The Temporary Increase in Trust in Government and Compliance with Anti-pandemic Measures at the Start of the Covid-19 Pandemic*

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Abstract: Public support for government institutions tends to increase in the face of threats such as armed conflict, terrorism, or natural disasters. This phenomenon, known as the 'rally-'round-the-flag' effect, has also been observed as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic in many countries. Citizens' trust in the government's good intentions and ability to handle a crisis is very important, as it gives government the legitimacy to take strong measures. High trust in government also increases citizens' willingness to comply with these measures. The aim of this study is to examine the 'rally-'round-the-flag' effect in the Czech Republic, analyse the characteristics related to the increase in trust in government, and test the relationship between trust in government and compliance with anti-pandemic measures. The analysis uses data from five waves of the Czech Household Panel Study (2016–2020) and finds a dramatic increase in trust in government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A relatively higher increase in trust in government was observed among people with a low level of education and low social trust. Overall, however, the rise in trust in government is more of a general tendency across society than it is an increase in one specific group of the population. Trust in government is also linked to compliance with anti-pandemic measures.

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Introduction

When individuals or groups of people are faced with a collective threat, they tend to unite in order to better manage the threat. At the country level, this is referred to as the 'rally-'round-the-flag' effect. In extremely difficult times, in the midst of armed conflict, acts of terrorism, natural disasters, or epidemics, for instance, citizens rally by showing increasing support for government institutions and the people in leadership positions. This civic support provides governments with the mandate to take important steps to prevent the crisis or curb its impact. Trust in government is significant for its positive correlation with compliance with protective measures. Originally best known in the context of the Cold War and US foreign policy, the rally-'round-the-flag effect has recently come to be discussed in the case of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Studies in many countries around the globe showed that trust in government was growing in the period before the pandemic and in the spring of 2020 [Edelman Trust Barometer 2020]. When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, increasing trust was observed despite government regulations that sought to prevent the spread of the virus by restricting social life, restricting economic activity, closing the borders, and imposing curfews. One reason why trust-based government legitimacy matters is that trust makes citizens more likely to attach importance to and comply with government regulations. The Czech government introduced some of the most restrictive measures anywhere at the start of the pandemic [Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker 2021], but relatively little is known about the existence, possible causes, or the effects of the increased trust in government at that time.

This article investigates the causes and effects of the increased trust in the Czech government at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. The analyses draw on five waves of the Czech Household Panel Study (hereinafter CHPS), which interviewed the same individuals annually from 2016 to the spring of 2020, when the final wave took place. As a source of information about the life situations, behaviours, and attitudes of Czechs in the period several years before the pandemic and during the first wave of the pandemic, this unique dataset allows us to study the effects of the pandemic situation on trust in government and compliance with government measures. Given the nature of the data, we use mixed, multilevel, repeated-measurement models to analyse the trend in trust in government, and a multilevel regression model to analyse the final-wave data on compliance with measures.

In the following text, we first describe the rally-'round-the-flag theory and its relevance to the coronavirus crisis. We then present research evidence on the effect of crisis situations on trust in government, drawing on recent studies dealing directly with the Covid-19 pandemic, and on studies that have examined the effect of trust in government on compliance with government measures. The results of our regression analyses are discussed in reference to previous research with a view to interpreting the causes and effects of the growth of trust in Czech government at the outset of the Covid-19 crisis.

Rallying 'round the flag

The rally-'round-the-flag phenomenon was first defined by John E. Mueller [1970, 1973] to explain abrupt and short-term spikes in US presidential approval ratings. A sudden and substantial increase in support for the head of the executive branch was observed immediately after important foreign policy events, and especially after military interventions or escalated international negotiations that potentially foreshadowed armed conflict.

Although the rally-'round-the-flag effect is frequently described in the literature, few studies have analysed the causes and mechanism behind it (one exception is, e.g., Perrin and Smolek [2009]). Explanations have primarily centred on two potential sources of this effect: (1) a sense of patriotism and (2) opinion leadership [Hetherington, Nelson 2003]. In the first explanation, the government and top government leaders become symbols through which people identify with their group (e.g. the nation) and distinguish themselves from other groups that are threatening them [Tajfel 1982]. The sense of uncertainty and danger emanating from that threat is key. Leaders are supported and followed as a defence mechanism for coping with the threat [Doty, Peterson, Winter 1991]. Communication, as opposed to socio-psychological mechanisms, is at the centre of the other dominant explanation. People rally 'round the flag because opposition leaders are reluctant to criticise the government in times of crisis. Such reluctance then inspires the media to take a lenient or even positive approach to government and, in doing so, support its positions and actions in fighting the enemy. As a result, the message conveyed to the public, both directly and indirectly, is that the government is doing a good job, and this boosts trust in government [Hetherington, Nelson 2003].

According to Hetherington and Nelson [ibid.], the patriotism and opinion leadership explanations are not mutually exclusive but complementary. While patriotism better explains the emergence of the rally-'round-the-flag effect, opinion leadership helps us understand why the effect is typically temporary and does not transform into long-term support for government. When the initial emotions subside and the situation becomes at least somewhat stable, the opposition and the media start evaluating the government's actions and, as a rule, trust in government or leader approval ratings begin to decline.

When the rally-'round-the-flag effect was first described in the 1970s, studies were accounting for the situations that followed the escalation of Cold War conflicts such as the Cuban Missile Crisis or the Vietnam War [Mueller 1970, 1973]. Researchers were able to identify trends in rising and declining approval ratings because at that time the popularity of US presidents was surveyed at sufficiently short intervals for them to do so, and because the enduring conflict with the Soviet Union meant that there were plenty of serious security crises. The rally-'round-the-flag effect survived the end of the Cold War and has been observed not only during armed conflicts [Hetherington, Nelson 2003; Kriner 2006] but also, more importantly, in the aftermath of terrorist attacks [Dinesen, Jæger 2013; Perrin, Smolek 2009; Wollebæk et al. 2012]. Trust in government grew following

the 2011 Utøya mass shooting in Norway [Wollebæk et al. 2012] and after the Madrid bombing in 2001 [Dinesen, Jæger 2013]. The same effect was even observed after natural disasters that occurred in Nepal and Spain [Boittin, Mo, Utych 2020; Ramos, Sanz 2020]. Current rally-'round-the-flag research is mainly focused on the Covid-19 pandemic [Bækgaard et al. 2020; Esaiasson et al. 2020; Kritzinger et al. 2021; Schraff 2020], and so does this article.

Rallying 'round the flag during the Covid-19 pandemic

At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic, the conditions were ripe for the emergence of the rally-'round-the-flag effect in almost every country in the world. Uncertainty and a sense of threat led citizens to support governments and their actions. The tendency of political parties to unite against a common threat, along with the acute nature of the crisis, inspired opinion leaders to suspend criticism of the government [Esaiasson et al. 2020; Schraff 2020]. A sharp rise of trust in government was observed, for instance, in Sweden [Esaiasson et al. 2020], Denmark [Bækgaard et al. 2020], the Netherlands [Hegewald, Schraff 2020], and Austria [Kritzinger et al. 2021]. Even Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's scandal-plagued prime minister, enjoyed a spike in popularity in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic [Hamanaka 2020]. In Bavaria, the ruling Christian Social Union (CSU) managed to transform the rally-'round-the-flag effect into a victory for its incumbents in the local elections [Leininger, Schaub 2020].

The existence of a Covid-related rally-'round-the-flag effect, as opposed to a mere trend in the development of trust in government, is supported by several studies demonstrating that the increased trust in government prompted by the pandemic was only temporary, as it was in other cases of this effect [Johansson, Hopmann, Shehata 2021; Kritzinger et al. 2021]. In Austria, the high level of trust in government observed among the public regardless of their political orientation then declined between May and June 2020, when it returned to the pre-pandemic levels that reflected people's party preferences [Kritzinger et al. 2021]. A similar scenario was observed in Sweden, where government strategy came under increasing criticism after the initial shock of the crisis subsided, and government measures eventually became the central policy issue, which resulted in a decline of trust in government [Johansson et al. 2021].

Mechanism of the rally-'round-the-flag effect during the Covid-19 pandemic

Of the many studies devoted to the rally-'round-the-flag effect during the Covid-19 pandemic, only a handful consider the specifics of the mechanism in the pandemic context compared to other types of threat. From the public's perspective, it is the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic and the predictability of its consequences that differentiate it from armed conflicts, natural disasters, or terrorist

attacks. Bækgaard et al. [2020] argue that while terrorist attacks are a type of threat that has a clearly defined duration from start (the attack) to finish (elimination of the terrorists), the Covid-19 pandemic is not similarly delimited, which generates a sense of uncertainty and concerns about the impacts of the pandemic on people's lives. In terms of terror management theory [Greenberg et al. 1992], individuals are faced with a potential threat to their lives and need to cope with that possibility. Pyszczynski et al. [2021] argue that regardless of whether individuals perceive the coronavirus as life-threatening or a mere flu-like nuisance, their attitudes and behaviours are shaped by a fear of Covid-19 related death. During the first wave of the pandemic, the media were replete with statistics on infection incidence and mortality. Studies by Alekhin and Dubinin [2020] and Dong and Zheng [2020] described something called 'headline stress disorder', which refers to the psychological distress and ensuing mental health problems that are caused by constant exposure to emotionally charged media coverage, in this case relating to the pandemic. Beyond media headlines, people were being reminded of death on a daily basis by the public display of sanitisers, facemasks, and gloves, the social distancing, and the posting of various regulations and restrictions. In such cases, people turn to their leaders for symbolic safety, for someone to calm their fears. As leaders provide psychological security during sudden crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, followers tend to put increased trust in them [Baekgaard et al. 2020; Landau et al. 2004]. The rally-'round-the-flag theory and the terror management theory inform us that the growth of trust in government during the initial phases of the Covid-19 pandemic was caused by people's concerns about the health and economic impacts of the disease and their tendency to turn to government leaders for a sense of security [Esaiasson et al. 2020; Schraff 2020].

Concerns about the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

Some individuals would not have experienced severe disease symptoms even if they had contracted the coronavirus. To them, there were no apparent health benefits to Covid-19 lockdowns. What they did notice, however, were the immediate negative effects of lockdowns on the economy. While the preventive measures in place had debatable and often 'invisible' effects on people's health, their economic impacts and the related negative changes in people's lives were clearly visible, potentially shaping public opinion about government. Trust in government can be expected to decline among those at risk of the negative economic impacts of the pandemic or those reasonably concerned about the potential post-pandemic financial recession. For that reason, two opposing mechanisms are assumed to be in place: trust in government grows with the perceived level of threat and simultaneously is suppressed by concerns related to economic decline. A considerable increase in trust in government was more often observed among people of lower economic status [Brück et al. 2020] or with lower educational attainment [Gozgor 2021].

Concerns about the health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

Although the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath pose a threat to the entire population, the level and type of risk people are exposed to vary. The novel coronavirus poses a greater health risk to people who are older or who have chronic health problems. In addition to this real risk, trust in government may also be influenced by a greater personal tendency to fear disease or to support restrictive measures. For these reasons, the tendency to express greater trust in government can be expected to vary depending on people's state of health. Despite the absence of panel studies, evidence of differential responses to the crisis can be found in cross-sectional studies. Higher levels of trust in government have been partly attributed to people's expectations that government actions would protect them and their loved ones [Bækgaard et al. 2020]. During the pandemic trust in government grew more strongly among older individuals [Bovan et al. 2021; Hegewald, Schraff 2020] and people with poor health [Olagoke, Olagoke, Hughes 2020].

So far, we have dealt with the causes of the rally-'round-the-flag effect. Yet this effect, observed as growing trust in government during the pandemic, also has several fundamental consequences that make it easier for governments to take the kinds of difficult decisions that on the one hand are designed to slow down the virus, prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed, and reduce unnecessary deaths, but on the other hand also restrict people's lives and stifle the economy.

Trust in government, social trust, health, and compliance with government measures

One of the most important effects of a sudden spike in people's trust in government at the outset of a crisis is that this gives the government greater legitimacy and therefore a stronger mandate to impose restrictive measures. High levels of trust help governments fight the pandemic threat swiftly and effectively [Bovan et al. 2021] because high trust is related to better compliance with government measures [Falcone et al. 2020; Pak, McBryde, Adegboye 2021]. The relatively abundant research on compliance with protective measures during crises demonstrates that trust in government is one of the strongest predictors of compliance [Bish, Michie 2010; DeYoung, Peters 2016; Han et al. 2017; Rubin et al. 2009]. A simple mechanism is at work here: people who trust the institution issuing regulations or guidelines are more likely to consider these measures legitimate, important, and necessary, and, in turn, are more likely to comply with them. Thus, trust-driven willingness to comply with government measures should be the main benefit of the rally-'round-the-flag effect.

When we look at infectious disease crises (swine influenza, H5N1 influenza, SARS, and so on), we see that higher levels of trust in governments and government leaders were related to greater compliance with the measures introduced to control the disease [Bish, Michie 2010; Rubin et al. 2009]. The essential role trust

plays in the effectiveness of government measures becomes especially clear in situations of low trust in government and a threat of active resistance. As Bovan et al. [2021] demonstrate on the case of Croatia, the public debate is not only marked by disagreement with government actions but also includes messages that question the legitimacy of government measures and call for the violation of or even outright active resistance to these measures.

There are other possible motivations for complying with government measures besides trust in government. Past research on the factors of such compliance has focused on sociodemographic characteristics [Brouard, Vasilopoulos, Becher 2020], education [Nivette et al. 2021], economic status [Júnior et al. 2021], social trust [Siegrist, Bearth 2021], and subjective health [Bogg, Milad 2020; Szwarcwald et al. 2021]. Studies indicated that women were more likely than men to comply with government measures and also more willing to change their behaviour during the pandemic. Compliance was more frequently observed among older than middle-aged and young people [Brouard, Vasilopoulos, Becher 2020]. In Switzerland better educated individuals were more likely to violate government measures [Nivette et al. 2021]. A study of behavioural differences by economic status [Júnior et al. 2021] found the lowest levels of compliance among private sector employees and retired individuals.

The Covid-19 pandemic is primarily a threat to people's health, and despite individual differences in disease symptoms and the likelihood of lasting health effects, there is a general consensus that older cohorts and especially people with pre-existing conditions are more likely to suffer severe symptoms, hospitalisation, lasting health effects, or even death from a coronavirus infection. Poor health increases individuals' motivation to protect themselves against infection because of the potentially fatal effects of the disease. The fact that people who do not feel healthy are often at risk of other illnesses, beyond the pandemic context, also strengthens the connection between subjective health and the perceived threat posed by infection with the virus. Worse subjective health is correlated with a lower standard of living, unemployment, lower income, lower subjective happiness, and a lower quality of life in general [e.g. Adler, Ostrove 1999; Diener, Chan 2011].

The relationship between subjective health and compliance with government measures was not supported by Bogg and Milad's [2020] study conducted on a sample of 500 US citizens at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Like most other studies of compliance with government measures during the pandemic, this study suffers from one pitfall: the data were only collected after the start of the pandemic. All the variables observed in these cross-sectional questionnaire surveys were measured either at the time contemporaneous with the pandemic or retrospectively. To better understand the relationship between individual characteristics and compliance with government measures during the pandemic, we need panel surveys that collected information before the pandemic. In this article, we use data based on variables observed before the pandemic or at its outset. As an exception, questions about compliance with government measures were only

asked once, in the final wave of data collection, which was during the pandemic. For that reason, only cross-sectional data enter the model that tests compliance with government measures.

Defining the hypotheses

Building on the theories and available literature outlined above, we will here define a set of hypotheses to test the growth of trust in government (the rally-'round-the-flag effect) and compliance with measures. We first present our trust-in-government hypotheses. Based on the rally-'round-the-flag theory, which seeks to explain why trust in government temporarily surges in times of crisis, and on existing research from other countries, we assume that while different groups of the population will respond differently to a crisis, an overall growth of trust in government will be observed.

H1: A sudden increase in trust in government was observed in the spring of 2020 compared to the pre-pandemic period.

With the sudden onset of the crisis, the government was faced with a decision about the extent to which it should restrict economic activity and individual liberties on the one hand and how to go about protecting the public's health on the other hand. The goal of government measures would have been to strike a balance between sufficient public health protection and a functioning economy. The measures imposed in the spring of 2020 included a 9 p.m. curfew, closing non-essential shops and businesses, scaling down manufacturing operations, and ordering businesses to allow people to work from home whenever possible. Although the government launched a support programme for the businesses and companies that were required under pandemic measures to close or limit their activities, the country started discussing the possibility of an economic recession in the pandemic's aftermath. The Covid-19 pandemic may have aroused feelings of insecurity among the public, especially among those with a harder time finding work in the labour market (people with lower educational attainment) and self-employed individuals, whose businesses in many cases faced an existential threat from the pandemic. Because of their stronger concerns about the economic situation, people with lower levels of education and self-employed individuals can be expected to show higher trust in government in the hope that it can protect them.

H2: A bigger increase in trust in government will be recorded among the self-employed individuals than other segments of the population.

Like the concerns about the economic impact of the pandemic, people's concerns about their personal health may be associated with increased trust in government. Our third hypothesis builds both on the theories outlined above and on international evidence of higher levels of trust in government among older individuals [Bovan et al. 2021; Hegewald, Schraff 2020] and people in poor health

[Olagoke, Olagoke, Hughes 2020]. Consequently, Hypothesis H3 is expected to hold for the Czech Republic as well.

H3: Worse subjective health is associated with greater increase in trust in government.

Although at the start of the pandemic increased trust in government was recorded in several countries (e.g. Israel, Sweden, Denmark, or the Netherlands, see above), there is no evidence on whether such an increase can be observed across the board or whether the tendency for trust in government to grow suddenly is stronger in some social categories. To investigate the change in trust in government resulting from the pandemic, trust would have had to have been measured immediately before and after the pandemic's onset. This is probably why, to the best of our knowledge, there is only one study that has focused on this research problem [Hegewald, Schraff 2020]. In their analysis of Dutch panel data for the pre-pandemic time period and the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, Hegewald and Schraff [2020] demonstrate that trust in government grew more strongly in categories that are characterised by low levels of social and political trust irrespective of the crisis situation among people who, irrespective of the crisis, typically express low levels of social and political trust. Between-group differences in the growth of trust in government are attributed to the varying level of concern about the disease, which is higher among older than younger individuals, and to the varying level of trust in others (hereinafter social trust). Hegewald and Schraff argue that the overall spike in trust in government was driven by individuals with consistently low levels of political and social trust, who were motivated by the perceived threat to abandon their scepticism of political leaders and show support for them. Following Hegewald and Schraff [2020], our fourth hypothesis (H4) is that at the time of the crisis individuals with low levels of social trust deviated from their consistently sceptical attitude towards politics and society and showed support for political leaders to overcome the new crisis.

H4: Growth of trust in government is associated with low social trust.

Several studies attribute the overall growth of trust in government to the people whose trust in government was already high before the crisis. Evidence of stronger growth of trust in government among people who already supported their government before a crisis has been provided by Edwards and Swenson [1997] in the case of the Iraq War, Perrin and Smolek [2009] in the context of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Chatagnier [2012] in reference to the growth of trust after the Gulf War. We therefore expect that growth of trust will be greater among the supporters of government parties, namely the ANO party and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). Our fifth hypothesis is:

H5: Growth of trust in government is associated with support for the government parties ANO and ČSSD.

The opposite effect can, however, also be expected. An alternative explanation consistent with Hegewald and Schraff's [2020] study is that, just as people with low social trust overcome their antipathy or apathy toward politics, people with a negative opinion of the government parties overcome their antipathy and show stronger support for government during a crisis.

Our final hypotheses focus on compliance with government measures. There is a research consensus that individuals with higher levels of trust in government are more likely to comply with government measures, and that this is true even in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic [Moran et al. 2021; Pak, McBryde, Adegboye 2021; van Mulukom et al. 2020]. Amidst severely restrictive measures, people with high trust in government were estimated to be twice as likely to comply with measures as people with low trust [Pak, McBryde, Adegboye 2021]. According to a literature review by Moran et al. [2021], trust in government authorities was the third most frequently studied factor of compliance with government measures, after age and gender. Seven studies demonstrated a relationship between trust in government and social distancing, wearing facemasks, and limiting one's travel. In addition to compliance itself, trust in government authorities was also associated with the belief that other people would also comply with government measures [Al-Hasan, Yim, Khuntia 2020]. Based on previous studies, our sixth hypothesis is as follows:

H6: Better compliance with government measures is associated with higher trust in government.

As well as trust in government, this article focuses on social trust, i.e. trust in other people. Siegrist and Bearth [2021] studied the relationship between compliance with government measures and social trust and found that people with higher levels of social trust were less likely to comply with pandemic measures than people with low social trust. While this may seem paradoxical at first, the authors interpret this finding as follows: individuals with higher levels of social trust consider the spread of the coronavirus less of a risk than people with weaker trust in other people. This finding suggests that social trust, a factor normally deemed desirable for the functioning of society and the economy, is not practical in a pandemic situation. Individuals with high levels of social trust tend not to see other people as a potential infection threat and are consequently less willing to accept and comply with government measures to contain the disease [Siegrist, Bearth 2021].

H7: Better compliance with government measures is associated with lower social trust.

Better compliance with government measures can be expected among people with worse subjective health because they will also be more concerned about infection than people who had rated their health as good or even excellent before the pandemic. Their infection concerns result in the hypothesised stronger tendency to comply with government measures, because, as less healthy individu-

als, they are at greater risk of severe disease symptoms and lasting effects. Concerns give rise to caution, behaviour accompanied by the least possible amount of risk [Lerner, Keltner 2001], and a tendency to follow government regulations [Brouard, Vasilopoulos, Becher 2020; Harper et al. 2020].

H8: Worse subjective health is associated with better compliance with government measures.

Dataset and methods of analysis

Research sample

We conducted our analysis using data from five waves of the Czech Household Panel Study (CHPS). The survey was fielded each year from 2015 to 2018. In the years 2019 and 2020, two ad hoc surveys were carried out among the respondents who took part in the CHPS in 2015–2018. The original CHPS data are representative of Czech-speaking residents of the Czech Republic, and households were selected by means of random sampling. The face-to-face interviews took place directly in people's homes. First, a representative of the household completed a household grid. All members of the household aged 10 or older were then asked to participate in interviewer-assisted questionnaire completion and also to complete a written questionnaire on their own. Households received financial remuneration for their participation. In 2015, a total of 10,476 individual questionnaires were collected from 5,159 households. The number of households decreased to 4,147 in Wave 2 (2016), to 3,616 in Wave 3 (2017), and to 3,188 in Wave 4 (2018), yielding retention rates of 79.5%, 84.7%, and 86.4%, respectively. Financial constraints meant that only 2,046 adults were sampled for the follow-up surveys in 2019 and 2020. Although we originally used random sampling, the follow-up data in 2019 and 2020 were collected from more willing respondents, thus yielding a non-random sample. No weights for the 2019 and 2020 waves are available. Wave 1 data from 2015 are not used in our analyses because they do not contain the essential variable of trust in government. Our dataset consists of data from the five subsequent waves from 2016 (T1) to 2020 (T5) and contains a total of 3,843 individuals who were interviewed at least once during those five waves (2016–2020). Additional information on respondent sampling, data collection methods, and the fieldwork instruments can be found in the technical documentation for the CHPS [Kudrnáčová 2019].

Variable operationalisation

The final wave of the CHPS survey was conducted from 19 May to 9 July 2020. Although it contains measures of trust in government and compliance with pandemic control measures, which are essential for testing our hypotheses, several

independent variables were not measured in that wave (T5) but only in the previous ones (T1–T4). These variables were constructed as a grand mean centred for all the waves of the survey. This solution precludes testing within-person changes between waves and only allows for testing between-person differences. As a result, Models 1–7 explaining trust in government do not test the relationship between a temporal change in the independent variable and a change in the dependent variable, but instead test how the differences between the dependent variable values for different respondents correlate with the mean values of respondents' independent variables (see, e.g., Bell, Fairbrother and Jones [2019] for more on the disaggregation of within-person and between-person effects). The final model (Model 8) uses only the cross-sectional data from the final wave in 2020.

Trust in government, a key variable in this study, is used as a dependent variable for testing Hypotheses H1 through H5 and at the same time as a key independent variable in the model to test Hypothesis H6. Trust in government was measured as the answers to the following question: 'Please tell us how much you trust … the government?' The response options 'completely trust', 'quite trust', 'don't trust very much', 'don't trust at all' were recoded so that the higher values would indicate higher trust. This standard operationalisation of trust in government is frequently used in the literature.

Compliance with government measures is another dependent variable (H6–H8) used in this article. This is an additive index representing the number of government measures followed. In the questionnaire in 2020, respondents were prompted with the following six measures and asked to report their compliance: wearing a face mask outside the home; wearing gloves outside the home; using hand sanitiser; washing one's hands more often; limiting social contact; sheltering at home. A value of 1 was added to the index for each case of compliance. Thus, the variable ranges between zero (does not comply with any measures) and six (complies with all the measures).

Subjective health is another of the main independent variables that we need to test our hypotheses. We constructed the indicator of subjective health by reverse-coding respondents' answers to the following question: 'In general, would you say your health is …': 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'fair', or 'poor'. We also used *social trust* as a variable, measured on a scale of zero to ten based on answers to the question, 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?', where 0 means 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people' and 10 means 'most people can be trusted'. To construct the indicator of support for government parties (*party sympathies towards ANO/ČSSD*), we used respondents' answers to a party sympathy battery. Respondents were given a written questionnaire in which one of the questions contained a list of parliamentary political parties and they were asked how they felt about each party on a scale of zero to ten, 'where 0 means that you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party'.

In the regression models, we also controlled for age, gender, educational attainment, economic status, and willingness to take on risk. The variable *willingness to take on risk* is measured on a scale of zero to ten, where zero refers to being 'completely unwilling to take on risk' and ten means being 'completely willing to take on risk'. Willingness to take on risk is included in the models to predict compliance with government regulations because existing literature supports the assumption that unwillingness will be associated with higher compliance levels [Miguel et al. 2021].

Method of analysis

CHPS data are hierarchical in nature. There are theoretical reasons to assume that members of the same household will have more similar opinions than randomly selected members of the population. At the same time, we hypothesise that the effects of independent variables will differ in time. We used likelihood-ratio tests to gradually compare the models with and without a random intercept and slope and found they support the use of a random intercept for households ($\chi^2(1) = 580.5$, $p < 0.001$) and a random slope for time ($\chi^2(2) = 466.4$, $p < 0.001$). For these reasons, the relationships between selected key variables and trust in government are tested using mixed multilevel repeated-measures models (1–7) with a random intercept for households and individuals and a random slope for time. To be able to test whether trust in government is predicted by the key variables and whether such effects differ between waves, three-level hierarchical models with time nested within individuals and individuals nested within households were fitted. Model 8, the final one, testing the relationship between selected variables and compliance with measures, does not measure change in time, and hence it is a two-level model with a random intercept for households within which individuals are nested.

We first studied the association between time, sociodemographic variables, and trust in government (Model 1). We used time as a categorical variable to distinguish both the annual change of trust in government and whether the year 2020, with its pandemic situation, affected trust in government more than the previous years. Subsequently, the analysis focused on the relationship between selected variables and trust in government over time. The interactions of time with the key independent variables were gradually added to Models 2–7 to test whether their effects differed between years and especially to test how the year 2020 affected trust in government among different social categories. Model 8 is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and focuses on the association between selected variables and compliance with government measures to control the pandemic.

Table 1. Trust in government – multilevel repeated-measurement models – first part

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
Time (T1)	T2 – 2017	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.03	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)	−0.04	(0.04)	−0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)
	T3 – 2018	0.04***	(0.01)	0.12***	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)	0.30***	(0.04)	0.22***	(0.03)	−0.28***	(0.02)	0.09***	(0.02)
	T4 – 2019	0.07***	(0.02)	0.16***	(0.03)	0.02	(0.02)	0.42***	(0.06)	0.23***	(0.04)	−0.28***	(0.03)	0.09***	(0.03)
	T5 – 2020	0.50***	(0.02)	0.63***	(0.04)	0.45***	(0.03)	0.99***	(0.07)	0.87***	(0.06)	0.09*	(0.04)	0.52***	(0.04)
	Age	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.01)
	Gender	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)	−0.03*	(0.01)
Education (basic + secondary vocational)	Secondary educ. with a Maturita	0.03*	(0.01)	0.06**	(0.01)	0.03**	(0.02)	0.03*	(0.01)	0.03*	(0.01)	0.03*	(0.01)	0.03*	(0.01)
	Tertiary education	0.07***	(0.02)	0.17***	(0.02)	0.07***	(0.02)	0.07***	(0.02)	0.07***	(0.02)	0.07***	(0.02)	0.07***	(0.02)
Economic status (employed)	Self-employed	−0.08***	(0.02)	−0.08**	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.02)	−0.08***	(0.02)	−0.08***	(0.02)	−0.08***	(0.02)
	Unemployed	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	−0.05	(0.05)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)
	Students	0.13***	(0.03)	0.13***	(0.03)	0.15***	(0.04)	0.14***	(0.03)	0.13***	(0.03)	0.13***	(0.03)	0.13***	(0.03)
	Retired	0.05*	(0.02)	0.05*	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)	0.05*	(0.02)	0.05*	(0.02)	0.05*	(0.02)	0.05**	(0.02)
	Maternity leave	−0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.03	(0.04)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)
	Social trust	0.05***	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)
	Subjective health	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.08***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
	Party sympathy ANO	0.06***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)
	Party sympathy ČSSD	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)

Table 1. Trust in government – multilevel repeated-measurement models – second part

		Model 1	Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Interactions										
Education and time (basic + secondary vocational and T1)	Secondary educ. with a Maturita*T2		0.01	(0.02)						
	Secondary educ. with a Maturita*T3		−0.07**	(0.03)						
	Secondary educ. with a Maturita*T4		−0.07	(0.04)						
	Secondary educ. with a Maturita*T5		−0.10*	(0.05)						
	Tertiary education*T2		0.01	(0.03)						
	Tertiary education*T3		−0.23***	(0.03)						
	Tertiary education*T4		−0.23***	(0.04)						
	Tertiary education*T5		−0.34***	(0.05)						
Economic status and time (employed and T1)	Self-employed*T2				−0.02	(0.04)				
	Self-employed*T3				−0.09*	(0.04)				
	Self-employed*T4				−0.13*	(0.06)				
	Self-employed*T5				−0.29***	(0.08)				
	Unemployed*T2				0.07	(0.06)				
	Unemployed*T3				0.08	(0.06)				
	Unemployed*T4				0.11	(0.09)				
	Unemployed*T5				0.25*	(0.11)				
	Students*T2				0.04	(0.05)				
	Students*T3				−0.05	(0.05)				
	Students*T4				−0.09	(0.08)				
	Students*T5				−0.20*	(0.09)				
	Retired*T2				−0.06**	(0.02)				

Table 1. Trust in government – multilevel repeated-measurement models – third part

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	Retired*T3			0.16*** (0.03)				
	Retired*T4			0.20*** (0.04)				
	Retired*T5			0.22*** (0.05)				
	Maternity leave*T2			−0.02 (0.05)				
	Maternity leave*T3			−0.06 (0.06)				
	Maternity leave*T4			−0.10 (0.08)				
	Maternity leave*T5			−0.03 (0.09)				
Subjective health and time (T1)	Subjective health *T2				0.01 (0.01)			
	Subjective health *T3				−0.08*** (0.01)			
	Subjective health *T4				−0.11*** (0.02)			
	Subjective health *T5				−0.16*** (0.02)			
Social trust and time (T1)	Social trust*T2					−0.01 (0.01)		
	Social trust*T3					−0.04*** (0.01)		
	Social trust*T4					−0.04*** (0.01)		
	Social trust*T5					−0.08*** (0.01)		
Party sympathy toward ANO and time (T1)	Party sympathy ANO*T2						−0.01 (0.01)	
	Party sympathy ANO*T3						0.07*** (0.01)	
	Party sympathy ANO*T4						0.08*** (0.01)	
	Party sympathy ANO*T5						0.09*** (0.01)	

Table 1. Trust in government – multilevel repeated-measurement models – fourth part

|		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
Party sympathy toward ČSSD and time (T1)	Party sympathy ČSSD*T2													-0.01	(0.01)
	Party sympathy ČSSD*T3													-0.01*	(0.01)
	Party sympathy ČSSD*T4													-0.01	(0.01)
	Party sympathy ČSSD*T5													-0.01	(0.01)
	Constant	0.98***	(0.05)	0.96***	(0.05)	1.00***	(0.05)	0.88***	(0.05)	0.91***	(0.05)	1.10***	(0.05)	0.97***	(0.05)
N(observations)		19,047		19,047		19,047		19,047		19,047		19,047		19,047	
N(individuals)		6,683		6,683		6,683		6,683		6,683		6,683		6,683	
N(households)		3,822		3,822		3,822		3,822		3,822		3,822		3,822	
AIC		36,091		36,001		35,940		35,987		36,006		35,471		36,093	
BIC		36,272		36,245		36,277		36,199		36,218		35,683		36,305	
Proportion of variance explained (households)		0.13		0.13		0.13		0.13		0.13		0.13		0.13	
Proportion of variance explained (individuals)		0.36		0.36		0.36		0.36		0.36		0.36		0.36	
Log likelihood		-18,023		-17,970		-17,927		-17,966		-17,976		-17,709		-18,020	

Note: Mixed multilevel repeated-measurement models with random intercept for households and individuals and random slope for time. Reference category and standard errors in parentheses; *** $p < 0.001$. ** $p < 0.01$. * $p < 0.05$.

Figure 1. Predicted values of trust in government in time
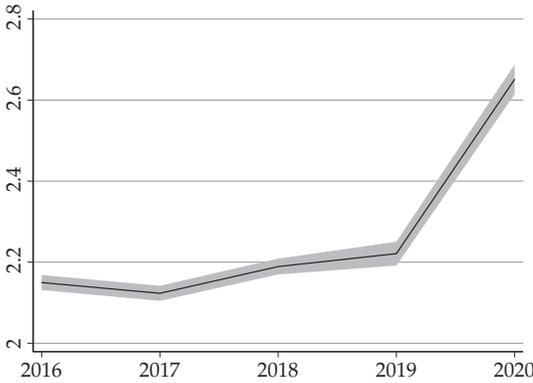
Note: The estimates are based on Model 1; 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. The interaction effects of trust in government and education in time

——— Basic ed. + secondary vocational ed.
----- Secondary ed. with a Maturita —··— Tertiary ed.
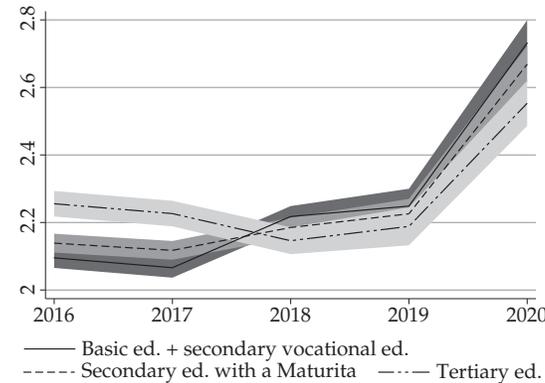
Note: The estimates are based on Model 2; 95% confidence intervals.

Regression analysis results

Trust in government

An initial model without predictors (not presented) explained 48% of the variance of trust in government between individuals and 25% of the variance between households. For Model 1, we added sociodemographic variables, education, economic status, social trust, subjective health, party sympathy towards ANO party, party sympathy towards ČSSD party, and the fixed effect of time.

The results (Table 1) reveal that higher trust in government is associated with better subjective health, more positive feelings about ANO/ČSSD, and

Figure 3. The interaction effects of trust in government and economic status in time
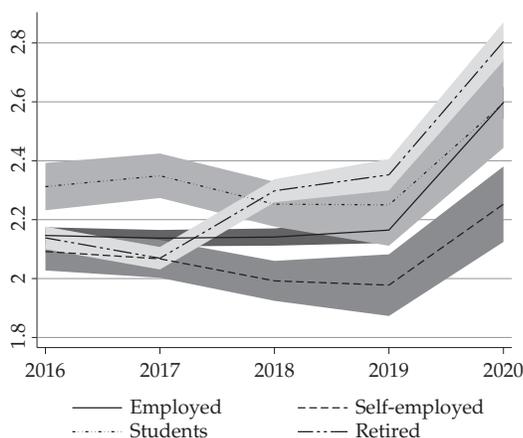
Note: The estimates are based on Model 3; 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 4. The interaction effects of trust in government and subjective health in time
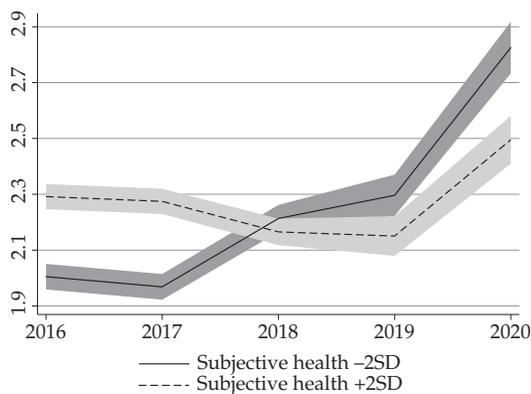
Note: The estimates are based on Model 4; 95% confidence intervals.

higher social trust. Retired individuals, students, and those with secondary education with a Maturita examination or with tertiary education exhibit higher trust in government than employees or individuals with basic or secondary vocational education. In contrast, self-employed individuals trust their government less than employees. Figure 1 shows the predicted values of trust in government for each point in time after fixing all other variables in Model 1 at their mean values. Although trust in government saw a slight increase from 2017 on, there was an abrupt spike in the year 2020. This result supports the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and trust in government.

The following models (2–7) tested whether characteristics like education, economic status, subjective health, social trust, or sympathy for ANO and ČSSD

were associated with trust in government. This effect would be indicated by a statistically significant increase in trust in government between the years 2019 and 2020.

Figure 2 shows the predicted values of trust for each educational category in time based on categories in Model 2). The decrease in trust among people with tertiary education and the increase among lower-educated individuals between 2017 and 2018 were likely a response to the fact that the ANO leader Andrej Babiš formed his government. The difference between the growth levels of trust in government before and during the pandemic is only statistically significant (p = 0.024) between people with basic and secondary vocational education and people with tertiary education. People with basic and secondary vocational education were more likely than people with tertiary education to increase their trust in government in the pandemic context.

Given the larger number of economic status categories, Figure 3 only shows the probabilities that were calculated for the categories between which statistically significant differences were revealed in the interaction between economic status and the year 2020 (Model 3). The biggest increase in trust is observed among retired individuals between 2017 and 2018. In contrast, self-employed individuals consistently showed the lowest levels of trust in government. When we look at the change in trust in government between 2019 and 2020, we find a similar increase across every economic category. The only difference between categories in 2019–2020 is the difference in the increase in trust observed among employed and self-employed individuals: a smaller increase in trust was observed among the latter than the former (B = −.158, p = 0.040).

The relationship between trust in government and time by subjective health (Figure 4) reveals an increase in trust among people with poorer health after ANO party leader Andrej Babiš formed his government (2017–2018). The pandemic year of 2020 saw a change in the trend of trust in government among people who described themselves as healthy, whose trust in government was more or less unchanged until 2019 but then grew between 2019 and 2020. Trust in government among those with a poor subjective sense of health grew in a near-linear fashion from the year 2017. When we look at the 2019–2020 change alone, we find a statistically significantly (p < 0.001) stronger increase in trust among people with poor subjective health than among people who said they feel healthy (H3).

Figure 5 shows the calculated probabilities of trust in government by social trust that emerge out of the interaction between social trust and time in Model 5. While people with lower levels of social trust report consistently weaker trust in government, the pandemic context levelled the differences in trust in government that originally stemmed from differences in social trust (H4). In other words, unlike in previous years, little to no difference in trust in government by level of social trust was observed in 2020. This was the result of a bigger increase in trust in government among individuals with lower social trust (p < 0.001).

In line with expectations, those who felt positively about the government party ANO exhibited the highest levels of trust in government (Model 6). Fig-

Figure 5. The interaction effects of trust in government and social trust in time
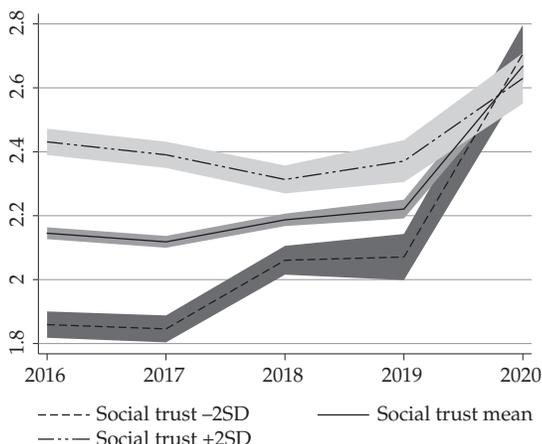
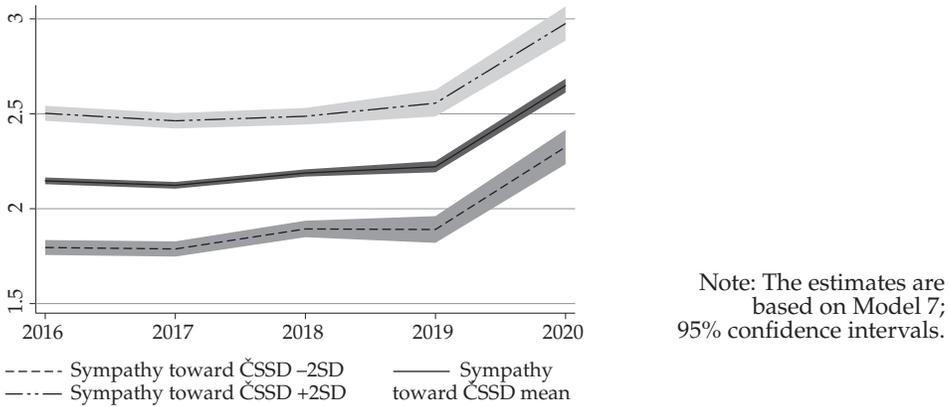Note: The estimates are based on Model 5; 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 6. The interaction effects of trust in government and party sympathy toward ANO in time
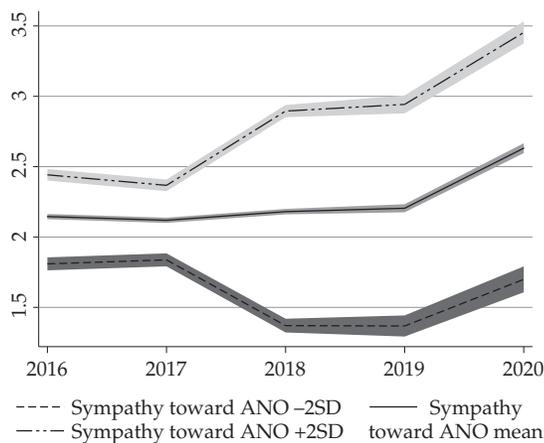
Note: The estimates are based on Model 6; 95% confidence intervals.

ure 6 shows the correlation between positive feelings for ANO and trust in government. A comparison of the predicted probabilities of trust in government between 2017 and 2018 reveals a decline among those with negative feelings about ANO and an increase among those who felt positively about the party. This growth of trust in government was probably driven by the leading role that ANO played in the two successive governments formed by PM Andrej Babiš. Yet the sudden start of the pandemic was accompanied by comparable levels of the 2019–2020 growth of trust in government irrespective of people's previous feelings about ANO. Similarly, Model 7 and Figure 7 demonstrate higher levels of

Figure 7. The interaction effects of trust in government and party sympathy toward ČSSD in time

Note: The estimates are based on Model 7; 95% confidence intervals.

----- Sympathy toward ČSSD –2SD   ——— Sympathy
—··— Sympathy toward ČSSD +2SD   toward ČSSD mean

trust in government among those who reported positive feelings about the other government party, ČSSD. The same levels of annual (2019–2020) growth of trust in government irrespective of how people felt about ČSSD point to the absence of a relationship between feelings about the party and growth of trust in government at the outset of the pandemic crisis. We found no support for the hypothesised relationship between growth of trust in government and positive feelings about ANO or ČSSD (H5).

Compliance with measures

Based on existing literature, we formulated three hypotheses on the relationship between selected characteristics and compliance with pandemic control measures. A two-level regression model was used to test Hypotheses H6 to H8. A likelihood-ratio test confirmed the adequacy of using a random intercept for households, $\chi^2(1) = 27.2$, $p < 0.001$. An initial model without predictors (not presented) revealed a 37% variance of compliance with measures between households.

The results of Model 8 (Table 2) indicate that compliance with measures is associated with trust in government ($p = 0.015$) (H6), but not social trust ($p = 0.631$) (H7), subjective health ($p = 0.705$) (H8), or willingness to take on risk ($p = 0.230$). The results also demonstrate a higher tendency among women to comply with measures ($p < 0.001$). Other sociodemographic variables such as education or economic status are not statistically significant predictors of compliance with measures.

Table 2. Compliance with government measures – multilevel regression model

		Model 8	
	Willingness to take on risk	−0.01	(0.01)
	Social trust	0.01	(0.02)
	Trust in government	0.11*	(0.05)
	Subjective health	0.02	(0.04)
	Gender (man)	0.44***	(0.07)
	Age	0.01	(0.01)
Education (basic and secondary vocational)	Secondary education with a Maturita	−0.11	(0.08)
	Tertiary education	−0.04	(0.09)
Economic status (employed)	Self-employed	−0.05	(0.13)
	Unemployed	−0.05	(0.18)
	Student	0.27	(0.19)
	Retired	0.07	(0.12)
	Maternity leave	0.08	(0.15)
	Constant	3.01***	(0.28)
	N(individuals)	1,262	
	N(households)	1,050	
	AIC	3,986	
	BIC	4,068	
	Proportion of variance explained (households)	0.31	
	Log likelihood	−1,977	

Note: Multilevel regression model with random intercept for households. Reference category and standard errors in parentheses; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

Like other important threats, the Covid-19 pandemic generated a context in which many governments around the world enjoyed a considerable growth of trust among their citizens [Bækgaard et al. 2020; Esaiasson et al. 2020; Kritzinger et al. 2021; Schraff 2020]. Conceptualising this in terms of the rally-'round-the-flag theory, we tested this effect on data from the Czech Household Panel Study (2016–2020). Compared to an annual change of trust in government of around 3%

in the years between 2016 and 2019, between 2019 and 2020 we saw a 20% increase in trust. This finding supports our first hypothesis.

Opinion leadership and a reluctance on the part of the political opposition and the media to criticise government are the two prevailing explanations for the rally-'round-the-flag effect. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, the tendency of people to turn to government leaders for a sense of security seems more relevant than opinion leadership. The other prevailing explanation, namely the reluctance of the political opposition and media to criticise government in times of crisis, makes the Czech case study unusual in the context of international research. For example, Merkley et al. [2020] in the case of Canada and Bækgaard et al. [2020] for Denmark observed a consensus across the political spectrum and argue that this contributed to an increase in trust despite the introduction of extremely strict pandemic control measures. In the Czech Republic, though, the opposition did not support the government and instead continuously made claims about government failures in addressing the pandemic. Therefore, this explanation of growth of trust in government is less likely in the Czech case.

Based on existing evidence of steeper increase of trust in government among at-risk groups [Hegewald, Schraff 2020; Vaughan, Tinker 2009; Bovan et al. 2021; Olagoke, Olagoke, Hughes 2020; Brück et al. 2020; Gozgor 2021], this article sought to identify individual characteristics that might be associated with the higher levels of growth of institutional trust during the Covid-19 crisis in the Czech Republic. Only partial support was found for the second hypothesis, namely that higher growth of trust in government is associated with economic status. Like Gozgor [2021], we found that trust in government grew more strongly annually among individuals with basic and secondary vocational education than among people with tertiary education. In contrast to Brück et al.'s findings [2020], however, the effect of economic status is not supported by our study, which may be the result of the presence of several additional variables in the model that may have absorbed the effect of economic status (e.g. gender, age, subjective health, social trust). Given the ongoing public and expert debate about the gendered impacts of the pandemic and related government measures, future research could focus on the behavioural differences between men and women.

The next hypothesis (H3) deals with the relationship between subjective health and trust in government. In line with Olagoke, Olagoke and Hughes [2020], our results indicate stronger growth of trust in government among individuals with poorer subjective health than among those who felt healthy. This finding also corresponds with previous evidence on the relationship between perceived threat and institutional trust. Poorer subjective health likely increases a person's sense of fear, and at-risk individuals tend to trust government to take care of them.

The fourth hypothesis dealt with the association between social trust and trust in government. Individuals with low levels of trust in other people typically have little trust in politicians and government as well. Our analysis supports Hegewald and Schraff's [2020] finding, as Czechs with low levels of social trust seemed to overcome their scepticism during the crisis, showing support for

their government. In a similar vein, those who felt negatively about a government party (ANO or ČSSD) were assumed to overcome their feelings and show greater support for government (H5). Although the analysis confirmed an increase in trust in government among those who felt negatively about ANO or ČSSD, the increase was weak and from a very low baseline level. We found no support for the hypothesised relationship between positive feelings about government parties and trust in government because similar increases in trust were observed irrespective of feelings about ANO or ČSSD.

We further tested hypotheses on compliance with government measures to combat the pandemic. People's confidence in their government's good intentions and ability to take action is highly important for a number of reasons, including the authority it gives the government to take sweeping measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the emergency and the increased willingness to comply with measures that it inspires in citizens. In line with theoretical expectations and existing research [Bish, Michie 2010; DeYoung, Peters 2016; Han et al. 2017; Rubin et al. 2009; Moran et al. 2021; Pak, McBryde, Adegboye 2021; van Mulukom et al. 2020], the analyses in this article found support for the positive relationship between trust in government and compliance with pandemic control measures (H6). As well as trust in government, we tested the relationship between compliance and social trust (H7). A study by Siegrist and Bearth [2021] showed that although social trust is important for cooperation, people with high levels of social trust find it unacceptable to view others as vectors of virus transmission. However, we found no support for the relationship between social trust and compliance with measures as hypothesised (H7) in accordance with Siegrist and Bearth's [2021] findings. The absence of this effect may be because people who are less trusting in one area tend to be less trusting in other areas as well and vice versa. Bækgaard et al. [2020] observed a growth of trust in other government institutions as well, such as the judiciary, the legislature, the media, and the public sector in general. Their results suggest that a spike in trust in government tends to spill over to other institutions. The lack of support for the effect of social trust on compliance with measures may be due to the fact that the effect of social trust was absorbed by the effect of trust in government.

Similarly, there was no effect of subjective health (H8). Those who are ill, and consequently the most at risk if infected with the virus, were assumed to try the hardest to comply with government measures. The absence of such an effect may be due to the higher likelihood of poor subjective health among older individuals.

Strengths and limitations

There are several strengths to the present study, including the use of longitudinal data covering the answers of respondents who were interviewed annually from 2016 to the spring of 2020, when measures to control the Covid-19 pandemic were

introduced. This dataset contained a battery of questions on compliance with pandemic control measures and a question on trust in government. The latter was also included in the previous waves, allowing us to analyse annual change of trust in government.

Along with these advantages, there are also a few limitations to our study. First, some of the variables, such as subjective health, social trust, party feelings, or economic status, were not observed in the final wave, which prevented us from measuring how trust in government was affected by the change in key variables between the penultimate and final waves. Instead, we relied on the long-term average or the penultimate wave's values. Second, although the data were obtained from a long-term panel whose original units were sampled randomly, random sampling was not in place for the final wave. Despite satisfactory retention levels, it was possibly a greater willingness to participate in the study that characterised the respondents who remained in the panel. The sample was consequently not representative, a fact we much keep in mind when interpreting the results. Yet the strength of the dataset is in panel structure and the ability to follow the same individuals over time. Third, inferences should be made about association rather than causality. Moreover, any changes to variable values observed relate to the time points of observation, and we are unable to determine what happened between those time points. Some variables, such as trust in government or party sympathies, may be susceptible to the time period of observation. These variables are influenced by every scandal and every important step taken, whether or not it relates to combating the pandemic. Moreover, at the time of the fieldwork for our final wave, trust in government was already declining in Austria [Kritzinger et al. 2021]. Although there are likely country differences in the timing of the growth and decline of trust in government, it is impossible to say whether the Czech data were collected during a phase of rising or declining trust. Fourth, some indicators were measured in suboptimal ways. An objective indicator of health status would be useful instead of subjective health, and a multi-item index should be used for measuring social trust. Compliance with government measures is a self-reported variable, and one can only assume that it reflects actual behaviour. Ideally, there would be another wave of data collection so we could observe whether trust in government declined gradually, as similar studies done in other countries suggest, and how the effect of trust in government on compliance changed over the course of the pandemic. Despite its acknowledged weaknesses, this study has produced several interesting findings.

Conclusion

Growth of trust in government in response to a serious crisis was observed at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic. Our analyses of unique panel data on trust in government before the pandemic showed that the growth of trust in government was not strongly determined by sociodemographic char-

acteristics and instead occurred almost universally. A slightly bigger increase in trust in government was observed among individuals with low educational attainment and low levels of social trust than among others. While the exact motivations for growth of trust in government within the two groups remain unknown, their response to the Covid-19 pandemic situation was stronger than in other social categories. The growth of trust in government in times of crisis proves to be almost guaranteed, helping government by inducing people to comply with its measures. Public compliance on anti-pandemic measures appears to depend on governments being able to maintain people's trust. Future research could focus on the relationship between compliance with measures and trust in government at different points in the crisis. Based on the rally-'round-the-flag theory and existing evidence, trust in the Czech government can be assumed to have declined over the course of the crisis. The question is whether this was indeed the case and whether any decrease of trust also translated into weaker compliance with government measures. It can be expected that compliance with measures, even during a crisis, will depend on the ways people assess government performance.

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Data

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Appendix

Table P1. Descriptive statistics

	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Compliance with measures (T5)	3,95	1,20	0	6
Gender (T1)	1,54	0,50	1	2
Age (T1)	49,15	17,20	18	94
Education (T1)	1,85	0,76	1	3
Economic status (T1–T4)	1,87	1,90	0	5
Trust in government (T1–T5)	2,19	0,75	1	4
Party sympathy toward ANO (T1–T4)	4,42	2,93	0	10
Party sympathy toward ČSSD (T1–T4)	3,84	2,71	0	10
Social trust (T1–T4)	4,25	1,96	0	10
Subjective health (T1–T4)	3,04	0,95	1	5
Willingness to take on risk (T4)	4,64	2,44	0	10

Note: 'T' indicates the wave from which the variable values come. N (T1–T5) = 1,472.

Figure P1. Trust in government (2016–2020)
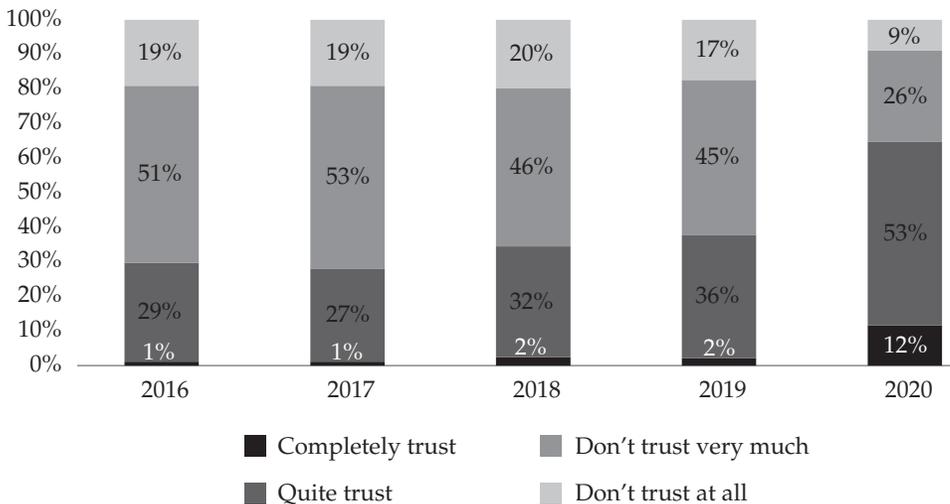
Note: N(individuals) – 2016 = 6,438, 2017 = 5,663, 2018 = 4,907, 2019 = 2,002, 2020 = 1,472. Full question: 'Please tell us how much you trust the government?'