The causal influence of information about COVID-19 on laypersons' trust in government, perception of their living conditions, and economic expectations

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Abstract
The current COVID-19 crisis has profound effects around the world. A potentially important factor for the perception of the crisis by laypersons appears to be the specific type of information they receive. Focusing on two emerging markets, Thailand and Vietnam, we study the impact of different information treatments on people’s assessments of (i) their government’s response to COVID-19 as well as their level of government trust, (ii) the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their life, and (iii) the future development of macroeconomic variables as well as their sentiments as consumers. In addition, we are also interested in whether and to what extent people’s assessments of the government’s response and their trust in the government affects their sentiments as consumers. The analysis will be based on two representative Internet-based surveys conducted in Thailand and Vietnam amongst the population aged 18 or older. Vietnam and Thailand were chosen, because other population surveys indicated very different beliefs about how the respective government is handling the crisis (in Vietnam, policy measures are perceived to be much less insufficient than in Thailand and trust in government is substantially higher).

We will randomly split up our samples for each country and apply four different information treatments in addition to a control group. First, a map presenting the share of people in a country stating that they perceive the public reaction as insufficient and some text. Second, information based on a global survey on how populations judge their governments’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, a graph and some text illustrating the effectiveness of social distances for avoiding infections. Fourth, information about the International Labour Organization’s devastating forecasts about the effects of COVID-19 on worldwide employment.

We expect to find the information treatments to have significant and economically meaningful causal effects on how people assess (i), (ii), and (iii). Moreover, we will test whether similar treatments have similar effects in two emerging countries, distinguished by very different public perspectives on how the respective government is handling the crisis.

Data:
- Representative population surveys in Thailand and Vietnam.
- Targeted samples are 3,000 respondents each.
- Data collection via the Internet by local survey institutes.
- Sampling period planned for late April 2020.
- Four information treatments regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

Data coverage: Online surveys in Thailand and Vietnam

Field: Causal influence of information about COVID-19 on trust in government, perception of living conditions, and economic expectations

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