

# **Discrimination against Mobile EU Citizens before and during the first Covid-19 lockdown: Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment in Germany**

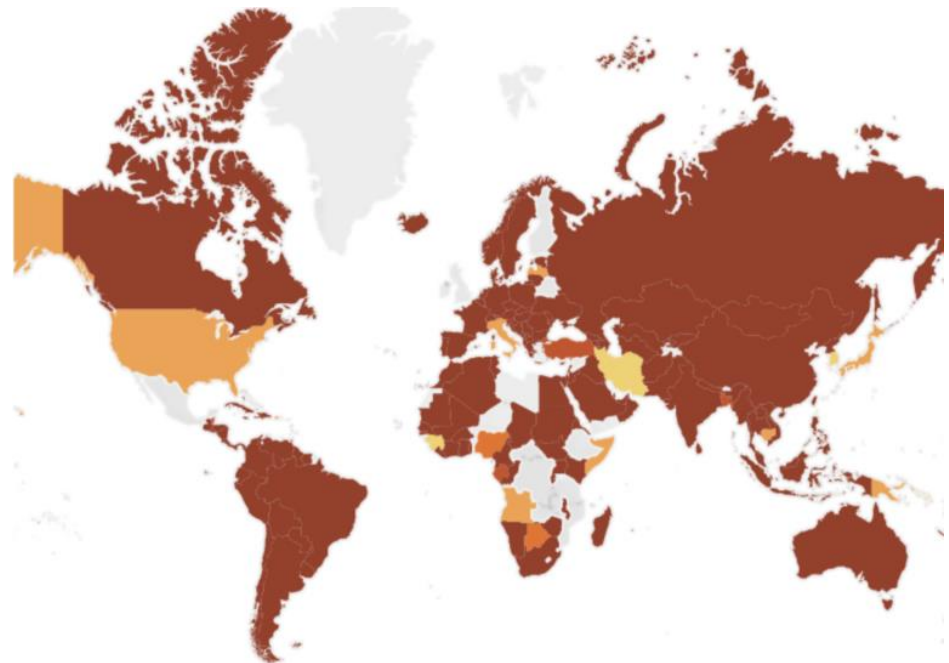
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## COVID-19, first wave – national political reactions

Quick national reactions to stop the spread of Covid-19 in spring 2020:

- National lockdowns
- International travel restrictions
- Social distancing measures



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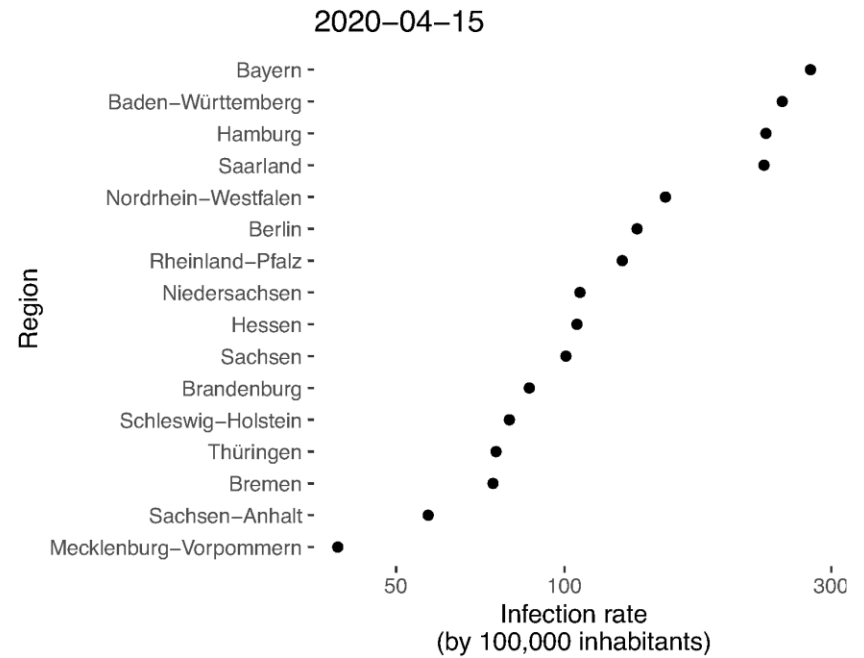
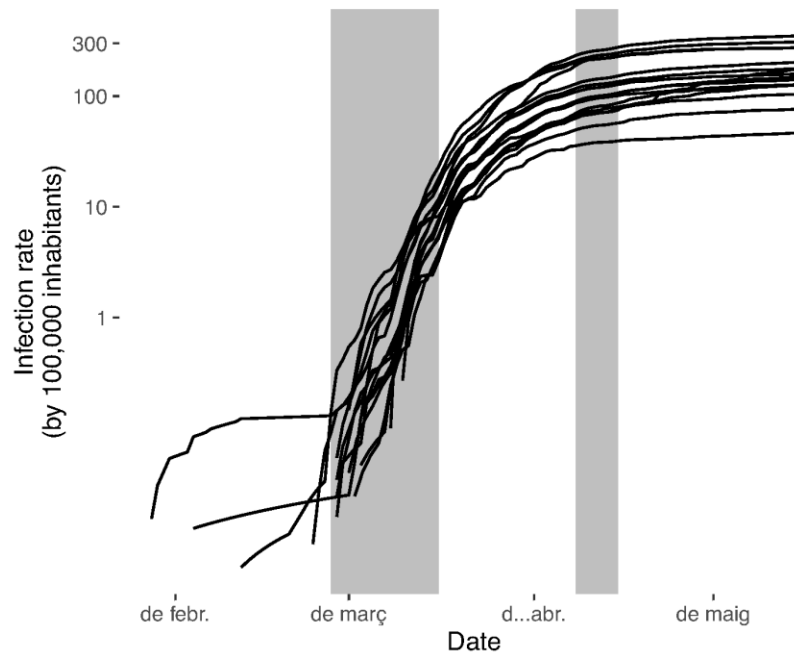
Countries with travel restrictions. Source : IATA (5 mai 2020), illustration: NCCR On the Move.

# Theoretical background

Why should this pandemic increase discrimination, meaning the unequal treatment of individuals based on arbitrary group characteristics such as nationality or language skills (i.e. discrimination against «dissimilar others»)?

- 1) **Increased threat (e.g., health, economy, symbolic, realistic, egocentric, sociotropic...) and inter-group competition (medical services, social benefits)** (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2015, Quillian 1995)
- 2) **National protectionist reactions and border closures**, despite the global and local/regional nature of the pandemic (Piccoli 2020), intensification of nationalist discourses and social identity (Hartman et al. 2020)
- 3) **«Behavioural immune system»: disgust sensitivity** as a trigger for anti-immigrant attitudes (Aarøe et al. 2017), increased sensitivity to disgust and avoidance of threatening marginal groups in times of pandemic (Faulkner et al. 2004, Huan et al. 2011)

# Exposure to COVID-19 in Germany



# Hypotheses

- H1*  
**Crisis** We expect an increase in discrimination due to the crisis, meaning preferential treatment based on cultural similarity (captured via nationality, Dutch vs. Bulgarian) and language skills.
- H2*  
**Exposure** Respondents will show higher prioritization of individuals that are more similar to them in terms of nationality and language, the more they were exposed to the outbreak of COVID-19
- H3*  
**Vulnerability** Individuals most likely to be affected by the COVID-19 crisis, that is, individuals above 60 and those in low-income groups, will show more discriminatory behaviour as the crisis gains in salience.

# Research design

Conjoint experiment,  
two waves in Germany

- Before the first «lockdown» (early March 2020, N= 2'999)
- During lockdown (mid-April 2020, N = 1'063)

## Social benefits example

'Please consider a scenario in which you have a job working for the local government in your municipality. You receive two applications for a social benefit, the so-called Hartz IV. As EU-citizens, both applicants are eligible to apply for this social benefit. Due to personal time constraints, you are required to make a choice of which applicant you process first, which will lead to a delay in the payment to the other applicant.'

## Voting rights example

'Please consider a scenario in which you have a job working for the local government in your municipality. You receive two requests concerning missing vote documents for the upcoming local election. As EU-citizens, both persons are eligible to vote in this election. However, without the necessary documents, they will not be able to cast their vote. Due to personal time constraints, you are required to make a choice of which request you process first, which will lead to the other person cannot vote in the upcoming election.'

	<b>Applicant (Request) 1</b>	<b>Applicant (Request) 2</b>
Nationality	Dutch	Romanian
Gender	female	male
Language proficiency	broken German	fluent German
Profession	nurse	medical doctor
Age	25 years old	40 years old

**Which of the two applications (requests) will you process first?**

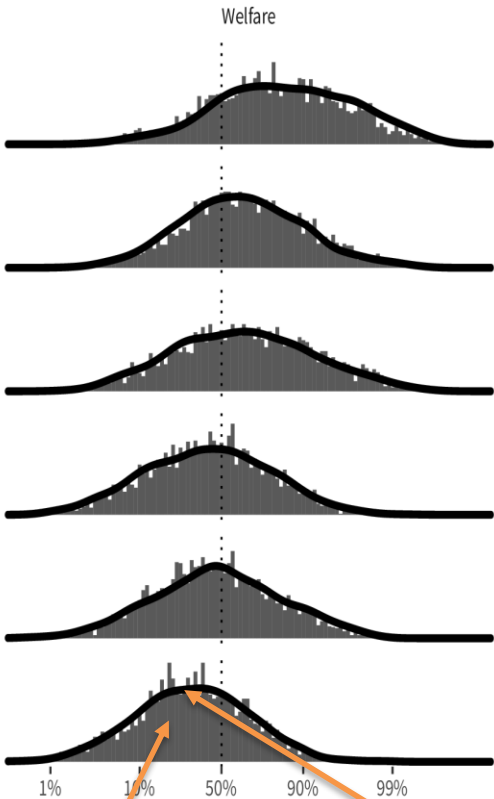
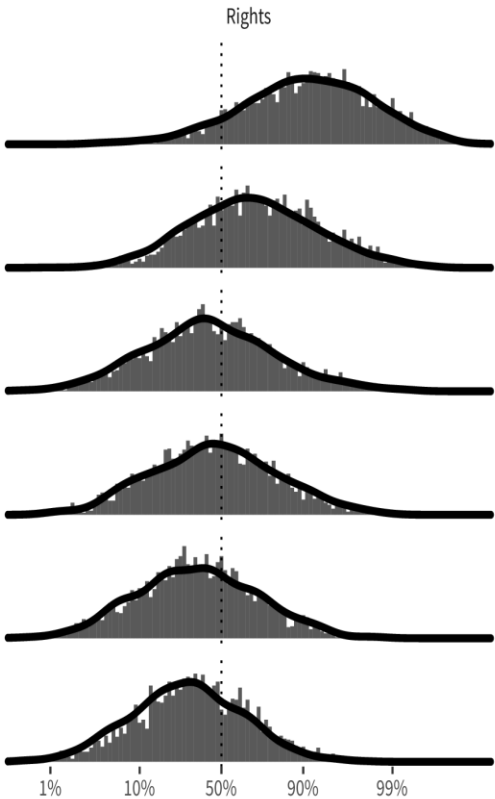
<1> Applicant (Request) 1

<2> Applicant (Request) 2

# Results H1

## Voting rights

## Social benefits



- Language Full
- Nationality Netherlands
- Profession Nurse
- Age 25
- Age 55
- Gender Male

1. Preference for EU citizens with good language skills and Dutch nationality
2. Almost identical preferences before and during the pandemic

H1: X

Utility

Histogramme = main (pre-crisis) sample

Black line = crisis sample

## Results H2

**Table 2:** Probability of the effect of higher exposure to COVID-19 (due to living in a different region) being higher after the lockdown than before, for the two features regarding identity.

Outcome	Feature	Prob H2
Welfare	Language Full	0.5680
Rights	Language Full	0.5346
Rights	Nationality Netherlands	0.3860
Welfare	Nationality Netherlands	0.3820

Individual (regional) exposure to the virus does not influence individual preferences

H2: X



## Results H3

**Table 3:** Probability of higher effect of age and income (vulnerability) on prioritization (identity) during the COVID-19 crisis than during regular time.

Outcome	Feature	Covariate	Prob H3
Welfare	Language Full	Age ( $\geq 60$ )	0.5226
Rights	Language Full	Age ( $\geq 60$ )	0.5138
Rights	Language Full	Income (Low)	0.4072
Welfare	Nationality Netherlands	Income (Low)	0.4006
Rights	Nationality Netherlands	Income (Low)	0.3282
Welfare	Language Full	Income (Low)	0.3234
Rights	Nationality Netherlands	Age ( $\geq 60$ )	0.2706
Welfare	Nationality Netherlands	Age ( $\geq 60$ )	0.2312

No evidence that the most vulnerable people (elderly, low income) react with more discriminatory behaviour to this pandemic

H3: X

# Conclusion and interpretation

## Conclusions

- Similar levels of discrimination (preferential treatment) in relation to nationality and language skills before and during the crisis
- No short-term impact of increased exposure or vulnerability on discrimination during the crisis

## Possible interpretations

- General trend (no change in discrimination) may be the result of contrasting effects across subgroups (increased solidarity among some vs. more discrimination among others)
- Results consistent with research documenting support for the (moderate) political status quo (“rally around the flag”), not for right-wing populist candidates, in times of crisis (Bol et al. 2020)

## Open questions

- 1) No immediate (short-term) effects of the crisis on discrimination in Germany - but what about long-term effects? Not really... (3rd survey early May 2021)
- 2) What about other individual attributes that can trigger discrimination? (e.g. Asian?)
- 3) Special case Germany? Findings generalizable beyond Germany?

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