	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd.
Strictness	25.93	74.54	46.364	10.382
COVID-19 cases	3.390	75.386	24.551	20.227

Trust in government	1	2	1.54	.498
Trust in the EU	1	2	1.48	.500
Age	15	99	51.05	17.614
Employed	0	1	.589	.492

Statistical analyses

Primarily, the three data files will be merged together with 'country' as the key variable, consisting of the 27 European member states. A bivariate Pearson's Correlation will be run to see whether there is any correlation between the six variables: COVID-19 cases, strictness of measures, trust in the national government, trust in the EU, age and the employment status. Hereafter, to analyze the effect of strictness of lockdown measures and COVID-19 cases on trust in the national government, a multiple linear regression will be performed, including the two control variables age and employment status. This analysis will also be conducted for the effect of strictness of lockdown measures and COVID-19 cases on trust in the EU, including age and employment status.

Results

Bivariate correlations between variables

To explore the one-on-one correlation between the variables, a bivariate Pearson's correlation is executed. The results are shown in Table 2. It can be deduced that no significant correlation between trust in the national government and strictness is present while a negative significant correlation occurs with the reported COVID-19 cases. As for trust in the EU, the results show a positive significant correlation with both strictness and COVID-19 cases. Furthermore, age has a negative significant correlation between trust in the government but has a positive significant correlation between trust in the EU. The variable for employment shows the opposite results between trust in the national government as the outcome displays a positive significant correlation. In addition, there is no significant correlation between the employment status and trust in the EU.

Table 2. Correlation between strictness, COVID-19 cases, trust in the national government, trust in the EU, age, and employment status

	1	2	3	4	5	6

1. Strictness	-					
2. COVID-19 cases	.342**	-				
3. Trust in national government	-.009	-.085**	-			
4. Trust in the EU	.033**	.019**	.394**	-		
5. Age	.014*	.042**	-.085**	.046**	-	
6. Employed	-.031**	-.025**	.044**	.006	-.347**	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Trust in the national government

Firstly, the two hypotheses (1a & 1b) regarding the effect of strictness and reported COVID-19 cases on trust in the national government were tested. It was expected that higher strictness leads to more trust and that more COVID-19 cases would lead to less trust. A multiple linear regression is performed between strictness, COVID-19 cases and trust in the national government, including age and employment. The results are shown in Table 3. The regression model is significant ($F(4.23959)=88.186$, $p<.001$), but the explained variance of the variables altogether is small (R2=.015). Furthermore, there is a positive significant effect of strictness on trust in the national government (b=.001, p<.01). This shows that the stricter the lockdown measures in a country, the more trust is reported in the national government, which supports the hypothesis (1a).

In addition, the results show that reported COVID-19 cases have a negative significant effect on trust in the national government (b=-.002, p<.001). This indicates that the higher the COVID-19 cases in a country, the less trust is reported in the national government, which again supports the hypothesis (1b).

Age has a negative significant effect on trust in the national government, which means that the higher the age, the less trust is reported in the national government (b=-.002, p<.001). Furthermore, the employment status has a positive significant effect on trust in the national government (b=.017, p<.05). This shows that employed people report higher trust in the national government than unemployed people.

Trust in the EU

Another multiple linear regression is performed to test the hypotheses (2a & 2b) regarding the effect of strictness and COVID-19 cases on trust in the EU, including age and employment. It was expected that higher reported strictness would lead to higher reported trust in the EU, whereas higher COVID-19 cases was expected to lead to lower trust. The regression model is significant ($F(4.23959)=22.937$, $p<.001$), but the explained variance is even smaller than for the previous analysis (R2=.004). As shown in Table 3, strictness has a small positive significant effect on trust in the EU, which indicates that the stricter the lockdown measures in a country, the higher the trust in the EU (b=.001, p<.001). The results support the hypothesis (2a).

As for the reported COVID-19 cases, the results show that there is no significant effect found on trust in the EU (p=.331). This shows that the effect of COVID-19 cases on trust in the EU is not found within this study.

Age has a positive significant effect on trust in the EU (b=.002, p<.001), which means that elderly people trust the EU more than younger people. As for the employment status, the results show that there is a positive significant effect on trust in the EU (b=.027, p<.001). These results indicate that employed people report higher trust in the EU than unemployed people.

Table 3. Multiple linear regression for trust in the national government and trust in the EU

	National government *(N = 23964)*		**European Union** *(N = 23964)*	
	B	**SE**	**B**	**SE**
Strictness	.001**	.000	.001***	.000
COVID-19 cases	-.002***	.000	.000	.000
Control variables				
Age	-.002***	.000	.002***	.000
Employed	.017*	.007	.027***	.007
Constant	1.645***	.019	1.317***	.019
R2	.015		.004	

*Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

Conclusion

Political trust is a crucial element during the COVID-19 pandemic. As previous studies showed, in order for the public to comply with the legislations promulgated by political institutions during the pandemic, people first need to tend to trust these institutions. However, the opposite

relation can also exist. The aim of this study was to answer the question: *To what extent do strictness of lockdown measures and reported COVID-19 cases explain the differences in trust in the national government as well as in the European Union between European countries?* Studies showed that when political institutions listen to the needs of the public during crisis and implement legislations according to these needs, the public rewards institutions by showing their support. Furthermore, facing a threat such as a pandemic can affect citizens' trust in political institutions as a result of non-satisfaction. Previous studies have not yet researched the combination of these two determinants of political trust, or is the connection made between trust in the national government and trust in the EU. Furthermore, there have been studies that examined political trust in European countries, however none of these studies included all the European member states. Based on previous research, this study expected that stricter lockdown measures in a country would lead to higher levels of trust in both political institutions. In addition, it was foreseen that higher COVID-19 cases would lead to lower levels of trust.

The results of this study show that the stricter the lockdown measures in a country, the higher the reported trust in the national government as well as in the EU, which is in line with the expectation. As for the reported COVID-19 cases, the results support the assumption that higher cases lead to less trust in the national government. However, the effect on trust in the EU is not found within this study. Age and employment status were included in the analyses in order to examine whether these variables could occur as an alternative determinant. Interestingly, the results showed that elderly people tend to trust the national government more than younger people, but the opposite accounts for trust in the EU. Furthermore, this study has outlined that employed people tend to trust both the national government as well as the EU more than unemployed people.

It is of great importance knowing whether the strictness of lockdown measures affects public's trust in both the national government as well as in the EU. This information could imply that the public cares about the EU acting upon the needs of their people during difficult times like these. Considering that trust is an important factor for the integration of the EU and its future, it is helpful to provide insight on how this trust could increase. Furthermore, it is shown that trust in the national government decreases when COVID-19 cases go up, which outlines the importance of improving a crisis as a political institution. As previously mentioned, scholars have found that in the beginning phase of the pandemic, increasing COVID-19 cases have led to the increase of political trust as a result of fear and anxiety. However, this study focused on a different phase whereas some time has been passed. Herewith, on the contrary to the previous, the results show that high COVID-19 cases lead to the downfall of trust. As

expected, this could imply that at the beginning phase of the pandemic trust in political institutions is high because it is influenced by the publics anxiety, but after a period of time when more reported cases occur the trust decreases as a result of un-satisfaction. Thus, the conclusion can be made that the longevity of political trust can easily fluctuate, and that trust is not always fully guaranteed. It is important for political institutions to keep this in mind and act upon it. In addition, the results show that age and employment status can be alternative determinants for trust in both political institutions, which can also be meaningful information regarding the increasement of political trust.

However, this study has some limitations. Firstly, strictness of lockdown measures affects both trust in the national government as well as the EU, but the effect is rather small. In similar to the effect of COVID-19 cases on trust in the national government. Hence, there could be some adjustments made in order to see whether a greater effect could be found. One of the critical points that could be made is that the trust in the two political institutions is measured at one specific date. Further research could include a more dynamic research where trust is measured in a span of a couple of months or even years. This way, the results could show a bigger effect. In addition, researching whether the trust in both political institutions really changes before and after the pandemic has been introduced could show better and more reliable results. Secondly, this study only makes use of trust in two political institutions from the Eurobarometer survey. Different results could be shown if other or more political institutions would be included, such as the national parliament or local public authorities. Furthermore, because trust is only measured based on strictness of lockdown measures and COVID-19 cases within specific countries, it could be the reason for the small effect found between strictness and trust in the EU, as well as not finding an effect between COVID-19 cases and trust in the EU. Further research could study the effect of the two determinants on trust in the EU, or other European institutions, but based on policies and legislations made by the EU itself. This could show more reliable results because this could directly have an effect on trust in these institutions.

Interestingly, the results show that age and employment status could be an alternative determinant of trust in the two political institutions. Further research could investigate the effect of age more and include factors that influence this, such as knowledge about politics, anxiety and fear perceived by people, or other factors that could change the perspectives of people from different ages. This can also be done for employment. The results of this study show that employed people report higher levels of trust, which could be further studied. For example, by including the effect of being in contact with people during the pandemic which makes people

rely more on political institutions. Additionally, it can be interesting to research whether there is a difference in reported trust between different occupations, as this study only researched whether the respondent is employed or not. People that, for example, travel for their work may have a different view on the topic than people that work at the office. Furthermore, the reason to research the strictness of lockdown measures was based on the satisfaction by the public regarding these measures. Further research could investigate this more by measuring the effect of satisfaction with measures and legislation on trust in political institutions. Lastly, it could also be interesting to see whether there is a linkage between the trust people have in other people and trust in political institutions. This could imply that trust is based on the characteristics of people and their possibility to trust others.

All in all, there are many possibilities for further research regarding trust in political institutions. This study has contributed to the sociological field by finding that stricter lockdown measures lead to increased trust in both the national government as well as in the EU. In addition, more reported COVID-19 cases in a country lead to less trust in the national government.

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Appendix A. Included countries

France

Belgium

The Netherlands

Germany

Italy

Luxembourg

Denmark

Ireland

Greece

Spain

Portugal

Finland

Sweden

Austria

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Estonia

Hungary

Latvia

Lithuania

Malta

Poland

Slovakia

Slovenia

Bulgaria

Romania

Croatia

Appendix B. Response rates

The response rates are calculated by dividing the total number of complete interviews with the number of all the addresses visited, apart from ones that are not eligible but including those where eligibility is unknown. For Standard Eurobarometer 93, the response rates for the EU27 countries, calculated by Kantar, are:

BE	51.1%	EL	27.8%	LT	43.6%	PT	37.3%
BG	44.6%	ES	31.7%	LU*	33.7%	RO	61.9%
CZ	46.8%	FR	29.3%	HU	55.8%	SI	48.3%
DK	43.6%	HR	56.1%	MT	48.5%	SK	61.4%
DE	18.1%	IT	21.8%	NL	39.5%	FI*	12.5%
EE*	28.6%	CY	44.3%	AT	43.2%	SE**	54.1%
IE*	35.6%	LV	41.1%	PL	40.4%	SE***	65.9%

*CAWI only (LU for probabilistic sample) and without asking into account recruitment phase ** CAPI: Computer-Assisted Personal interviewing *** CAWI: Computer-Assisted Web interviewing

Appendix C. Occupations within employment variable

Unemployed

1. Responsible for ordinary shopping, etc.
2. Student
3. Unemployed, temporarily not working
4. Retired, unable to work

Employed

5. Farmer
6. Fisherman
7. Professional (lawyer, etc.)
8. Owner of a shop, craftsmen, etc.
9. Business proprietors, etc.
10. Employed professional (employed doctor, etc.)
11. General management, etc.
12. Middle management, etc.
13. Employed position, at desk
14. Employed position, travelling
15. Employed position, service job
16. Supervisor
17. Skilled manual worker
18. Unskilled manual worker, etc.