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LEGITIMULT

IACFS conference,
Antwerp

Gaining trust through
cooperation? How
intergovernmental
interaction influences
citizens' political trust in
times of crisis



Introduction

- ▶ Growing importance of and attention for intergovernmental relations (IGR)
- ▶ However, lack of literature on how IGR affects citizens' attitudes towards their governments
 - ▶ Especially relevant in times of crisis (e.g., political trust)
- ▶ RQ: How do intergovernmental consultations prior to decisions on crisis management affect citizens' political trust and how can the effect of consultation be explained?
 - ▶ Focus on consultation as one aspect of IGR in general
 - ▶ Focus on political trust

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Theory

The importance of IGR

- ▶ In federal and other multi-tiered systems
 - ▶ Interdependency of different tiers of government and balancing needs in federal systems
 - ▶ Ensuring coherence and consistency across a system
 - ▶ Influencing decisions, information exchange, economics of scale...
- ▶ During transboundary crises (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic)
 - ▶ Coherent policies for the whole system
 - ▶ Information exchange and influencing decision-making
 - ▶ Overcoming boundaries of (fragmented) competences
- ▶ => common reasons and advantages to engage in IGR

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Citizens' perceptions of IGR

- ▶ Hypothesis 1: A positive effect of IGR is less strong for citizens with strong attachments to a certain level of government than for those with weaker attachment to that level of government
 - ▶ Literature on citizens' preferences for self-rule and shared rule in federal and unitary systems
- ▶ Hypothesis 2: The positive effect of IGR on citizens' political trust is smaller for right-wing citizens compared to left-wing citizens
 - ▶ Mostly found in literature on (horizontal) cooperation preferences at the local level, but also at the regional level

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Theory

Citizens' perceptions of IGR

- ▶ Expectation 1: Effect of IGR to be found in both federal and unitary systems given the crisis situation
- ▶ Expectation 2: Effect of IGR in dual competitive systems compared to cooperative integrated systems
 - ▶ a. Effect is stronger: way to overcome conflicts and enhance decision-making in times of crisis vs. normal mode of governance
 - ▶ b. Effect is weaker: Creation of suspicion, and thus less trust, because of cooperation
- ▶ Expectation 3: Citizens who perceive a strong impact of a level of government are less susceptible to the effect of IGR than those who perceive a lower impact of that level
 - ▶ Those who perceive a stronger impact might not see the need for cooperation

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Methods

Data and methods

- ▶ Survey on trust in different government levels with hypothetical scenario depicting a restrictive and supportive measure as crisis response
 - ▶ Scenario similar to Covid-19 with additional question on intergovernmental interaction for least and most trusted level
- ▶ 6 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Spain
 - ▶ Different types of (federal) systems with different IGR traditions
 - ▶ 1000 respondents per country
- ▶ Data collection in June 2023 by Bilendi
- ▶ Independent samples t-tests, ANOVA and regression analysis

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The effect of IGR on trust

Results

- ▶ Trust in a government level to take a measure in times of crisis generally higher after consultation of other levels, but:
 - ▶ Trust after consultation **lower** if trust was already **high**
 - ▶ Trust after consultation **higher** if trust was very **low** before
- ▶ So, the effect of consultation differs depending on the level citizens' trust in a certain level of government
 - ▶ For all levels of government and both types of measures

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The effect of IGR on trust

Results

- ▶ No differences in effect of IGR on citizens' trust in a level of government to take a pandemic measure between unitary and federal systems
- ▶ But, differences between types of federal systems.

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Results

How citizens perceive IGR

- ▶ The effect of IGR is influenced by citizens' individual characteristics:
 - ▶ Stronger effect for highly educated citizens who accept the governments' pandemic management and perceive a severe crisis
 - ▶ Weaker effect for older, strongly attached citizens who perceive high impact of a level of government

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Conclusion

Three main insights

- ▶ IGR does matter for citizens political trust in times of crisis
 - ▶ But, different effect of IGR depending on level of trust in a given government level!
- ▶ Effect differs between types of federal systems, but not between unitary and federal systems
 - ▶ IGR tradition seems to be more important than the latter distinction
- ▶ The effect of IGR is influenced by citizens' individual characteristics:
 - ▶ Stronger effect for highly educated citizens who accept the governments' pandemic management and perceive a severe crisis
 - ▶ Weaker effect for older, strongly attached citizens who perceive high impact of a level of government

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Conclusion

Further research

- ▶ Limitations
 - ▶ Analysis only for least and most trusted levels due to survey constraints
 - ▶ Focus on the Covid-19 pandemic
 - ▶ What about other forms of IGR like coordination, cooperation... or intergovernmental tensions? Or horizontal IGR?
 - ▶ Including the EU in the hypothetical scenario
- ▶ Nevertheless, research shows that it is worthwhile looking at the effect of IGR on citizens' attitudes (also in unitary systems!), especially in light of increasing interconnectedness and complexity of MTS and of future crises

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