

I’ll Be Good for Grandma: Institutional and Relational Trust and COVID-19 Restriction Compliance

Problem

- Trust shapes behavior during crises, but not all types of trust influence compliance equally.
- COVID-19 containment efforts (like lockdowns and gathering restrictions) relied heavily on voluntary public compliance.
- While **institutional trust** (e.g., in government or health authorities) has been studied, **relational trust** (e.g., in family and friends) has received far less attention.
- In Guayaquil, one of the early epicenters of the pandemic, understanding what drives compliance was especially important.

General Objective

To examine how **relational trust** (in family and close friends) and **institutional trust** (in public institutions like government and military) influence individual compliance with COVID-19 mobility restrictions in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Methods

- Sample:** 1,165 adults in Guayaquil surveyed while receiving a COVID-19 test (April-July 2020).
- Instrument:** In-person questionnaire measuring trust in family, friends, community, institutions, and media using 10-point Likert scales.
- Key Outcome:** Self-reported compliance with COVID-19 restrictions, defined as avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people in the past 3 weeks.
- Analysis:** Linear Probability Models (LPMs) with and without controls for demographics, economic status, and COVID-related experiences.
- Composite Trust Indices: Created for:**
 - Close Relations (family + friends)
 - Community (co-workers, neighbors, others)
 - Institutions (government, police, military)
 - Media (national + international)

Results

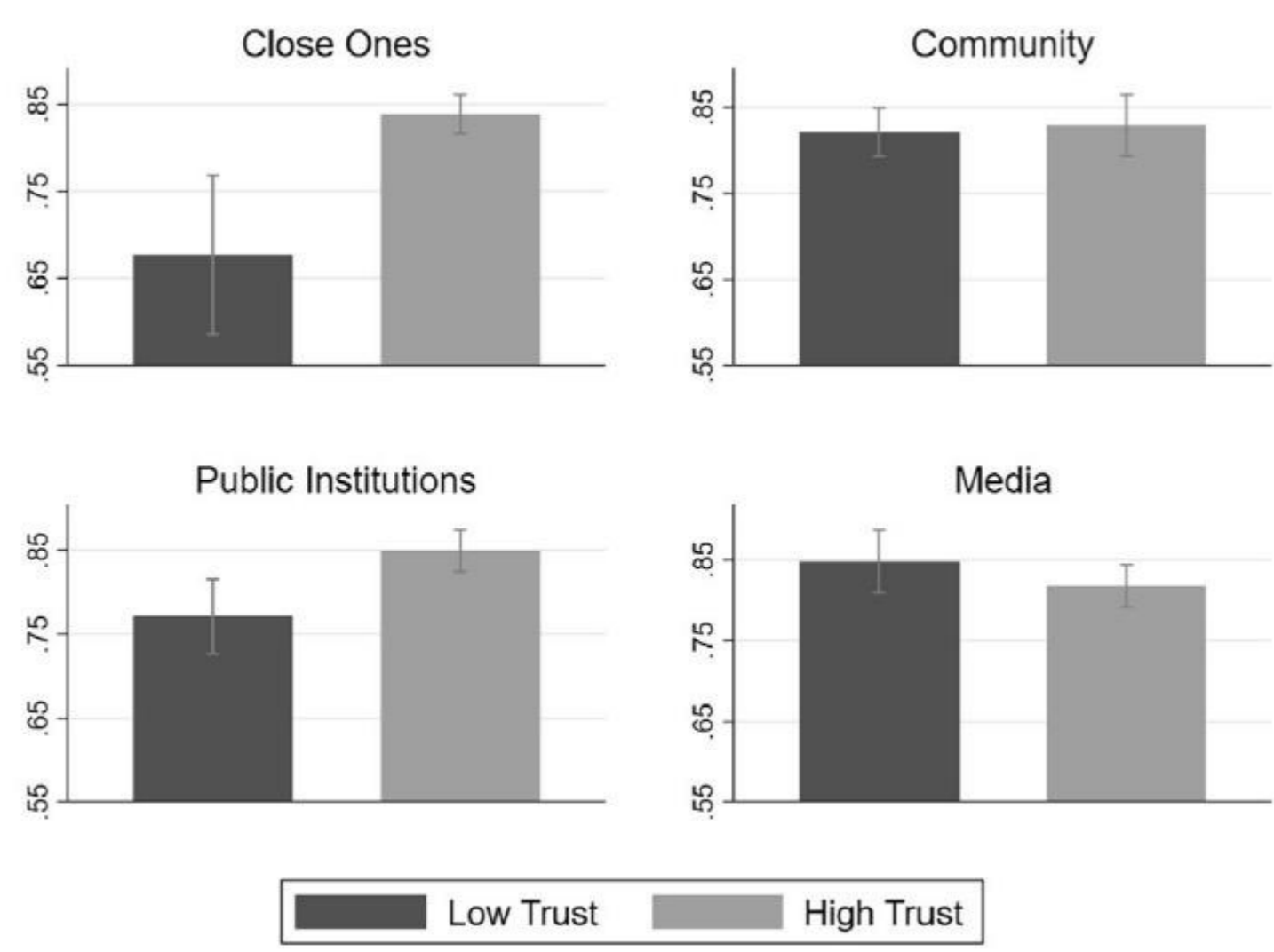


Table 2. Regression Estimates of Reported Compliance on High Level of Trust (Composite Indices)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Close ones	0.162*** (0.0478)	0.133*** (0.0472)						
Community			0.00815 (0.0233)	0.00420 (0.0256)				
Public institutions					0.0780*** (0.0258)	0.125*** (0.0281)		
Media							−0.0307 (0.0240)	0.0257 (0.0268)
Constant	0.676*** (0.0464)	0.772*** (0.115)	0.821*** (0.0143)	0.895*** (0.107)	0.771*** (0.0225)	0.816*** (0.104)	0.848*** (0.0198)	0.879*** (0.105)
Observations	1138	975	1138	975	1147	969	1150	972
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Each column represents a specification of a linear probability regression. The dependent variable is binary and takes the value of 1 if the respondent indicated that they had not attended a gathering of 10 or more people within the last 3 weeks at the time of the survey. The control variables are constructed from questions about sex, age, results of the COVID test, household income, percentage of income saved each month, cash and food reserves, job security and several questions referring to the COVID crisis. See text for details. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
****p* < 0.01.

- Compliance was significantly higher among those with high trust in **close relations** and **public institutions**.
- No significant effect was found for **community trust** or **media trust**.

Conclusions

- Relational trust** matters: People are more likely to comply when they trust their family and close friends will be there for them.
- Institutional trust** also plays a key role: Belief in government and military response is linked to higher compliance.
- Trust in community members and media does not significantly affect behavior
- Takeaway: **People follow the rules to protect loved ones, not strangers or because the news says so.**

Recommendations

- Design public health campaigns that emphasize protecting those your love.
- Leverage relational trust by framing behavior (e.g., mask-wearing, avoiding gatherings) as an act of care for close family.
- Avoid relying heavily on media messaging alone. It has limited behavioral impact.