

Support for curfew depends on beliefs about others' compliance

Young males are more likely to disobey

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To flatten the curve and to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, many governments worldwide have imposed measures that severely cut civil rights and individual freedom. These measures are on a scale on which they have not been experienced by most people during their lifetime.

Social distancing measures are only effective if supported by the population. Although compliance can be controlled by police and non-compliance can be punished, the scope of these measures makes full state control neither feasible nor desirable from a civil rights perspective. The success of these measures in slowing down the spread of the virus crucially depends on widespread support, approval and voluntary compliance.

Researchers of the University of Bonn, University of Tilburg and IZA have analysed the support for curfew measures in a representative sample of the Dutch population. Survey participants reported their support for the enacted measures as well as their willingness to and motivations for complying with a full curfew.

The Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), was originally fielded in 2007 and since then yearly follows the life course and living conditions of about 4,000 Dutch households. During the Corona crisis, households were interviewed starting 5 days after the policy measures were announced by the Dutch government.

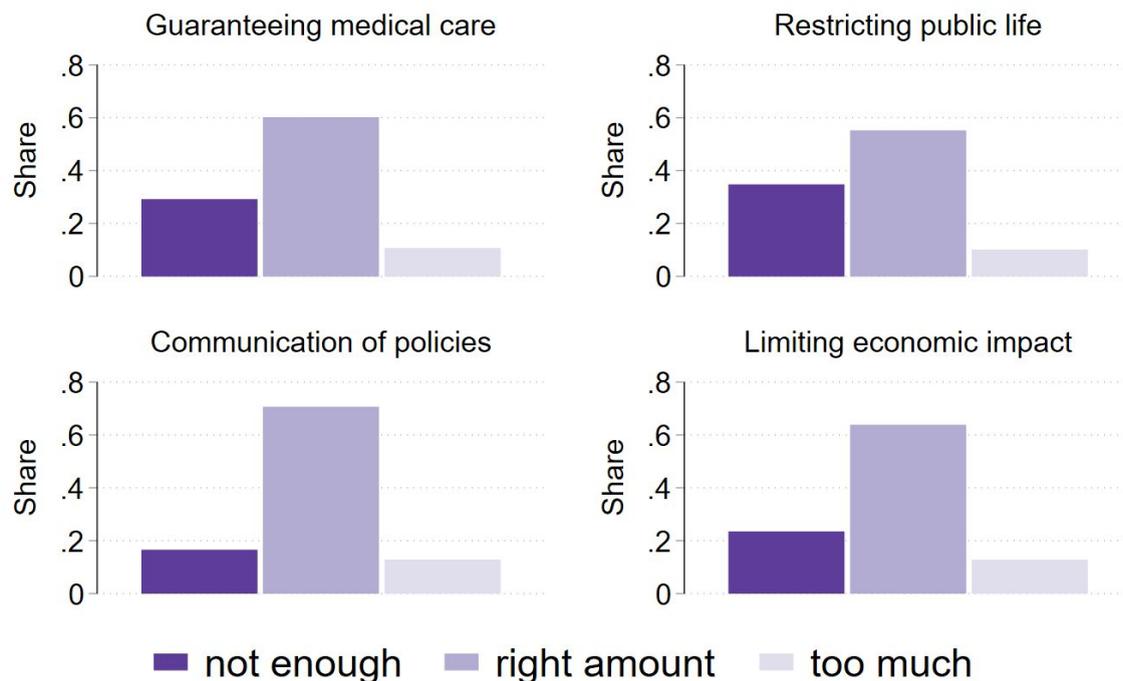
High support for current levels of restrictions

After first regional restrictions in early March, nationwide recommendations for social distancing were first enacted through a press conference of the prime minister on March 12th. School closures followed on March 15th, as well as a shutdown of the catering industry, gyms, saunas and spas. On March 23, the Dutch government announced another tightening of existing regulations: People were advised to stay at home, to keep a distance of at least 1.5 meter to each other and to avoid social contacts. Yet, a full curfew was not enacted. The current level of restrictions will be valid until April 28, with larger gatherings banned until June 1.

The LISS survey asked its participants to separately state in how far they deemed the level of government actions in securing medical care, restricting social life, limiting the economic impact of the pandemic and in communicating these measures to the public as appropriate or whether they would like the government to increase or decrease the intensity of the current measures.

Apparently, the level of government action is broadly supported by the population. About 60 percent think that the level has chosen the right amount of action towards guaranteeing medical care. Similar shares of the population think that the right amount was chosen in restricting public life (57 percent) and limiting the economic impact of the crisis (65 percent). Even better support receives the governments' communication: 71 percent feel that the level of public communication is appropriate. These high levels of support slightly increase with age, income and education. Of those who disagree with the level of action, most rather ask for a strengthening of measures than for a relaxation.

Support for government actions

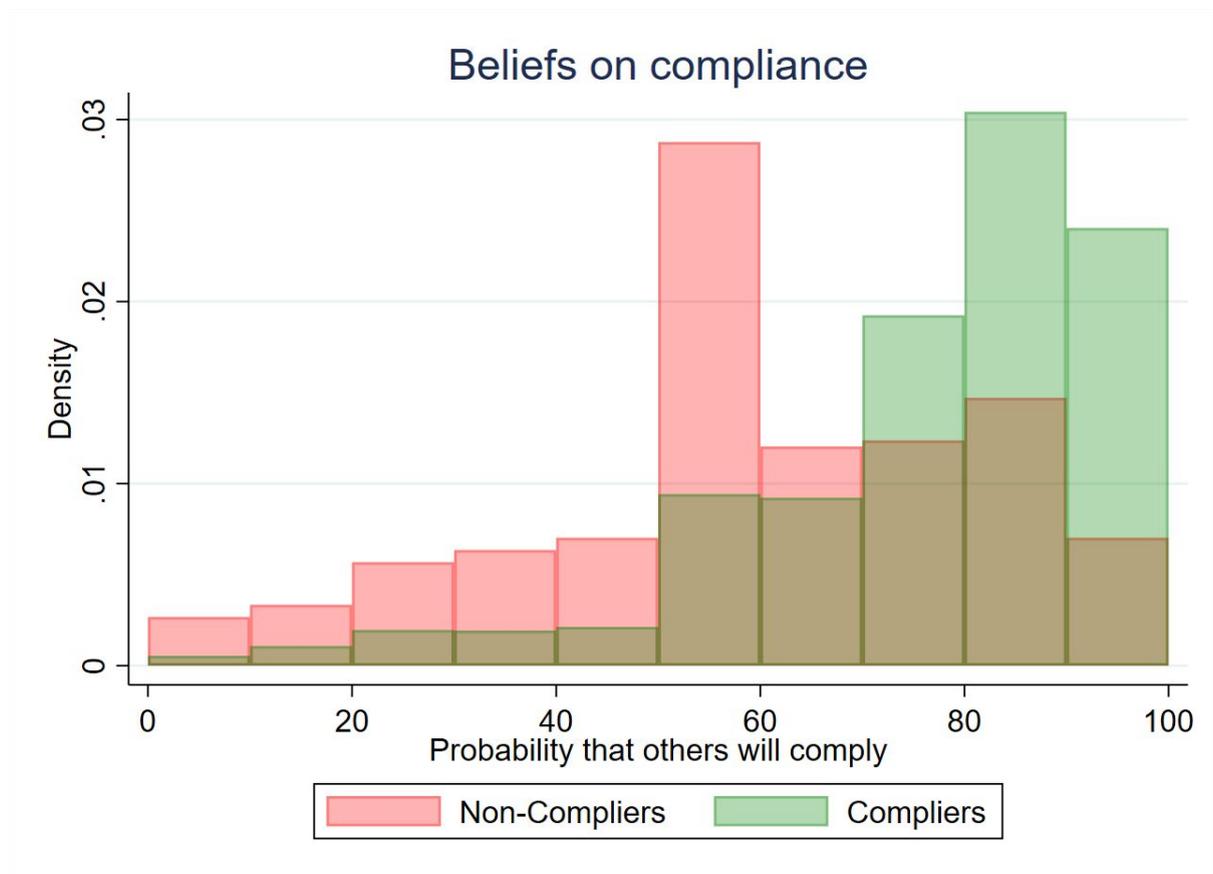


Willingness to comply with curfew is high but trust in others to comply is not

Such a strengthening could for example entail more restrictive curfew measures, as they are currently enacted for example in some parts of Southern Germany and Austria. Participants of LISS were asked whether they would comply with such a full curfew if it would be enacted in the Netherlands, and in how far they expected their fellows to comply.

Own willingness to comply is very high. 92 out of 100 participants who do not report to work in a critical profession (who would be exempted) say that they would comply with a curfew. Yet, if asked about others' willingness to comply, participants reveal overly pessimistic beliefs. On average, people report that they believe that only 73 out of 100 individuals would comply. Beliefs over others' compliance point to a certain reciprocity in the willingness to

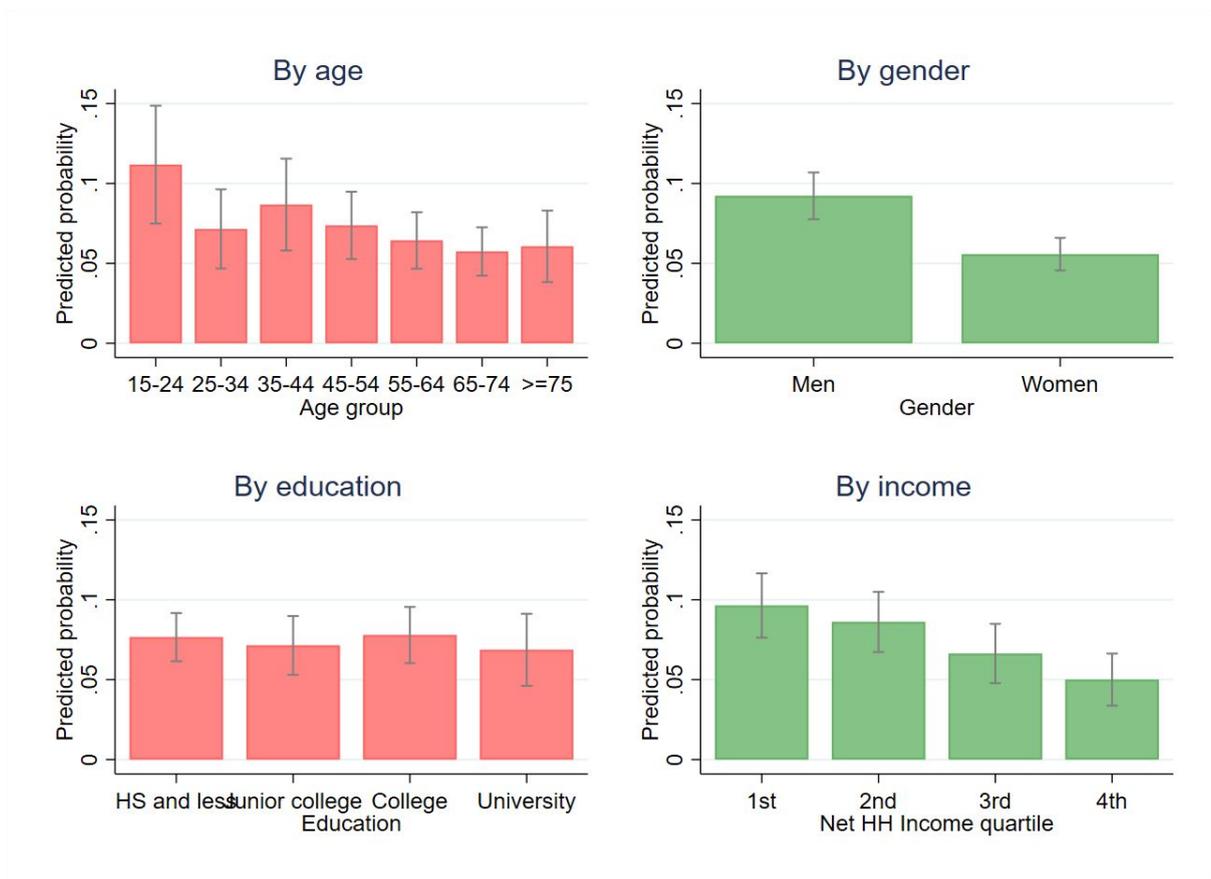
comply. Those who do not want to comply themselves estimate a much lower average number in the society of just 56 out of 100.



Compliance differs by age, gender and income

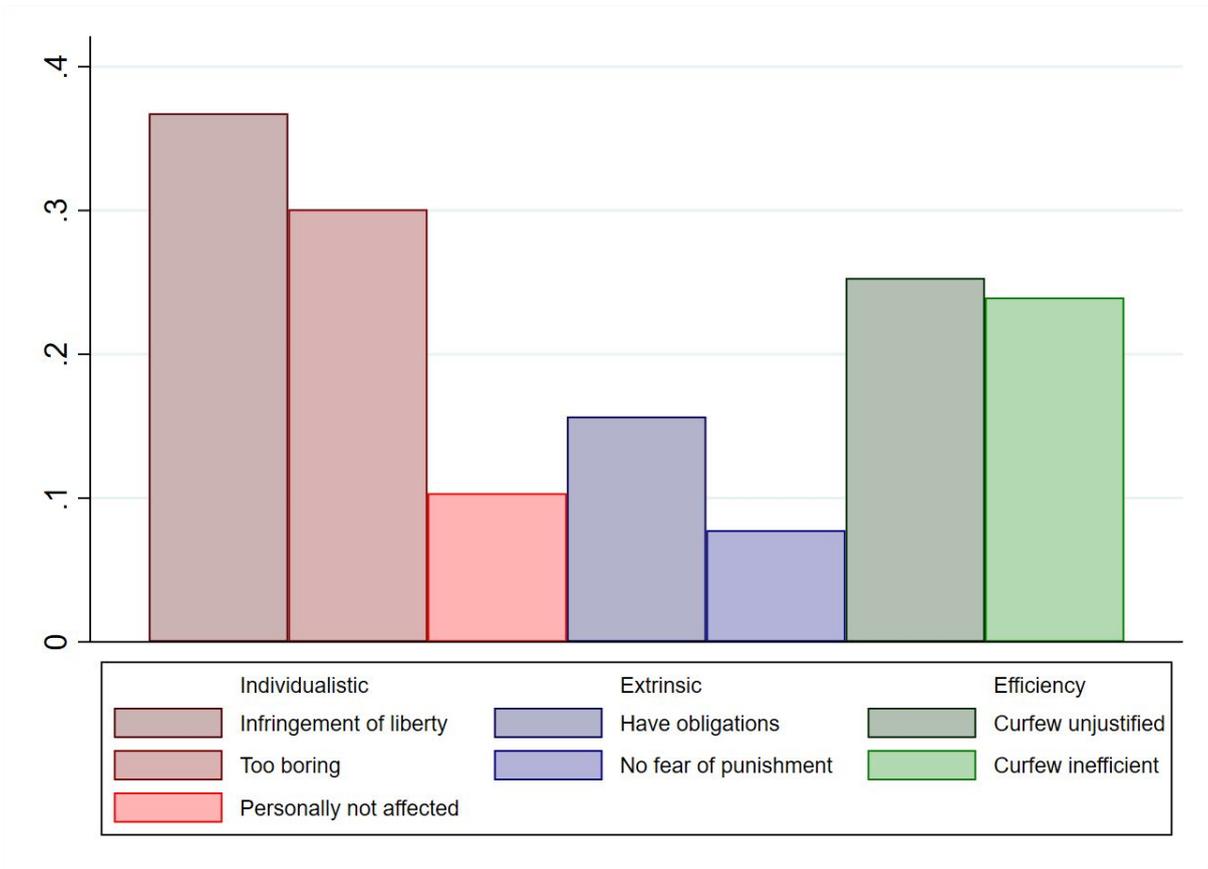
When analyzing non-compliance rates separately by age, it turns out to be the young generation that stands out in terms of their strong unwillingness to comply. Individuals below age of 25 are about 50 percent more likely to be unwilling to comply with a curfew as the average older person. A second stark difference in non-compliance rates arises between genders. Male participants reported again about 50 percent higher non-compliance rates. Almost every tenth male participant is not willing to comply with a full curfew.

Non-compliance decreases with available net household income. The bottom 25 percent of the income distribution report an almost twice as high non-compliance than the highest 25 percent. A potential explanation for this income gradient might be a higher flexibility of work arrangements in better-paid white-collar jobs. The incidence of home office (before Corona) was 31 percent for the highest quartile, but only 18 percent in the lowest quartile.



Reasons for non-compliance differ, too

Survey participants were asked about their reasons behind the non-compliance. Reasons can be broadly categorized into three groups. Individuals might reject a curfew as they do not accept the infringement of liberty, fear the resulting boredom or feel that they are not affected by the outbreak. We label these motives as *individualistic motives*. Individuals do not plan to comply with a curfew because they have obligations to fulfill or they do not fear punishment. We label these motives *extrinsic motives*. Finally, individuals feel that the curfew is inefficient for preventing the spread of Corona, or that it is unjustified. We label these motives *efficiency reasons*.

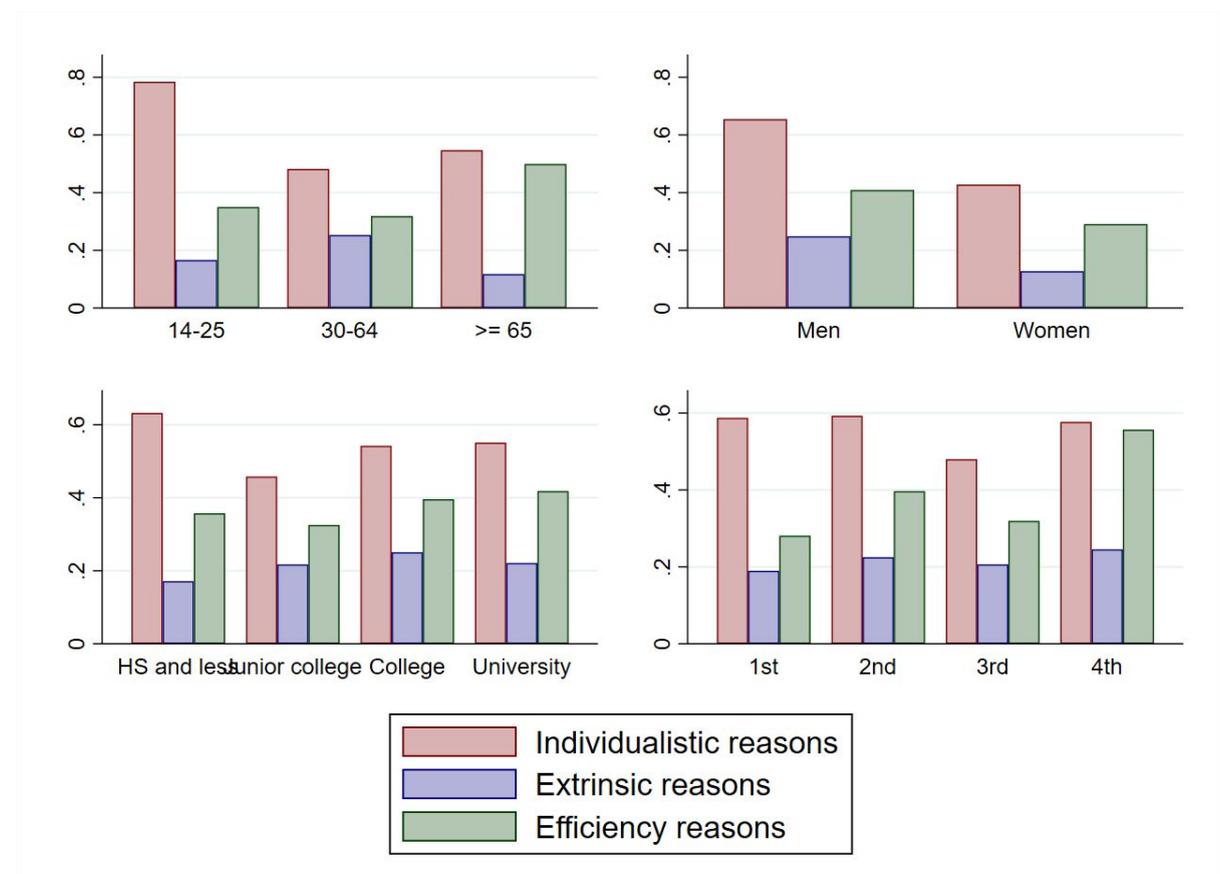


Understanding the importance of these motives is important to better design measures, i.e. public messages, to increase the acceptance among the public for such strong measures. If, for example, non-complying individuals do not comply because they expect the measures to be inefficient and unjustified, public messages rather have to convey empirical evidence on the measures' effectiveness. Individualistic motives might rather ask for messages highlighting the civic duty component of the curfew compliance. Finally, non-compliance out of extrinsic necessity, e.g. through child care and work obligations, limits the role of information, but asks for measures alleviating these concerns through support in easing the compatibility of family and work.

Figure 3 shows the relative frequency of each answer among those who said that they would not comply with a curfew. Individualistic motives (red bars) stand out in explaining the non-compliance. More than one third of all non-compliers mention that they would see a curfew as an infringement of their liberty they would not accept. Almost as many mention that they could not stand the related boredom. Slightly less frequent, non-compliers mention that they do not believe a curfew to be efficient or justified (green bars). Extrinsic reasons such as obligations play a lesser role.

The motives behind the non-compliance differ strongly between demographic groups (Figure 4). Strikingly, those groups that stand out in their non-compliance (male young individuals) show much stronger individualistic motives behind their non-compliance. Almost 4 out of 5

Individuals below 25 report an individualistic motive behind their unwillingness to comply with a curfew, while it is only about half of the older age groups. Similarly, 2 out of 3 men report individualistic motives compared to less than half of women. Differences across education and income are less pronounced, apparently. The belief that a curfew is inefficient or unjustified seems to increase with education and income, yet so for those groups who have increasingly lower rates of non-compliance.



This heterogeneity in motives is to some degree worrisome. Apparently, those groups with the highest rate of non-compliance mostly are driven by individualistic motives. These motives are hard to overcome by simply informing the public about the efficiency of social distancing as a preventive measure. Targeted messages towards the freedom-loving predominantly young male group of non-compliers have to be found that address their love for liberty if social acceptance of curfew measures is to be increased.