

WHAT'S WORKING TO CALM HEARTS WORLDWIDE?

Perspective from IPREX Partners Around the World

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in most of our lifetimes, we are watching one common crisis play out across every country in the world. It's a unique opportunity to study how different cultures and different approaches fare in dealing with a common crisis.

This report includes perspectives from IPREX partners in 14 countries – examining how these countries' leaders communicated with the public and the level of public support. It covers the period from February to July 2020. These real-time case studies on communications best practices, provide a unique comparison of how different countries responded to the pandemic.

The power of perspectives from around the world is part of the power of IPREX. Together, we share experiences and counsel across time zones the same way we would across hallways with our office mates, to the benefit of agencies and clients. Some interesting themes emerged:

CONTROLLING INFECTION RATES IS POSSIBLE

Take Japan. As our partner explained, Japan's highly collaborative culture combined with [masks](#) already being a part of their lives helped the country to keep the virus largely in check. Their [per capita](#) rates are a head-turning 232 per million as of July 27.

On July 23 Ireland had a mere [7 new cases](#). Our Irish partners attribute that to regular consistent communication, strong leadership, and canceling events such as the St. Patrick's Day celebrations straight away. Culture played a role, too. For example, in the spirit of togetherness, postal carriers took on the responsibility of checking on seniors at their doors. This tactic is heart-warming, especially as we fight about masks amid high-five-digit daily new case counts in the U.S.

RESULTS DON'T ALWAYS TRANSLATE TO FAVOR

You'd think thwarting the spread of the virus would automatically mean increased approval of a country's leader – the individual ultimately charged with the country's well-being.

The two aren't always correlated. France stands out for its very modest approval increase and Japan for its precipitous approval ratings fall, both despite significant successes.

BY-COUNTRY OVERVIEW

AUSTRALIA

Australia's Prime Minister entered the crisis with slumping sentiment based on handling of the bushfires in late 2019. Early action, a compliant population, cooperation between the states, territories and federal government, and relatively low urban population densities all played a role. However, his consistent, regular, realistic, and easily understood messaging, mixed with genuine concern and generous government assistance, won Prime Minister Scott Morrison a tremendous amount of goodwill (37% to 68% approval).

CYPRUS

All published polls have given the President of Cyprus and the Minister of Health a positive rating over COVID-19 crisis management. The Health Minister activated a crisis management plan, while the Ministry of Health and the government as a whole adopted the slogan "We will succeed." Cyprus put an end to restrictions and gradually opened the airports as of mid-June.

DENMARK

In Denmark, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen took a personal approach to the announcement, even predicting she would make mistakes given the unknown territory. All political parties coalesced around the shutdown she oversaw – Denmark has been hailed as first-in, first-out of shutdown, a broader shutdown than in other European countries. It seems unity played a major role in the country's success and the 85% satisfaction rate with the measures the government took.

FRANCE

Our partners in France were proud to report that the country had [avoided nearly 700,000 deaths](#), thanks to President Macron's health measures, and that France had the [most lives](#) saved in Europe. At the same time, the President's approval rating has risen by only 3%. Our partners cite France's culture of criticism for this chasm.

GERMANY

Chancellor (and scientist) Angela Merkel calmed the country early in the crisis with a rare televised address. Her statement that became famous: "This is serious. Take it seriously." The country's leading virologist discusses COVID-19 issues on a daily podcast, showing science leading the way and experts out front. The German Minister of Health was praised for his modern crisis management – especially his understanding of modern means to reach young people, namely, through non-traditional channels, such as apps like TikTok and Telegram. A healthcare system poised to handle the crisis and even to take on patients from other countries helped Chancellor Merkel's approval ratings.

GREECE

Greece has seen very favorable public sentiment, as good health is so strong a value, it's part of their basic greetings. Our partner credits this – along with the country's family orientation and their esteem for their oldest residents – with the nation's embrace of early and restrictive lockdown. 86% of Greeks were satisfied with the government's handling of the crisis. Our partner explains that Greece has performed better than any other country in Europe by taking early containment measures. The WHO's data that Greece has had 402 cases per million population supports that claim.

INDIA

India's exceptionally popular Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, saw a rise (76 to 82%), then fall (75%) in approval ratings. Our partners attribute the fall in part to a lack of a clear, cohesive communications strategy. More specifically, they cite the absence of a centralized messaging framework, communication that has not been inclusive of all people – which is most notable in a country where 400 million people are illiterate – and the government working to curb media freedom instead of utilizing the media to amplify messages.

IRELAND

Politically, the Government's handling of COVID-19 has proven to benefit the country but also the Fine Gael Party and its leader Leo Varadkar (who enjoyed a satisfaction rating of 75% in June).

The strategy had a number of success factors. All decisions were driven by medical and scientific evidence or advice, and were primarily communicated to the public by health professionals. Ireland was also one of the first countries to report cases in a completely accurate manner. This enabled the government to establish the public's trust and ensured their communications were taken seriously.

JAPAN

Our partner reports approval ratings of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and his cabinet fell to its lowest – 29% – in May, although May saw some of the best daily COVID-19 new case rates the country has seen – mostly under 100. When you consider counter measures were a request, not a mandate like in so many other countries, the country's success is even more impressive.

MEXICO

Mexico stands out for the wrong reasons, with press briefings building up to four per day, contradictory messages, and advice from the president that outright counters science, like encouraging hugging. However, on several occasions President López Obrador has boasted about his approval ratings and the support he has from a majority of the population, a fact that has been ratified by different polls. It is also true that a lack of sensitivity and numerous contradictions in the response to the pandemic have cost him plenty in terms of popularity. At the start of his term, he enjoyed 77% popularity, which had fallen to 56% as of June.

POLAND

From an early stage, the pandemic in Poland was overshadowed by the presidential election. The situation that finally took place was surrealistic – due to Coronavirus, the election in May was not cancelled but there was also no opportunity to vote, in any form. It was finally held in June (1st round) and July (2nd round). The final results gave a slight victory (2%) to the incumbent president and showed how divided the Polish society is. In general, the government has shown inconsistencies in both its actions and communication. Initially high support for the decisions quickly began to melt due to chaos and many ambiguities.

SWEDEN

In what has widely become known as “the Swedish experiment,” Sweden elected to apply the principle of the ‘herd immunity’ during the initial stages of COVID-19. Opting for softer restrictions, the government enjoyed highly favorable ratings despite its higher infection rate relative to its neighbors. Our partner attributes it to the trust the government showed in its people playing well with the Swedish culture, and the country's relatively good economic performance.

UNITED KINGDOM

In the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's approval ratings, boosted by daily briefings, consistent, simple messaging, economic support for those furloughed – a common theme in most countries – and a campaign in support of healthcare workers, rose from 47% to 66%. A vacuum in communications after Johnson went into intensive care with the Coronavirus, then later when he stood by one of his officials who seemingly flouted quarantine rules while he had the Coronavirus himself, brought them down to 52%, and they have since declined further.

UNITED STATES

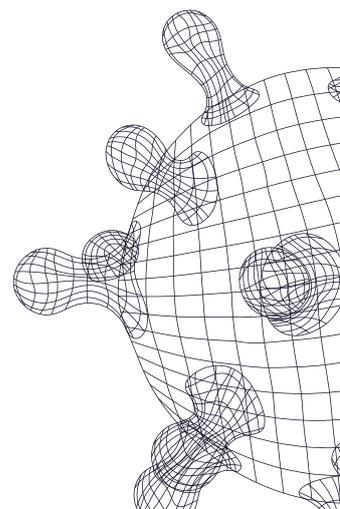
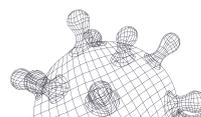
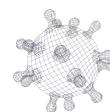
Mixed messages have been a major factor in the U.S. as President Donald Trump initially downplayed the virus. As cases grew exponentially and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) began issuing warnings, Trump changed his tone and method of delivery, holding regular briefings on the subject. But he soon seemed to drop the subject and move on. By mid-June, his approval ratings slid to 41% with 55% disapproval as he ceased the medical briefings, the virus spread, and other issues dominated the news.

CONCLUSION

As one U.S. partner said, “No doubt the story is still being written.”

This pandemic will likely continue for some time. In some countries restrictions are being reinstated shortly after they are lifted, as outbreaks begin to resurge. At the same time, governments simultaneously fight the virus and the economic havoc it has wreaked. So far, what has prevailed, independent of infection rates, is decisive action and clear, simple and consistent messaging. Even in the crisis of near-unprecedented magnitude, those simple tools have proven the most effective and will continue to be in the many months ahead of us.

Julie Exner
IPREX Global President



AUSTRALIA – OUT OF THE FIRE AND INTO THE FRYING PAN



Country:
Australia
Region: APAC



Government:
Liberal Party /
Nationals coalition



Country leader:
Scott Morrison

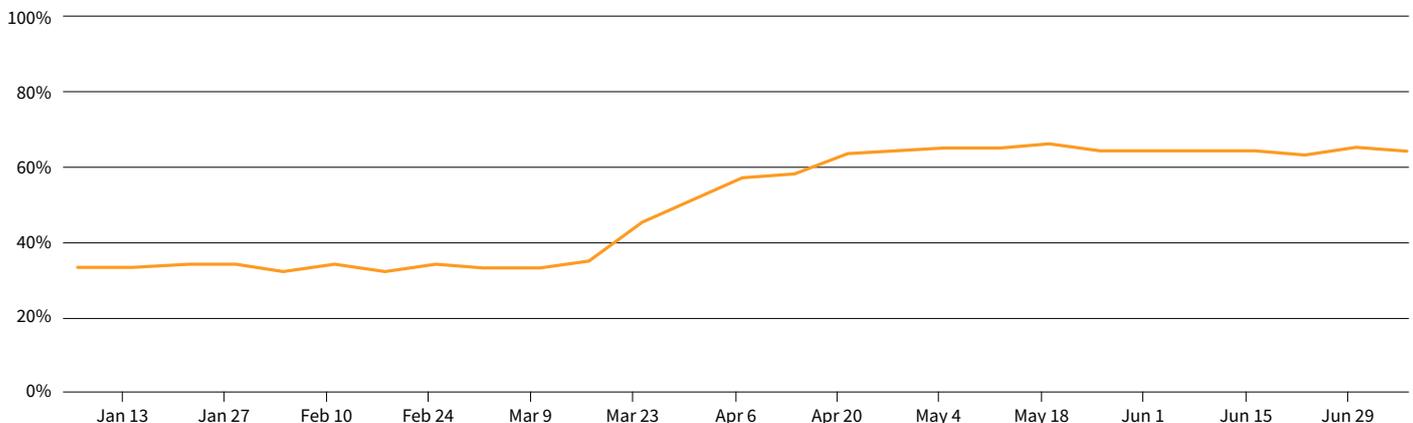


Change in
approval ratings:
37% in January
to 68% in July



IPREX partner
assessment:
[Wells Haslem](#)
[Mayhew](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN AUSTRALIA WHO APPROVE OF SCOTT MORRISON



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

SCOMO'S SUMMER OF DISCONTENT

Any analysis of the performance of Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, (known colloquially as ScoMo) during the COVID-19 crisis requires a brief look back at how Australia's 30th Prime Minister managed the Government's response to summer bushfires, widely considered the worst to affect Australia since European settlement in 1788, which preceded the pandemic.

The natural disaster ran from September 2019 to February 2020 and affected every state and territory, burning 186,000 sq. km. of vegetation, destroying 2,779 homes and claiming 34 lives.

In early December 2019, Morrison was riding high in the opinion polls. ScoMo led the Australian Labor Party's leader, Anthony Albanese, as preferred PM by 48% to 34%, according to an opinion poll in The Australian newspaper.

Then it all went pear shaped.

Inexplicably, as fires raged, Morrison went on a family holiday to Hawaii a week before Christmas. Worse, he didn't bother to tell the Australian people. Pictures of Morrison posing with Aussie tourists appeared on social media on the same day two volunteer firefighters, both young fathers, were killed.

Morrison cut short his trip and apologised. However, on New Year's Day, he hosted a garden party for the Australian and New Zealand cricket teams at his official Sydney residence, overlooking Sydney Harbour. The day before, massive fires had laid waste to coastal communities along much of the New South Wales (NSW) South Coast and in eastern Victoria.

The next day, Morrison declared the bushfires were "something that will happen against the backdrop of this (Cricket) Test match". Visiting the fire-ravaged southern NSW township of Cobargo, a local woman refused to shake the PM's extended hand – so he grabbed her right arm with his left hand and clutched her right hand in his. The public backlash was brutal.

On 13 January, an opinion poll in The Australian newspaper had Albanese as preferred PM, satisfaction in Morrison fell eight points and dissatisfaction increased by 11 points.

COVID-19

By late February with flooding rains having extinguished the fires and global attention shifting to the looming coronavirus pandemic, Morrison's and the government's polling numbers had improved only marginally.

The Prime Minister began holding regular media conferences from the last week of February to outline his government's response to COVID-19. He was joined by his Health Minister, Greg Hunt, and the nation's Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Dr Brendan Murphy.

Daily briefings were held by the Health Minister and the CMO or his deputy from the nation's capital, Canberra.

These briefings made use of infographics and easy to understand charts and graphs, with a strong emphasis on "flattening the curve".

Morrison's tone was serious but empathetic. His focus was that Australians faced a challenge unlike any since the second world war, that it would last for months and that many people would suffer. He was quick to emphasise that Australia's State and Territory governments (Australia is a Federation) were working cooperatively with the Federal government, despite several being led by Labor administrations. Partisanship was put aside. Pundits expressed amazement at the level of cooperation between the two levels of government, who usually endured frosty relationships.

The core message was that Australia needed to manage both the health crisis and the economic crisis, and this required discipline and sacrificing some personal freedoms, but it was a collective effort.

Morrison never appeared to be trying to generate political capital out of the crisis. The Federal Labor Opposition was careful not to be overly critical of the government's response, focusing mainly on the lack of income support for casual workers and the arts sector.

The CMO's and the Health Minister's briefings were factual but never dry. The fact people were dying was never glossed over but nor was messaging mawkish.

By 11 March, Morrison was once again preferred PM and his disapproval rating had fallen to 49%, according to a poll on the Guardian Australia website.

TWO DAYS LATER, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, A NATIONAL CABINET OF THE PM AND STATE AND TERRITORY LEADERS WAS CONVENED TO MEET WEEKLY.

This decision was not only taken for pragmatic reasons (only the states can implement some laws and regulations and test for COVID-19) but also to reduce the Federal Government's political risk by placing some of it on the shoulders of the States and Territories.

By mid-March, with confirmed cases of COVID-19 beginning to mount, Morrison announced that 6.5 million people on government benefits would receive up to AUD750 each in cash payments.

On 22 March, unemployment benefits were doubled. Many businesses were also provided tax relief of up to AUD100,000.

On 30 March, Morrison announced the JobKeeper wage subsidy of AUD750 per worker per week for small- to medium-sized businesses that could demonstrate a loss of earnings, at an estimated cost to taxpayers at the time of AUD130 billion.

What surprised many was that a politically conservative government was prepared to spend large sums of public funds propping up businesses and jobs, knowing it would create a budget deficit that could potentially take a generation to pay off, if at all.

Government spending was matched by tough physical distancing measures, implemented by states and territories. At one point, people were banned in most states and territories from congregating in groups of more than two. Only five people could attend weddings; 10 at funerals.

Playgrounds, gymnasiums; restaurants (except takeaway); pubs; beauty therapists and schools were closed. People found travelling outside their local area without a reasonable excuse were fined.

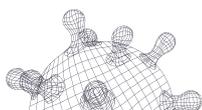
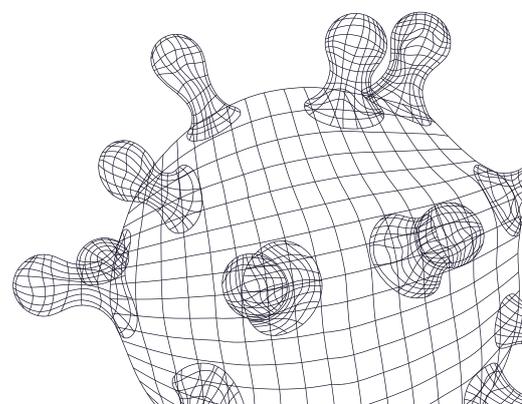
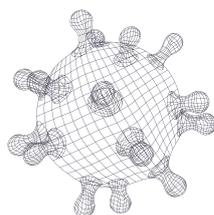
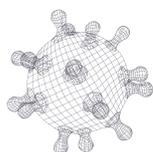
The States of Queensland and Western Australia closed their borders, while South Australia, Tasmanian and the Northern Territory forced arrivals from interstate into quarantine.

People were permitted to visit retail outlets such as supermarkets and pharmacies, but strict limits were placed on the number of shoppers permitted in each store based on its square meterage.

Most people worked from home, where they could, and strict limits were placed on public transport numbers, based on the one person per four-square-metres rule.

Morrison and his CMO regularly thanked people for their efforts and gently chastised those who flouted social-distancing rules, particularly younger people.

On 6 April, the Daily Mail published a poll showing Morrison had recorded the highest approval rating for a PM in more than a decade.



The Lowy Institute conducted a poll between 14 and 27 April and found 82% of Australians were very confident or somewhat confident in the federal government's response to the pandemic.

By late May, the number of daily new COVID-19 cases in Australia were regularly in single figures, the country was beginning to phase out the stricter social distancing rules, and people were slowly beginning to return to workplaces.

On 2 June, a Guardian Australia poll showed Morrison had won the approval from 89% of the Coalition voters, 53% of Labor voters and 41% of Greens voters. Less than half the sample had rated Morrison as a capable leader (45%) in January. By June this was up to 70%.

At the end of June, Morrison's personal approval rating, according to Newspoll, had reached a new high of 68%, with dissatisfaction at its lowest ever 27%.

Morrison's turn around has been extraordinary. From ham-fisted and tone deaf to widely respected in six months.

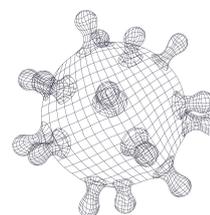
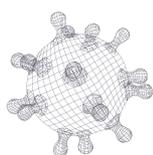
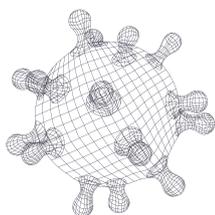
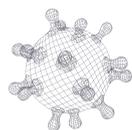
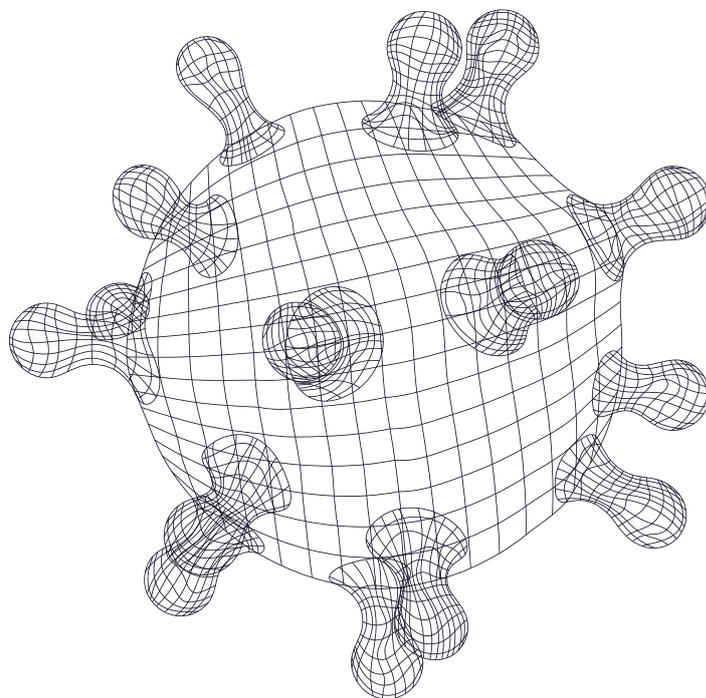
There have been some minor hiccups – the government overestimated the cost of JobKeeper payments by a factor of about 100% and the disembarkation of a cruise ship in Sydney without testing for COVID-19 – but overall Australia has managed the pandemic remarkably well.

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT AUSTRALIA'S
RAPID AND SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE TO
COVID-19 HAS RUBBED OFF ON THE PM.

At the time of writing, 189 Australians have died from COVID-19 and there have been 16,295 confirmed cases. However, a recent spike in infections in Australia's second-largest city, and the State capital of Victoria, Melbourne, has health officials concerned and led to Victoria closing its borders.

Early action; a compliant population; cooperation between the states, territories and Canberra; Australia's relative isolation and relatively low urban population densities all played a role.

But Morrison has performed well. Consistent, regular, realistic, and easily understood messaging mixed with genuine concern and generous government assistance have won him and his team voter approval.



CYPRUS – SUCCESS STORY



Country:
Republic
of Cyprus

Region: EMEA



Government:
Democratic Rally
(Right Wing)



Country leader:
President
Nicos
Anastasiades

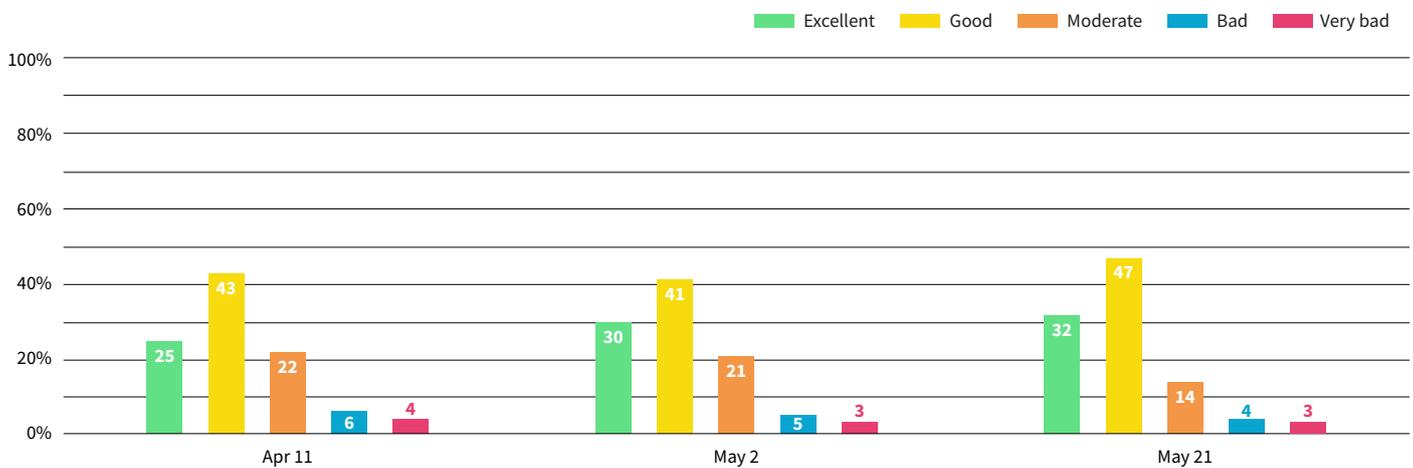


Change in
approval ratings:
Small increase



IPREX affiliate
assessment:
Alfa Dimiourgiki

HOW ADULTS IN CYPRUS ASSESS NICOS ANASTASIADES HANDLING OF THE CORONAVIRUS



Retail Zoom (online poll for Politis Newspaper), published 31/5/2020

Even though the epicenter of SARS-CoV-2 epidemic was Wuhan Province in China, which is very remote geographically from Cyprus, the Ministry of Health's Epidemiological Surveillance Unit was in constant communication as early as January, monitoring developments and adopting necessary measures based on guidelines of the World Health Organization and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

An action plan was drawn up on January 25 to better organize all services involved and measures went into effect. To start with, strict measures were implemented at entry points of the Republic of Cyprus for all passengers arriving from any part of China, not only from Wuhan, long before the first cases were recorded in European countries.

MEDICAL CENTERS AT ALL OF THE ISLAND'S AIRPORTS AND PORTS WERE STRENGTHENED, AND A QUESTIONNAIRE HAD TO BE COMPLETED UPON ARRIVAL, IN ADDITION TO TAKING THE TEMPERATURE OF ALL PASSENGERS FROM CHINA.

Similar measures were taken at checkpoints with the northern area of Cyprus which has been under illegal occupation by Turkey since 1974.

At the same time, Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou activated a crisis management plan and was at the head of the ministerial committee while President Nicos Anastasiades, who comes from the liberal Democratic Rally party, regularly attended set meetings.

A TOTAL LOCKDOWN IN CYPRUS WAS IMPOSED IN MID-MARCH. EVEN HOME GATHERINGS WERE BANNED.

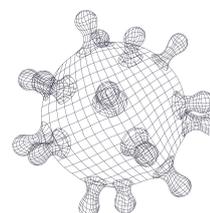
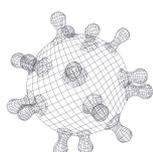
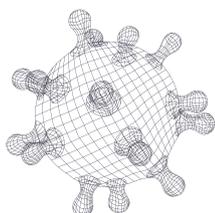
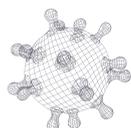
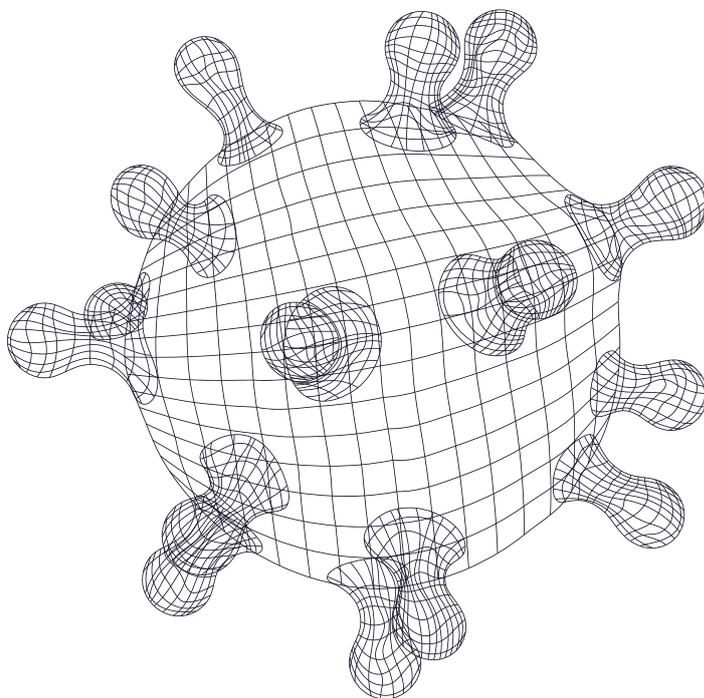
Following consultations with the World Health Organization and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, Cyprus also enforced a very strict strategy providing for a large number of diagnostic tests and a thorough tracking of contacts of all individuals who were positive for the virus. This strategy led to the prompt detection and isolation of suspected cases before these could spread out to the community.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Ministry of Health and the government as a whole adopted the slogan "We will succeed" with the country's mainstream media, along with organizations and corporations following suit. The general public joined forces with government efforts and kept encouraging doctors, nurses and other health professionals in public hospitals.

Scientific experts in the field were the ones to announce live on television, at 6 p.m. daily, the results of new cases, deaths, hospital admissions and discharges. A special website, <https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus/en>, was created where all announcements, decisions and general information about the pandemic was recorded.

All published polls have given the President of Cyprus and the Minister of Health a positive rating over the crisis management. Moreover, Cyprus put an end to restrictions and gradually opened the airports as of mid-June.



DENMARK – LEADS IN PUBLIC SATISFACTION



Country:
Denmark

Region: EMEA



Government:
Social Democrats



Country leader:
Mette Frederiksen

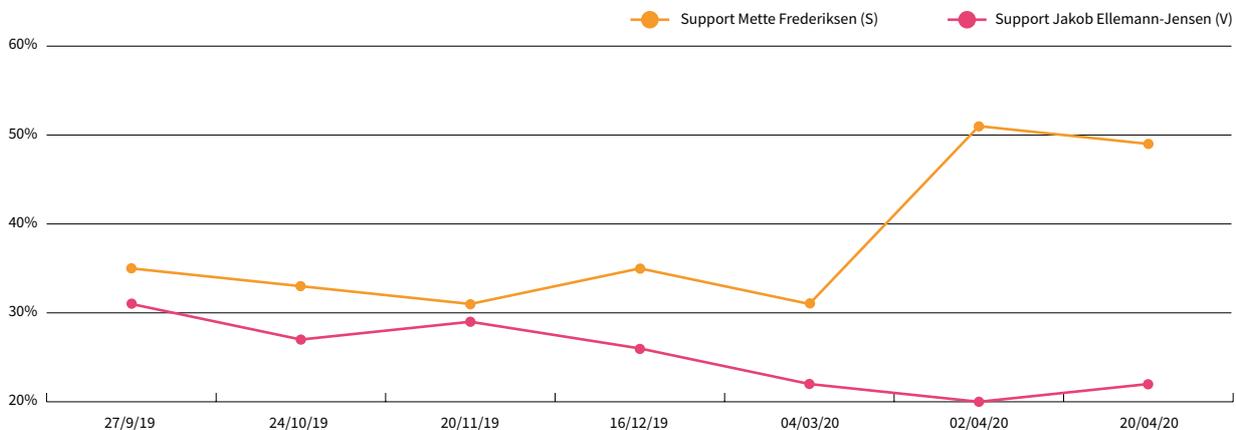


Change in approval ratings:
Increase



IPREX partner assessment:
[Operate A/S](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN DENMARK WHO APPROVE OF METTE FREDERIKSEN



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted May27 - June 2, 2020

Prime Minister Frederiksen has been a dominant figure in the Danish national response to the coronavirus pandemic. Frederiksen became Prime Minister in June 2019 after a solid election victory for the parties left of centre in Danish politics. The election allowed Frederiksen to form the first one-party social democratic government in Denmark since the early 80s, supported by the socialist and social-liberal parties in Folketinget.

Beginning March 11 with the national shutdown, Frederiksen was front-and-center in a series of defining press conferences. Referring to scenes from Italy, Frederiksen took a personal communicative approach when she announced the massive national shutdown:

“We are in unknown territory. We are in a situation unlike anything we have tried before. Will we make mistakes? Yes. Will I make mistakes? Yes.”

Minister for Health, Magnus Heunicke, and Head of the Danish Health Authority, Søren Brostrøm, also became prominent figures and were granted a series of exceptional authorities on March 12 through new legislation unanimously approved by all political parties. The following day, borders closed, and all international travels were advised against by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There has been some public debate as to whether a complete shutdown was recommended by health authorities or not, leading Frederiksen to say on May 22 that it was ultimately a political decision – and not directly recommended by authorities.

However, during the shutdown, politics were pushed aside, and all political parties supported the shutdown. In addition, the Queen of Denmark gave a rare address, in which she mentioned the Prime Minister directly:

“This concerns us all. The Prime Minister has just had to announce even harder decisions. We need to make our contribution, each and every one of us.”

Conclusively, the Prime Minister personally took charge of a wider shutdown than seen in other countries, and political parties, the Monarchy and the Danes largely supported this approach initially.

CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS HELPED GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

The widespread shutdown, nonetheless, immediately created concerns of economic disaster. However, already on March 15, a defining agreement was reached in the Danish tripartite cooperative labour market system.

Among other things, unions, employers and the government agreed on a government compensation of 75% of any given employee's wages (max 30.000 DKK a month) if the employee is sent home, as well as compensation for a range of fixed costs.

Although certain industries (such as tourism, hospitality, consulting etc.) has complained that the agreement does not cover their expenses sufficiently enough for them to survive long term, the compensations have contributed widely to the positive public response to the shutdown.

Furthermore, political scientists argue that the world-leading high level of social trust in Denmark allows the government to achieve efficient public behaviour changes without drastic measures such as curfews, as seen in France, Italy and Spain.

FOCUS ON PRIME MINISTERS FADE AS PARTY-POLITICS RETURN

The political unity and national support for government measures were helped by the fact that the strong initial response produced positive results. Infection numbers and deaths from the coronavirus fell sharply in the beginning of April.

The sharp fall in coronavirus cases and deaths meant that the “reopening phase” began faster than expected. On April 15, Denmark was the first European country to partly reopen public schools. While politics returned during this “Reopening phase,” with broken negotiations between political parties, most parties have worked together in reopening or scheduling the reopening of most sectors, institutions etc., by mid-June.

This has also marked the beginning of the final phase of restarting the economy, starting with an almost unanimously supported agreement with exemptive fiscal policy actions.

All in all, end results in these following phases were the same as during the shutdown: Unanimous decisions in Folketinget and strong initiative from the government. However, the personal focus on the Prime Minister has faded as there are no longer central press conferences and as the discussion turns from strong-leader issues, such as disaster-handling, onto more divisive issues of exemptive fiscal policy – such as taxation, government subsidies, etc.

HIGHEST SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT MEASURES IN THE EU

Conclusively, the consensus is that the Danish measures have proven effective relative to other countries in handling the coronavirus pandemic as well as the economic consequences of the shutdown.

85% of Danes are “Fairly satisfied” or “Very satisfied” with the measures that the Danish government has taken so far against the coronavirus pandemic. That is the highest number in all of the EU, where an average of 56% are satisfied with government measures.

In addition, the strong government control of the measures shows itself in public surveys. When asked whom they trust to inform them about the coronavirus pandemic, a very high share of Danes, relative to other countries, choose health authorities and the government.

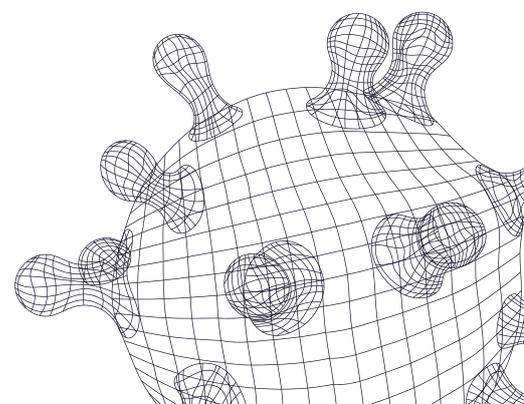
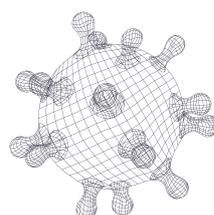
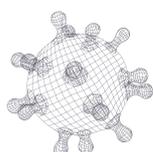
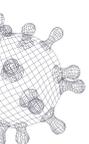
This also shows in public support of the Social Democratic government and the Prime Minister specifically.

As of March 4, 31% of Danes preferred Mette Frederiksen as prime minister, whereas 22% preferred the centre-right opposition leader Jakob Ellemann-Jensen who took over the second largest party, Venstre, following the election defeat.

Since then, support for reelecting prime minister Frederiksen has risen 20 percentage points to approximately 50% on April 20, however Jakob Ellemann-Jensens support has remained stable around 20-25%.

Another survey found that Frederiksen had an approval rating of 39% and a disapproval rating of 23% as of March 4. A month later, her approval rating was an impressive 79%, whereas only 5% thought she was doing a bad job.

Meanwhile, the support for Frederiksen's Social Democratic Party has risen seven percentage points since the beginning of March to approximately 34%, drawing support from many other parties.



FRANCE – LEADERS OF CRITICAL THINKING



Country: France
Region: EMEA



Government: Centrist (LREM)



Country leader: President Emmanuel Macron

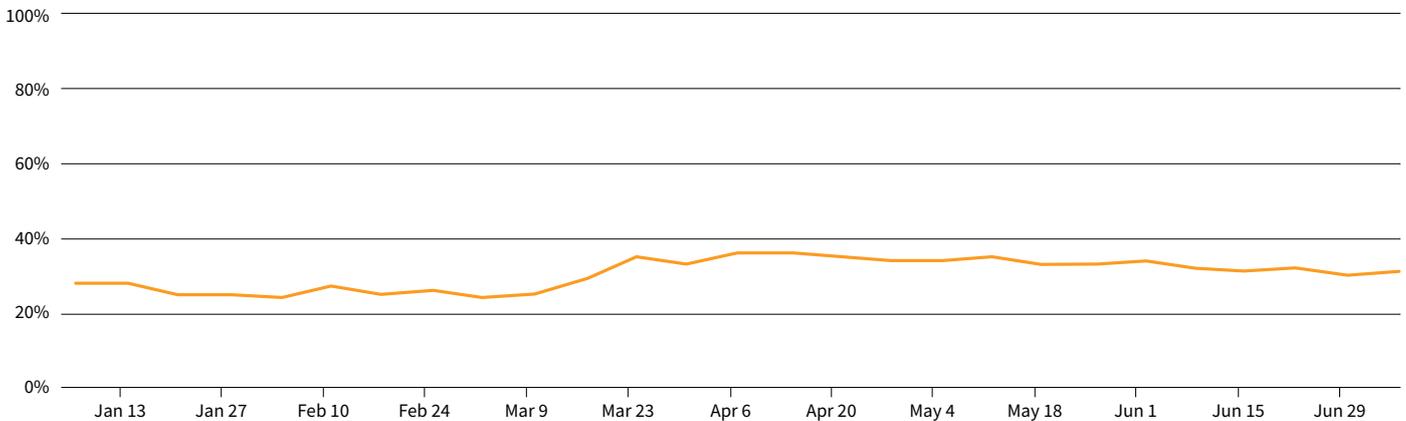


Change in approval ratings: Small



IPREX partner assessment: [Gen-G, Paris](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN FRANCE WHO APPROVE OF EMMANUEL MACRON



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

The COVID-19 crisis tested the popularity of all governments. While it enabled them to assert their leadership under extreme conditions, it has above all highlighted the value they place on the human and economic aspects when making difficult decisions dictated by the virus, during a six-month period that was totally unprecedented in the history of our societies.

Figures provided by the Morning Consult Institute on the approval ratings of the leaders of 10 major countries reveal the widely dispersed effects of COVID_19 on public trust. Some leaders managed the crisis to consolidate their stature as protectors of the nation, while others were heavily disavowed by their people. But in France, we have observed a fluctuating confidence over the weeks, leading in fact to very little change in the traditional mistrust French people feel towards any form of institution.

MISTRUST, A FRENCH TRADITION?

The figures here provide us with valuable insights, both into our national tropisms and the relevance of our President's communication.

France is characterized by its culture of criticism: At the beginning of this year, with an approval rate of 28% (Morning Consult), President Macron ranked last among the 10 leaders in this study. He barely improved his ranking at the end of the semester by obtaining 31% approval, beating only one of his peers, the Japanese Prime Minister, on the scale of distrust.

Thus, 3 years after his election, it is as if the core of his supporters was still essentially his electorate of the first round of the Presidential elections. The crisis nevertheless brought him a short-lived revival in popularity, peaking at 36% in the first half of April. But how can we explain these variations in confidence?

TWO MONTHS OF PROCRASTINATION

President Macron began the year with a strong note of mistrust, linked to the discontent of a large part of the population. Yellow vests movement, transport strikes, hospital malaise, there is no shortage of discontent as China discovers the [first official cases](#) of a still unknown disease. The first cases were reported in France on [January 24th](#), but the virus still appears to be a distant threat.

As a result, the Minister of Health resigned on 16 February in an attempt to seize the Paris City Hall, while the government focused on [pension reform](#), which should then be decreed without a vote (29 February). Even before the virus entered the scene, the President's approval rating was at its lowest on 3 March. But the virus was spreading and disrupting priorities. On 12 March, the President solemnly took the floor to announce not only the closure of schools but also the controversial continuation of the [first round of municipal elections](#).

WAR ON THE VIRUS

March 16 marks a turning point in the history of this crisis with the [address of the President](#) who hammers the word "war" 7 times to announce the lockdown, the rules of social distancing and the freezing of the economy. Accompanied by radical measures to support employees and companies, this decision is welcomed by a dizzying increase in the President's approval rating, which rose from 25% to 36% between 10 March and 7 April.

It is true that the government is sparing no effort with the full [compensation of reduced-hours work](#) (13 March) and the launch of a massive program of [state-guaranteed loans](#) to companies (25 March). In spite of the incessant debate about masks, the French people were ultimately much more broadly in favor of a policy that gave priority to health while preserving all the players.

SPRING'S BEAUTIFICATION

As the epidemic finally began to recede, the President took the floor again on 13 April to set a deadline for the lockdown, the date of 11 May. He paid tribute to the healthcare staff and announced the continuation of economic support measures - and on that day it still met with broad approval from the French people. Employees were teleworking, companies were getting a breath of fresh air, and the country was maintaining its confidence. And this revival continued until the end of May.

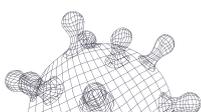
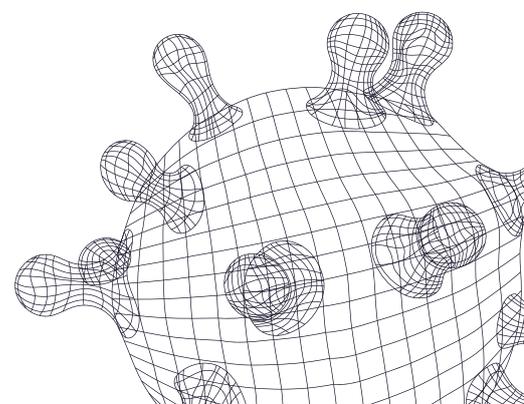
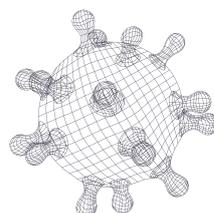
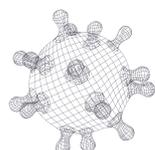
A COMPLICATED WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

As the day of deconfinement loomed, the President's approval rating deteriorated. The cause was certainly the fear of layoffs and of companies failing, despite the state aid, events which were predicted by the [Minister of the Economy](#) himself (22 May). At the same time, decision-makers were talking about the need to "[work more](#)" to relaunch the economic machine. And this was a difficult proposition knowing the treatment of this crisis had required the injection of [€ 500 billion in public aid](#) to that point.

Yet, according to [Imperial College](#) researchers, France had avoided nearly 700,000 deaths thanks to health measures as of May 4 - and it is the European country where the most lives have been saved. At the same time, the President's approval rate has risen by only 3%.

For sure, communication has not always been very fluid in this period of extreme tension and the "new world" looks very complicated. With the need to upgrade working conditions for many categories of staff, while maintaining the competitiveness of companies, communication will still be a tough exercise. But COVID-19 will have confirmed that the French are decidedly the leaders in terms of critical thinking.

ACCORDING TO IMPERIAL COLLEGE RESEARCHERS, FRANCE HAS AVOIDED NEARLY 700,000 DEATHS THANKS TO HEALTH MEASURES AS OF MAY 4. AND IT IS THE EUROPEAN COUNTRY WHERE THE MOST LIVES HAVE BEEN SAVED.



GERMANY – CAUTIOUS BUT CONFIDENT



Country:
Germany
Region: EMEA



Government:
Coalition Government
(Christian Democrats and Social Democrats)



Country leader:
Chancellor
Angela Merkel

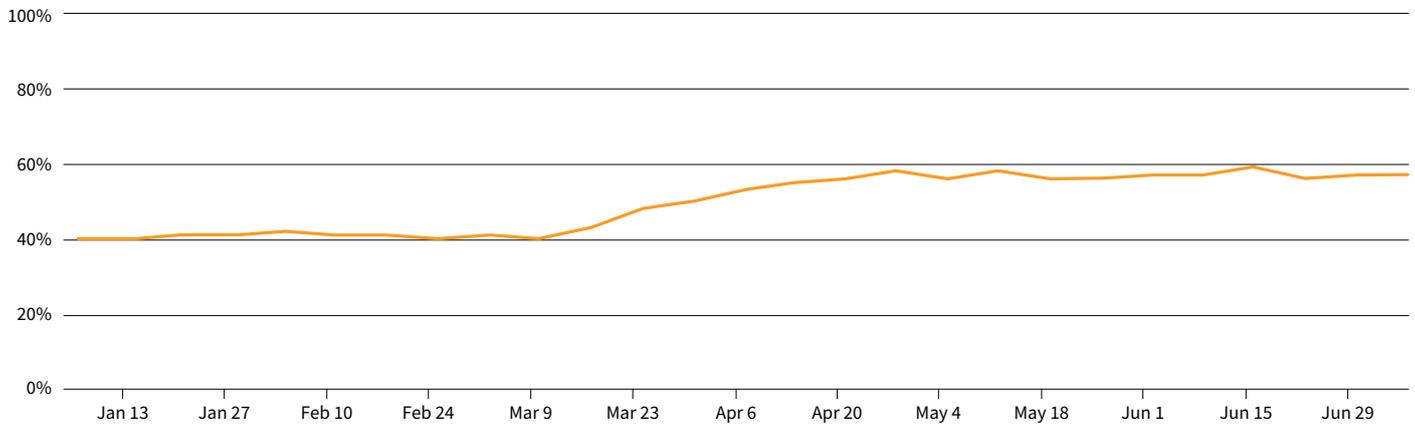


Change in approval ratings:
Rise



IPREX partner assessment:
[Orca Affairs](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN GERMANY WHO APPROVE OF ANGELA MERKEL



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

The coronavirus pandemic is a test for all governments, without exception. However, the consequences and outcomes vary greatly from one country to another, the successes and failures of a country's leadership reflected in their polling numbers. The spread of SARS-CoV-2 in Germany began on January 27, 2020, brought on by a workshop with international participants in Munich. To this day, Bavaria remains the German state most affected by the virus.

Like many other nations, Germany underestimated the gravity of the situation at first. A month of limited government action passed until footage taken in overwhelmed hospitals in northern Italy

and Spain started to hit the news - forcing the German government to reassess the dangers posed by the novel coronavirus. From this point forward, the government's crisis task force has met with increasing frequency, a ban on large public gatherings was imposed, and the Robert Koch Institute (Germany's centre for disease control) started providing daily briefings on the increase in cases - and soon, fatalities. One by one, German states started shutting down, and nationwide contact restrictions soon followed. Public life in Germany was reduced to a minimum.

RISING CASE NUMBERS, RISING APPROVAL

The outbreak initially strengthened the German public's confidence in their government, like it did in countries across the world. But unlike many other countries, as the pandemic continued to rage on, the German people's confidence in their leaders continued to rise. To date, it has increased significantly compared to 2019 with approval even doubling in East Germany.¹

According to initial surveys conducted at the end of March, 59% of Germans were satisfied with the government's response to the crisis.² These approval ratings coincided with Germany's highest reported daily case numbers. Compared to her colleagues – Boris Johnson (UK) and Donald Trump (US) – Angela Merkel's approval ratings were already a step ahead in the early days of the COVID-19 crisis - but while approval of the government's response continued to decline in the UK, and never passed 50% in the US, her approval rose steadily.

“THIS IS SERIOUS. TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.”

A factor that shouldn't be ignored when weighting these numbers: to date, the German health care system has yet to face collapse or even reach capacity. Thanks to quick action by the administration to increase the number of ICU beds, even patients from neighboring European countries could be treated in German hospitals. The government never once gave the impression that it was overwhelmed by the huge challenge it faced, and seemed to be in control of the situation at all times. Chancellor Merkel, in a move remarkably unusual for a German leader, even gave a rare televised address to the nation in late March. Her simple line that would become famous: “This is serious. Take it seriously.”³

The survey results regarding the German government (especially those of the two governing parties) immensely benefit from Merkel's tried-and-proven crisis management. More than two-thirds⁴ of those surveyed were either “satisfied” or “very” satisfied. Similar sentiments can be observed when it comes to the public's reaction to lockdown measures. At least half of all survey respondents expressed that they found the measures to be just right⁵ - neither too restrictive nor too loose. German Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, was also praised for his modern crisis management - especially his understanding of modern means to reach young people, namely, through non-traditional channels, such as apps like TikTok and Telegram.

Germany's top virologist, Dr Christian Drosten, even won awards for how he communicated issues to the public throughout the crisis - on June 25, his daily podcast (“Das Coronavirus Update mit Christian Drosten”) was awarded the prestigious Grimme Online Award, honoring excellence in digital journalism and information services, in two categories.

Additionally, the German government launched an enormous federal aid program worth 819.7 million euros intended to support the health sector as well as families, small businesses, the self-employed and freelancers. In order to help keep Germans employed and avoid mass redundancies, short-time working allowances were increased and extended.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S MEASURES ARE ALREADY PROVING EFFECTIVE: GERMAN UNEMPLOYMENT IN MAY OF THIS YEAR WAS ONLY 1.2 PERCENTAGE POINTS HIGHER THAN AT THIS POINT IN 2019.⁶

At a European level, a 540 billion euro solidarity package was launched to counteract the economic collapse that has occurred across the continent as a result of the pandemic. Merkel's strict austerity measures, once a hallmark of her tenure in office, now a thing of the past.

While there was a general upward trend in support for the two ruling parties as a result of their response to the pandemic, Angela Merkel's own popularity ratings are at historic levels. In June of this year, a survey revealed that 84% of Germans are satisfied with her work as Chancellor.⁷ Once again, Merkel's crisis management has - like it did during the 2015 refugee crisis - proven to be both effective and persuasive to voters. Germans appreciate her calm, objective, and matter-of-fact approach to a crisis, and that she does not fall victim to populist rhetoric or fear-mongering.

It remains to be seen how support of Merkel's administration and its measures to contain the spread of coronavirus will hold up throughout the duration of Germany's lockdown and spikes of new cases across the country following attempts to relax measures. What is clear, however, is that Germany has been able to brace the initial impact of the pandemic comparatively well by international standards, and that confidence in the German government is stronger than it has been for a long time. Whether this is due to the strength of Germany's health care system, Merkel herself, or women in leadership positions in general (suggested to be a factor in the responses of countries like Norway, South Korea and New Zealand) continues to be the subject of intense debate.

1 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/675140/umfrage/bewertung-der-arbeit-von-angela-merkel-als-bundeskanzlerin/>

2 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1106354/umfrage/zufriedenheit-mit-den-reaktionen-der-regierung-auf-die-covid-19-corona-pandemie/>

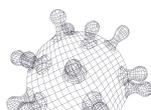
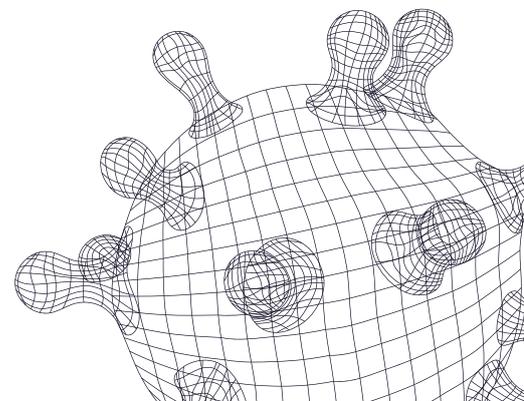
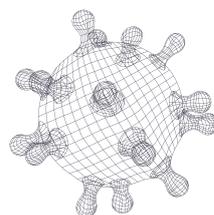
3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YS20YQbVE4>

4 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1109262/umfrage/corona-krise-umfrage-zum-krisenmanagement-der-bundesregierung/>

5 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1116180/umfrage/-un-zufriedenheit-mit-der-streng-der-massnahmen-gegen-die-coronavirus-pandemie/>

6 <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Short-Term-Indicators/Labour-Market/arb210a.html>

7 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/675140/umfrage/bewertung-der-arbeit-von-angela-merkel-als-bundeskanzlerin/>



GREECE – SUCCESS STORY MAKES GREEKS PROUD



Country: Greece
Region: EMEA



Government: 'New Democracy' (Conservative, Right Wing)



Country leader: Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis



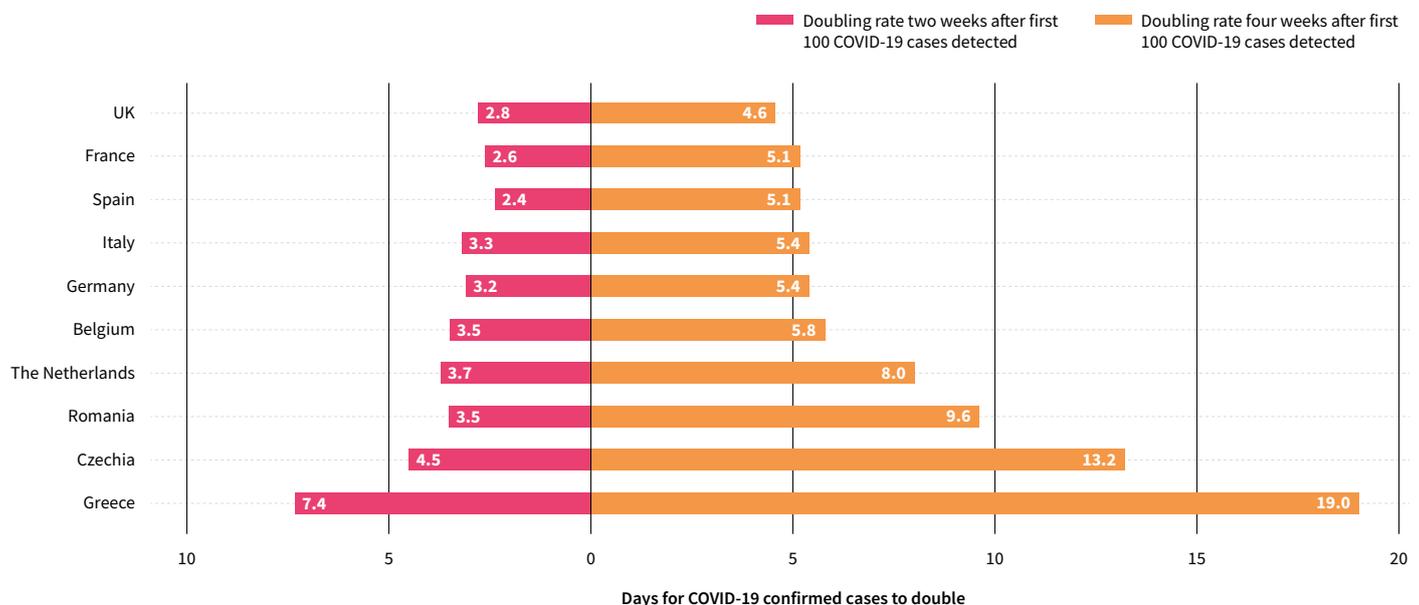
Change in approval ratings: Rise for the Prime Minister. 64% - November 2019, 67% - July 2020



IPREX partner assessment: [Reliant Communications](#)

HOW QUICKLY HAVE CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES BEEN DOUBLING?

(AFTER THE FIRST 100 COVID-19 CASES DETECTED)



<http://www.thebridgetank.org/wp-includes/images/media/Flattening%20the%20Curve%20-%20The%20Bridge%20Tank%20COVID-19%20-%2016042020.pdf>

The coronavirus outbreak could have been a disaster for Greece. The country has the second oldest population in the E.U, it is a significant tourist destination, its health sector has been damaged by austerity measures with only 550 ICU beds for the entire population and a devastated economy due to the three bailouts.

But Greece has avoided the worst, with under 200 deaths and less than 4500 confirmed cases so far. And why is this? Greece took early steps ahead of most of Europe, becoming an example of successful crisis management.

Handling of a crisis requires an effective communications strategy along with efficient operations. Furthermore, handling of the first hours of a crisis can define its outcome. Greece handled successfully the first horrifying period by taking immediate actions and giving its citizens the sense of safety. In the midst of a crisis, it is crucial for people to feel that the administration (or the crisis manager) is absolutely capable of handling it. So, Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservative government was considered capable from the very start. His crisis team (consists of specialists in health and civil protection sectors) assessed all elements, evaluated the threat, composed the management plan and communicated its actions to its audience, the Greek citizens.

However, besides the proper risk assessment, Greece is a country where health is a common good which has to be protected. Hygeia, which means health in Greek, was the goddess of health, and all the wishes and good words in Greece end with a phrase for good health. Greece is also a family-oriented society and old people - grandmothers and grandfathers - are the beloved ones who have to be protected.

PHASE 1 – THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Before any fatality was reported (first death on March 12), the crisis team was already assessing the situation daily, and rapidly made all corrective moves to cope with the spread of the pandemic. At the same time, the government personalized the crisis administration “putting a face” on its crisis team. The coronavirus briefing was a daily, 6 p.m., televised event by the heads of the crisis team (infectious disease specialist Sotiris Tsiodras and Deputy Civil Protection Minister and operations crisis manager Nikos Hardalias). It has to be noted that [Sotiris Tsiodras became the most popular Greek for the 94.6%](#) of citizens.

Furthermore, a campaign was launched (#stayhome) to keep the public informed, to advise on self-protective measures, and for severe restriction of activities. All communications were a strong warning for elderly and vulnerable people to stay home and also for thorough implementation of hygiene measures “to protect our beloved ones.”

The restrictive measures escalated rapidly, from cancellation of mass activities and carnivals on March 1, to closure of schools on March 10, and closure of restaurants, cafes and suspension of shopping, entertainment and travels on March 13. By March 23 a total lockdown was imposed on all movements of citizens.

The step-by-step restrictive measures were communicated mainly by the Prime Minister himself, who addressed the nation four times during the two-month lockdown. In his first two messages during the early stages of the lockdown, Mitsotakis declared that “we are at war” with an enemy that is “invisible but not invincible” and argued in favor of the strict restrictions for the protection of the most vulnerable. His third message came just before Greek Easter holidays and urged the public to self-restriction with social responsibility and said the restrictive measures “won us precious

time” to better organize the national healthcare system. He declared the biggest gain is the trust towards the state, the government and fellow citizens. In his fourth televised address, announcing the end of lockdown and gradual reopening of life and economy, Mitsotakis thanked the people and made the nation proud of its accomplishments. He stressed the state's ‘reforms’ (digital public administration, the civil protection, the healthcare system) in the faces of the small heroes – the everyday people who work together and respond to social responsibility. “Thank you for setting an example for our country around the world.”

The plan worked. The lockdown measures have been greeted with widespread support by the citizens, while the whole communications strategy made the people proud of successfully beating the invisible enemy. In April, in two different polls, Greek citizens said they are [satisfied by the government's overall handling of the coronavirus pandemic crisis by 85.7%](#), and [also a 79.9% respondents believe the conservative Mitsotakis government's management of the crisis so far is “surely or probably positive.”](#)

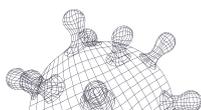
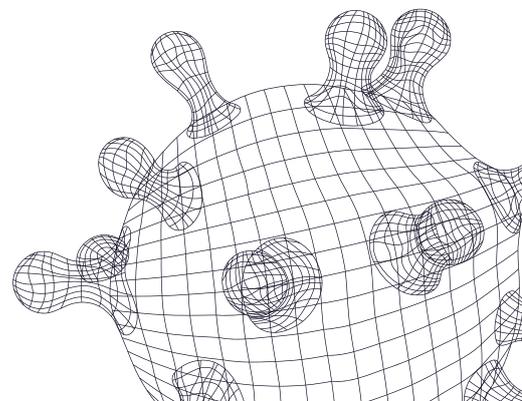
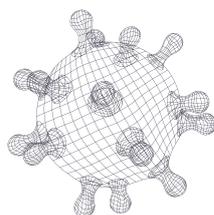
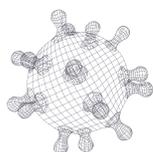
PHASE 2

The second phase, COVID-19's effect on the economy, is more challenging. The country faces a nearly 10% recession in 2020 due to the global lockdown, with lack of tourism being the main factor. Government has a communications plan for this too.

THE SUCCESS OF THE COUNTRY'S RESPONSE TO CONTAINING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS A FACT. [GREECE HAS PERFORMED BETTER THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN EUROPE BY TAKING EARLY CONTAINMENT MEASURES.](#) THE SUCCESS STORY IS PUBLISHED AROUND THE WORLD, MAKING GREEKS PROUD AND ALSO LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A LESS CATASTROPHIC TOURISTIC PERIOD.

The global campaign to promote tourism focuses on the motto ‘Greece is a state of mind’, practically urging travelers to keep Greece in their calendars, whether they visit this summer or not. Furthermore, based on the “safe country” motto, Greece has released an open invitation with the Prime Minister's video message from Santorini calling on travelers to enjoy their Greek summer. Opening the tourism sector after lockdown, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said “I do not want to make Greece the No.1 destination; I want it to be the safe destination.”

In July, [the positive opinion for the government is still high \(67%\)](#), but also led by fear of the future economic status. However, fewer people state they are worried about the coronavirus. Kyriakos Mitsotakis remains the most approved leader by 67%.



INDIA – EARLY PROMISE BELIED AND SQUANDERED MOMENTUM



Country:
India
Region: APAC



Government:
Bharatiya Janata
Party



Country leader:
Narendra Modi

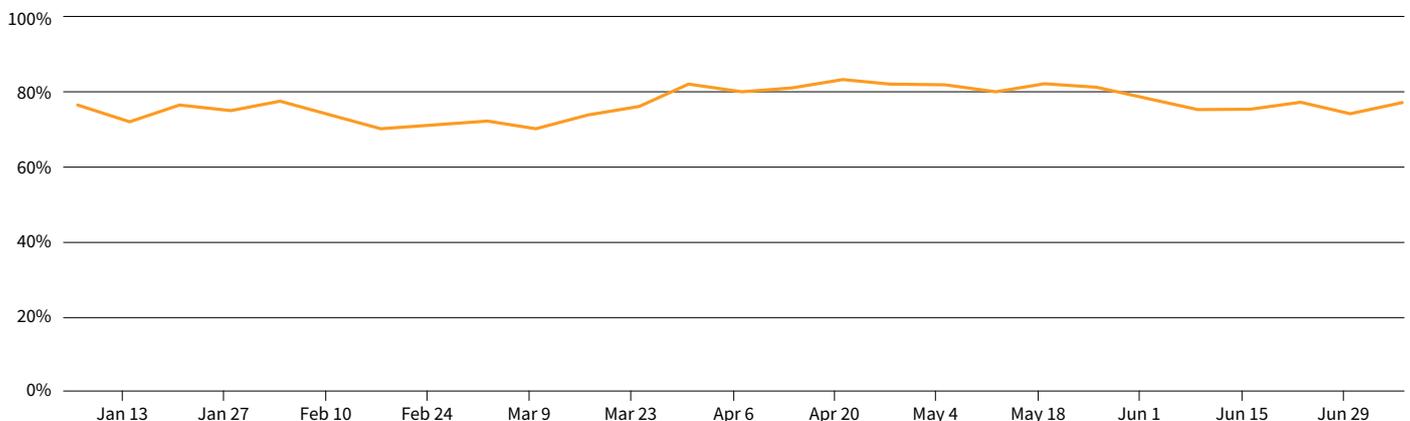


Change in
approval ratings:
Slight drop



IPREX partner
assessment:
[PRHUB](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN INDIA WHO APPROVE OF NARENDRA MODI



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

India had many unique advantages (in our opinion) relative to other nations going into the COVID-19 crisis:

- Starting February most of India excepting high altitude zones becomes a warmer tropical region; progressively it gets warmer in March, April and May; June begins warmer but ends in rain; as studies show, warmer/humid climates diminish virus's transmission rate.
- Against world average of 16% youth population, India has close to 20%; a huge advantage considering young have higher immunity levels and lower mortality rates
- India is the largest producer of Hydroxychloroquine and has significant production levels of paracetamol to be able to help other countries without shortage occurring
- Indians are known to have more genes (than the Chinese and Caucasians) that enable natural killer (NK) cells, a type of white

blood cells in our body that provide the first line of defense against viral infections. They're also relatively more exposed to microbes that keep the immune system primed.

- India is among five nations who isolated the virus strain, a leader among the vaccine efforts and also the world's largest distribution player in Serum India.
- It imposed the most stringent of national lock-downs starting March 24th until June end (starting June 8th this was relaxed in a phased manner across India, but there is lack of clarity on whether relaxations will be rolled back partially or fully and nationwide or selectively)
- It had a leader who is hugely popular, charismatic and had among the highest popularity rating of any world leader at 76% (it peaked at 82% before dropping to 75% by mid-June)

MILESTONES

First case

January 30th, student in Kerala who returned home for a vacation from Wuhan, China

Spread of cases

March cases spread beyond to different parts

First death

March 12th, 42 days after the first case was reported in India

Case number increase

Starting early April further accelerating towards end May/early June

Deaths increase

End May/early June

100,000 cases

May 19th

MAJOR GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

6th March

International passenger screening at airports starts

10th March

Airlift of Indian citizens from global COVID-19 hotspots begins, starting with Iran and Italy

13th March

Non-essential traveller visas suspended

16th March

Land border crossing by passengers suspended

22nd March

Domestic air travel stopped

22nd March

One day Janta curfew

24th March

First nation-wide lock down imposed, which was extended multiple times until May 31st

25th May

Domestic flights restart

8th June

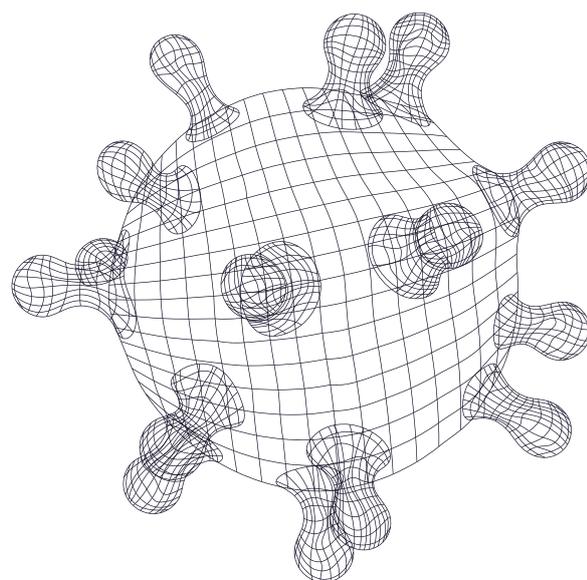
Phased relaxations implemented nationwide with curbs in COVID-19 hotspots

With 1.3 billion citizens spread over 736 districts in 28 states (many of which are the size of countries) and 8 union territories, thousands of dialects, even larger cultural variations and a democracy, crisis communication in India is among the most complex. Compounding this is the fact that the literacy rate in India is 69.1% i.e., a whopping 400 million are illiterate.

Early affected states prepared their own response to in the absence of clarity/direction from the federal government. Few imposed curfews-invoking section 144 of the Criminal Procedure code. March 19th, the federal government came into the picture with the Prime Minister calling for a Janta curfew on 22nd march. While his initial two televised addresses were widely acknowledged and boosted public morale, there has been criticism that it lacked clarity and detail.

States like Kerala and Maharashtra did implement a comprehensive and holistic crisis communication strategy by clearly and repeatedly communicating official statistics, respective governments' action plans and also precautionary measures to be observed. These interactions, though repetitive, minimised the scope of any undue panic among the public. The state of Tamilnadu has done the most testing and Delhiis doing aggressive contact tracing.

At the central and state level, in the absence of a centralized messaging guideline/framework, there have been different approaches used in conveying timely and accurate information to the public, a key requisite of effective crisis communication. For example, the federal health ministry had a daily briefing until May 11th. Post that, daily briefings were stopped and a daily statement issued instead. Also, a representative from ICMR (Indian council of Medical Research), which is among the triad of organizations tasked with Epidemic handling, has been missing in these briefings since April. NCDC, the Indian equivalent of US's Center for Disease Control (CDC) has had little to no role or say, constrained by personnel shortages due to budget cuts and lack of clarity on its role.



The courts also have been involved on and off. There has been criticism of the way India's apex court has been responding to various facets of the crisis, including the migrant crisis. Prevalent perception is that certain state courts have been proactive/more responsive. The federal government's relief package was extensively criticized for being wrongly focused and as more repackaging than real relief. What has been most criticized has been the large-scale humanitarian crisis caused by the abrupt imposition of nationwide lockdown in a country that has a large informal labour base. Millions of immigrants who were left with no incomes due to the shutdown started moving on foot, or whatever mode was available, back to their villages. This resulted in untold misery and dozens of deaths. What made this worse was bungling by state governments, like the one in Delhi. A silver lining has been the huge public-driven effort to feed and take care of these migrants.

There is a lack of legal framework as well. India relies on The Epidemic Disease Act of 1897 and the National Disaster Management Act of 2005, both of which do not elaborate explicitly on crisis communication, despite it being the key element in any crisis management. Particularly now where fake/unsubstantiated information spreads faster through social and digital platforms than genuine/official information.

There has been criticism that the communication has not been inclusive and that it has been allowed to paint a certain community in bad light. There are numerous fake videos across platforms that depict the community as irresponsible and vector of the disease. Thankfully this has eased to some extent in June/July.

Despite having a vibrant media adept at amplifying messages to the public, the Indian government has instead been trying to curb its freedom in many ways, like approaching India's apex court with a direction to stop them from publishing/broadcasting news on the pandemic, without checking with the government. On top of a central portal (not that widely accessed) and Arogya Setu mobile app (more popular), co-opting the media would have enhanced effectiveness multi-fold.

The Prime Minister led the communication outreach himself, leaving the communication of INR 20 trillion COVID-19 relief package to the Union Minister of finance. His choice has been televised live addresses, monthly Mann Ki Baat radio broadcasts or tweets from his official handle. Curiously, he kept away from any formal communication on covid-19 once cases increased exponentially. And the federal government even more moving away leaving it to the states to handle the crisis on-ground, except for monitoring.

Even before the country reported its first case on 30th January, India's social media was rife with wild rumours, conspiracy theories, doctored videos about disease's origin, its subsequent spread and possible remedies, much like in other nations. These started leaping up on Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter & TikTok, as India reported more cases. According to a report by fact checking website BOOM, COVID-19 related fake news began climbing in March third week peaking early April, particularly after the Tablighi Jamaat incident in Delhi. Fake news is even more crippling in India, as the 376 million Indians on these platforms are more susceptible to it, worsened by sloppy regulation of social media platforms. A case-in-point was the fake news about how consuming chicken could lead to COVID-19 infection. This spread like wildfire, causing a staggering US\$250 million loss to the local poultry industry, as many people stopped consuming it. While hundreds of attackers have been arrested and several social media platforms warned, fake news around the virus continues to flourish, significantly impacting India's fragile inter-community relations and creating numerous hurdles for the federal, state and local governments, in their fight against the pandemic.

Another curious instance is the cycle of decision-making by the federal government. As pointed out earlier, initially, it largely left the decisions to the state governments and as the cases peaked in early June, the federal government again left it to the states to articulate their own strategy, content with providing financial support and guidance.

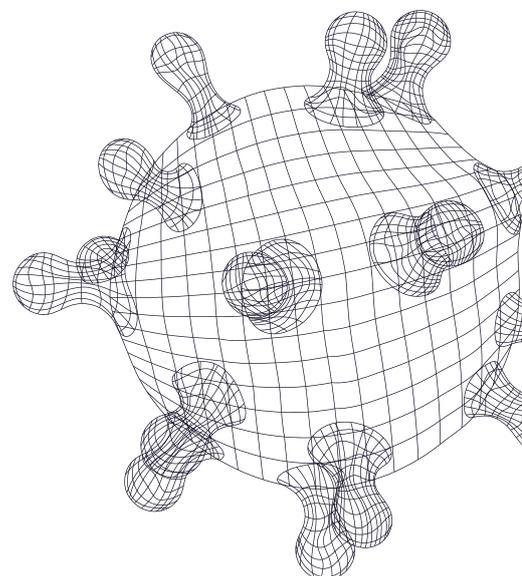
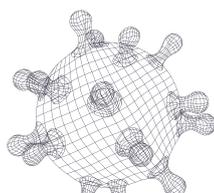
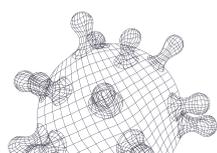
The Prime Ministers' bold decision of imposing the stringent lockdown was welcomed by many and did probably lead to his already high rating of 76 to leap to 82. But that seems to have been lost, with his approval ratings currently at 75, one point lower than at the start. A pertinent point to note here is that barring a couple, most world leaders have had falling approval ratings of late.

QUESTIONS THAT NATURALLY ARISE ARE:

1. In sitting on the fence biding time, was India late to act?
2. Could better coordination between states and federal government have helped?
3. Would de-centralization of crisis handling maintaining uniformity in guidelines/processes, been more effective?
4. Why were't communication professionals along with, specialists, allowed to handle the communication outreach?

Third in the world in the number of cases and seventh in the world on the number of deaths, the unmistakable truth is that a clear, cohesive, inclusive and empowering communication strategy would have added more teeth to India's COVID-19 efforts. While COVID-19 being unprecedented is a challenge for any leader/government, the federal and state governments in India clearly lost somewhere due to lack of strategic clarity and direction at the topmost levels and inadequate attention to media & communication strategy. Considering the complexity of communicating to such a huge and diverse populace, it would have helped if the federal government was open about its limitations, thus fostering a more collaborative approach. Surprising has also been the lack of accountability at the federal level and large parts of media not even trying to seek accountability. Unfortunately, India's is a case of early promise belied and the momentum squandered.

* The article relied on numerous public sources. All their copyrights and IP ownership is hereby recognized. In case of issues, we are happy to acknowledge explicitly or make necessary corrections. There is a time lag between the white paper drafting and its publishing which does have its own impact.



IRELAND – COMMS STRATEGY GRABS PUBLIC ATTENTION AND SUPPORT



Country:
Ireland

Region: EMEA



Government:
Coalitions led by

Fine Gael party
(Feb-June)
Fianna Fáil (July +)



Country leader:
Leo Varadkar
(Feb-June)

Micheál Martin
(July +)



Change in approval ratings:
January - Leo Varadkar 35%
Micheál Martin 33%

June - Leo Varadkar 75%
Micheál Martin 46%



IPREX partner assessment:
[Walsh:PR](#) and
[AM O'Sullivan PR](#)

Irish culture has a global influence through the Irish diaspora.

The country's national day, St Patrick's Day on 17 March, is celebrated worldwide with major landmarks, buildings and rivers turned green for the day.

It was therefore a major and brave decision by the Irish government to cancel all St. Patrick's Festival celebrations this year as the country was struck by Covid-19.

The decision showed leadership at a time when the political situation in the country was unstable.

Three weeks before the first Covid-19 case was reported, there had been an inconclusive general election in Ireland. The outgoing government led by the Fine Gael Party with Leo Varadkar as Taoiseach (Prime Minister) had suffered a heavy blow. It ended up as the third largest party in terms of the number of seats in the Dáil (Parliament).

With no party achieving sufficient seats to form a government, there was a need among elected representatives to begin discussions on the formation of a new government. Under the Irish Constitution, the incumbent government stays in power and all ministers retain their positions until a new government is formed. The new government did not take up office until 27 June.

MESSAGE DELIVERY

The caretaker government strategy had a number of key elements. In particular, all decisions were driven by medical/scientific evidence/advice and primarily communicated to the public by health professionals.

The daily briefings from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) were presented by Dr. Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Chair of NPHE, who became a highly respected spokesperson. The briefings were used to communicate updates of Ireland's daily increases in case numbers and to notify the public of any deaths due to Covid-19. Public health advice was also communicated.

In addition to keeping the public informed about the latest restrictions and measures in action, NPHE was keen to be as transparent as possible in order to be a source of reassurance to the Irish public. Information and data were made freely available, which allowed for informed debate and discussion around Ireland's situation.

The group ensured that Ireland was one of the first countries in the world to report cases in a completely accurate manner (including all cases in all settings, hospitals and care homes). This enabled them to establish the public's trust and ensured that their communications were taken seriously.

During March these daily briefings were supplemented by weekly briefings from the HSE and their purpose changed several times over the course of the crisis. Initially, they were used as an opportunity for the HSE to echo the public health advice being communicated by Leo Varadkar and NPHE. These briefings were also used to visually reassure the viewing public, with briefings taking place from a range of different healthcare facilities each week.

THE TRANSPARENCY AND HONESTY DISPLAYED BY ALL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THESE BRIEFINGS AUGMENTED THE CALM AND UNAMBIGUOUS MESSAGES WHICH CAME FROM LEO VARADKAR AND HIS CABINET.

Leo Varadkar's first address was from Washington on March 12th while on a state visit to the US. It was a speech which all leaders should take note of. Announcing restrictions he said, "I know that I am asking people to make enormous sacrifices. We're doing it for each other. Together, we can slow the virus in its tracks and push it back. Acting together, as one nation, we can save many lives. Our economy will suffer. It will bounce back. Lost time in school or college will be recovered. In time, our lives will go back to normal. Above all, we all need to look out for each other."

His second address to the nation on the national holiday, St. Patrick's Day 17th March, also struck exactly the right note. His words were genuine, authoritative, informative, calming and emphasised the need for unity. "We're asking people to come together as a nation by staying apart from each other," was just one of the notable quotes from the speech.

These televised addresses continued throughout March, April, May and June, while Varadkar, a qualified GP, backed up his words by re-joining the medical-register early and spent some time every week working as a healthcare support.

COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME

The communications programme was a great example to communicators everywhere. In addition to the daily televised briefing, every possible communications channel was used: PR, press and broadcast advertising, outdoor, social media and direct mail, with a Covid-19 booklet delivered to every home in the country. The design of all material was consistent, simple and used the colour yellow as the base for everything.

From the beginning the messages were kept simple - wash your hands, sneeze into your elbow, keep your distance. A myriad of campaigns were organised by every area of society with hashtags such as #InThisTogether.

For those whose first language is neither English nor Irish, public health information was translated into 24 other languages. Telephone helplines were also set up.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

There were of course communication challenges. They included:

AN OPEN BORDER

Ireland had the difficulty of being an island with two jurisdictions taking somewhat different approaches to combating Covid-19. For example, at the time when travel in the Republic of Ireland was restricted, motorists from Northern Ireland could travel from anywhere in Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland without hindrance. This meant that after some confusion in the beginning, the two jurisdictions had to work more closely together to ensure consistency of messaging.

CHILDCARE

The provision of childcare has been a contentious issue during the Covid-19 crisis in Ireland. For the most part, the public understood the need for childcare facilities to close, and the fact

that many parents were now forced to work from home served to dispel some initial concerns. Although the government moved quickly to reassure the public that a scheme to provide childcare facilities would be put in place, almost as soon as it was announced, the scheme was abandoned due to a lack of childcare providers signing up.

STATE EXAMINATIONS 2020

Typically taking place in June, the Leaving and Junior Certificate state exams play a central role in the Irish education system. Early in the Covid-19 crisis, students and teachers were instructed to prepare for exams to go ahead as normal and carry out remote learning using web-based software. In April, the Minister for Education announced that the exams would be postponed until July in order to give students the opportunity to return to schools for a number of weeks before the exams began. On May 8th, the Minister chose to reverse his decision and announced that all students would receive predicted grades, which would be calculated by their own teachers.

TIMELINE

The arrival of the virus in Europe was confirmed on 24 January, when the continent's first case was reported in the French city of Bordeaux. The pandemic reached the Republic of Ireland on 29 February.

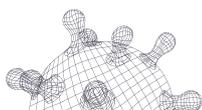
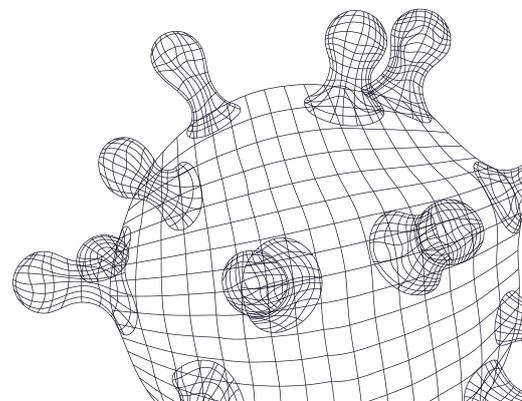
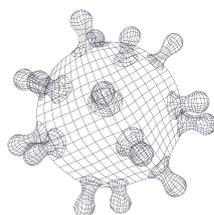
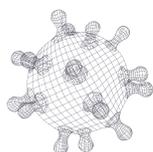
On 12 March, the government shut all schools, colleges, childcare facilities and cultural institutions, and advised cancelling large gatherings.

Twelve days later, almost all businesses, venues, facilities and amenities were shut; but gatherings of up to four were allowed.

Three days later, the government banned all "non-essential" travel and contact with people outside one's home, including family and partners. The elderly and those with certain health conditions were told to cocoon. People were made to keep apart in public. The Garda Síochána (Irish Police) were given powers to enforce the measures, which were repeatedly extended until 18 May.

On 18 May, the government's five-phase roadmap of easing COVID-19 restrictions began. The roadmap was reduced to four phases in an accelerated version of the original plan announced on 5 June. On 27 June the new government was formed under the leadership of Micheál Martin. A tracker app was launched on 6 July and over 1.3 million people have signed up to date. Following an increase in cases in the previous two weeks, the government announced on 11 July that Phase 4 of the roadmap was being postponed from 20 July to 10 August. On 20 July the wearing of face masks was made mandatory on all public transport.

By 20 July, NPHET had confirmed 25,760 cases and 1,753 deaths in the Republic of Ireland.



PUBLIC RESPONSE

The positive response from the public was extraordinary when you consider that so many cultural, social, sporting and religious events were cancelled and schools, colleges, childcare facilities along with many retailers considered non-essential, were closed.

People came together like never before. Local authorities joined with local voluntary and community groups to ensure that the elderly and most vulnerable in their communities were not left alone. The state postal service, An Post, launched a series of community initiatives including ensuring that postmen and postwomen across the country called to the front doors of older and vulnerable customers along their delivery routes.

Charities reported a boost in numbers offering to volunteer.

Artists, singers and young people created songs and messages to keep spirits high. The Late Late Show, the world's second longest-running late-night talk show after the US "The Tonight Show," broadcast weekly appeals for various charities which raised almost €6m over a number of weeks.

Despite the seriousness of the situation there were moments of humour, such as the closure of the Guinness Express. It happened when a quick-thinking publican in Donegal began delivering pints of Guinness by car and even by bicycle on some occasions to its local customers. However, as it wasn't considered essential, the long arm of the law intervened and stopped the delivery service.

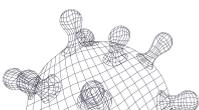
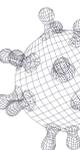
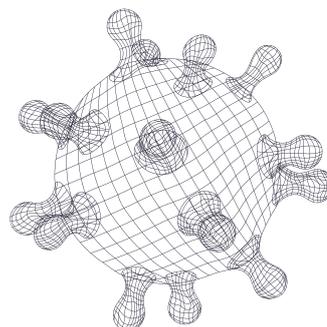
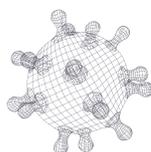
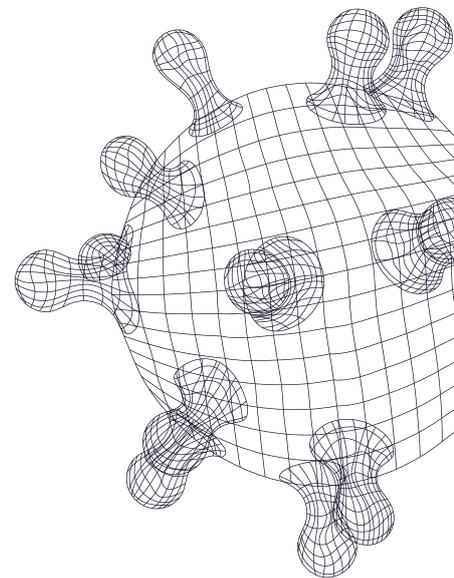
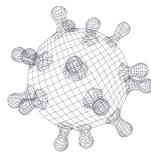
Overall the Garda Síochána strategy was one of calm intervention rather than aggressively implementing Covid-19 restrictions. There have been one million interactions between the police and the public but only 313 people facing court or criminal convictions over failure to obey the law.

Politically the Government's handling of Covid-19 has proved to be not only to the benefit of the country but gave a major boost to the Fine Gael Party and its leader Leo Varadkar. Based on his performance during Covid-19, an Ipsos MRBI poll for the Irish Times newspaper at the beginning of June found that he had a satisfaction rating of 75%. The leaders of the other two Parties who had finished ahead of Fine Gael in the election were at 49% and 46% respectively.

THE POLL ALSO FOUND THAT 88% FELT THE GOVERNMENT WAS DOING A GOOD JOB, AND 66% OF PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT FULL REOPENING NOW IS ABOUT RIGHT.

This is an extraordinary high satisfaction rating for any campaign which imposed such hardship. It demonstrates the power of consistent, clear messaging delivered in an authoritative way from a collective society that is resilient and caring.

As Leo Varadkar said in his first Covid-19 address: "Ireland is a great nation. And we are great people. We have experienced hardship and struggle before. We have overcome many trials in the past with our determination and our spirit. We will prevail."



JAPAN – CULTURE HELPS CONTROL VIRUS



Country:
Japan
Region: APAC



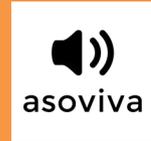
Government:
Liberal
Democratic
Party



Country leader:
Prime Minister
Shinzo Abe

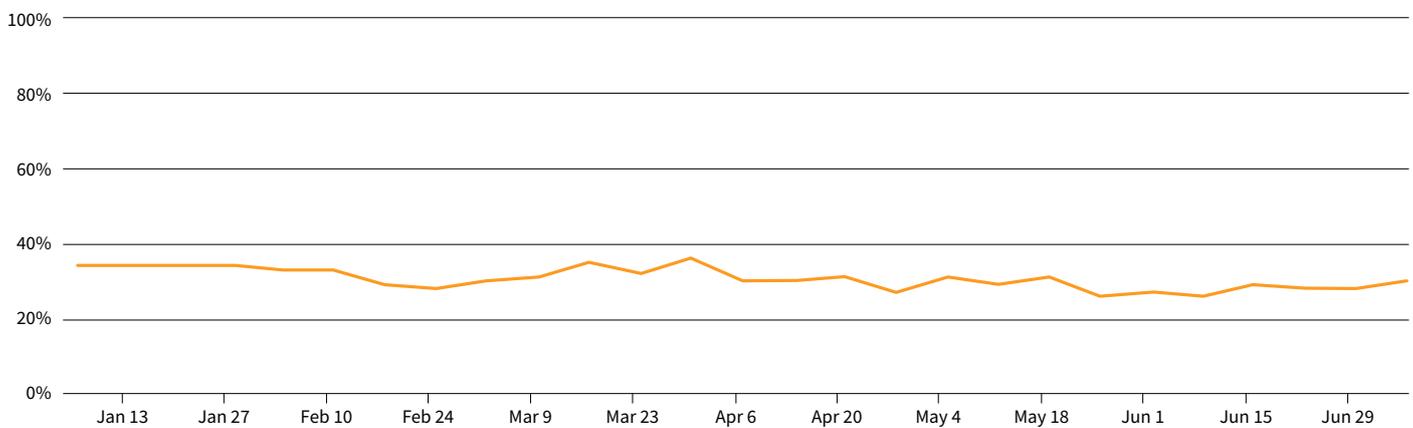


Change in
approval ratings:
Significant drop



IPREX partner
assessment:
[Asoviva](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN JAPAN WHO APPROVE OF SHINZO ABE



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

JAPAN'S CULTURE HELPED IT CONTROL THE VIRUS WITH ONLY SUGGESTIONS

On February 3, the novel coronavirus began spreading in Japan when the cruise ship "The Diamond Princess," which was carrying the passengers who tested positive for the virus, entered Yokohama port. An 80-year-old male passenger who lived in Hong Kong, tested positive for the virus after he had gotten off the ship in Hong Kong. Approximately 2,600 passengers and 1,000 crew members were on board, 712 were COVID-19 positive and 13 died.

On February 27, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the request of closure to all elementary, junior high and high schools across the nation until early April, under the government's responsibility for the issues that may arise from these measures. On March 9, the government of Japan expert meeting proposed the "3Cs" countermeasures to the coronavirus, asking citizens to avoid the following three conditions occurring simultaneously: (1) Closed space with poor ventilation, (2) Crowded with many people and (3) Conversations and vocalization in close proximity (within arm's reach of one another).

On March 24, Prime Minister Abe pushed for a one-year delay of the Tokyo Olympics during a conference with the head of the Olympic organizing committee. Prime Minister Abe and Mr. Bach agreed to delay the Games, and the new dates for the Olympic Games were set for July 2021 and the Paralympic Games were set for August 2021.

On April 7, Prime Minister Abe declared a state of emergency for a total of 7 prefectures (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Chiba, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka), based on a special measures law against new types of influenza and other infectious diseases, until May 6. Prime Minister Abe stated at a press conference, "According to experts' calculations, if people reduce contact by at least 70% or 80%, in two weeks the increase in infections will peak out." Following this announcement, Japan declared a nationwide state of emergency on April 16th, as the coronavirus continued to spread. On May 4, the Japanese government extended to May 31 the nationwide state of emergency declaration that had been due to expire on May 6. On May 7, an example of practicing "New Lifestyle" was announced, and on May 25, the state of emergency was completely lifted, including Tokyo and the neighboring prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba, as well as the northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido. It had been a month and a half since the state of emergency was declared on April 16th.

THE APPROVAL RATE FOR PRIME MINISTER ABE AND HIS CABINET FELL ITS LOWEST 29% - ACCORDING TO A POLL CONDUCTED IN MAY

The Abe administration is the longest-serving in the constitutional history since 2012, however, public opinion polls of five representative media in Japan show that its approval rating is slumping. A weekend opinion poll by the Asahi newspaper showed the lowest approval rating of 29% as of May. One of the factors that his approval rating dropped significantly, although Japan kept the virus spread in check, is the government's slow response to the new virus. This essential reason created a negative spiral and let the approval rating decline regardless of government's measures to combat the coronavirus. Specifically, when the governor of Tokyo Yuriko Koike alerted as "lock-down needs to happen if there wouldn't be a countermeasure" at the end of March, Prime Minister Abe showed an optimistic thought about affected area and cases in early April. He finally declared the state of emergency to 7 prefectures including Tokyo on the April 16th, and expanded it to nationwide on the 16th. Although the current situation improved considerably, it is said that the inactive reaction caused a rapid spread of infection from late April to early May and tightened the medical field, and the emergency declaration was made only because the governor Koike alerted.

Correlation between the timeline and an increase or decrease in approval ratings among those opinion polls:

February 27

Request of closure to all elementary, junior high and high schools across the nation

Increased rating reported by 4 media outlets, decreased rating reported by 1 media outlet

March 9

Proposal of 3Cs countermeasures to the coronavirus

Increased rating reported by 4 media outlets, decreased rating reported by 1 media outlet

March 24

Postpone Tokyo Olympics

Increased rating reported by 3 media outlets and decreased rating reported by 2 media outlets

April 7

Declare state of emergency for 7 prefectures

Increased rating reported by 3 media outlets and decreased rating reported by 2 media outlets

May 4

Declare nationwide state of emergency

Decreased rating reported by 5 media outlets

May 7

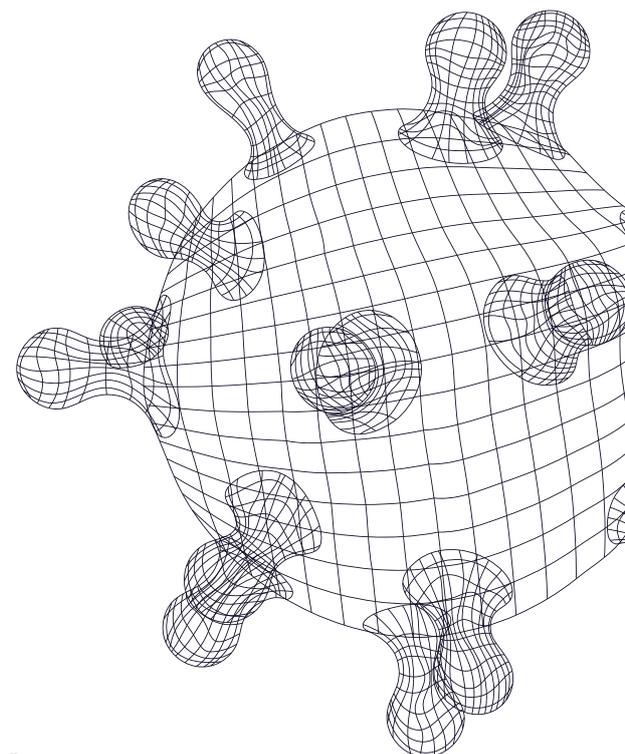
Adoption of New lifestyle

Decreased rating reported by 5 media outlets

May 25

Remove state of emergency

Decreased rating reported by 5 media outlets



JAPANESE GOVERNMENT'S MEASURES TO COMBAT THE CORONAVIRUS ARE OFTEN CRITICIZED BY THE PUBLIC

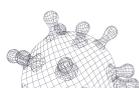
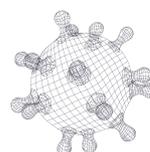
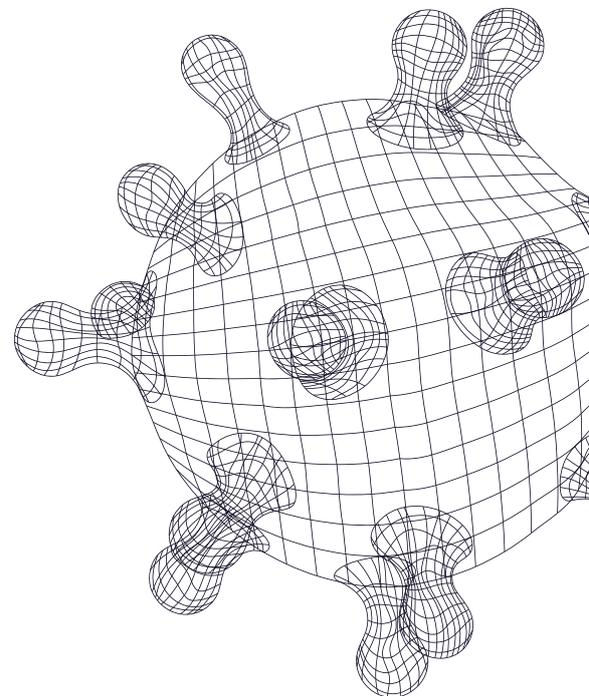
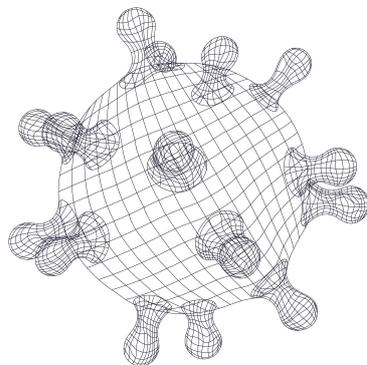
On April 1, Prime Minister Abe announced the distribution of two cloth masks to 50 million households nationwide in response to the increasing demand for face masks, which was mockingly called Abenomask, which means "Abe's mask" and was a play on his Abenomics package of economic measures. When the state of emergency was declared, government called for the implementation of remote work and requested business suspension of restaurants and other stores in accordance with the 3Cs, but the lack of preparation/information in the compensation system to support those restaurants was also highlighted. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shared a [Stay-at-Home video on Twitter, collaborating with Japanese musician Gen Hoshino](#), which stirred controversy. In the post, Prime Minister Abe asks people to stay at home to curb the spread of the virus and to return to normal lives as soon as possible for meeting and talking with others. But "Who do you think you are?" became a top trend on Twitter, with users saying Abe's message ignored the plight of those struggling to make a living during the coronavirus outbreak.

JAPANESE PEOPLE ARE EASILY INFLUENCED BY CELEBRITIES AND HIGHLY COOPERATIVE

On March 29, Ken Shimura, the popular Japanese comedian, died of pneumonia caused by coronavirus. Sudden obituaries of one of the most popular Japanese celebrities had a great impact on society, but the research found an interesting fact: The number of tweets containing the feeling of "scary" surged about three times, according to analysis conducted by Associate Professor Fujio Toriumi of the University of Tokyo.

Japanese people often criticize government's measures to combat the coronavirus but not aggressively enough to make excessive claims or demonstrations, and prefer to foster harmony of a community. Asoviva is located in one of the world's largest cities, Shibuya, Tokyo and we see 99% of the Japanese in the city wear face masks but only 30 - 50% foreigners wear face masks.

Japanese have monochronic culture that has educated people to care for others (cares not to get infected) and fear behaving differently from others (wearing masks and discipline 3Cs). Those factors may have helped Japan keep coronavirus rates as low as possible.



MEXICO – INCONSISTENT RECOMMENDATIONS CAUSE CONFUSION



Country:
Mexico

Region:
The Americas



Government:
Populist Left



Country leader:
Andrés Manuel López Obrador

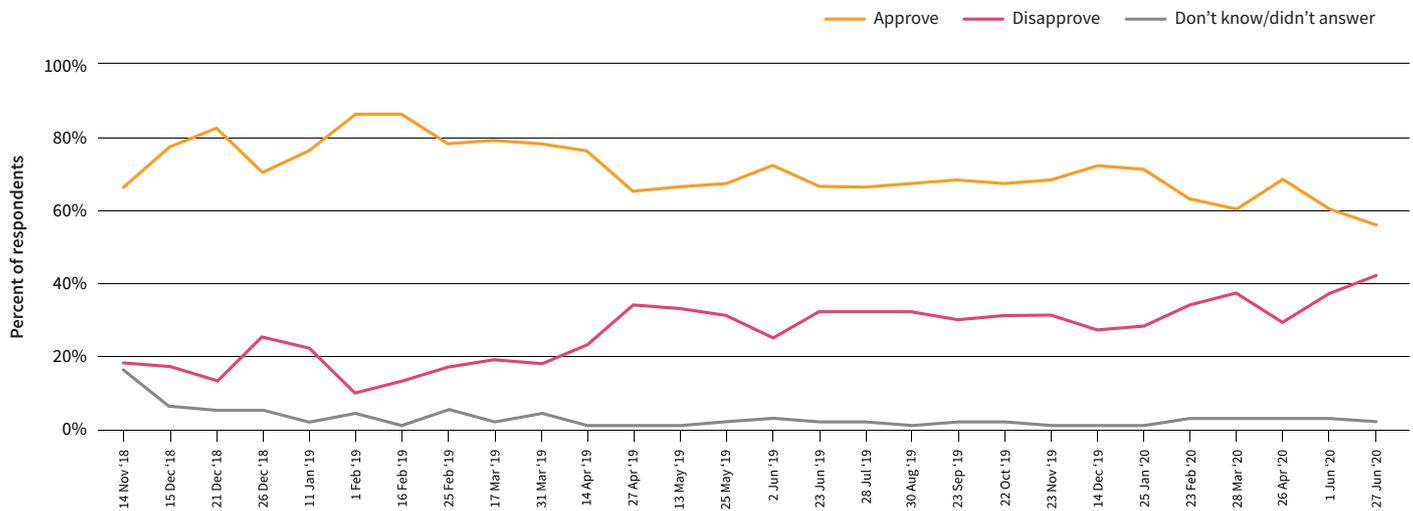


Change in approval ratings:
Decreased by a minor percentage



IPREX partner assessment:
[Dextera Comunicación](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN MEXICO WHO APPROVE OF ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR



Government communications over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico, have become one of the most significant recent challenges facing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's Administration.

When President López Obrador began his term in December 2018, he established the practice of holding daily morning briefings which, aside from attaining media coverage, were posted on YouTube. The exercise, which he considers “a practice of transparency and accountability,” has been questioned given the President’s leadership. He primarily responds to softball questions that are ‘fed’ to a group of individuals claiming to be journalists in attendance, often brazenly evades issues he prefers not to discuss, and disqualifies his political opponents or criticism.

The pandemic scenario has come to exacerbate differences with opposition governments, those who did not vote for him, and critical media. This led the Lopez Obrador government to adjust their communication strategy by designating Hugo López-Gatell, Undersecretary of Health Prevention and Promotion, as the official spokesperson assigned to address the evolution of the disease in the country.

By February 28, when Mexico’s first COVID-19 case was confirmed, daily conferences at night were instituted to start communicating on the country’s situation and any health measures to be imposed. The strategy sought to reduce direct questioning on the issue towards President López Obrador and avoid the politicization of health decisions.

Under pressure from the business sector to learn about a strategy by the government to respond to the financial crisis generated by the pandemic, López Obrador repeated the formula, assigning Graciela Márquez, head of the Ministry of Economy, the task of informing on economic recovery measures and holding daily afternoon conferences that started in late April.

Later, on May 13, yet another daily press briefing was added to the list, intended to cover social programs, including provision of pensions for the elderly and financial support for young people.

In total, Mexico's federal government gave four briefings per day, issuing nearly 5 hours of messaging in total – a communications decision that instead of providing transparency, has brought into question a lack of clarity and constant changes in strategy that have become necessary to manage the situation.

A PHASED APPROACH

Mexico's government established three phases to qualify the degree of contingency caused by the pandemic, to be used for guidance and decision-making purposes. In the initial phase, communications centered on conveying reassuring messages. Recommendations included basic prevention measures such as frequent hand washing, social distancing, sneezing into elbow, use of face masks, and staying home in case of respiratory disease symptoms.

March 14 marked the start of a social distancing program titled Jornada de Sana Distancia, that 'recommended' suspending non-essential activities and events, as well as schools and school activities, from elementary through high school, for one month (to date, these activities have not yet resumed). On 18 March, four days after the program started, Mexico confirmed its first death due to coronavirus.

Phase II of the pandemic was declared on March 24, and the change in phases included measures pertaining to suspension of schools at all levels, though most higher education institutions by then had made decisions to do so on their own. Other measures included closing public spaces, cancelling events or meetings with over 100 people, and restricting work activities.

On April 21st, nearly a month and a half after the first case was detected, Phase III was announced – a stage considered as maximum transmission of the virus. This called for intensified health measures, extensions to voluntary confinement of the general population, and definite closings of establishments and public spaces.

THE PRESIDENT: DISCOURSE VS ACTIONS

Completely disregarding any recommendations to help reduce the risk of contagion, President López Obrador was communicating messaging in clear opposition to his daily actions and activities, including his morning press briefings, which were averaging 100 attendees per day, conducting political tours and holding massive events in different states throughout Mexico. In particular, he was widely seen engaging in physical contact with event attendees, resisting the use of facemasks and rejecting antibacterial gel.

López Obrador's discourse not only minimized the seriousness and impact of the pandemic, but also, undermined scientific warnings:

- It is generally believed that this virus isn't that harmful...not as fatal – January 31
- Go ahead, hug... nothing will happen – March 4
- Be sure to go out... take your family out for a meal – March 22
- For purposes of our transformation, this situation fits like hand in glove – April 2
- I'm not wearing a mask because Hugo (López-Gatell) hasn't recommended that I do so – April 29
- Avoid lying, stealing, or betraying... that's what helps against coronavirus – June 4

Though attendance numbers at his morning briefings and all presidential events were reduced to groups of no more than 50 people as of March 24, his political tours around the country continued through mid-April. When he was accompanied by cabinet members, only some used facemasks, in fact, when the Secretary of the Interior (the second highest position in the Mexican government, after the president), Olga Sánchez Cordero, was questioned about this, she replied that it wasn't necessary, "I'm well protected by nano citrics nanomolecule drops... they penetrate viruses, dissolving the layer of fat found in viruses... penetrating and disintegrating the virus, they just kill it." Clearly, no scientific evidence exists backing up any such claims or their use against the virus.

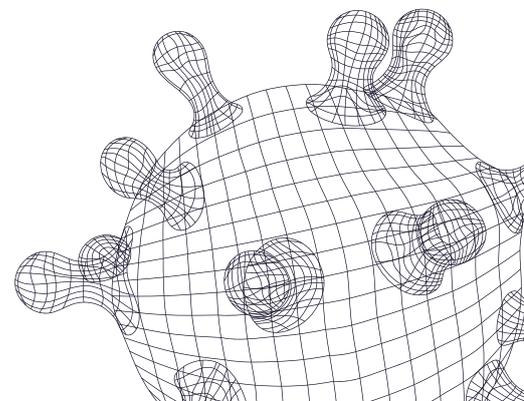
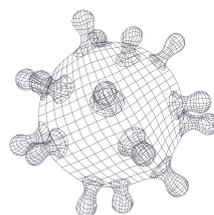
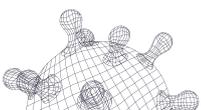
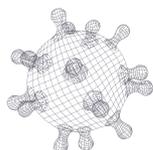
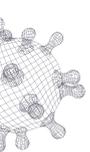
A NEW NORMAL

Just as the so called 'epidemiological stop light' was established at 'level red' in 31 of the 32 Mexican states, the government came out to announce the end of the Jornada de Sana Distancia program, and the return to a new normal as of June 1.

After almost two months of no travel, and when Mexico's numbers were reaching 93,435 recorded cases of the disease plus 10,167 deaths, President López Obrador once again took up his travels throughout the nation, starting in the southwestern region, to inaugurate the initiation of work on the 'Tren Maya' Project (considered to be one of the emblematic undertakings of his administration).

In the course of 75 days, between March and May, Mexico reached over 10,000 COVID-19 related deaths, and during the following 16 days into the 'new normal' phase, the country added another 10,000. Despite this fact, López Obrador encouraged the general population, "the worst is behind us," he claimed, and urged people not to be fearful.

As of July 14th, deaths have risen to 35,491 and a total of 304,435 people have been infected.



ECONOMIC CRISIS

ACCORDING TO INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND FORECASTS, MEXICO IS EXPECTED TO BE ONE OF THE ECONOMIES MOST AFFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND THE WORLDWIDE DROP IN OIL PRICES. ESTIMATES ARE FOR THE ECONOMY TO CONTRACT BY 10.5% THIS YEAR, A DRASTIC REDUCTION FROM THE 3.9% DROP PROJECTED LAST APRIL.

The pandemic caused its first visible economic effects on March 12 – a mere 13 days after the announcement of coronavirus in the country. The first historical minimum reached by the peso against the dollar was registered at \$22.75; since then, Mexico's currency has more dropped further, even reaching \$24.64.

Regardless of this outlook, the President has remained optimistic and as a solution, he set a plan in motion to tackle the economic crisis with measures including the closure of certain government offices, salary reductions for senior government officials, postponing government spending, strict application of the 'Republican Law of Austerity' (a decree regulating federal public spending), creating new jobs, and offering exceptional treatment to the Ministry of Health, the National Guard, and the Ministry of Navy and Defense. For micro, small and medium enterprises, generators of nearly 78% of employment in Mexico, no real significant type of support was announced. A company in this segment was offered access to -with interest- from the federal government of \$25,000 pesos (approx. US\$ 1,100), an insufficient amount to face any kind of economic crisis.

Despite these actions, a survey by the Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica (Celag) revealed that income dropped for 78% of Mexicans as a result of the economic crisis brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these, 56% reported a partial reduction in their income, whereas 21% stopped receiving income entirely. In addition, 7 out of 10 Mexicans reported reduced consumption of different products stemming from the crisis.

POPULARITY AND CREDIBILITY

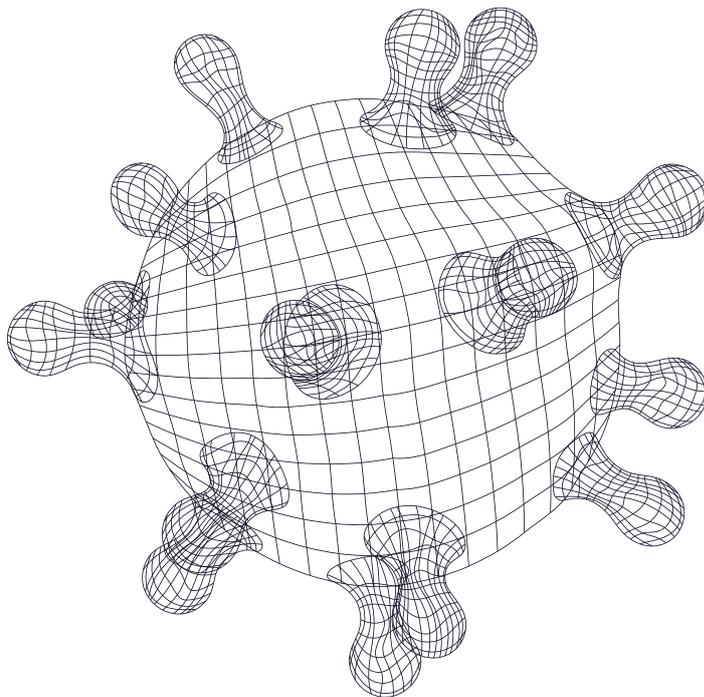
On several occasions, President López Obrador has boasted about his approval ratings and the support he has from a majority of the population, a fact that has been ratified by different polls. However, it is also true that a lack of sensitivity and numerous contradictions in the response to the pandemic have cost him plenty in terms of popularity.

According to a monthly poll carried out by business news daily, El Financiero/Bloomberg, 77% of Mexicans reported approval of López Obrador's work as president at the start of his term (December 2018), a number that saw some slight variations during the first year of the government, without drastic changes.

The pandemic, however, has been a time when the President's approval numbers have fallen the most. In a recent poll dated June 2020, his approval rating was at 56% among the general population and 42% disapproval, quite different from only 17% who were dissatisfied with his work back in December 2018.

In a separate public opinion report titled, Balance del Coronavirus y la Nueva Normalidad, addressing the pandemic and return to a 'new normal' conducted by research consultants De la Heras Demotecnia, 31% of respondents believe that the President's image has worsened as a result of his reaction to the pandemic. In the same report, work done by the government is considered 'regular' at 34% versus 28% who qualify it as very good.

Undoubtedly, President López Obrador's credibility and that of his team has been severely affected by media overexposure, coupled with a lack of consistency between recommendations issued to the population and actions taken by the authorities. This will add to whatever becomes the final toll of economic and social repercussions brought about by the pandemic.



POLAND – CORONAVIRUS VS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



Country:
Poland

Region: EMEA



Government:
Right-wing, conservative
(Law and Justice)



Country leader:
Prime Minister
Mateusz
Morawiecki
President
Andrzej Duda



Change in
approval ratings:
Variable and
still changing



IPREX partner
assessment:
[More](#)
[Communications](#)
[Agency](#)

From an early stage, the pandemic in Poland was overshadowed by the presidential election, originally scheduled for May 10, 2020.

The first COVID-19 infection was detected on March 4, 2020 - relatively late compared to other countries. Up to this point, the government maintained a narrative saying that we were fully prepared for what might happen. This did not correspond with the opinions of healthcare representatives, indicating the insufficient number of respirators, places in hospitals, performed / available tests, as well as protective measures for doctors, nurses and paramedics.

On March 11-13, at specially convened press conferences attended by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Minister of Health - Łukasz Szumowski, a full list of restrictions was introduced to put the country into a state of complete lockdown. The number of infections was 31-68 within those days. The government reacted extremely fast, but... was it necessary?

Studies showed that these decisions were well received by society.

A survey published on April 5, conducted by SW Research, showed that 81.4% of Poles positively assessed the restrictions introduced by the government. 63.2% considered them necessary, 18.2% positively assessed, but rated it as too harsh. 9.5% were of the opposite opinion.

On April 16, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki presented a 4-stage plan to defrost the economy - without specifying dates, except the first one. On April 20 new rules were introduced in trade and services - 4 people for one cash point in stores up to 100m². For stores over 100 m², one person was allowed per 15 m² of space. Moreover, he reinstated the ability to go out for recreational purposes (with social distance and covering the face), open access to forests and parks (excluding playgrounds), allowing people under 13 to go out without adult supervision, and allowing religion worship - one person per 15 m².

At the same time, however, the public discussion about the fate of the upcoming presidential election scheduled for May 10 was intensifying with each passing day. On April 17, Łukasz Szumowski, Minister of Health announced that:

“SAFE ELECTION IN THE TRADITIONAL FORM WILL BE POSSIBLE IN TWO YEARS AT THE EARLIEST; IF POLITICAL GROUPS DO NOT AGREE TO THIS FORMULA, THEN THE ONLY SAFE FORM IS CORRESPONDENCE ELECTION. ONLY THIS FORM CAN I RECOMMEND.”

Shortly afterward a decision was made that the election would be held completely by correspondence. It caused a lot of controversy - both in society and in the environment of epidemiologists. Only 1/3 of Poles declared their willingness to participate in this form of voting.

The situation that finally took place was surrealistic - the election on May 10 was not cancelled but there was also no possibility to vote in any form. Polling stations were closed.

IT WAS WIDELY REPORTED BY MEDIA AROUND THE WORLD:

- [POLAND HOLDS GHOST ELECTION WITH 0% TURNOUT | WORLD NEWS](#)
- [WHAT POLAND'S 'GHOST ELECTION' CAN TEACH US ABOUT PANDEMIC-ERA DEMOCRACY](#)

On May 15, Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska, candidate of the Civic Coalition and main rival of the current president Andrzej Duda (Law and Justice) announced that she quits the presidential run. It was right after her ratings clearly dropped.

I won't take part in the presidential election. When the ruling party came up with a diabolical idea to organise election in the middle of the pandemic, not caring for health of those who would have taken part in them, I couldn't stay silent and had to speak out. If it wasn't for my firm stance and calls for boycott, the May election would have probably taken place. I know I have to shoulder the responsibility for what happened. The drop of support happened because the Poles weren't sure if I was taking part of or not. I mainly cared for their health, safety and to keep Poland a democratic and European country – she said.

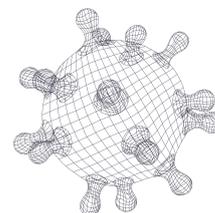
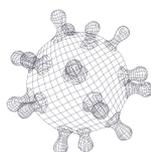
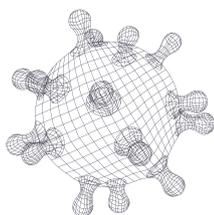
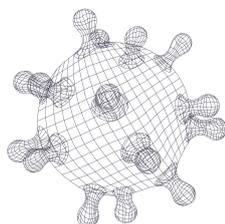
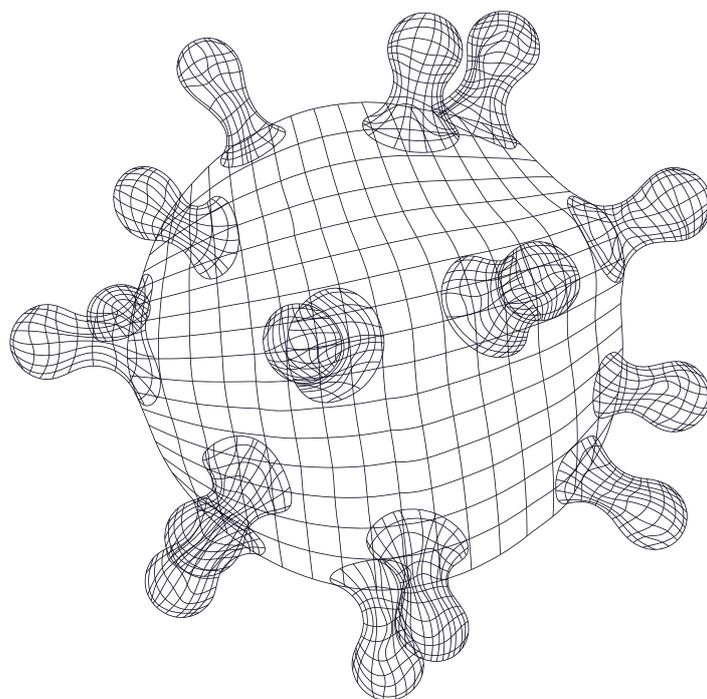
After a few hours of deliberations, it was decided that the Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, would replace Kidawa-Błońska as the new candidate. His survey results were steadily increasing, and the advantage to Andrzej Duda was decreasing.

The presidential election (first round) was finally held on June 28, 2020 - partly by correspondence, partly in person. The results gave significant lead to the current president (Duda 43%, Trzaskowski 30%).

The second round took place on July 12, 2020. It was won by Andrzej Duda - however, he achieved only a 2% advantage over Rafał Trzaskowski. Despite the record turnout (68,12%), the election showed how strong the divisions are in the country, both geographically - the west voted for Trzaskowski, the east for Duda, and depending on demographic factors. The majority of President Duda's electorate were people with primary and vocational education, seniors, inhabitants of small towns and villages, farmers. Rafał Trzaskowski was a candidate of young, educated voters, mostly from large cities.

The epidemiological situation in Poland, despite the decision to loosen the restrictions, is not under control yet. Each day brings 300-400 new cases, of which there are over 40,000 in total as of July 20, 2020. These numbers are much higher than when the lockdown was introduced - which contributed to a significant deterioration in the economic situation of the country - both from the perspective of enterprises and citizens.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN INCONSISTENCIES IN BOTH ITS ACTIONS AND COMMUNICATION. INITIALLY HIGH SUPPORT FOR THE DECISIONS QUICKLY BEGAN TO MELT DUE TO CHAOS AND MANY AMBIGUITIES.



SWEDEN – TRUST SLOWLY GAINED



Country:
Sweden

Region: EMEA



Government:
The Social Democratic Party

(Officially: The Social Democratic Workers' Party of Sweden, Socialdemokraterna)



Country leader:
Stefan Löfven

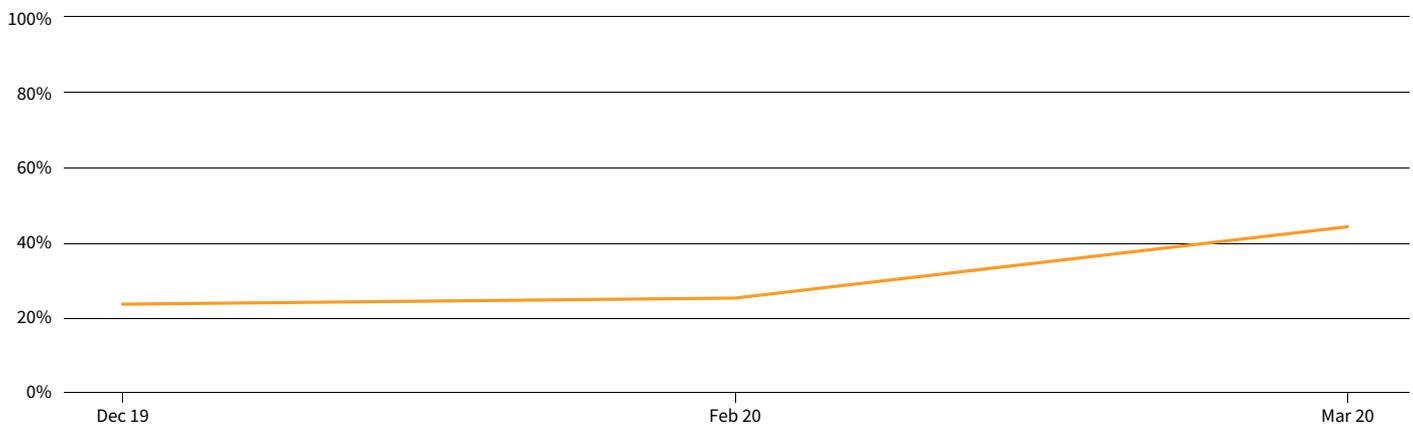


Change in approval ratings:
Increase in approval ratings



IPREX partner assessment:
[Spotlight PR – Stockholm](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN SWEDEN WHO APPROVE OF STEFAN LÖFVEN



STATE OF AFFAIRS LEADING UP TO COVID-19

In the months leading up to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Sweden, polls showed the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) leading the polls for the first time ever, surpassing the Social Democrats as Sweden's biggest political party. The populist right wing party which had placed third in the last election had been steadily increasing their numbers in the past two elections and reached the milestone late 2019, proving to be a challenging time

for Stefan Löfven and the Social Democrats in their efforts to once more win the general election in 2022. When [DN/ipsos](#) polled the Swedish public on their confidence in Stefan Löfven as their leader in January, he amassed a meager 28 percentage points and placed fourth among Swedish party leaders.

SWEDEN'S HANDLING OF COVID-19

In what has widely become known as “the Swedish experiment”, Sweden elected to apply the principle of the ‘herd immunity’ during the initial stages of Covid-19. While many neighboring countries were closing down business and restricting gatherings, Sweden seemingly was allowing comparatively larger gatherings and keeping businesses and society at large partially open.

On March 11, the first person in Sweden died as a result of the virus and with it came several political messages. The government pushed for extra billions in the spring, the qualifying sick leave day was abolished and gatherings with more than 500 people were prohibited.

Recommendations and guidelines to the Swedish public on how to manage the effects of Covid-19 were now provided via daily briefings on national TV by the Public Health Agency of Sweden in part, led by spokesperson and state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell. As the Swedish public continued to lean on the advice and updates from the authorities in Sweden, voices of concern were raised as prime minister Stefan Löfven had yet to address the nation as of March 21.

On March 22, Löfven held a short, fiery speech of five minutes, encouraging the Swedish nation and its citizens to stay strong and care for each other along with the most vulnerable during this time of crisis. The speech was apolitical in nature as he spoke to all Swedes. The EU flag, which can normally be found in the background of Löfven's speeches along with the Swedish flag, was not to be found at this time.

The following days were riddled with announcements, such as the Public Health Agency and the Swedish Infection Protection Agency changing procedures for the persons to be tested for the virus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advising against travel to all countries and recommendations that everyone in the Stockholm region should work from home. On March 17, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven announced at a press conference that all upper secondary schools, colleges, universities and professional colleges are recommended to close. However, children in school are allowed to remain and no mask requirements are enacted.

By the end of March and as a direct consequence of the pandemic spreading, Löfven and the Social Democrats are [surging in the polls](#) and approval ratings are up to 25 percentage points, a comfortable lead over the other political parties.

As the pandemic spreads and Sweden is severely affected in regards to the number of deaths compared to its Nordic neighbors, the government restricts gatherings to a maximum of 50 people. At the same time and in collaborations over party lines, the government is freeing up funds to support Swedish businesses and industries in the form of crisis packages. The support allows industries to temporarily lay off staff and mitigate the economic impact of the virus.

Public opinion on Sweden's handling of the corona crisis is mixed, and debates arise in terms of the correct method of suppressing the outbreak. While some argue for the reopening of society and a return to normalness, in order to alleviate the economic pressure of the crisis, others argue that Sweden's approach has been far too careless, leading to an inordinate amount of deaths per capita.

All the while, Stefan Löfven and the Social Democrats are rising in the polls. An April poll from [DN/Ipsos](#) evaluating the confidence in political leaders showed that Stefan Löfven had successfully maneuvered his way to the top, rising 16 percentage points since January to a total of 44. Another late April poll by [SVT/Novus](#) pointed to a support for the Social Democrats of 30,4 percentage points. The two numbers combined point to the public having confidence in and a popular support for the work and measures put forward by the government.

SO FAR, COVID-19 HAS TAKEN OVER 5000 SWEDISH LIVES, FAR MORE THAN ANY OF ITS NEIGHBORING NATIONS.

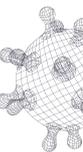
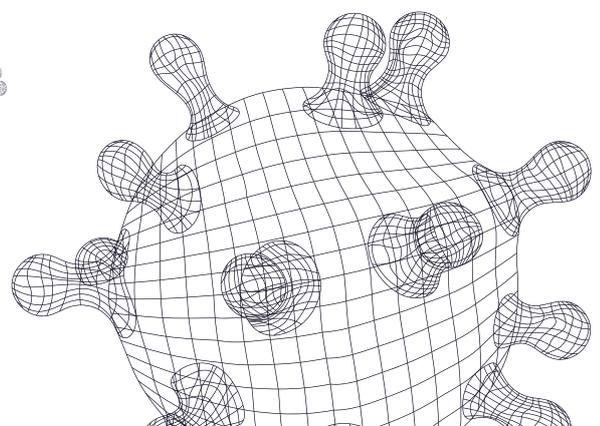
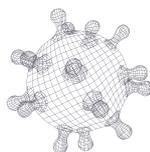
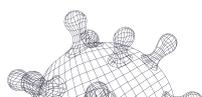
The economic impacts of the pandemic cannot yet be determined. However, early estimates of the first quarter showed that Sweden's growth stopped as expected and that GDP fell by 0,3%. Better than many countries, and not terrible. At the same time the GDP for the full year 2020 is expected to fall by 8%.

STEFAN LÖFVEN AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS LOOK TO COME OUT OF THE CRISIS WITH A FIRMER GRIP ON THE TRUST OF THE SWEDISH PUBLIC. CONSIDERING THE SPIRALING SITUATION THAT THE PARTY WAS IN DURING THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE VIRUS OUTBREAK, LÖFVEN AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE GAINED THE TRUST OF THE SWEDES FOR THEIR HANDLING OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

It may seem strange that the approval ratings have stayed high despite the high death rate relative to our neighbors. However, the “softer” restrictions have enabled Swedes to get on with their normal lives and the relatively good economic performance of the country has helped. Also, the total death rate is not much higher than it was in Sweden last year.

An additional reason for the high ratings is that the softer restrictions play well with the Swedish culture, the authorities have shown trust in the people to follow the “guidelines” of social distancing.

However, there may be more challenging times ahead for Löfvén. It may take longer than expected for the economy to recover, the virus is still present and the opposition is getting more aggressive. So, we will need to wait and see how things develop before we can draw any firm conclusions.



UNITED KINGDOM – HIGHS AND LOWS



Country:
United Kingdom
Region: EMEA



Government:
Conservative
(The Tories)



Country leader:
Prime Minister
Boris Johnson

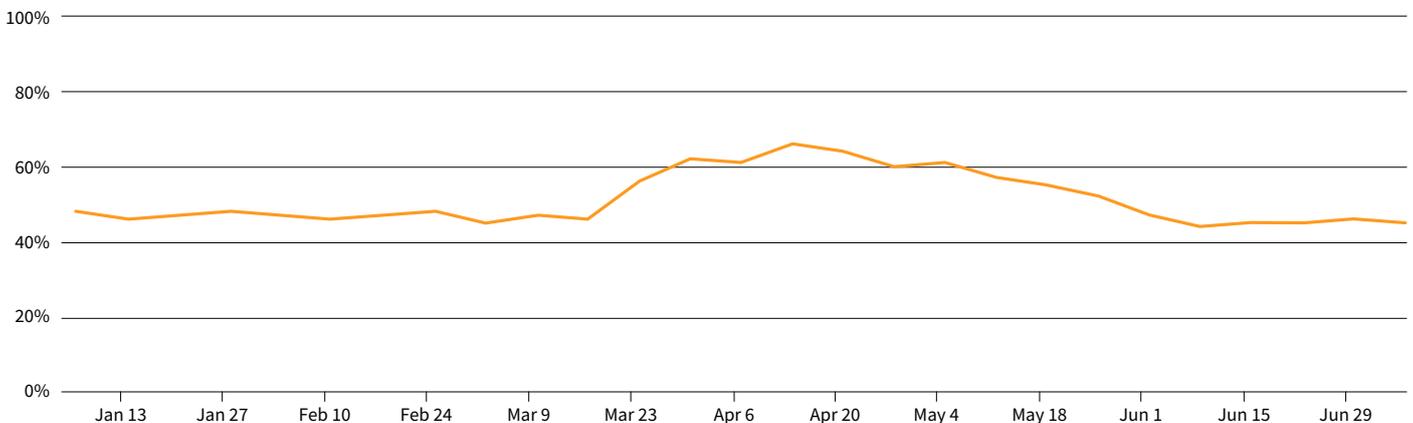


Change in approval ratings:
No change



IPREX partner assessment:
[MC2 - Manchester](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN THE UK WHO APPROVE OF BORIS JOHNSON



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 3,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

THE NARRATIVE OF THE UK'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOLLOWS THE PERFECT STORY ARC.

The set up sees Britain's Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, facing the pandemic emergence at the start of 2020 off the back of a landslide election victory in December 2019. Flushed with confidence and portrayed as the maverick populist, he had achieved the largest Conservative majority since Margaret Thatcher (78 seats). The simplicity of his 'Get Brexit Done' messaging devised by his chief advisor, the anti-establishment, disruptive Dominic Cummings,

had landed well across the UK. His approval rating of 47% just prior to the UK's first confirmed Covid-19 transmission at the start of February, was significantly higher than his predecessor.

The rising action narrative saw Britain's initial response to the coronavirus pandemic in February and early March widely criticised as slow – protective and precautionary measures were considered too little, too late. While the Prime Minister remained 'distracted by Brexit' according to some, his Health Minister was delivering updates to Parliament on the government's response to the virus guided by a plan to gain 'herd immunity' counter to the strategy seen in the majority of countries across the globe.

Despite this, there was no negative impact on the approval rating. When 'self-isolation' for the over 70's was first raised on 15 March, Johnson still boasted a net positive approval rating of 47%.

As the nation was finally instructed in a televised address by Johnson to implement social distancing, the government upped its coronavirus briefing to a daily 5pm televised event (on 16 March), coinciding with a spike in public approval.

THE NEWS CONFERENCES WERE LED BY JOHNSON OR A SENIOR MINISTER, ALONGSIDE THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF MEDICAL ADVISOR AND/OR CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR.

In the same week, the public was informed of the government's furlough scheme, with the Chancellor appearing alongside the PM during the daily briefing to announce a promise to pay 80% of wages for workers at risk of losing their jobs.

Throughout the rest of March, the public remained staunchly behind Johnson's handling of the crisis against the backdrop of non-essential travel bans and the closure of pubs, cafes and gyms. Over 6 weeks after the first case was confirmed in the UK, national lockdown was announced on 23 March with a simple message – "Stay Home, protect the NHS, save lives". The jewel in the UK's crown, the workers in the National Health Service, were championed by the Prime Minister and the media as heroes. The UK's public embraced them.

FROM 26 MARCH, EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT AT 8PM HUGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE, LED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, TOOK TO #CLAPFOROURCARERS FROM DOORSTEPS ACROSS THE NATION.

The climax of the story arc was seen on 27 March. Johnson's announced that he had himself tested positive for coronavirus and approval rating hit 62% by the end of the month. On 1st April, Johnson tweeted a video of himself saying that, although in isolation with mild symptoms, he was 'in constant touch' with his officials, adding the hashtag #StayHomeSaveLives. This quickly changed and by 6 April, Downing Street issued a statement that the Prime Minister had been taken into intensive care. The vacuum in consistent and aligned communications was evident as a series of Ministers made error after error in daily televised briefings.

HIS APPROVAL RATING HIT A HIGH OF 66% ON APRIL 14 BUT HAS BEEN IN DECLINE EVER SINCE.

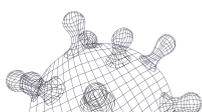
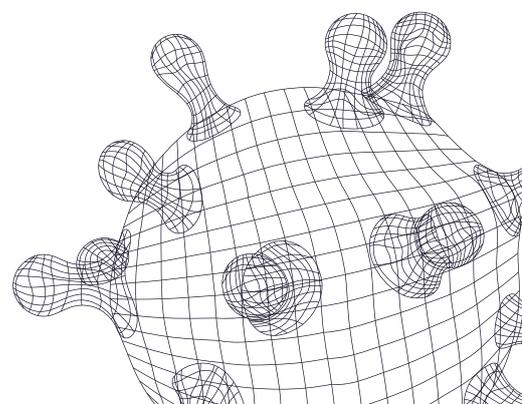
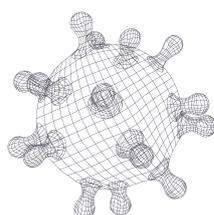
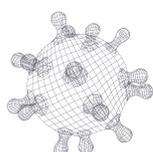
In mid-April, the Cabinet Office Minister, interviewed on the BBC, disclosed that Johnson had missed five COBRA meetings during the crucial early weeks of the pandemic planning and approval dropped. By the time, the Prime Minister returned to office on 27 April, his ratings were -6 points against the high at 66% and the government was facing media scrutiny on its strategy, its personal protection equipment procurement for the NHS and its failure to accelerate a test/tracking plan. On 5 May, the UK's Covid 19 death rate reached the highest in Europe (29,427).

The falling action stage of the story arc took place on 10 May. Journalists were pre-briefed on the downgrading of the slogan from "Stay Home" to "Stay Alert." The Prime Minister made a televised 8pm Sunday appearance to explain the easing of lockdown restrictions. This was done prior to the presentation of a more detailed paper being scrutinised by UK parliament and the devolved Scottish and Welsh parliaments. This proved to be a strategic communications error. The complexity of the relaxation rules was lost in Johnson's preference for soundbites and simple graphs. The Scottish and Welsh governments announced different approaches and confusion reigned in the media and public alike. This was compounded as Boris Johnson then went 10 days without attending a daily briefing. The hashtag #WhereisJohnson trended.

Resolution of the story arc was reached on 22 May, when it emerged that the Prime Minister's chief adviser and architect of the lockdown strategy had travelled more than 260 miles to his second home with Covid-19 symptoms. The subsequent row, as the Prime Minister stood by Dominic Cummings, saw his approval ratings decline to 52% by 26 May.

At the start of June 2020, over a month past the peak of UK coronavirus transmissions, the Johnson's approval rating is back at 47%. This is on par with the position at the start of the crisis, but the trend is now downwards.

THE ARC FROM 47% APPROVAL TO 66% AND BACK AGAIN SITS AGAINST THE TOTAL DEATH TOLL SURPASSING 50,000 PEOPLE, CEMENTING BRITAIN'S POSITION AS HAVING ONE OF THE WORST DEATH RATES IN THE WORLD.

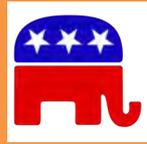


USA – MIXED MESSAGES FROM TRUMP



Country:
United States of America

Region:
The Americas



Government:
President and U.S. Senate: Republican

U.S. House of Representatives: Democrat



Country leader:
President Donald Trump

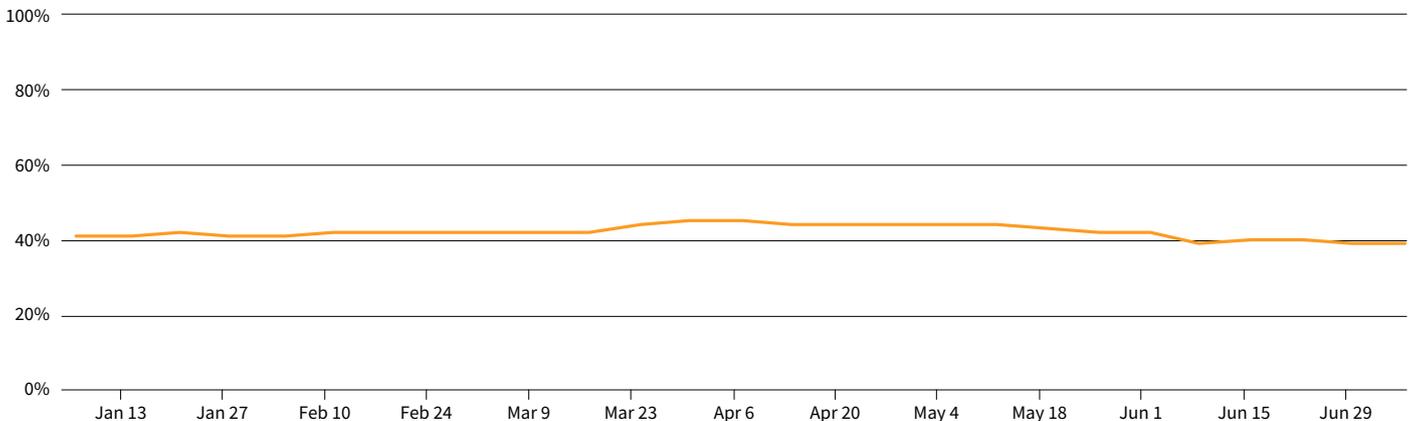


Change in approval ratings:
Small rise in spring, then drop



IPREX partner assessment:
[Grisko](#)

THE SHARE OF ADULTS IN THE US WHO APPROVE OF DONALD TRUMP



This data comes from Morning Consult Political Intelligence and is based on an average of over 49,000 weekly interviews. The latest data is based on surveys conducted July 1-7, 2020

Regional, political and cultural differences across the 50 states have shaped the story of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. No doubt this story is still being written. Right now, the U.S. is experiencing a surge of confirmed cases of the virus, especially in the southern and western states, places where stay-at-home orders were lifted or never firmly established. At the same time, the police killing of a Black man in Minnesota ignited a major social reckoning that has dominated news coverage, as the country once again faces its racial inequities.

But even with this uncertainty, and the national elections looming, three main themes emerge in looking back over the past months since the first cases of the virus appeared in the U.S.:

THE TRUMP FACTOR

It is impossible to analyze communications from the federal government without addressing President Donald Trump's oversized impact. By sheer force of will and a constant presence on social media, he drives the narrative.

His messages downplay the virus. "We have it totally under control," he told CNBC on Jan. 22, when the first case appeared in the U.S. That message was delivered in impromptu press sessions and on his Twitter feed.

As cases grew exponentially, and the Centers for Disease Control issued its first official warning on Feb. 25, health experts like Dr. Anthony Fauci became highly visible on newscasts warning of the pandemic and Trump abruptly changed his tone and method of delivery. By mid-March daily briefings led by Trump from the White House took place and continued until late April with specific information and warnings.

The impact on Trump's approval rating was noticeable. He started the year with an approval rating of about 42%, according to the polling website FiveThirtyEight.com. By early April it had climbed to 46%, as he leaned into informational messaging and stood with medical experts before the nation.

As the pressures of the national election, nation-wide protests about racial justice, and the stagnant economy mounted, Trump turned away from this approach. By mid-June, his approval ratings slid to 41% with 55% disapproval as he ceased the medical briefings, the virus spread, and other issues dominated the news. As the virus hits hard in southern states like Texas, Arizona and Florida, and his approval ratings the same, President Trump says he will resume the briefings – and tweeted that it is patriotic to wear a face mask.

A TALE OF TWO STATES

There are many examples of effective communication led by the nation's governors. "The governors are the ones who are seen at the helm, much more than the White House," according to Harvard public policy professor Matthew Balm, who leads a monthly study on public views on the pandemic. Two examples that stand out are New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican.

DeWine, a former U.S. Senator and Ohio attorney general, had long established a low-key style of leadership. But the pandemic saw him take swift action well ahead of others by closing schools, postponing elections and moving to stay-at-home measures. In daily briefings broadcast across the state, "I relied on the best science that's available," he told one reporter. "Forty years doing politics and government, the mistakes I've made are because I didn't get enough facts." This approach resonated with Ohioans, who gave him the highest approval rating among all U.S. governors during the pandemic.

By contrast, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's sometimes-abrasive style is far from low-key. A former U.S. cabinet secretary, his approval rating in New York was only 44% in January. But as the New York City region emerged as an epicenter of the virus, Cuomo became a constant presence, conducting a remarkable 111 press briefings through mid-June.

Using simple language, easy-to-follow graphics and flanked by experts, Cuomo led a daily tutorial about the disease and why drastic measures were needed. As the virus curve flattened, Cuomo's approval rating soared to 77% by April; 66% in May.

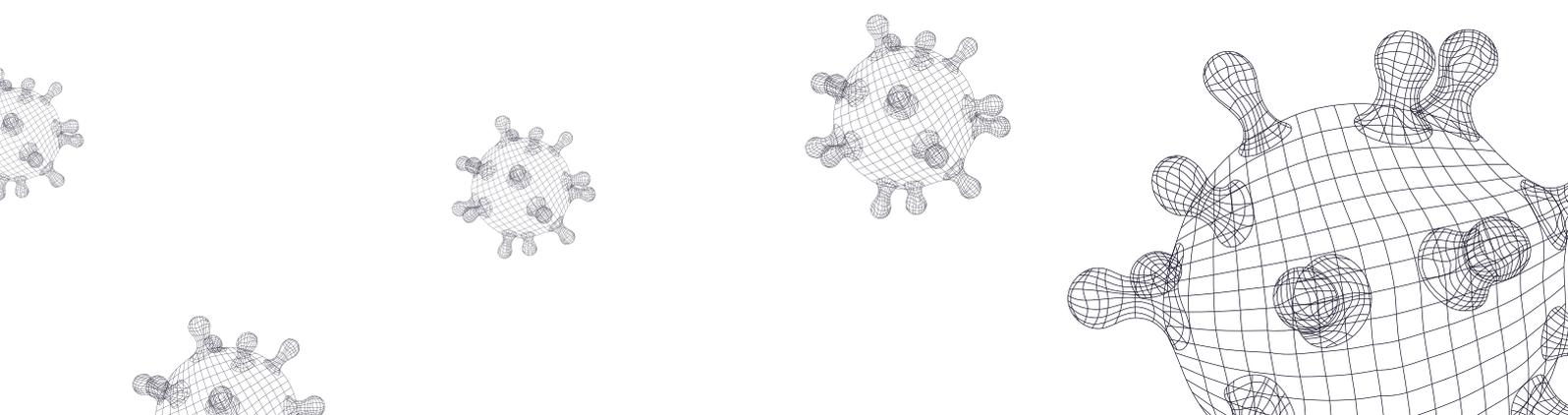
TOUGH LOVE AND SMILES

The real test of communications during the pandemic is whether it changes personal behavior. Despite a deeply divided nation politically and culturally, there is evidence people are responding. In July 63% of Americans said they were wearing masks in public places "all or most of the time." While not optimal, this compliance exists despite mixed signals from the federal government, owed in part to the way people receive information during the pandemic. For younger Americans especially, national surveys show social media networks as well as friends and family are the primary sources of information. One local leader who tapped into that is Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

As the mayor ordered a city-wide shutdown, she released a series of [humorous videos](#) reinforcing her "Stay Home Save Lives" tough messages. These spread quickly across social channels, as [homemade memes](#) popped up everywhere playing off her [stern messages delivered with humor](#). She embraced these memes and created some of her own. Chicagoans adhered to the stay-at-home orders and only now are beginning to resume outside activity.

The U.S. is a troubled nation as it passes the five-month mark of this pandemic. Almost 4 million Americans have tested positive and over 144,000 people have died. Confirmed cases continue to grow as the virus moves across the nation. Test results are often delayed a week or more, limiting their ability to control the virus. It remains to be seen whether fifty states can act as one in tackling the most pernicious public health emergency it has experienced in over a hundred years.

TRANSPARENT, FACT-BASED COMMUNICATIONS DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN REACHING PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY WHEN PRESENTED WITH TRANSPARENCY AND CONSISTENCY ACROSS MULTIPLE CHANNELS.



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