

# ‘We’re all in this together?’

*A survey experiment on the perceived legitimacy of region-specific crisis interventions in Germany and the Netherlands*

Dr. Lars Brummel | EGPA Conference, 3-6 September 2024, Athens



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Leiden**  
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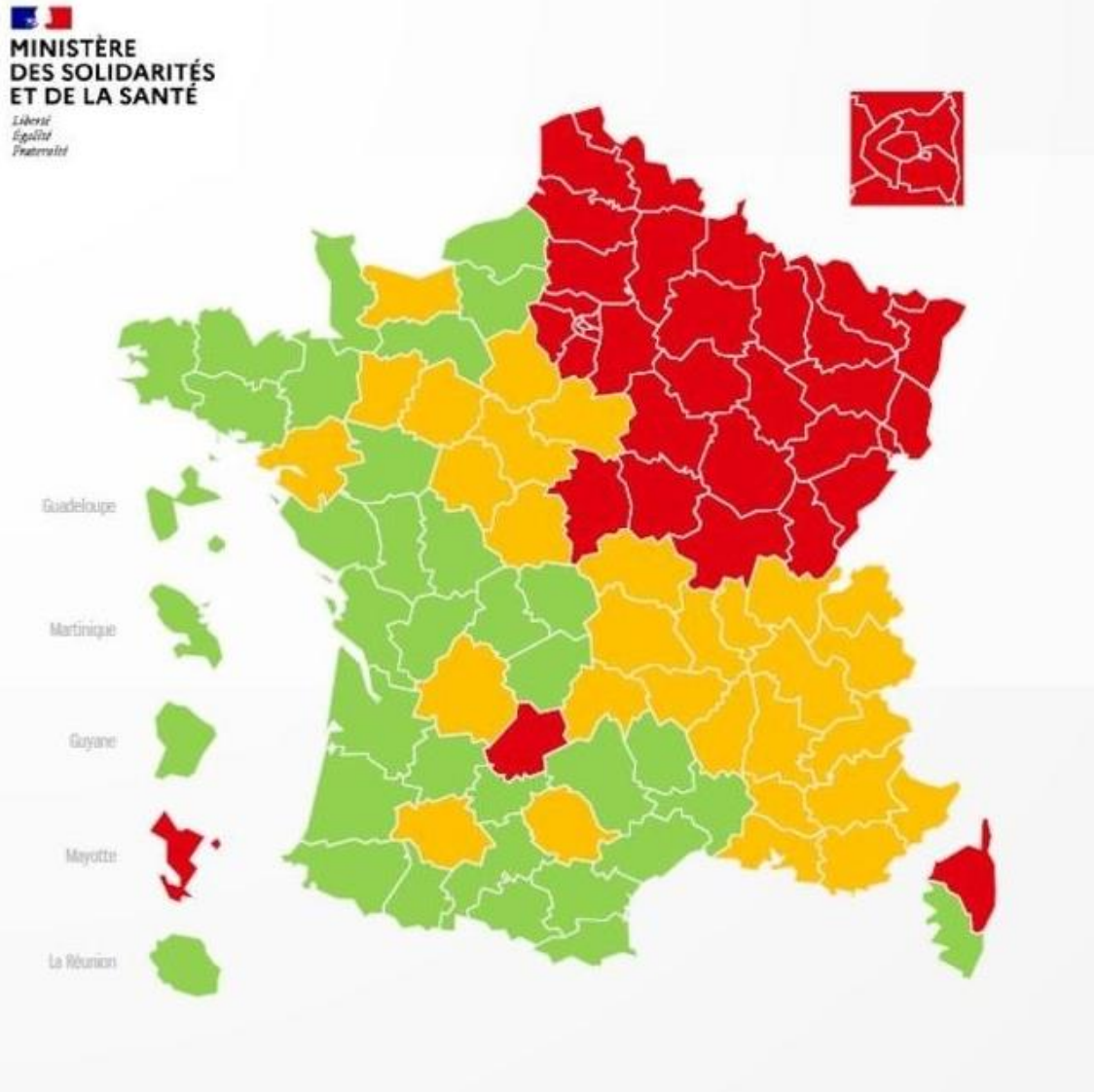
# The project

- <https://legitimult.eu/>



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# Regional dimensions of crisis management



## Antwerp is put under curfew, new province-wide measures to combat coronavirus

Colin Clapson

Update Tue 28 Jul 2020 17:52

Tue 28 Jul 2020 09:59

## Germany's Länder break ranks with Merkel to ease lockdown

Frustration in Berlin as some states lift curbs ahead of conference aimed at co-ordinating strategy

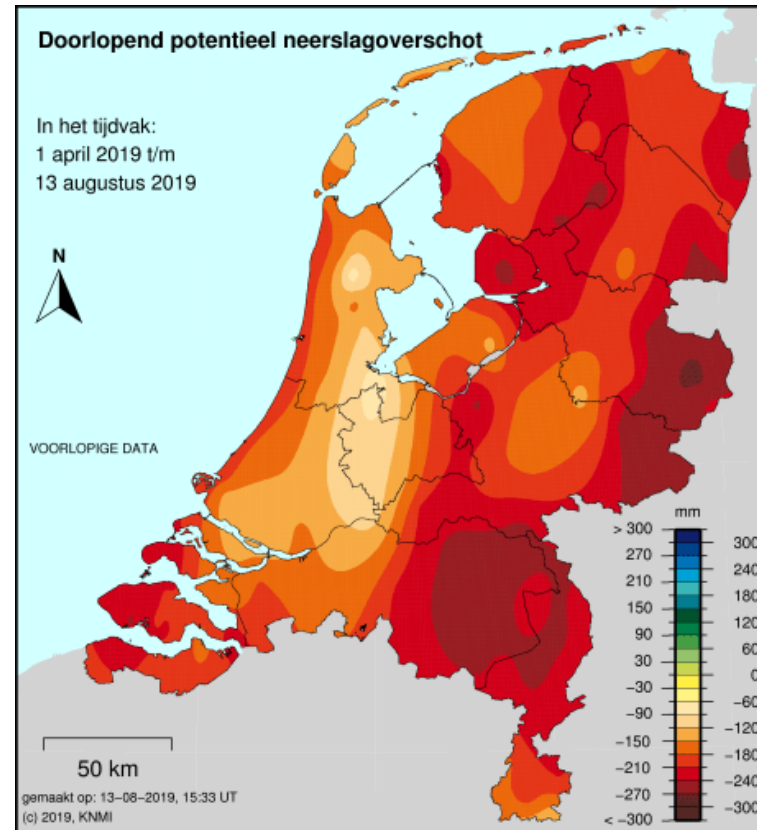
Guy Chazan in Berlin MAY 6 2020

## Coronavirus Spain: Catalonia locks down area of 210,000 people

4 July 2020

# Research puzzle

- Many crises tend to cross territorial boundaries, and manifest differently across affected regions
- Region-specific crisis interventions offer a tailor-made and flexible strategy to deal with regional differences in the impact of a crisis
- Such measures might however challenge principles of equal treatment
- Are citizens willing to accept region-specific crisis interventions?
- Other crisis-related examples:
  - Drought / water shortages in the Netherlands
  - Wildfires in Sweden



# Legitimacy of crisis management

- *“Crisis management performance is not only a question of objective reality but also a matter of public perceptions and sentiments”* (Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja, 2016, p. 889)
- *“When collective behaviour is the key to effective management of the crisis, legitimacy is probably the most important asset that governments can possess.”* (Boin, ‘t Hart and McConnell, 2021, p. 56)

# Fairness of region-specific crisis measures

- Governments might face multiple legitimacy tradeoffs in crisis management
  - Trade-off between security and freedom
  - Trade-off between efficiency and equality
- Distributive justice theory suggests that citizens evaluate the legitimacy of governmental actions based on their own treatment compared to the treatment of others
- When citizens perceive more restrictions in their own region compared to other regions, we expect that citizens would consider these restrictions to be less fair and less appropriate

# Does multi-level governance matter?

- During transboundary crises, different governmental layers can decide on the introduction of crisis-related measures
- Citizens tend to differentiate in their political attitudes and evaluations between different levels of governments
- Does it matter for citizens' legitimacy perceptions of crisis interventions which level of government takes a decision?
  - Regional subsidiarity thesis
  - Centralization thesis
  - Institutional hypothesis

# Methods: a two-country survey experiment

- Pre-registered vignette experiment with a 2x2 between-subjects randomized design
- Experimental treatments:
  - Level of government: national vs. regional decision-making
  - Policy uniformity: national uniformity vs regional diversity of measures
- Hypothetical scenario: implementation of strict rules in response to an epidemic outbreak
- Country context: Germany and the Netherlands (fielded in May 2024, with N=2,252 respondents)
- Outcome variables: two different facets of perceived legitimacy
  - (1) Compliance and (2) Protest acceptability



# Country selection

- **Germany**

- Federation
- Strong position of state governments (*Länder*), with considerable legislative powers and responsibilities
- Large country, with regions having varying degrees of connectivity

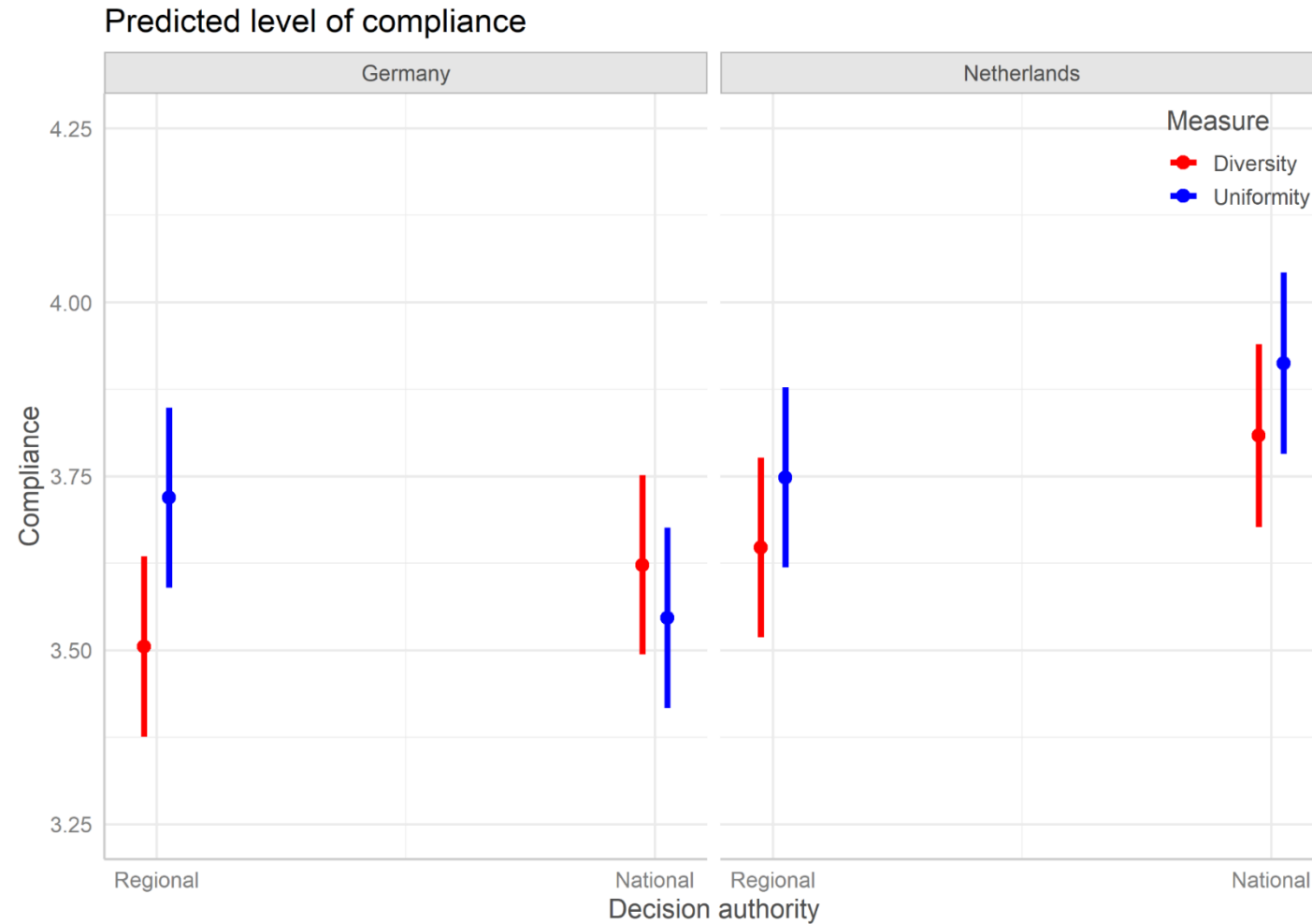


- **The Netherlands**

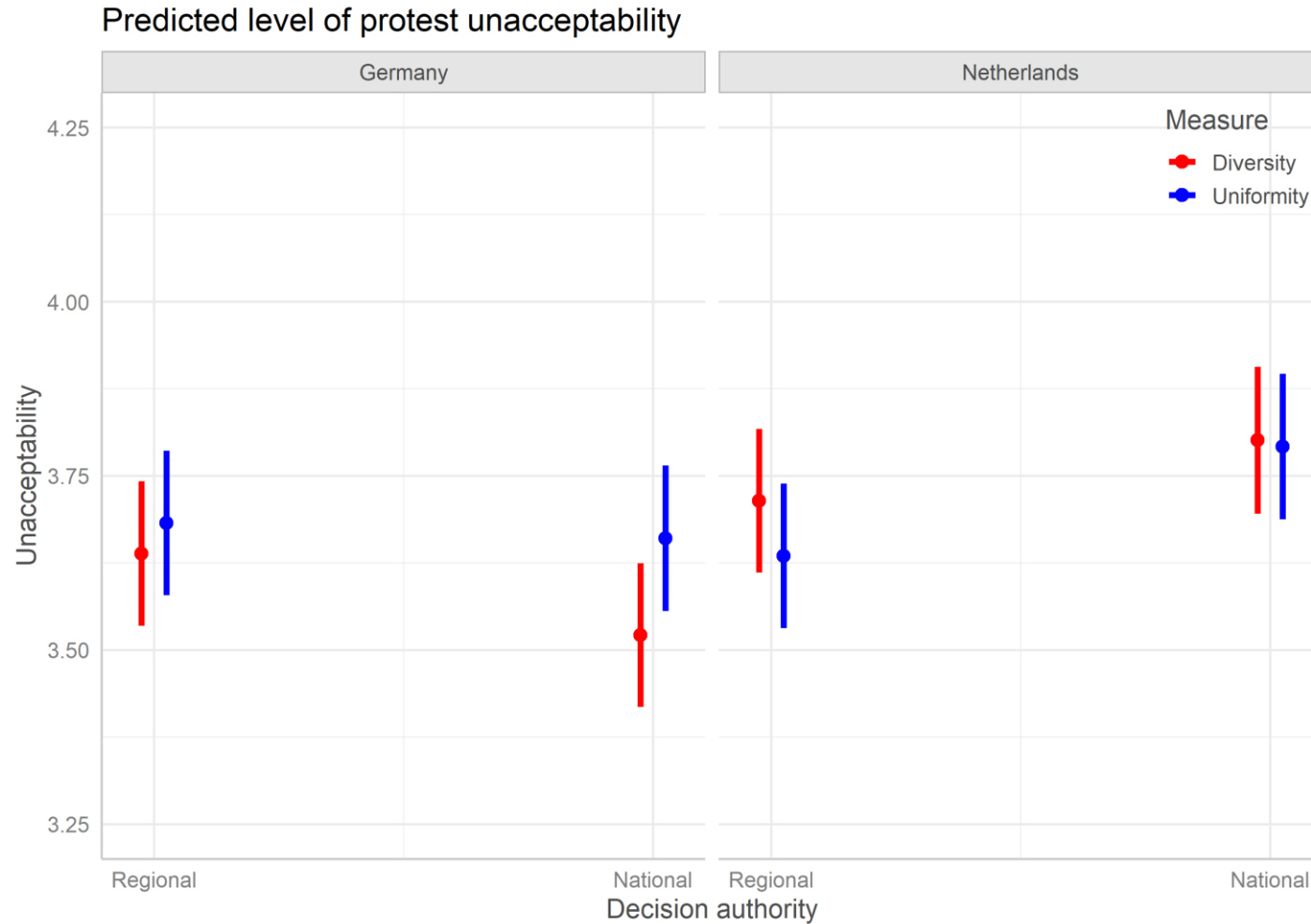
- Decentralized unitary state
- Relatively weak position of provincial governments; and largely invisible and irrelevant for (most) citizens
- Small and densely populated country, with well-connected regions



# Experimental findings



# Experimental findings - II



# Conclusions and implications

- Nation-wide crisis interventions are not viewed as inherently more legitimate than region-specific ones.
- In the Netherlands, restrictions decided by the national government are more accepted than those decided regionally but there is no difference in Germany
- An important question remains to what extent our findings are transferable to other countries (i.e. multinational states) and other types of transboundary crises
- In reality, how citizens perceive the legitimacy of region-specific crisis interventions, would further depend on crisis leadership and communication
- Region-specific crisis interventions are not without legitimacy challenges – however, other facets of crisis management might be more important for securing legitimate crisis governance

# Thank you for your attention!



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