

# LEADERSHIP IN THE TIME OF COVID



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Pandemic Responses in Central  
Europe

*George Hays II, Joshua Hayden, and  
Milada Polišenská*



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*To those we lost,  
and to those we found,  
and to those who went with us  
through these turbulent times*



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# Introduction

JOSHUA HAYDEN, GEORGE HAYS II,  
AND MILADA POLIŠENSKÁ

## Introduction

The global pandemic known as Covid-19 was more than a public health crisis; it had economic, social, and political aspects as well. It threatened every citizen and public policy directly affected the daily lives of people in a way few had seen before. Leadership scholars look at the coronavirus crisis as a crisis of leadership, that is, decisions must be well-coordinated and implemented in the midst of deep ambiguity and uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> Some see leadership theory as an inadequate way to analyze such a crisis, especially because much of it is leader-centric and thus without adequate appreciation for context or the nature of the relationship between leaders and collaborators/followers. Only recently has there been a critical move for scholars to understand leadership in terms of an “ecosystem” of leader, followers, and context, sometimes called the “leadership triangle.”<sup>2</sup> Public leaders can issue regulations on wearing masks and quarantine, but then they need the cooperation of followers (the public, businesses, and law enforcement) to implement these regulations. Psychologists might examine this in terms of social dilemmas, sociologists in terms of social trust; but overall, these are human dynamics not reducible to easy solutions.

One leadership theory, however, that incorporates the dynamics of the leader-follower relationship while appreciating the contextual differences between the acute phase of a crisis and the longer-term

1 Tourish, “Why the Coronavirus Crisis Is also a Crisis of Leadership”; Kay and King, *Radical Uncertainty*.

2 Kellerman, *The End of Leadership*.

stabilization process is adaptive leadership theory.<sup>3</sup> Many of the examples used to frame adaptive leadership come from the public sector, but the theory itself is derived from evolutionary biology. Furthermore, adaptive leadership is a post-industrial theory,<sup>4</sup> meaning that it is focused on the dynamic interplay between leaders, followers, and context.<sup>5</sup> Since the theory was not constructed to primarily address crisis per se, the framework used for this study builds on a foundation of research in crisis management studies along with adaptive leadership. Crisis management can help us understand how preparation, urgency, expertise, coordination, and communication are deployed effectively.<sup>6</sup> Adaptive leadership helps us understand how leaders and followers mobilize each other to act by distinguishing between the technical and adaptive aspects of the challenge. This ties leadership intimately with learning new ways. As Dunn explained, “Adaptive leaders seek to mobilize knowledge quickly, are responsive to contextual needs, and seek to empower their colleagues to act, even when the path is unclear, and the journey might be messy.”<sup>7</sup>

As Covid-19 has progressed, many organizational leaders and scholars in health care, business, education, non-profit management, and government have sought guidance in adaptive leadership to understand how leaders and followers have fostered change and adaptation in response to government actions, a defining feature of the pandemic. One group of Canadian healthcare practitioner-scholars wrote:

Adaptive Leadership is about *anticipating* future needs, trends and options; *articulating* these needs to build collective understanding and support for action; *adapting* to allow continuous learning and the adjustment of responses as necessary; and having *accountability*, including transparency in

3 Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*; Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

4 Rost and Smith, “Leadership.”

5 Kellerman, *Followership*.

6 Boin, Hart, Stern, Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management*.

7 Dunn, “Adaptive Leadership,” 33.



decision-making processes and openness to challenges and feedback. These skills are all essential during a pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

Businesses and educational institutions were realizing that past adaptations to markets or client needs would not suffice, that learning new ways meant coming to terms with what is essential to the mission and what is peripheral. One study of business firms concluded that the leadership challenge was in finding the balance between “tough decision making and human stewardship to build a culture of trust, continuous learning and innovation” to enable a deeper, rather than superficial, form of organizational thriving.

Adaptive leadership theory also recognizes that any crisis will have an acute phase and an adaptive phase. The acute phase of a crisis requires the exercise of authority, the adaptive phase requires learning new ways and combining expertise with experimentation and discovery. However, there is a danger that the acute phase of a crisis, with its overreliance on authority figures, will become a new normal. The acute phase does require swift action, but with the sensitivity that adaptive work will immediately arise. This is what Ivan Krastev, in his reflection on the pandemic, *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic*, predicted as a danger in Europe: namely that democracy would be sidelined leaving populists emboldened by a “stay-at-home nationalism.”<sup>9</sup> Adaptive leadership during a crisis would provide direction, protection, and order (the charge of authority) while recognizing the need for people to take responsibility, work effectively together, and embrace civil dialogue about critical issues. In the Czech Republic, civic organizations, citizens, and groups stepped in to make masks, organized ways to provide laptops and internet access to disadvantaged children, and donated food and supplies and personal labor to hospitals.<sup>10</sup>

In Central and Eastern Europe, leading up to the Covid-19 crisis, populist leadership has meant to many a serious threat to democracy

8 Laur, Agarwal, Mukerji, Goulbourne, Baranek, Pus, Bhatia, Martin, & Bhattacharyya, “Building Health Services in a Rapidly Changing Landscape.”

9 Krastev, *Is It Tomorrow Yet?*

10 Buščíková, *Nations in Transit 2021 Report for Czech Republic*.

reaching even more alarming heights as the virus spread.<sup>11</sup> In the Visegrad countries of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary, administrations have a vested interest in positive and sustained public adaptations to the threat economically and politically. On top of that the strength of a democracy depends on civil society and the participation of the governed. Thus, it is critical to evaluate and learn from the response to Covid-19 in this region through an established framework.

### Leadership Framework

Through research on strategic crisis management and Adaptive leadership, we focus on five dominant points that capture the key tasks in the collaboration between leaders and followers moving through a crisis. These tasks include:

1. Framing the problem
2. Prompt decision making and coordination
3. Transparency and communication
4. Fostering collaboration across sectors
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future

Rooted in theory and research, this conceptual framework will ground our analysis of the various responses from Visegrad countries to the Covid-19 pandemic. Here we recognize that crisis leadership has two distinct phases: the emergency, or acute, phase and the adaptive phase. The function of the emergency phase is to stabilize the situation and maintain order, while the adaptive phase is focused on the underlying causes of the crisis and capacity-building needed to flourish in the future.<sup>12</sup> Responding to a novel crisis especially involves the strategic use of authority, which establishes safety and relies on expertise, but it also requires learning and experimentation to foster a stronger, more long-term focused problem-solving. Populist leadership relies on the emergency part of a crisis while

<sup>11</sup> Krastev, *Is It Tomorrow Yet?*

<sup>12</sup> Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, "Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis."

tending to ignore the adaptive phase, even as it is ill-equipped to handle both.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Framing the Problem***

Adaptive leadership emphasizes the task of distinguishing two types of challenges: technical and adaptive. While technical problems are solved through authoritative expertise, adaptive problems are solved through perspective-taking, capacity-building, and learning across the enterprise. Leadership fails when it attempts to address adaptive problems as though they were technical.<sup>14</sup> During a health crisis, authorities are essential for understanding protective measures and treatments; but crises are also defined by uncertainty and ambiguous information. The task of sense-making, formulating an actionable diagnosis of the unfolding crisis, is essential.<sup>15</sup>

This can include the difficult and disruptive leadership task of prevention. Kay and King apply the distinction between a puzzle and a mystery to Covid-19.<sup>16</sup> A puzzle is like a technical problem, it has well-defined rules and a known solution; while a mystery is defined by “vagueness and indeterminacy” and can only be framed by identifying the critical issues, offering a way forward collaboratively.<sup>17</sup> Mysteries resemble adaptive problems because in providing an early warning, leaders risk telling people what they do not want to hear, and preventative actions can be seen as attacks on people’s jobs and livelihoods.<sup>18</sup> Yet framing the problem involves convincing people that the risk will be worth the trouble for the future, and thus a high level of trust is needed.

Heifetz originally named this task “getting to the balcony” because, as opposed to being on a dancefloor, the balcony offers a different perspective on the patterns emerging, it looks at the

13 Moffit, “How to Perform Crisis.”

14 Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*.

15 Duckers, Yzermans, Jong and Boin, “Psychosocial Crisis Management.”

16 Kay and King, *Radical Uncertainty*.

17 Kay and King, *Radical Uncertainty*, 21.

18 Tourish, “Why the Coronavirus Crisis Is also a Crisis of Leadership”; Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*.

systemic issues of responding to a crisis, and it often involves outside perspective and new discovery.<sup>19</sup> This discovery process ideally involves getting multiple perspectives by encouraging debate and task conflict, in which good leaders encourage robust exchange on critical issues.<sup>20</sup> Amid the uncertainty of a prolonged crisis, adaptive leaders learn to distinguish the technical from the adaptive challenges, identify the values and priorities at stake, and instill an action-oriented approach to the problem.

### ***Prompt Decision Making and Coordination***

Decision-making teams during crisis must act with urgency. While crisis response calls for a more authoritative approach during the emergency phase of the crisis, adaptation requires articulating and evaluating alternatives. In fact, in decision-making research, strategic teams that considered more alternatives made faster and better decisions than teams that considered fewer (two or less) alternatives.<sup>21</sup> Again, the adaptive phase decision making should not fall into the trap of overrelying on authority figures, but engage multiple perspectives and stakeholders. The governance literature emphasizes “implement[ing] evidence-based decisions and creating alignment between different stakeholders.”<sup>22</sup>

Along with decision making, coordination of an ongoing response is key within the framing of the problem. Glenn, Chaumont, and Dintrans emphasized the importance of involving those parties that have to implement the decision in the decision-making process.<sup>23</sup> In terms of buy-in and troubleshooting of potential unforeseen consequences of a decision, implementers can be critical to provide information and feedback to the strategic apex of the crisis response.

19 Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*.

20 Roberto, *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer*.

21 Eisenhardt, “Making Fast Strategic Decisions.”

22 Buchan, Williams, and Zapata, “Governing Health Workforce,” 41.

23 Glenn, Chaumont and Dintrans, “Public Health Leadership.”

## ***Transparency and Communication***

Transparency, especially when new information is difficult to hear, is crucial for crisis management. The flow of information across sectors, the willingness of leaders and followers to have difficult conversations and communicate about challenges and needs, strengthens the long-term adaptation of the system. Mitigating the risk of rumors and misinformation spreading during a crisis is essential. As Forster, Patlas, and Lexa reflected, “With Covid-19, the understanding of who to screen (and how) before what procedures changes regularly and is a source of anxiety which clear evidence-based updates can reduce.”<sup>24</sup> Communication with the public during the emergency phase can be problematic politically, but adaptive leadership requires a courageous stance toward transparency. These leaders build credibility using scientific data and knowledge over political screening of information.<sup>25</sup> One of the characteristics of populist government has been downplaying or censoring information.

Common identity is built through communicating a unifying narrative that promotes responsible behaviors among citizens.<sup>26</sup> A common identity can be a powerful motivator and guide for behavior, as in Delores Huerta’s message of “Si se puede” (yes we can) to farm workers on strike in the United States. Communication also involves enabling feedback systems for monitoring the effectiveness of communication. Getting information to the right places and instilling the psychological safety to discuss problems is a big part of the work for leaders of healthy organizations in and outside of crisis.<sup>27</sup>

## ***Fostering Collaboration across Sectors***

To be effective during a crisis, participating entities share their resources and align major tasks and functions to accomplish a

24 Forster, Patlas and Lexa, “Crisis Leadership,” 421.

25 Sadiq, Kapucu, and Hu, “The Role of Governors.”

26 Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

27 Edmonson and Lei, “Psychological Safety.”

shared objective.<sup>28</sup> Government, scientists, healthcare entities, businesses, and non-governmental community organizations need new ways of working together to best leverage their collective resources during a pandemic. In the stress of a crisis, it may be tempting to listen only to voices of agreement rather than warnings or criticisms. Adaptive leaders do the opposite, they listen to and protect voices of dissent within and outside their organizations.<sup>29</sup> This goes a long way in furthering the psychological safety mentioned above.

Cross-cultural leadership evidence suggests that in Central and Eastern Europe, implicit understandings of leadership are less focused on charismatic or participative leadership and more centered on autonomous or self-protective approaches.<sup>30</sup> This can make collaboration across sectors a challenge. In these contexts, the structure by which tasks are coordinated should be clear and consistently followed.

### ***Learning from Past Decisions and Preparing for the Future***

Learning plays a central role in adaptive leadership, especially because adaptive work involves a difficult change in loyalties or values and new ways of operating together. Crisis leaders need to draw up political and organizational lessons in order to plan and train for future crises.<sup>31</sup> One might even ask to what extent the approach to the pandemic in Visegrad countries was based on lessons from other crises. From the standpoint of the highest authorities, public officials and others should model learning by holding themselves accountable for decisions and actions taken. In addition, giving the work back to collaborators and followers means helping them confront the missteps as well as “bright spots” from the crisis response to enable adaptation in the future.<sup>32</sup>

Cross-sector learning from best practices is encouraged and utilized. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky point to Egon Zehnder’s

28 Sadiq, Kapucu, and Hu, “The Role of Governors.”

29 Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

30 House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta, *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations*.

31 Sadiq, Kapucu, and Hu, “The Role of Governors.”

32 Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*; Heath and Heath, *Switch*.

leadership when he told his firm that the future is in their hands, and using a distributed and collaborative model he enabled learning and new strategic approaches in response to a rapidly changing environment.<sup>33</sup> Adaptive leadership recognizes that authority can get in the way of good leadership and achieving learning means involving multiple levels and sectors in reflection and planning. The worst thing that would-be leaders could do as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is miss the opportunity to learn and apply the lessons to the future.

While the Covid-19 pandemic is global, our individual experiences of it are local. With this in mind, our research into the problem begins with “our locale,” an extensive review of the dominant literature guiding our understanding of the pandemic from the Czech Republic. It is not possible, nor is it our goal, to offer an exhaustive overview of publications that, with the exception of medical, microbiological, biochemical, pharmaceutical, and other related fields, were published or written in the Czech Republic. The purpose of this overview is to show the main contours, focus, key works, and the overall state of literature in social sciences and humanities, non-fiction, and fiction on Covid published in the country at the beginning of our research.

Covid has been and continues to be, naturally, the subject of research of a wide range of medical, microbiological, biochemical, pharmaceutical, and other disciplines. Covid also became a research topic of social sciences and humanities, which is the focus of primary interest of this study. Sociology, psychology, public policy, international relations, philosophy and theology, legal sciences and economics, including contemporary history and other disciplines, ask questions about the manifestations and impacts of Covid on individuals and society, and examine the reactions of individuals and society on Covid, according to their specialization. It was symptomatic for the research literature on Covid in Czechia published in the period under investigation that the scholarly results appeared as research articles. Writing and publishing research books is usually a lengthy process. The books related to Covid appeared very soon,

33 Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

being not negligible in terms of quantity and impact on the public, but not (yet) as comprehensive scholarly monographs. On the other hand, some prominent experts and professional personalities addressed Covid in a more popular form of books intended for the general public which had significant social impact. We have also included in this chapter publications outside the official academic area, “alternative” for simplicity, due to their wide distribution, large readership, and notable influence.

The Covid theme also appears in literature of various genres, fiction, drama and poetry, autobiographical writings and other, and became an inspiration of various artistic works and public projects. A specific category is more or less serious and responsible journalism which, on the one hand, has an irreplaceable information role, and on the other hand, has contributed to the atmosphere of fear from the future and of general uncertainty and stress, fear that was further intensified by the outbreak of war in Ukraine in the spring of 2022.

In respect of primary sources, authorized documents of official provenance are nowadays accessible electronically. These are laws, regulations, and decrees of the Government of the Czech Republic, of the highest state authorities, government offices, and other key institutions. There are also practical publications of an informative and helpful nature compiled from official documents.<sup>34</sup>

Very soon, CERGE-EI<sup>35</sup> and the Institute of Sociology and Institute of Psychology of the Czech Academy of Sciences established themselves as leading institutions in Covid research through the prism of social sciences. Topics of examination include the impact of Covid on the economy in Central Europe including environmental issues, Covid and hostility against foreigners, issues of contact tracing, the negative impact on educational outcomes and identified expected increase of educational inequalities, antagonisms between

34 Keisler, Kotulková, and Lobotka, *Covid-19: Přijatá opatření a náhrada újmy*; also Hendl, *Big data: věda o datech – základy a aplikace*.

35 Joint institution of Economic Institute of Czech Academy of Sciences and Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education.



generations, the category of “older people,” and social and health policies.<sup>36</sup> *Czechia Report. Sustainable Governance in the Context of the Covid-19 Crisis* is a very useful work by a team of experts. This country report is part of a cross-national comparative survey of 41 countries.<sup>37</sup> Covid-related phenomena prompted the interest of researchers, right from the beginning, to focus on gender aspects of the pandemic from many angles including economic effects of the pandemic and anti-pandemic measures on women and men, domestic violence and many others, and on the influence of Instagram, electronic communication, and social networks.<sup>38</sup> Relationship between Covid and mental disorders became a primary research focus of psychology and it can be expected that in the near future the frequency of psychological investigations will grow.<sup>39</sup>

A number of “Covid and law” studies emerged very early on, due to the need to address specific legal situations related to Covid. The Institute of State and Law of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Faculty of Law of Charles University are so far the leading institutions in legal research on Covid.<sup>40</sup> A particularly “hot” question, which was the subject not only of expert legal analyses but also of political encounters and public discourse, has been the constitutionality of emergency legislation, specifically, the constitutional aspects

36 Brada, Gajewski, and Kután, “Economic Resiliency and Recovery, Lessons from the Financial Crisis for the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Regional Perspective from Central and Eastern Europe”; Bartoš, Bauer, Cahlíková, and Chytilová, “Covid-19 Crisis and Hostility Against Foreigners”; Jann, Kocourek, and Steiner, *Using Bluetooth Technology for Covid-19 Contact Tracing*; Jann, Münich, and Zapletalová, *The Gap of In-Person Teaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic*; Hasmanová Marhánková, “Ageism, Age Distribution and the Experience of Old Age in Crisis.”

37 Guasti, Mansfeldová, Myant, and Bönker, *Czechia Report. Sustainable Governance in the Context of the Covid-19 Crisis*.

38 Nyklová, Moree, *Violence Against Women in Connection with Covid-19*; Menzel and Miotto, *The Different Economic Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis on Women and Men in the Czech Republic*; Heřmanová, “Do Your Research.”

39 Lečbych, “Relationships between Covid-19 Disease and Mental Disorders”; Džuka, Klučárová and Babinčák, “Economic, Social and Psychological Factors Covid-19 in Slovakia.”

40 Křepelka, “Právo pandemie covidu-19: náčrt celkového obrazu”; MacGregor Pelikánová, MacGregor, “The Covid-19 as Interpretation Instrument”; Kamensky, “Globalization, Covid-19 Pandemic and White Collar Crime: A New Threatening Combination.”

of emergency status and the obligation to wear facial masks.<sup>41</sup> Other priority legal issues include labor code and employment contracts and their termination.<sup>42</sup>

The global nature of the pandemic and plethora of international impacts and diverse specialization and expertise of researchers and analysts indicate that despite an intensive publication activity, a great deal of work still lies ahead for them. The leading journal in the field of international relations in the country, *Mezinárodní vztahy/ Czech Journal of International Relations*, repeatedly paid attention to the international dimensions of Covid, focusing particularly on “vaccine diplomacy,” particularly Russian vaccine diplomacy, digital surveillance, vulnerability and the inability to grieve, infodemic erosion, resilience of democracy, autocratization, and anti-Covid policies and strategies in selected foreign countries.<sup>43</sup>

Former Czech President Václav Klaus et al. published a book *Karanténa* [Quarantine].<sup>44</sup> The authors warn against using the crisis as a pretext for profound political, social, and economic interventions that would impact decades to come, and call for experts in public policy and social and economic disciplines to be involved in the debate. This work first appeared in e-form in March/April 2020 as a twelve-part series published on the iDnes server.

41 Horák, Dienstbier, and Derka, “Ústavnost mimořádných opatření podle zákona o ochraně veřejného zdraví”; “Právní úprava mimořádného vládnutí v kontextu pandemie covid-19. Rozhodnutí o vyhlášení nouzového stavu”; “Nouzové zákonodárství a roušky.”

42 Special issue of *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Iuridica*, 2021/2.

43 Rychnovská, “Rethinking the Infodemic”; Guasti, “Democratic Erosion and Democratic Resilience in Central Europe during Covid-19”; Maati, “Digital Surveillance Is Here to Stay”; Hardoš, “On the Forms of Vulnerability and Ungrievability in the Pandemic”; Kazharski, “Russia’s Vaccine Diplomacy in Central Europe”; Resende, “Pandemics as Crisis Performance”; Stehlíková, “The Corona Crisis, Data Protection and Tracking Apps in the EU”; Butković, “The Impacts of Executive Responses on Democracy During the Coronavirus Crisis in Croatia, Slovenia and Austria”; Grančayová, “Plagues of Egypt – the Covid-19 Crisis and the Role of Security Dilemmas in the Authoritarian Regime Survival Strategies in Egypt and Turkey”; Kizeková, “Covid-19 Management and Soft Power: Actual and Perceived Competence”; Metodieva, “The Far-Right Across Central Europe in 2020”; Ayan Musil, “The Global Wave of Autocratization and the Covid-19 Pandemic.”

44 Klaus et al. *Karanténa*.

Covid-19 sparked interest in historical epidemics. For instance, the Spanish flu, for decades in the margin of attention even of historians, started to appear as a topic of popular articles and as a reminiscence in introductions of research studies. However, to the best knowledge of the author of this survey, a substantial expert study on the Spanish flu in Czechoslovakia has not yet been done.<sup>45</sup> The economist Aleš Michl, from 2022 Governor of the Czech National Bank, suggested in 2021 that great changes in the economy have always been preceded by unpredictable events such as the plague, the Spanish flu, and now Covid-19. Michl argues how important it is to have a good economic background and not to risk the debts in order to mitigate unpredictable disasters.<sup>46</sup>

Covid was reflected in a number of studies dealing with ethics, philosophy, the meaning of life, and religion, including its projection into social work.<sup>47</sup> This is the sphere, where, in addition to research studies, contributions intended for the wider public and published in both books and media appeared the most. An admirably rich publication activity on Covid can be found in the journal *Caritas et Veritas* published by the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. The spiritual literature contains important and profound testimony of Archbishop of Olomouc, since 2022 Archbishop of Prague, Jan Graubner, on what he experienced when he was sick with Covid-19. The Catholic priest and author of several spiritual books for the larger public, Jan Houkal, addressed the question of God in the time of Covid.<sup>48</sup> In psychology, a book by a well-known psychologist and popular commentator Radkin Honzák et al.<sup>49</sup> attracted intense attention.

A special genre of Covid literature are books of interviews by journalists, publicists, and writers with important and influential scientific personalities, and compiled collections of contributions

45 On the Spanish flu, the book by Harald Salfellner *Die Spanische Grippe: eine Geschichte der Pandemie von 1918*, was translated from German, in Czech translation *Španělská chřipka: Příběh pandemie z roku 1918*.

46 Michl, *Reset ekonomiky – Co nás čeká po covid-19*.

47 Šrajer, “Význam sociálního učení církve v konfrontaci se socioekonomickou realitou globálního světa v době pandemie nemoci covid-19.”

48 Houkal, *Bůh v době koronavirové*.

49 Honzák, *Doba koronavirová*.

by various personalities who commented on Covid.<sup>50</sup> Interviewed have been leading Czech biochemist and vice-rector of Charles University Jan Konvalinka, philosopher Anna Hogenová, and Jan Hnízdl—doctor of medicine, critic of the pharmaceutical industry and excessive anti-Covid regulation, opponent of then Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.<sup>51</sup> These publications have had a significant impact on the readers.

Covid has been a prominent topic for journalists. The myriad of reports and information on paper and online ranging from informative data and facts, responsible and reliable sources, to fake news, conspiracy theories, and manipulative articles and texts are left out of this survey. Nevertheless, three books produced by journalists should be mentioned. Petr Holub asked, and that's also how he named his book,<sup>52</sup> whether coronavirus was a false alarm or not, how it was possible that people in most European countries accepted anti-Covid restrictions and renounced their constitutional rights, for which their ancestors did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives, and how it was possible that the Czech and other governments halted the economy, even though it caused its deepest decline since World War II.

The most comprehensive and thorough work in the field of Czech Covid journalism so far are two very extensive documentary volumes by Vojtěch Gibiš and Michal Kubal. Each of the books offers about one thousand pages of chronicle of the Covid pandemic in Czechia.<sup>53</sup>

Soon after the start of Covid-19, translations of books published abroad appeared, most of which were published originally before Covid but which either focused on issues that seemed to foreshadow the pandemic, or eventually were revised and up-dated for Covid. Among the first translated authors was professor at New York

50 Palán, *Za oknem: 19 spisovatelů proti Covid-1919*.

51 Palán, Šibík, *Spánek rozumu plodí příšery: Jan Konvalinka v rozhovoru o covidu, právu na omyl a historickém optimismu*; Nesvadbová, *Povídání s Annou Hogenovou*; Müller, *Rebel Hnízdl: Rozhovory s MUDr. Janem Hnízdem anebo S odvahou a humorem v časech dobrých i zlých*.

52 Holub, *Koronavirus, falešný poplach*.

53 Gibiš, Kubal, *Pandemie*; Gibiš, Kubal, *Pandemie: anatomie krize*.

University Scott Galloway,<sup>54</sup> philosopher Bernard-Henry Lévy,<sup>55</sup> Michael Osterholm and Mark Olshaker with their popularizing book on germs,<sup>56</sup> and the book on “from cholera to corona” by Sonia Shah.<sup>57</sup> A prominent Bulgarian political scientist of international acclaim, Ivan Krastev,<sup>58</sup> examined the political, social, and cultural implications of Covid-19 and crisis management in democratic and authoritarian states (big data government), and presents a pandemic as a basic common experience of today’s population.

Last, but not least, the literature on alternative medicine and natural healing should be mentioned. Covid appears mainly in the translated works: American expert herbalist Stephen Harrod Buhner<sup>59</sup> and Austrian author Clemens G. Arvay, popular and often translated in this country, addressed specifically Covid and the vaccination.<sup>60</sup> A book on Covid in traditional Chinese medicine was announced in early 2021 and at the time of writing has already been published.<sup>61</sup> Czech authors so far have rarely focused on Covid. Jiří Patočka and Anna Strunecká are biochemists and toxicologists, oriented toward a healthy life; Strunecká is at the same time a recipient of several distinguished academic awards, and has been criticized for pseudoscientific approaches.<sup>62</sup> The biologist and ecologist Radomil Hradil addressed Covid from an anthroposocial

54 Galloway, *Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity*. The Czech translation *Svět po Covidu – Od krize k příležitosti*. Tomáš Krsek Publishing House, 2021.

55 Lévy, *The Virus in the Age of Madness*. The Czech translation *Virus, ze kterého šílíme*. Praha: Kalich, 2020.

56 Osterholm, Olshaker, *Deadliest Enemy: Our War against Killer Germs*. Czech translation *Neviditelní zabijáci: Válka člověka se smrtícími patogeny*. Prostor, 2020.

57 Shah, *Pandemic: Tracking Contagions, from Cholera to Ebola and Beyond*. Czech translation *Po stopách nakažlivých chorob od cholery je koronavirům*. Esence, 2021.

58 Krastev, *Is It Tomorrow Yet?: Paradoxes of the Pandemic*. Czech translation *Už je zítřka? Aneb jak pandemie mění Evropu*. Praha: Karolinum, 2020.

59 Buhner, *Herbal Antivirals: Natural Remedies for Emerging & Resistant Viral Infections*. Czech translation *Přírodní antivirotika: Alternativní způsob léčby*. Esence, 2021.

60 Arvay, *Corona-Impfstoffe: Rettung oder Risiko?* Czech translation *Očkovat nebo neočkovat proti koronaviru*. Fontána, 2021. Arvay, *Wir können es besser-Wie Umweltzerstörung die Corona-Pandemie auslöste und warum ökologische Medizin unsere Rettung ist*. Czech translation *Co nás má naučit koronavirus*. Fontána, 2021.

61 Yan, *Prevention and Treatment Guidance of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Covid-19*. Czech translation *Covid-19 a tradiční čínská medicína*. Alpha Book, 2022.

62 Patočka, Strunecká, *Doba jedová a covidová*.

position.<sup>63</sup> He raises the question of whether anti-Covid restrictions hinder or not the desirable and necessary human development toward responsibility.

Writers, novelists and poets, and even musical composers<sup>64</sup> coped with and were inspired by Covid, and their works are mirroring the Covid time. They share first-hand experience, personal testimonies, sometimes with humor, sometimes with irony and sarcasm,<sup>65</sup> sometimes with despair. There is projection of stories against the backdrop of the pandemic, reflection of isolation of an individual exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, even reminiscences of the totalitarian regime associated in people's memory with the restrictions. The term "Covid" inspires pranks and puns that do very well in the Czech language and are a particularly difficult task for translators.<sup>66</sup>

## Chapter Outline

This work is guided by two questions:

1. What has the pandemic response been among the Visegrad states, and how effective has that response been in aiding the Visegrad societies to navigate the health and societal effects of the pandemic?
2. How can an adaptive leadership approach better aid the Visegrad societies to navigate the health and societal effects of the pandemic?

To answer them, we will analyze each of the four Visegrad states in turn. Each state chapter will contain two analysis sections. The first section will be dedicated to a common analysis based upon the adaptive leadership framework outlined above. The second section

63 Hradil, *12 covidových tezí: Lidstvo v karanténě a další texty*.

64 Bazala, Piano compositions *Karanténa*.

65 Landsman, *Karanténa s moderním fotrem*; Abrahámová, *Budoucí úča: aneb převážně nevážně o studiu v době covidu*; Brikciusová, *Kropení svčenu vodou*.

66 Čechák, *Covido(p)tikum*; Jansa, *Covídky*; Fabián, *Zápalky nepatří do rukou zvířat ani v době Covidu*.

will be an individual country analysis. Taken together, the two analysis structures will provide both a common analytical framework across the region as well as a window into each state according to different methods and levels of analysis. This allows for a composite view of the region that is more detailed and varied, while keeping hold of the central thread of adaptive leadership.

After the four analysis chapters, there will be a concluding chapter. This final chapter will contain a meta-analysis of the four state chapters, as well as a discussion of the implications of the analyses for the region in terms of both pandemic as well as democratic health. The answer to the two above research questions will also be presented.

# Chapter 1

## THE CZECH REPUBLIC: THE “BEST IN COVID”

*JOSHUA HAYDEN, GEORGE HAYS II,  
AND MILADA POLIŠENSKÁ*

*My profession is businessman, crisis manager, actually Prime Minister of Czech Republic. I won six time elections. And we have results, V4: best in Covid results, growth, lowest unemployment—we’re number one in Europe.*

*—Prime Minister Andrej Babiš speaking  
at Bled Strategic Forum, August 31, 2020*

### Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is a quintessential adaptive leadership moment. For one, it is a biological global event in which human bodies will literally have to adapt. Adaptive leadership is a theory derived from evolutionary biology,<sup>1</sup> our own genetic adaptation providing lessons for organizations and societies. In another sense, early Covid-19 was a deeply disruptive context in which many governments and organizations bypassed adaptive problems for technical fixes and confused authority with leadership. In both senses, human societies continue to struggle to adapt. This was certainly the case with the Czech Republic, which in 2020 alone went from being on a short list of countries demonstrating successful Covid-19 mitigation and spread prevention to being the world’s worst in number of cases per million.<sup>2</sup> The cautionary tale of the Czech government in 2020 and beyond is the failure to engage the adaptive work—to enable citizens to diminish the gap between their values (e.g. freedom) and the realities of the pandemic, realities informed by credible sources.

AU: please check edits in the sentence “This was certainly the case with...”

1 Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

2 Buščíková, *Nations in Transit 2021 Report for Czech Republic*.



Furthermore, adaptive leadership is a post-industrial theory,<sup>3</sup> meaning that it is focused on the dynamic interplay between leaders, followers, and context.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, our focus here is an analysis of how organizational leaders (as followers in the broader sense) adapted to government decisions and actions. Early data indicates that adaptive leadership behaviors matter in terms of how organizations have thrived during the pandemic.

As Covid-19 has progressed, many organizational leaders and scholars in health care, business, education, non-profit management, and government have sought guidance in adaptive leadership to understand how leaders and followers have fostered change and adaptation in response to government actions, a defining feature of the pandemic. One group of Canadian healthcare practitioner-scholars wrote, “adaptive leadership is about *anticipating* future needs, trends and options; *articulating* these needs to build collective understanding and support for action; *adapting* to allow continuous learning and the adjustment of responses as necessary; and having *accountability*, including transparency in decision-making processes and openness to challenges and feedback. These skills are all essential during a pandemic.”<sup>5</sup> Businesses and educational institutions were realizing that past adaptations to markets or client needs would not suffice, that learning new ways means coming to terms with what is essential to the mission and what is peripheral. One study of business firms concluded that the leadership challenge was in finding the balance between “tough decision making and human stewardship to build a culture of trust, continuous learning and innovation,”<sup>6</sup> to enable a deeper, rather than superficial, form of organizational thriving.

Adaptive leadership theory also recognizes that any crisis will have an acute phase and adaptive phase. The acute phase of a crisis requires the exercise of authority, the adaptive phase requires

3 See Rost and Smith, 1992.

4 Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*.

5 Laur, Agarwal, Mukerji, Goulbourne, Baranek, Pus, Bhatia, Martin, & Bhattacharyya, “Building Health Services in a Rapidly Changing Landscape.” Emphasis in the original.

6 Yeo, “In Praise of Covid-19: Discovering Adaptive Leadership in Unprecedented Times.”

learning new ways and combining expertise with experimentation and discovery.

However, there is a danger that the acute phase of a crisis, with its overreliance on authority figures, will become a new normal. The acute phase does require swift action, but with the sensitivity that adaptive work will immediately arise. This is what Ivan Krastev, in his reflection on the pandemic, *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic*, predicted as a danger in Europe: namely that democracy would be sidelined leaving populists emboldened by a “stay-at-home nationalism.”<sup>7</sup> Adaptive leadership during a crisis would provide direction, protection, and order (the charge of authority) while recognizing the need for people to take responsibility, work effectively together, and embrace civil dialogue about critical issues. In the Czech Republic, civic organizations, citizens, and groups stepped in to make masks, organized ways to provide laptops to disadvantaged children, and donated food and supplies to hospitals.<sup>8</sup> To what extent was this mirrored in private and public organizations which were left to respond to the often-chaotic mandates and communications from the government?

The rest of this chapter will be broken down into two main sections. The first will present a broad analysis of the Czech government’s response to Covid-19 based upon the 5- point framework outlined in the introductory chapter:

1. Framing the problem: expressing a clear understanding of the adaptive and technical challenges involved.
2. Prompt decision making and coordination: evaluating alternatives, engaging debate, and involving people to take responsibility for the solution.
3. Transparency and communication: using and disseminating credible information, accepting feedback, and building a unifying identity.

7 Krastev, *Is It Tomorrow Yet?*

8 Bušítková, *Nations in Transit 2021 Report for Czech Republic*.

4. Fostering collaboration across sectors: listening, giving the work back to the people with the problem, and aligning major responsibilities.
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future: capacity-building within the organization to learn from experiments, past mistakes, and best practices outside their own domain.

The second section will present a survey analysis targeting how decision making at a smaller scale within Czech society was perceived. This will be followed by a concluding discussion.

### **“DOOMSDAY SHOPPING”**

As the pandemic spread from China and reached Europe in the late winter of 2020, I watched it more intently together with the reactions of societies to it. Having only China as a model of response at the time, my wife and I worried that European states could follow that response. We began to worry about and prepare for lockdown, more so than for the virus.

The rumored wisdom of the time was that a two-week quarantine would be necessary to eradicate the virus, which would mean society shutting down for two weeks in isolation. It is almost charmingly naïve to think on at this point. With this yardstick in hand, though, and before any confirmed cases existed in the Czech Republic, my wife and I went (as we termed it) “doomsday shopping.” We planned out and bought two weeks’ worth of supplies covering food, hygiene, medicine, and a few new toys for the kids.

As we maneuvered our two overfull shopping carts of groceries through the parking lot to our car, mine hit a bump and started to tip. A man not far away saw this and approached to help. I reassured him that everything was fine and that I did not need help, as I wrestled to right the cart. My response was influenced by two paradoxical thoughts. The first was an already emerging sense of fear of proximity to strangers. The second thought was a feeling of foolishness at what I kept trying to tell myself was our overreaction, and not wanting the man to find out about our unusual endeavor.

We took our stores home, berating ourselves a bit for what we then saw as unnecessary reaction to fear. Certainly “it couldn’t happen here.” This is the stuff of movies. Nobody else was visibly so concerned at this point. We organized and put aside our reserves. As events would soon demonstrate, we merely beat the rush, although thankfully access to necessities was never as dire as we had feared.

The day that the policy of imminent lockdown was announced, our main street of shops was flooded with people desperately trying to stock up on supplies. Lines went out the doors all up and down the street. We felt vindicated in our preparation, but not happy at all in the reason.

In the end, we would barely need to touch our prepared supplies. Necessary stores and services continued to function. We eventually decided to save our supplies and throw a party with it once the pandemic was over. Such a day always seemed out of reach, and so we slowly used up our reserves over the following year.

## The Czech Case

### *Framing the Problem*

In terms of the framing of the problem, we can look at two main components. The first component is defining the nature of the challenge. The second is identifying the values and priorities involved.

As regards the nature of the challenge, we see a particular tension between health and economic concerns going through different stages. The immediate focus was one of health and safety.<sup>9</sup> This was directed toward the wellbeing of the populace outright, as well as quickly one of maintaining the healthcare infrastructure of the country. As the economic effects of this first lockdown became apparent, the responses to subsequent waves sought to mitigate the economic impact. This was illustrated in the response to the second wave most clearly with attempts to keep in-person study for children

9 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

too young to be left at home alone (while parents presumably went to work) for as long as possible,<sup>10</sup> and the relaxation of restrictions on stores and restaurants in the lead-up to Christmas.<sup>11</sup> There was and has continued to be a discourse of health associated with the economic argument, initially being one of young children being less susceptible, to the proven protection of masks and social distancing, to the proven protection of vaccines and boosters. There has also been, to a lesser extent, a broadening of the health discourse to one of mental and social health. The health and economic framings have also merged to a degree with a shift from “Covid elimination” to “Covid mitigation,” where the goal is to reduce severity of cases as opposed to reducing cases outright, which should both aid the broader wellbeing of the populace (physical, mental, and social health) as well as protect the healthcare system from collapsing (and being ineffectual for non-Covid medical needs).<sup>12</sup> This approach is also considered to better protect personal, organizational, and national economies.

In terms of identifying values and priorities, writ large, there were two particular tensions involved in the pandemic and its response. The first has been discussed above between health and economy among the ministers of the government. Though primarily an argument within the government, this argument was held among the broader public as well. The second argument was more between the government and various groups within the population, and that was between individual liberty and social responsibility.

Whether the government or elements within it were supporting the health or economy positions, they were arguing for a social acceptance and social participation in that position. Within the population, however, a strong individualist position presented itself in numerous forms. While the individual expressions can be described as “pro” various things (e.g. “pro choice,” “pro individuality,” “pro

10 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

11 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

12 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

personal responsibility,” “pro liberty,” “pro nature,” etc.), it is more easily expressed in the “anti” (e.g. “anti authority”). This disparate group posed and poses a real problem for the exercise of leadership, as they expressly are opposed to being knowingly led by any conventional agent of leadership.

The argument between individual liberty and social responsibility is thus the larger and more encompassing of the two, with the health/economy debate residing within the social responsibility leg. This noticeably compounded the work of the government. In tandem, the government put forward at times conflicting positions on what was best for society, all the while needing to convince a significant proportion of the populace that they should engage based on embracing social interest. This means that even when the government message was unified and well supported, there was always the larger detraction that the government should not be telling the populace what to do. The practical expressions of this are seen in the consistent percentage of anti-vaccination sentiment despite both carrot and stick policies of the government, as well as anti-masking and opposition to other mitigation policies. Certainly not all examples of refusal to vaccinate or mitigate are based upon individualist principles, but there is a core that is indeed based upon such opposition to conventional social leadership. This core has remained largely intact throughout the pandemic.

Rather than a managing of multiple interpretations, there has been more of a pendulum swinging to extremes before slowing to a center that encompasses some points of most positions. It is difficult to assign credit for this calming of reaction to a learning curve of leadership, as this overlaps also with the advancement of knowledge of the virus, methods of treatment, vaccine development and distribution, as well as the ever-constant increase of natural immunity.

### ***Prompt Decision Making and Coordination***

Decision making is predicated on the existence of alternatives that are examined and evaluated. Alternatives were articulated, though rather than evaluation, alternatives seemed to develop competing

(political) camps that took time to reconcile themselves, as discussed above. This further fed into efficiency.

A network of agencies and ministries were pulled together and/or established over the course of the pandemic’s first wave. There is no clear line of progressive efficiency in the functioning/implementation of individual policies, though. Rollouts of testing, then vaccinations by demographics, then boosters were met by similar logistical issues: lack of materials, lack of workers, lack of robustness of registration/processing systems, lack of clear messaging. With each particular policy implementation, over time, lessons were learned and systems improved. These lessons were not carried over between policy areas, though, leading to re-learning the same lessons in different contexts multiple times.

While representatives of groups that would be responsible for implementing the various policies (medical professionals, educators, police and fire, etc.) were able to provide their views, information, and concerns, both decision and execution did not consistently make use of these inputs. While debate occurred, there is little indication that constructive debate was encouraged, as represented by numerous public arguments, destructive debates, and back-tracking among the government that took place in and through the media. While the decision process involved inputs and information sources from many directions, numerous public disagreements from within the government made it abundantly clear that the Prime Minister’s view on any particular issue was paramount (even when those decisions were known by the government at the time to be incorrect as well as once such assessments were borne out shortly thereafter).

### ***Transparency and Communication***

During the first wave, there was a “wartime” appeal to solidarity and social responsibility, the acceptance of which helped ensure a surprisingly minor caseload.<sup>13</sup> This message was particularly strong around masking. Masking, as well as adhering to lockdown

13 Ministerstvo zdravotnictví České republiky, “Covid19: Přehled aktuální situace v ČR.”

measures, was expressed in terms of group identity and group effort against a common enemy. The lack of victory after the combined individual as well as group sacrifice helped swing the pendulum from the Czech Republic being negligibly affected during the first wave to consistently being among the worst affected in subsequent waves.

Individual statements of information were disseminated broadly and clearly during the pandemic. The problem emerges when the various bits of information are engaged with across time and across waves. Clear statements about what is going on beyond the immediate day of reference are noticeably inconsistent.<sup>14</sup> Within the time period of a few days, the government could reverse its declared policy position. Businesses and schools were allowed to reopen only to be limited or closed in short order.<sup>15</sup> For safety, masks had to be worn on public transport except for the drivers, who one would expect would be at greatest risk of infection and vectoring.<sup>16</sup> The information was disseminated across multiple media, as well as posted by businesses and other affected establishments. This did not translate to the information being easily understood.

These mixed messages led to the pandemic response presenting a challenge to popular conceptualizations of science. Popularly conceived, science is a static statement of truth. In actuality, science is a dynamic process of searching for truth. As the pandemic progressed, statements by decision makers “supported by science” became less and less convincing. To the popular ear, science kept changing its mind. This gave far greater breathing space to anti-science and anti-leadership positions, muddying the waters of credibility. This situation would be bad enough if it were not exacerbated by the consequences of the health/economy debate within the government. Once it became evident that the worth of the individual

14 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

15 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

16 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”



lives of the population had been reassessed, trust in the leadership and their claims to support was irreparably damaged.

Related to the discussion of the tension between health and economy outlined above, it is possible to see a significant shift in assessment and communication across different waves. The first wave was as reasonably detected and communicated as could be expected under the circumstances. A threat was known, although details were not really assessable at the time, and that information on the threat was communicated. Problems arose with the first trough and subsequent wave. The economic toll was clear, as was the realization that this would not be a one-off crisis. In its anticipation of the next wave, these two realizations created a fissure within the government between those ministers more concerned with politico-economic consequences on one side and those ministers more concerned with the health consequences on the other. This led to a significant and public fracturing of the message coming out of the government, where the Minister of Health announced a need for mitigation measures in the summer of 2020 only to be rebuffed by the Prime Minister. The tension ultimately led to the resignation/replacement of the Minister of Health (an event that would happen several more times), only to see his mitigation measures ultimately implemented, though too late to be effective.<sup>17</sup>

This tension would continue through subsequent waves, and involve more ministries. In order to get the economy moving, workers would need to return to their jobs. In order for that to happen, the workers’ children would need to return to school. In order for that to happen, teachers would need to feel safe. Underpinning all of these concerns would be development, testing, and logistical issues regarding testing supplies and processing, as well as personal protective equipment production/acquirement and delivery. All policies related to the above would also need to balance increasing public pushback and fatigue, otherwise risking the policies being ignored wholesale.

17 Ministerstvo zdravotnictví České republiky, “Covid19: Přehled aktuální situace v ČR.”

The next clearest example of this problem of crisis assessment and communication came with the 2020 winter holiday season during the second wave. While cases were declining, the wave was not over, and the general experience of the second wave was significantly different from that of the first. Late mitigation in the summer and fall resulted in a massive surge of cases never before seen in the country.<sup>18</sup> Mitigation efforts began to have an effect in November of 2020.<sup>19</sup> This led to the government ultimately relaxing mitigation efforts in the lead-up to Christmas, responding to pressures from retail and restaurant industries. The message of risk was downplayed, while messages of personal responsibility began to take greater place. The ultimate result of this was the return of heavy mitigation policies immediately after Christmas,<sup>20</sup> while the third wave began just as immediately.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Fostering Collaboration across Sectors***

Collaboration relies in part on resources and in part on organization and allocation of those resources. Sharing resources did not seem to be so much of a problem. The problem was in the lack of absolute resources due to the nature of the pandemic, combined with the lack of clear consistent policy direction.

An example of this problem of allocation of limited resources is exemplified from the later part of the second wave. During this time, shops were told that they would be able to reopen under a particular set of mitigation policies. This included a strict ratio of customers to floor space as well as making sure that all employees were wearing N95 quality masks.<sup>22</sup> This led to large stores buying

18 Ministerstvo zdravotnictví České republiky, “Covid19: Přehled aktuální situace v ČR.”

19 Ministerstvo zdravotnictví České republiky, “Covid19: Přehled aktuální situace v ČR.”

20 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

21 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

22 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

up those masks for their employees, only for the policy to change at the last minute keeping the stores closed and mandating the public wear N95 quality masks.<sup>23</sup> The stores preparing to reopen, however, had created a temporary shortage of such masks, leading to surges of people panic buying the remaining masks on the market.

This example is the exact opposite of fostering collaboration across sectors. Part of that breakdown in collaboration can be traced to the lack of debate and engagement with dissent, as outlined repeatedly in the above sections. Again, if we look to the tension between health and economy throughout the various waves and responses to the pandemic, we see that it really is not the case that dissent was listened to and productive debate engaged. The fact of repeated changes in the position of the Health Minister tied to relations with the Prime Minister further demonstrates this point. If anything, the actual changes on the ground (through trial and error, the spreading of the virus, and technological advancements in combating the virus) led to a resolution of the health/economy debate more than any political or leadership efforts to do so.

### ***Learning from Past Decisions and Preparing for the Future***

To a certain degree, this section is not really knowable at the moment. The pandemic is continuing. Lessons are still being taught, and whether or how they have been learned is still to be seen. Learning has been demonstrated by decision makers among waves, and a parliamentary election with the pandemic as one of the issues has successfully transferred power. How this global event impacts perceptions and preparations going forward can only be known after a great deal of time and investigation has passed.

On a different note, however, we may glean some understanding of this point through looking at a new global crisis that has emerged in the last year. The Russian war against Ukraine has presented world leaders with another crisis that impacts their civilian populations in a multi-faceted manner. This situation is even more the case

23 Government of the Czech Republic, “Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus.”

for the countries of Central Europe, including the Czech Republic. Again, we see rhetoric of collective solidarity and sacrifice leading the way. Again, we see popular fatigue and pushback as the crisis persists and costs rise. As opposed to the pandemic, though, we see a more unified message coming out of the government, combined with efforts to clearly communicate the issues involved as well as to provide support to civilians in order to mitigate the costs associated with the government’s approach to the crisis.

### **RACING THE LOCKDOWN**

As the pandemic got closer, and finally arrived in the Czech Republic, one question that became pressing was that of the closure of borders. My wife’s mother had been visiting to help take care of our sick kids. Once the first cases appeared in the Czech Republic, we began to fear what would happen with the borders and her ability to get home to Slovakia. In the end, looking at what was happening in other states more heavily affected at the time, we decided that she needed to leave immediately or risk not getting home at all.

We bought her one of the few remaining seats on a train east leaving the next night. I took her to the station, and there was a swarm of people all trying to get out of the city and out of the country. There was a feeling of chaos in the air, even though there was no real reason. The borders were open, all trains were running as scheduled, everyone had tickets, but there was palpable fear.

As I went with my mother-in-law to her platform, we passed many people carrying massive loads of luggage. One such person was a young Ukrainian woman with two small children. I helped her with her bags up the steps to the platform, where there were throngs of people going for two different trains. In my mind, I recalled various war movies about excited masses of people desperate to get out of harm’s way. That was the feel and image of the train station that night, not helped by the memorial to Winton’s children\* we passed in the tunnel leading to the platform. It was an upsetting scene.

As time would pass and crises would give way to crises, I would be reminded of that night. In the aftermath of Russia invading Ukraine in 2022, far worse and more warranted images

of desperate train stations and tearful departures would fill the information waves. More than once, I have wondered about the Ukrainian woman and her children whom I helped go east that night in 2020. I wonder if they were not among those again fleeing what had been considered a safe place. I wonder if perhaps they did not return to Prague. I hope they are well.

\* The memorial commemorates the efforts of Sir Nicholas Winton to rescue close to 700 children from Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, most of them Jewish. The memorial is a train door with the glass of the window showing reliefs of handprints from both sides. The outside reliefs are the handprints of adults, while those from the inside are of children. The memorial is situated in the central tunnel of Prague Main Train Station leading to all platforms.

## Survey: Czech Covid Leadership Response Questionnaire

Crisis creates uncertain, complex, and dynamic situations characterized by an overload of incomplete and sometimes conflicting information. “Adaptive leaders seek to mobilize knowledge quickly, are responsive to contextual needs, and seek to empower their colleagues to act, even when the path is unclear, and the journey might be messy.”<sup>24</sup> Our initial research into the organizational leadership during the crisis was conducted using our framework that combines adaptive leadership theory with crisis management theory.

Organizational behavior research suggests that differences exist between people at different levels of the organization, including those that were involved directly in making high-level decisions; between industries, depending on the size of the organization; and that individual differences may shape perceptions.<sup>25</sup>

AU: please check edits have retained sense in the sentence ‘Organizational behavior research suggests...’

## Methods

Our survey instrument, Czech Covid Leadership Response Questionnaire, was launched on April 4, 2022, and sent to business,

24 Dunn, *Adaptive Leadership: Leading Through Complexity*, 33.

25 Boleman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*.

education, government, and non-governmental organizations through various channels via email and LinkedIn. The survey is available in Appendix 1. A tailored message in Czech and English was provided discussing our purpose, the consent of those taking part, and our desire to have multiple responses from each organization and across sectors. Administration will continue through November 2022.

Our survey was designed around the Visegrad Leadership framework discussed above, and the dependent variable was the degree to which the respondent estimated how well their organization thrived through the pandemic. This item was framed this way to match Heifetz’ (1994) definition of the ends of adaptive leadership. We also gauged respondents’ rating of government actions and learning. Our research questions were: What is the relationship between adaptive leadership and organizational thriving and adaptation during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic? What are organizational leaders’ estimations of the Czech government’s decisions and learning capacity during the pandemic?

We compared the respondents by testing differences between groups, and whether the respondent was directly involved with decision making in responding to government decisions.

### ***Participants***

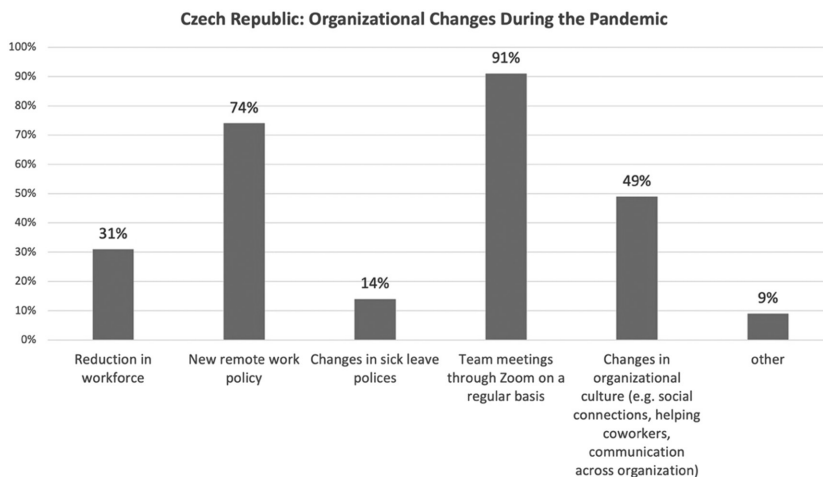
Up to May 6, 2022, we received complete responses from thirty-five people. Among these respondents 34% were men and 66% women; 54% were directly involved in decisions that their organization made about responding to the pandemic and government regulations. Most were from education (57%) and civic organizations (23%); 17% were from businesses. In terms of the size of the organization, a majority 71% were from organizations of fifty employees or more and 28% of these from organizations of over five hundred employees. Respondents represented a variety of managerial positions and levels within their organization—from freelance to executive—and about half of respondents had worked less than five years in their organizations. Only one in four respondents had worked for their organizations more than ten years. A total of 60% of respondents were Czech and all living within the Czech Republic.

## Results

Table 1.1 shows the means and standard deviations of each of the adaptive leadership items mapped onto the framework. These were all 5-point Likert scale items (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree). These items were then compiled into a scale to generate composite scores for the five components of the framework. Statistical tests for reliability found good levels of internal consistency in the framework components ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

The average rating in response to the item, “Please rate, on a scale of 1–10, the degree to which your organization was able to thrive as the Covid-19 pandemic progressed,” was 7.29 out of 10. Between respondents in business vs. education, ratings were, on average, the same (7.33), but civic organizations rated slightly lower (7.0). In terms of the changes that organizations underwent, Figure 1.1 shows a breakdown of which changes were most frequently cited.

In terms of the relationship between adaptive leadership behaviors and changes, one discernable difference between those who rated organizational leaders highly and those who did not was in enacting policies related to remote work: 83% who rated higher, compared to 64% of those who rated lower, on the adaptive leadership scale reported remote work policies in their workplace. Two



**Figure 1.1** Organizational changes during pandemic

**Table 1.1** Item means and standard deviations with the adaptive leadership framework

<i>Framework</i>	<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
<b>Framing the problem</b>	During government restrictions, leaders have challenged people to focus on organizational priorities and values. (priorities & values)	4.11	0.93
<b>Framing the problem</b>	Organizational leaders have had the awareness to recognize the emotional, physical, or other personal challenges of employees associated with the pandemic. (awareness)	3.97	0.88
<b>Fostering collaboration</b>	Organizational leaders gained perspective by listening to employees’ concerns and opinions. (listening)	4.28	0.73
<b>Fostering collaboration</b>	Organizational leaders fostered collaboration and/or debate about future changes in our organization provoked by the pandemic. (collaboration)	4.00	1.08
<b>Transparency and communication</b>	Leaders did not avoid controversial or difficult realities facing the organization during the pandemic. (realities)	4.26	0.86
<b>Transparency and communication</b>	Organizational leaders readily shared credible information about the crisis and its impact on our sector/organization. (credible info.)	4.43	0.88

(Continued)



**Table 1.1** Continued

<i>Framework</i>	<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
<b>Prompt decision making and coordination</b>	When any internal conflicts arose in response to the pandemic, leaders used their authority to resolve differences for the parties involved. (conflict resolved)	3.91	0.99
<b>Prompt decision making and coordination</b>	In moments of uncertainty during the pandemic, I trusted that our organizational leaders would help us work through the difficulties. (trusted)	4.21	0.91
<b>Learning from past decisions</b>	The pandemic has led to some new initiatives and/or internal processes in our organization. (new initiatives)	4.62	0.55

**Table 1.2** Leadership framework means and standard deviations

AU: Please provide citation placement for the table 1.2

<i>Component</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Stan. Dev.</i>
Framing the problem	4.20	0.83
Prompt decision making and coordination	4.06	0.95
Transparency and communication	4.35	0.87
Fostering collaboration across sectors	3.98	0.98
Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future	4.62	0.55

respondents who rated lower in adaptive leadership gave examples of “other” areas of change:

The company is currently undergoing a total transformation. I have very little insight into it as it mostly concerns the management structure, but it seems that a lot of high paid

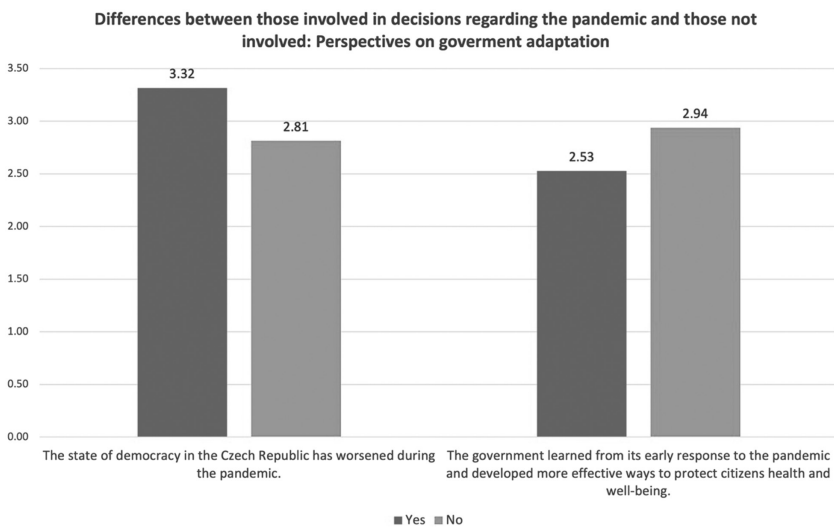
positions were cancelled and some roles in the management were blended, probably to reduce costs.

Another noted an increased workload as a result of the pandemic.

### *Perspectives on the Czech Government*

In our sample, only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that “the state of democracy in the Czech Republic has worsened during the pandemic,” but 49% were neutral, perhaps suggesting that it is too early to tell. Two-thirds of Czechs answered neutral to this question. On the other hand, 44% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the government learned from its early response “and developed more effective ways to protect citizens’ health and well-being,” 31% were neutral, and 23% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Among Czechs, a slightly lower percentage (38%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and Czechs were a little more favorable than others in their assessment of the Czech government’s learning and adjustment.

Decision makers higher up in the organization, those who made decisions about how to respond to the pandemic and government



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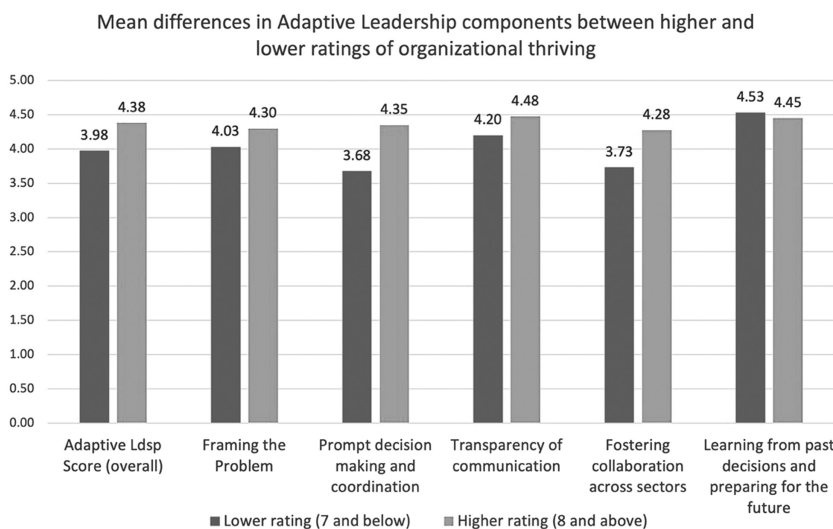
**Figure 1.2** Executive decision makers’ ratings vs. others

restrictions, had a similar perspective on governmental actions and democracy to those who were not. Both groups barely reached the threshold of neutrality about the state of democracy. A neutral position was taken by 47% of decision makers, while 50% of non-decision makers indicated the same. Learning, a hallmark of adaptive leadership, received worse ratings from both groups, indicating a general disagreement that the Czech government learned from its early response to the pandemic. Organizational decision makers were the more generous group in judging governmental learning.

### *Adaptive Leadership and Organizational Thriving*

In terms of the adaptive leadership components of the model, we found key differences between respondents that rated their organization highly (8–10/10; above average) and those that rated their organizations lower on the scale (7 and under). A representation of the mean differences is given in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.4 shows the magnitude and significance of the adaptive leadership framework items and relationship between the items and respondents’ organizational thriving rating. It shows a statistically significant relationship between five items in the framework plus



**Figure 1.3** Adaptive leadership and organizational thriving

	<i>Org thrive rating</i>	Priorities & values	Listening	Realities	Conflict resolved	Trusted	Awareness	New initiatives	Credible info.	Collaboration	<i>Adaptive Ldsp Scale</i>
<i>Org thrive rating</i>	1.00										
Priorities & values	0.25	1.00									
Listening	0.40*	0.34*	1.00								
Realities	-0.05	0.07	0.30	1.00							
Conflict resolved	0.31	0.35*	0.56***	0.47**	1.00						
Trusted	0.37*	0.36*	0.59***	0.20	0.72	1.00					
Awareness	0.37*	0.42*	0.54***	0.39*	0.39	0.49*	1.00				
New initiatives	0.14	0.23	0.10	-0.29	0.00	0.14	0.05	1.00			
Credible info.	0.50**	0.33	0.76	0.09	0.37	0.45*	0.45**	0.11	1.00		
Collaboration	0.44**	0.38*	0.71	0.14	0.57	0.69***	0.46**	0.20	0.69	1.00	
Adaptive Ldsp Scale	0.45**	0.60***	0.84	0.43**	0.76	0.78	0.69	0.21	0.72	0.83	1.00

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Figure 1.4** Correlations between leadership items and organizational thriving score (see Table 1.1 for definitions and abbreviations)

the composite adaptive leadership scale. The strongest correlations, however, between the thriving rating and model components were:

1. Organizational leaders readily shared credible information about the crisis and its impact on our sector/organization (R=.50;  $p < .01$ )
2. Organizational leaders fostered collaboration and/or debate about future changes in our organization provoked by the pandemic (R=.44;  $p < .01$ )
3. Composite scale measuring adaptive leadership practices (R = .45;  $p < .01$ )

Though the correlations are not of the highest magnitude, there is a clear relationship between adaptive leadership during the pandemic and judgments of organizational thriving. These are subjective judgments but psychologically powerful in their contribution to organizational outcomes. The differences in practices between groups based on ratings is big enough to draw the tentative conclusion that the biggest factors affecting organizational thriving were that leaders shared credible information and actively fostered collaboration and debate about the future of the organization.

From open-ended comments, we learned mostly of the neglected elements of adaptive leadership (see Appendix B). A comment related to communication drew a parallel between the respondent’s organization and the government’s actions:

neither my institution nor govt. communicated consistently, and initial goodwill and responsibility of employees/citizens was gone with the wind when my organization/govt started micromanaging.

Part of fostering true collaboration with employees is creating a psychologically safe environment to voice their concerns and ideas.<sup>26</sup> This was reflected in a respondent’s comment about the absence of a psychologically safe environment:

26 Edmonson and Lei, “Psychological Safety.”

Both on the country level and the company level, only one direction and means of action was considered correct and no other opinions were allowed, even those of “experts”. I felt insecure about expressing my point of view in the fear of losing the job. I felt manipulated towards behaviour and actions that are against my values, and which are not positive for the development of young students.

Ignoring alternative paths of action and points of view from employees left the employee feeling manipulated away from the fundamental adaptive issue: engaging people’s values and priorities. The treatment and wellbeing of young people was one way to engage those values and for many, failing to engage this was a decisive factor in leading.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Early data in this study suggests that businesses and educational institutions have succeeded where the government has largely failed in leading effectively through the pandemic. For example, the most robust finding thus far has been that the organizations that shared credible information about the crisis and its impact, and fostered collaboration, were more likely to be judged as thriving through the pandemic. Since the government was not very transparent with its mandates and decisions, credible information was not easy to come by. Information portals were created by civic organizations, for example, to interpret and bring some clarity to government actions and lack of collaboration with the scientific community.<sup>27</sup> In situations of high uncertainty, it is critical that decisions be explained with credible information and rationale rather than a top-down approach based on asymmetries of information. Adaptive leadership theory suggests that organizations need people’s active engagement, interest, and multiple sources of learning and sharing in order to thrive.

27 Buščíková, *Nations in Transit 2021 Report for Czech Republic*.

Another part of the framework that has been highly important during the pandemic has been framing the problem. Respondents’ high ratings of their organization’s adaptability to the Covid-19 environment was associated with prompt decision making and coordination in the adaptive leadership framework. Especially in the acute phase of the crisis, organizational leaders needed to act and offer a narrative of the challenges based on reliable information. Often decision makers needed the patience of taking one step at a time to coordinate action in an atmosphere of ambiguity and anxiety. For the Czech Republic, compliance with government mandates was uniform at the beginning, but as government officials began to lose credibility (Health Minister Prymula photographed walking out of a closed restaurant without a mask), organizations had to find their own way.

We found support for the importance of vigilance in coordination and decision making during the pandemic, which was another point of contrast to government actions. Authorities that fail to exercise leadership put their focus and communication elsewhere and it has a deleterious effect on their decision making. One example in the Czech government was Prime Minister Andrej Babiš’s boast that the Czech Republic was “best in Covid” and that the pandemic was under control. This self-congratulatory framing exemplifies what one leadership thinker called the problem of confusing a finite game (win-lose) for an infinite game, one where there are no winners and losers and the measure is instilling vision, learning, and growth.<sup>28</sup> As with the need for transparent communication, framing the problem often involves helping people affirm their mission within the organization and their ability to effectively address the challenges ahead posed by the pandemic.

The results about the state of democracy and the Czech government’s ability to learn from past mistakes, particularly from the second wave of infection, were more mixed than anticipated. We received many “neutral” responses to these questions making it difficult to interpret. Even when we analyzed the data in terms of people in the sample making decisions by paying close attention to the

28 Sinek, *The Infinite Game*.

government actions, the results were not dramatically different than the rest of the sample. Possible interpretations are that respondents believed it may be too early to tell either way or that respondents did not have enough information to make a definite judgment on these issues. Perhaps, though, there are some positive lessons in the Czech government’s learning from mistakes and actions that suggest adaptive capacity.

The degree to which organizational leaders got to the balcony, gained perspective through information gathering, stayed vigilant in communication, made prompt decisions, and gave the work back to people collaboratively within their own organizations made the difference when it came to employee perceptions of their organization’s ability to navigate those troublesome waters. For adaptive leadership, as our data suggest, it is rather in the aggregate that these behaviors and practices make a difference; they cannot be artificially cut and pasted onto a strategy during a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Appendix 1.1 Czech Covid Leadership Response Questionnaire**

### ***Czech COVID Leadership Response Questionnaire***<sup>29</sup>

#### **Leadership během pandemie COVID-19/Leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Tento průzkum je součástí výzkumného projektu podporovaného grantem of International Visegrad Fund, který zkoumá leadership organizací a státní správy v reakci na pandemii. Vaše odpovědi budou považovány za důvěrné. Předem vám děkujeme za účast! Vyplnění tohoto dotazníku by mělo trvat méně než 5 minut.

**(This survey is part of a research grant from the Visegrad Fund examining leadership in organizations and government in response to the pandemic. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you in advance for participating! This survey should take less than 5 minutes to complete.)**

29 This questionnaire is informed by Peter Guy Northouse’s *Leadership: Theory and Practice*.



- \* 1. **Název vaší pozice v organizaci a název vaší organizace:/Name of your position within your organization and name of organization:**
- \* 2. **Podílel/a jste se na rozhodnutích, která vaše společnost učinila ohledně reakce na pandemii a vládní nařízení? (Were you involved in the decisions that your company made as to how to respond to the pandemic and government regulations?)**  
Ano/Yes Ne/No
3. **Ohodnoťte, prosím, na stupnici od 1 do 10, do jaké míry byla vaše organizace schopna prosperovat během pandemie COVID-19. (Please rate, on a scale of 1–10, the degree to which your organization was able to thrive as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed.)**  
1= Pro naši organizaci to byla katastrofa/**It was a disaster for our organization;** 10= Naše organizace byla schopna plně prosperovat v podmínkách/**Our organization fully thrived**
4. **Zamyslete se, prosím, nad následujícími výroky o tom, jak vedoucí pracovníci/e /osoby s rozhodovací pravomocí ve vaší organizaci reagovali/y na pandemii COVID v posledních dvou letech. Uveďte, do jaké míry souhlasíte nebo nesouhlasíte s následujícími tvrzeními: (Please reflect on the following statements about how leaders/decision makers in your organization have responded to the COVID pandemic over the past two years. You will be indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following:)**

Scale for 4 A-I:

Rozhodně nesouhlasím/**Strongly disagree**

Nesouhlasím/**Disagree**

Neutrální/**Neutral**

Souhlasím/**Agree**

Rozhodně souhlasím/**Strongly agree**

N/A

- A. **Během vládních restrikcí vedoucí představitelé vyzvali lidi, aby se zaměřili na priority a hodnoty organizace. (During government restrictions, leaders have challenged people to focus on organizational priorities and values.)**

- B. Vedení organizace získalo rozhled tím, že naslouchalo obavám a názorům zaměstnanců. (**Organizational leaders gained perspective by listening to employees’ concerns and opinions.**)
- C. Vedoucí pracovníci/e organizace si uvědomují emocionální, fyzické nebo jiné osobní problémy zaměstnanců spojené s pandemií. (**Leaders did not avoid controversial or difficult realities facing the organization during the pandemic.**)
- D. Když v reakci na pandemii vznikly nějaké vnitřní konflikty, vedoucí pracovníci/e využili/y své autority k vyřešení sporů ve prospěch zúčastněných stran. (**When any internal conflicts arose in response to the pandemic, leaders used their authority to resolve differences for the parties involved.**)
- E. Ve chvílích nejistoty během pandemie jsem věřil/a, že nám naši organizační vedoucí pomohou překonat obtíže. (**In moments of uncertainty during the pandemic, I trusted that our organizational leaders would help us work through the difficulties.**)
- F. Vedoucí pracovníci organizace si uvědomují emocionální, fyzické nebo jiné osobní problémy zaměstnanců spojené s pandemií. (**Organizational leaders have had the awareness to recognize the emotional, physical, or other personal challenges of employees associated with the pandemic.**)
- G. Pandemie vedla k některým novým iniciativám a/nebo interním procesům v naší organizaci. (**The pandemic has led to some new initiatives and/or internal processes in our organization.**)
- H. Vedoucí pracovníci/e organizací ochotně sdíleli/y důvěryhodné informace o krizi a jejím dopadu na náš sektor/organizaci. (**Organizational leaders readily shared credible information about the crisis and its impact on our sector/organization.**)
- I. Vedení organizace podpořilo spolupráci a/nebo debatu o budoucích změnách v naší organizaci vyvolaných pandemií. (**Organizational leaders fostered collaboration and/or debate about future changes in our organization provoked by the pandemic.**)

5. Když se ohlédnete za reakcí české vlády na pandemii, uveďte, do jaké míry souhlasíte nebo nesouhlasíte s následujícími názory: **(As you look back to the Czech government’s response to the pandemic, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following:)**

Scale for 5 A-B:

Rozhodně nesouhlasím/**Strongly disagree**

Nesouhlasím/**Disagree**

Neutrální/**Neutral**

Souhlasím/**Agree**

Rozhodně souhlasím/**Strongly agree**

N/A

- A. Stav demokracie v České republice se během pandemie zhoršuje. (The state of democracy in the Czech Republic has worsened during the pandemic.)
- B. Vláda se poučila z počáteční reakce na pandemii a vyvinula účinnější způsoby ochrany zdraví a blahobytu občanů. **(The government learned from its early response to the pandemic and developed more effective ways to protect citizens’ health and wellbeing.)**
6. Prosím, uveďte jakékoli další připomínky k vedení vaší organizace během pandemie nebo k vašemu pohledu na reakci vlády na pandemii. **(Please offer any additional comments on your organization’s leadership during the pandemic or your perspective of the government’s response to the pandemic [open response].)**
7. Označte prosím všechny následující změny ve vaší organizaci za poslední dva roky: **(Please mark any of the following changes in your organization over the past two years:)**
- Snížení počtu pracovníků /**Reduction in workforce**
  - Nová politika práce na dálku/**New remote work policy**
  - Změny v zásadách nemocenské dovolené/**Changes in sick leave policies**
  - Pravidelné týmové schůzky prostřednictvím služby Zoom (nebo jiné platformy)/**Team meetings through Zoom (or other platform) on a regular basis**

- Změna organizační kultury (např. sociální vazby, pomoc spolupracovníkům, komunikace napříč organizací)/**Change in organizational culture (e.g. social connections, helping coworkers, communication across organization)**
  - další/**other** (uveďte prosím)
8. Pohlaví/**Gender**  
Muž/**Male** Žena/**Female**
9. Kolik let pracujete ve své organizaci? (**How many years have you worked at your organization?**)
- 1–2 roky /**years**
  - 3–4 roky /**years**
  - 5–10 roky /**years**
  - více než 10 let /**more than 10 years**
10. Státní příslušnost, národnost /**nationality**
11. Průmysl:/**Industry:**
- Zdravotní péče/**Health care**
  - Vzdělávání/**Education**
  - Vláda/**Government**
  - Obchod/**Business**
  - Nezisková, nevládní, občanská organizace /**NGO (civic organization)**
12. Kolik lidí přibližně zaměstnává vaše organizace na místní úrovni? (**Approximately how many people are employed in your organization locally?**)
- Méně než 15/**Less than 15**
  - 16–50
  - 50–100
  - 101–200
  - 201–500
  - Více než 500/**More than 500**

## Appendix 1.2 Covid Pandemic Leadership Open-Ended Comments

In my opinion, both governments follow somebody else's interest but of the citizens. Probably the one of the pharmaceutical companies. Both on the country level and the company level, only one

direction and means of action was considered correct and no other opinions were allowed, even those of “experts”. I felt insecure about expressing my point of view in the fear of losing the job. I felt manipulated towards behaviour and actions that are against my values, and which are not positive for the development of young students. I believe the holistic needs of children were thrown overboard in the past two years and showed that children have little value in this country, that their voices don’t matter. The government has created polarization in the country and contributed to hate speech—the same thing they deem to eradicate. Also, the complete disrespect towards the legal processes shows that the government’s regard for democratic processes is close to zero. Moreover, the government has repeatedly issued contradictory statements and false information, which, I believe, would have never happened if their decisions were based on facts. but it seems their decisions were purely political.

IWAP’s practices have been consistent with government guidelines throughout the pandemic.

British Council se více začala starat o mental health and wellbeing jejich zaměstnanců. (**The British Council started to pay more attention to the mental health and wellbeing of their employees.**)

Our university had a Covid Plan in place which was updated regularly and very comprehensive.

Internet a zoom pohovory rozhodně nám pomohlo fungovat dál. (**The internet and zoom interviews definitely helped us to function further.**)

Our President, VP other officers determined to keep organization functioning in what ever way possible.

I did appreciate that the Prime Minister always wore a mask in public and did not appear to partake in illegal parties.

I was Vice president at the time. Decisions and policies were discussed and approved by the Board strictly following the government guidelines. Having 130 members approximately at the time, the Board tried to remain in direct contact with all of them. IWAP activities are an essential part of its life and it was difficult to keep the interest and involvement of its members through virtual platforms.

Our organization: management was aware of increased physical, emotional demand as well as workload, but chose to keep

additional pandemic processes and admin workload even afterwards. Government: Babis govt should have spend less time with public opinion surveys and more time listening to the expert bodies (we could have decreased the death toll of 3rd wave). Both: neither my institution nor govt. communicated consistently, and initial goodwill and responsibility of employees/citizens was gone with the wind when my organization/govt started micromanaging.

Regulations were not coherent.

We were very fortunate in having a truly excellent caring, considerate leader who consulted widely.

bývalá vláda = katastrofa (**the former government = disaster**)

## Chapter 2

### SLOVAKIA: IN THE SHADOW OF SPUTNIK

NIKOLETA JAKUŠ MUTHOVÁ AND  
MÁRIA MURRAY SVIDROŇOVÁ

*We are taking responsibility for Slovakia at a time when confidence in police and courts is minimal, when Slovakia tops corruption rankings . . . We'll do anything to ensure that citizens will trust their state again.*

—Prime Minister Igor Matovič, comments to press after being sworn in, March 21, 2021

#### Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is the first pandemic of modern times that affected the entire world in about three months. Although the pandemic is mainly a health crisis, the effects of the pandemic are also an economic, social, and, last but not least, political crisis. The global scale of the crisis and its impact on various sectors have created challenges for political leaders. However, crisis management often takes place in an environment of uncertainty. It is precisely the uncertainty of the outcomes and impacts of the measures associated with the Covid-19 crisis that is also affecting political leaders and the rise of populist leadership.

In Slovakia, the pandemic is linked to a governmental crisis that occurred just after the elections in 2020 and the subsequent changes of government, a governmental crisis of the newly elected government, which led to the replacement of the Prime Minister and also the Minister of Health.

The Covid-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 is a test not only for all societies, but especially for their governments and leaders. The coronavirus pandemic has placed increased demands and associated expectations on leaders in all areas. Making decisions is

all the more challenging when we do not have sufficient evidence and face unpredictable outcomes, as the Covid-19 virus has been unknown until now.

Transparency requires openness, communication, and accountability on the part of the leadership as the government shares the current status and options for future developments and decision-making. Transparency has two main meanings, namely (i) informational, which means that the information provided by the leader is truthful, and (ii) participatory, which means that leaders' stakeholders are involved in identifying the information they need. The healthcare crisis forces leaders to not only maintain but also increase transparency efforts. This situation should lead to designing and implementing communication methods that increase transparency during a pandemic to help build trust. From a crisis management perspective, it is important that leaders do not overreact to the situation, but look ahead.

In general, not many people like to hear bad news, especially from political leaders and especially in bad times when we are all looking for certainty and comfort. On the other hand, telling people good news is easy, even (or especially) if it is not true; telling people the things they need to hear that they would rather not hear is much harder, and therefore a more important test of leadership.<sup>1</sup>

The role of leadership in pandemic times can perhaps be better understood if we frame the whole coronavirus problem in terms of critical problems.<sup>2</sup> Such problems or crises are complex and complicated from a problem-solving perspective, but are solvable through standard operating procedures in collaboration with experts. Complex problems are also crisis situations, for example, where a leader needs to motivate his/her followers to align to avoid a catastrophe, such as ordering schools and businesses to close for the foreseeable future.<sup>3</sup> However, a leader must also be able to say the unpleasant announcement at the right time even though the society does not like to hear it. However, coordination of professionals such as doctors, economists, and psychologists is

1 Grint, "Leadership."

2 Grint, "Problems."

3 Grint, "Leadership."



important so that decisions are made by the whole community and would not create chaos but would be understood. As a negative example, we can give the case of ordering businesses to close without leaders understanding or caring about the wider impact on the market, the economy, and society. On the other hand, ignoring these medical experts at the expense of advancing one's own interests can also lead to chaos with negative impacts on the country's economy.

In general, we can say that the approaches to dealing with the crisis associated with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic can be divided into two main groups of countries, namely (i) the UK and the USA and (ii) European countries. European countries have followed a strong emphasis on the recommendations of health professionals and have been more willing to put more constraints on society than we have seen in the UK or the USA. However, we can also see different approaches to crisis management among European countries.

According to Moffit, populist leadership thrives especially in crises, which begin with the actual presentation of the problem/crisis and the use of various emotions such as fear.<sup>4</sup> According to Moffit, the main features of crisis management by populist leadership include:

1. Identifying the failure. Failure can be real or expected. It is often presented as an existential emergency that requires prompt action.
2. Raising the importance of the crisis by linking the time dimension to the potential decline. Several problems are presented as somehow related and having a common source. Often crisis moments are presented as an unfavorable combination of crises that threaten established ways of life.
3. A framing view of the crisis in terms of "the people" and those responsible for it. Positive in-groups are contrasted with demonized out-groups who become "enemies of the people."
4. Media and promotion. For example, press conferences.

4 Moffit, "How to Perform Crisis."

5. Designing simple solutions and advocating strong leadership to the leader.
6. Recalling the crisis and crisis events (even after the crisis is over).<sup>5</sup>

Economic crises often affect societies disproportionately, and the very signs of the crisis, such as rising unemployment, stagnant wages, and precarious employment, also caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, will increase the sense of “relative deprivation.” Such a crisis may therefore intensify those trends that were already evident before its beginning when populist leadership/leaders began to take hold in many countries.<sup>6</sup>

However, theories dealing with leadership point to the fact that the occurrence of a “pure” form of populist leadership that contrasts with positive leadership is less likely. Collinson identifies five types of populist leadership that manifest in crisis:

1. Incompetent leadership characterized by distrust of professionals. An example is the promotion of the drug ivermectin by some opposition Slovakian leaders as suitable for the treatment of Covid-19 infection, despite the fact that no medical studies were available.
2. Denying leadership. Denialist leadership can also manifest itself in underestimating the full consequences of the crisis, even when experts point to them. An example is the British Prime Minister’s failure to acknowledge the impact that Brexit will have on the UK economy.
3. Panic management. It is characterized by sudden awareness of the crisis situation and its implications and admitting the need to call in experts to deal with the situation.
4. Othering leadership. This type of leadership is characterized by creating “scapegoats” or slandering and blaming. Examples include the labeling of the pandemic as a “Chinese virus” by, for example, former US President Donald Trump.

5 Moffit, “How to Perform Crisis.”

6 Haass, “Accelerate History.”

5. Authoritative leadership. It is characterized by a strong leader with strong power needed to resolve the crisis, which increases over time. An example is the Slovak former Prime Minister and later Minister of Finance Matovič who, despite his past and present position, managed and strongly influenced the pandemic while severely criticizing the Minister of Health and not listening to the advice of the experts. An example of this is the population-wide testing with antigen tests, which health experts called untargeted or unfeeling for such widespread testing, and economists pointed to the high cost of this measure.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of this chapter will be broken down into two main sections. The first will present a broad analysis of the Slovak government's response to Covid-19 based upon the 5- point framework outlined in the introductory chapter:

1. Framing the problem: expressing a clear understanding of the adaptive and technical challenges involved.
2. Prompt decision making and coordination: evaluating alternatives, engaging debate, and involving people to take responsibility for the solution.
3. Transparency and communication: using and disseminating credible information, accepting feedback, and building a unifying identity.
4. Fostering collaboration across sectors: listening, giving the work back to the people with the problem, and aligning major responsibilities.
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future: capacity-building within the organization to learn from experiments, past mistakes, and best practices outside their own domain.

The second section will describe the crisis, the leaders' approaches to managing it, and the solutions they proposed while keeping in mind Collinson's and Moffit's descriptive features of populist leadership outlined above.

7 Collinson, "Critical Leadership Studies."

## PARTY ON CHARLES BRIDGE

Picture the following scene. It is a beautiful summer day in Prague, the Czech Republic. Thousands of people are gathered on the famous Charles Bridge. These are not the usual throngs of international tourists getting selfies and exploring, though. These people are crowding around a massive table running the length of the bridge, feasting, singing, and drinking. What could the occasion be for such a celebration? The end of a war or the exaltation of freedom after the revolution? No. These people are gathered here to bid farewell to Covid-19. The catch, though, is the date. It's June 30, 2020, just after the *first* wave of the pandemic has ended.

At the time, the World Health Organization was warning that the pandemic was not in fact over, and that there was more to come. Even though the event was not organized by the government, it was symbolic of the populist approach to the pandemic in the Visegrad Group countries—the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Indeed, not long after this party, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis declared that his country was “Best in COVID.” It would only take a few more months for the hubris of the statement to be made evident, though.

Quickly and steadily, the Czech Republic became the worst-affected state with the most cases of infection and deaths caused by the virus per day per million. This radical shift during the early pandemic and afterward was emblematic of the experience of all of the Visegrad countries to a degree, but especially so for the Czech Republic. After months of impressive social action to make masks, stay home, and keep the economy running from a distance (months that were successful in keeping infections in the low thousands and deaths in the low hundreds), it was felt the end must have arrived.

Once that feeling of release, of celebration, had come, it was too difficult as a matter of collective social will and thus of political will to return to the measures of the first wave. Unfortunately, there was no real leadership effective at guiding society along any other path toward success. The party was glorious, but with all that would come after it and because of it, there would be nothing like it again.

## **The Slovak Case**

### ***Framing the Problem***

The first confirmed case of coronavirus infection in Slovakia was on March 3, 2020, while already on March 6, 2020, the first two deaths associated with complications of coronavirus infection were reported. These events were followed by the tightening of measures by the outgoing government headed by Peter Pellegrini where all international airports in Slovakia were closed, a mandatory state quarantine was introduced, a state of emergency was declared, and retail outlets were closed except for food, drugstores, and pharmacies. On March 25, 2020, the newly elected government headed by Igor Matovič made masks compulsory. On April 8, movement was restricted to trips to buy essential items, medical visits, and in-person work (which required a certificate from the employer).

The overlap between the pandemic and the change in government was so close that it is easy to see the one attached to the other. As will be discussed in the Analysis sub-chapter, many pandemic decisions were based upon efforts by the government, and the Prime Minister in particular, to have more of a political effect than a health effect. Awareness of this connection was quick to arise and persisted throughout the pandemic and Matovič's rule.

### ***Prompt Decision Making and Coordination***

Decision making was prompt, but perhaps too much so, and without much information or coordination. As was already mentioned, decision making also trended toward the populist rather than the effective. Prime Minister Matovič declared “war on the disgusting disease” and publicly announced that Covid is his personal enemy and he as Prime Minister will do whatever is necessary to win the war. Creating the publicly announced enemy could be seen as the first step toward populist public leadership.

Soon after the first step, typical autocratic populist steps were taken by the Prime Minister. Naming and shaming of all other stakeholders with different or alternative opinions, dumping coalition partners' proposals on how to solve problems in their sectors,

and even public defamation soon became standard managerial tools for the Prime Minister.

The key idea of the Prime Minister was to be the one who solves the crisis and brings the relief. To achieve this aim, more and more expensive measures with questionable value-for-money and ability to deliver expected outcomes started to occur (see the discussion on vaccination policies in the Analysis sub-chapter). We can say that the Covid-19 virus caused two kinds of crises, namely a health crisis and an economic crisis.

### ***Transparency and Communication***

The interventions were mainly presented in the form of press briefings by politicians and coalition political parties. At the same time, press briefings by opposition politicians as a form of critical response to the adopted or announced measures were often seen. The relatively frequent press briefings, together with the frequent changes in the decrees, could have caused a lack of clarity in the measures, which in turn could have had an impact on their acceptance by the public.

This legacy of an overabundance of briefings, combined with changing and conflicting information, had a negative effect on the public's responsiveness. This effect was made worse by the length of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. As new waves emerged, society was less and less likely to comply with mitigation measures. This communication problem, combined with general pandemic fatigue, would also negatively impact vaccination efforts. Eventually, seemingly due more to the friction against restrictions than to the effectiveness of vaccination and immunity development, the state of emergency and almost all restrictions were phased out in the winter and spring of 2022. Even this easing of restrictions, though, suffered from a perceived lack of transparent and informed decision making.

### ***Fostering Collaboration across Sectors***

There was not much true collaboration across sectors, which would have entailed a degree of transparency and communication already discussed as being problematic at best. The pandemic response was

implemented through two main avenues. The first was via decree by the Public Health Authority, led by Ján Mikas. The second was via the LEX Corona, which adjusted laws from numerous ministries (Economics, Labor, Health, etc.) to allow for the mitigation measures to be laid down and enforced. While at first these two components of implementation routes may make it appear that collaboration was happening, it is necessary to point out that this is only within the government. In addition, events would demonstrate that this was more about individuals acting adjacent to each other rather than a body acting in cooperation and in concert.

To the first point, it must be said that the decrees coming out of the Public Health Authority were well intentioned and responsive to the dynamics of the pandemic. With that said, though, there was little coordination or forethought given to the messaging and its effectiveness. There were notoriously more than four hundred decrees, seemingly to constantly adjust the “normal” daily lives of the people. This in turn affected both compliance to the mitigation efforts by the public, as well as impacting the attention and legitimacy paid to the authorities. This final point would be greatly impacted by the Sputnik vaccine scandal.

This leads into the LEX Corona and the legacy of it. The law aided in the populist message of centrality for Prime Minister Igor Matovič. Even though he faced push-back and criticism by outside experts almost from the beginning, his self-proclaimed indispensability in dealing with the crisis persisted. This key position was, of course, independent of cooperation, collaboration, or even of communication. He famously arranged for the import of Russian Sputnik V vaccines, which were in no way approved within Europe. Matovič singularly announced this to the country and the world at the airport in front of the dubious cargo. The fallout from this was his ultimate removal as Prime Minister, switching spots with Minister of Finance Eduard Heger.

### ***Learning from Past Decisions and Preparing for the Future***

There has not been any apparent true “learning” by the government officially and then unofficially headed by Matovič, although there

are signs that the wider political order and society are responding. In December 2020, Matovič's minority government lost a vote of no-confidence in the Parliament. This shows a shift in the political power, but there is as yet no clear indication of if or when an early election will be held. Attached to the period of this no-confidence vote is a new scandal, whereby Matovič physically snatched back the letter of governmental demise from the hands of the Head of the Office of the President. The coming months will show what amount of learning has been achieved by both the political powers as well as the Slovak voters.

### THE JANUS FACE OF EDUCATION

Janus was a god with two faces, each looking in opposite directions, expressing dual aspects existing simultaneously in one whole. Education under Covid has been like this Janus face. Someone likes one of his faces, someone likes the other face. However, the face is part of the head, and the head rests on the neck, which turns the head, nods in agreement, or shakes it in disapproval.

The neck in the time of Covid, which turned the head of education, was the Ministry of Education, which through its measures was supposed to secure teaching and at the same time protect students and teachers of all levels from the pandemic. In retrospect, opinions on these measures today cannot be more diverse—from "they did their honest best, under the circumstances" to "it was a crime."

The head, which was controlled by the neck, was composed of schools of all levels. The administrators and educators all had a heavy burden on their shoulders and managed the situation with varying degrees of difficulty. The head ached, unable to rest. Its job is to think and to solve problems. Not knowing what to do, it despairs and only found relief once things began to go well.

What about the two faces of Janus, looking in opposite directions? This is the impact of Covid on school children and university students. Many school-aged children were happy that they did not have to go to school and could stay home. However, the environment at home was not always favorable. Most parents



who still had work had mandatory home office. This work was on top of online teaching, at times made more difficult by a lack of skills and equipment for it. Nervousness and anxiety rose with the lack of space and privacy. Isolation and economic problems were thrown into the mix. Domestic violence increased. Children lacked social contact with their peers and lacked exercise, leading to more health problems and more isolation.

For university students, the time of Covid was no less of a difficult challenge. One face of Janus looked at dormitories closing. International students faced cascading closing borders. Professional libraries, conferences, and student mobility all ceased to operate. Technical, scientific, and medical fields were all left without laboratories, autopsy rooms, and necessary equipment. *Gaudeamus igitur iuvenes dum sumus* fell silent.

However, the other face of Janus was looking at the articles and studies, creative and artistic works completed in the quiet of the lockdown. And Janus' smile brightened even more looking at the positive benefits of online teaching. Unlike before Covid, Zoom and Teams platforms became commonly used in teaching and in academic life, increasing its accessibility and flexibility, and strengthening overall the academic community.

Janus was the god of doors and entrances, but in a deeper sense also the god of beginnings and endings, of transitions and transformations from one quality to another. It is this meaning that we have in mind now. We believe that despite all the negatives experienced, the space of education has been strengthened by the pandemic. We can only hope that despite all the disturbing events and trends of the present time, the transition in the broadest sense is close and that this transition will be ultimately in the direction toward the better.

## **Opinion Polls: Analysis of Slovak Public Opinion during Covid-19**

The Slovak peoples' opinions on important social issues have been mapped by the "Ako sa máte, Slovensko—How are you doing, Slovakia?" surveys, which through regular and continuous public opinion polls have enabled the public, media, and public

institutions to understand people's motivations for their behavior, who people trust, and how trust in institutions or their representatives has evolved. The surveys were representative of the online population of Slovakia. Data collection was conducted online using the MNFORCE SK panel method with a sample of one thousand respondents and adhered to strict ESOMAR quality standards. The authors of the project are the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Social Communication Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the survey agency MNFORCE, and the communication agency Seesame.

As part of our exploration of the issue of the leadership crisis that could be observed during the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions and interventions that were associated with slowing the spread of the virus, we present in Table 2.1 the trustworthiness of selected institutions. The conditional formatting in the table represents the rating scale of the respondents, with the white cells representing positive reactions and vice versa, the black cells representing negative reactions and ratings, and the shades of gray representing positions in between the black and white.

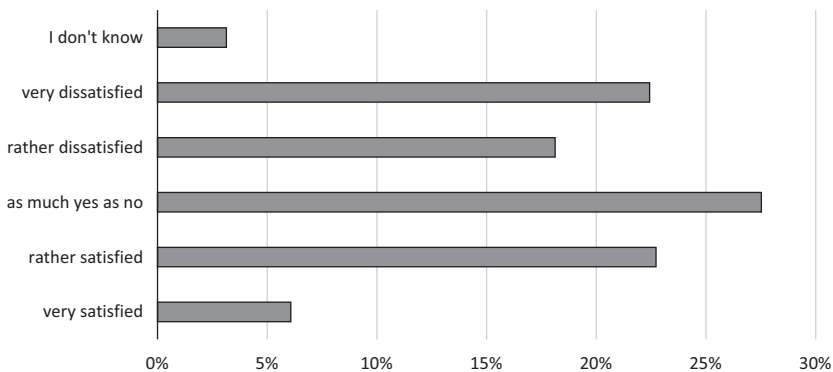
At the beginning of the pandemic, according to the survey, scientific institutions had the highest credibility, with more than 64% of respondents trusting them. After the scientific institutions, the President of the Slovak Republic—Zuzana Čaputová—was trusted by more than 57% of the respondents, and health professionals were trusted by more than 50% of the respondents. Conversely, the lowest trustworthiness was in political parties, which were not trusted by up to 85% of respondents. High levels of distrust were also achieved by Parliament, which was distrusted by 75% of respondents, the government, which was distrusted by 72% of respondents, and newspapers, which achieved the same level of distrust as the government at 72%.

The high level of distrust in the government and the Parliament is followed up by a survey question that asked: “How satisfied are you with the work and results of the current government coalition in dealing with the coronavirus epidemic?” The level of satisfaction with the government coalition is shown in Figure 2.1.

**Table 2.1** Answers to question: “Please take a look at this list and tell us about each institution and how much trust you have in it—do you trust it completely, trust it a little, trust it not very much, or not trust it at all?”

	Scientific institutions	Newspapers	Parliament	European Union	Health care	Political parties	Government of the Slovak Republic	President of the Slovak Republic
I fully trust	11.66%	1.27%	1.96%	3.43%	6.86%	0.59%	2.84%	17.83%
I rather trust	52.79%	22.92%	18.51%	32.32%	43.58%	9.70%	21.06%	39.57%
I don't trust very much	21.65%	42.21%	43.29%	33.20%	36.53%	45.84%	32.42%	23.21%
I don't trust at all	8.42%	29.87%	32.32%	25.66%	10.87%	39.28%	40.35%	15.67%
<i>I don't know</i>	5.48%	3.72%	3.92%	5.39%	2.15%	4.60%	3.33%	3.72%

Source: Own elaboration based on Ako sa máte, Slovensko survey, 2022



**Figure 2.1** Answer to question “How satisfied are you with the work and results of the current government coalition in dealing with the coronavirus epidemic?”

*Source:* Own elaboration based on “Ako sa mate, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

The low trust in the government (Table 2.1) is confirmed by respondents’ dissatisfaction with the government coalition’s management of the pandemic, where up to 40% of respondents were dissatisfied with the management of the pandemic, more than 27% of respondents were indifferent, and no more than 28% of respondents were satisfied with the management of the crisis associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The mood in society, as indicated by the results of the survey, was followed by the events described below.

On March 21, 2020, the new government headed by Igor Matovič changed and on March 25, 2020, it made the wearing of the mask/respirator compulsory and then on April 8, 2020, restricted free movement. The restriction of free movement only allowed trips to go to buy basic groceries, drugstore items, and medicines, to visit a doctor, and if it was not possible to work from home, it was possible to go to work. However, when going to work, a certificate from the employer was required declaring that the work performed by the employee could not be done from home. Measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus were implemented by decrees issued by the Chief Public Health Officer of the Slovak Republic, Ján Mikas. The decrees of the Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic

regulated the obligations with the wearing of respirators, meetings, and conditions for opening up services according to the Covid traffic light rule. Although the decrees responded to the current situation in various areas, this caused their high number, opacity, and their gradual rejection and non-compliance by society. In total, there were over four hundred of them.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic granted the LEX Corona, which was a package of measures to change laws from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, and the Office for Regulation of Network Industries.

The populist leadership features could have been identified very soon after the newly elected Parliament adopted the government's program. Where it really stands out is in regard to vaccines and vaccinations. Given that increasing the number of people vaccinated is the most effective way to protect lives and reduce both the economic and health damage caused by a pandemic, a price tag of half a billion euros (more than 0.5% GDP) was allocated to the public program to increase the overall vaccinated population. An interesting approach to improving vaccination coverage was the introduction of the so-called vaccination lottery and the vaccination bonus. However, the lottery and the bonus, introduced under the personal supervision of Igor Matovič, were questionable procedures and at the very end had only a marginal effect. The vaccine bonus draw was open to all vaccinated people, regardless of when and what vaccine they were given.

According to the Value for Money Unit (Útvar hodnoty za peniaze—UHP), the social cost per unvaccinated person is estimated at €4,384 (UHP 2021). According to the UHP, the vaccination lottery would be successful if it persuaded at least six thousand people. In practice, however, proving whether a citizen has decided to vaccinate based on a vaccination lottery coupled with the possibility of winning is very difficult. The total cost of the vaccination lottery was 26 million euros. The vaccination lottery was announced on July 1, 2021, which was followed by a slight increase in the first

8 Available at: [https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=223&Itemid=144](https://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=223&Itemid=144)

vaccination doses administered, but after the actual launch of the vaccination lottery on August 15, 2021, the first doses administered had a downward trend. Along with the vaccination lottery, a referral bonus was also launched, which those who recommended vaccination to another person who completed the first dose after July 1 and the second dose by October 31, 2021, were eligible for. At the same time, before Christmas 2021, the government introduced a reward for seniors aged 60 and over who were vaccinated by January 31, 2022, in the case of vaccines from Comirnaty and Spikevax, or by March 15, 2022, in the case of a booster dose with the Janssen vaccine. The amount of the bonus for seniors vaccinated with two doses was 200 euros (one in the case of the Janssen vaccine) and the third or booster dose was 300 euros. The main idea behind the vaccination bonus for seniors was to increase the vaccination rate of this particular population group, where the willingness to be vaccinated had been low for a long time. All these ideas were designed and presented by the Minister of Finance—Igor Matovič. Although increasing the attractiveness and motivation of citizens to vaccinate through a lottery, a middleman bonus or a vaccination bonus was meant in a positive sense—to protect people from the hard cases of coronavirus. However, from the point of view of experts from the ranks of economists or sociologists, these ideas were untested and had the character of a behavioral experiment with an uncertain chance of fulfilling the vaccination in the form of an increase in the vaccination rate. The nature of these tools and the way decisions were made have the characteristics of the crisis management of a populist leader according to Moffit (2015), in features such as the way of identification of the error, the media promotion of the crisis, the introduction of simple and wide-scale solutions to crisis situations, and the constant reminder of the consequences of the crisis if it is not solved.

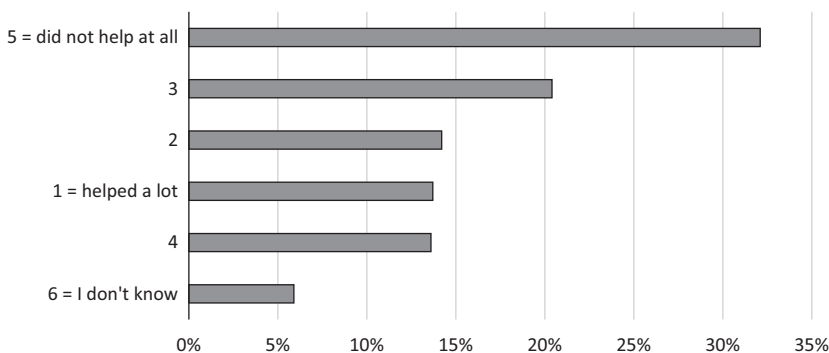
In the following tables and charts, we will present the results of the survey “How are you, Slovakia?” which was realized in December 2020. The survey was aimed at exploring people’s view of the situation related to the pandemic, including their income situation, satisfaction, constraints related to reducing the spread of the virus, but also their perception of the different measures and how

the government has managed to deal with the challenges—both health and economic.

Figure 2.2 shows respondents' ratings on the question of the effectiveness of nationwide testing. Only 19% of respondents were satisfied when rating their satisfaction with the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, 57% of respondents were dissatisfied with the management of the crisis linked to the spread of the virus.

We can say that the Covid-19 virus has caused two kinds of crises, namely a health crisis and an economic crisis. Table 2.2 shows the agreement or disagreement with the statement whether the government is able to manage the health and economic crisis. The conditional formatting in the table represents the rating scale of the respondents, with the white cells representing positive reactions and vice versa, the black cells representing negative reactions and ratings, and the shades of gray representing positions in between the black and white.

In this case, we can also observe that the respondents who agreed with the statements—and thus indicated that the government can manage the health and economic crisis—were fewer than those who



**Figure 2.2** Answer to question “In your opinion, has nationwide testing helped or not helped to fight the epidemic in Slovakia?” from survey “Ako sa mate, Slovensko?” made in December 2020

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa mate, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

**Table 2.2** Answers to question “When you think about the government’s actions, how much do you agree with the following statements?”

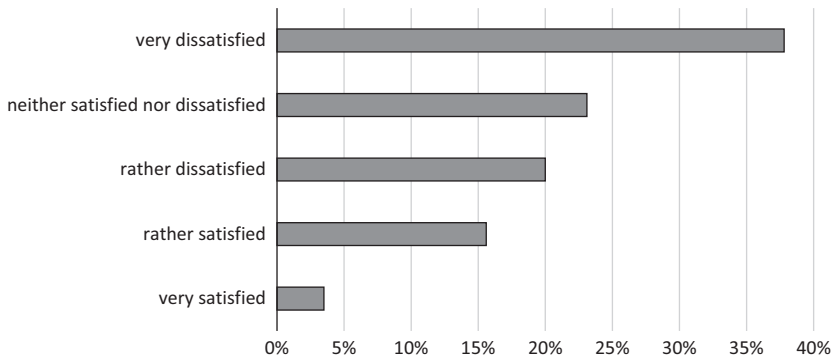
	<i>This government is able to face the health risks associated with the spread of the coronavirus</i>	<i>This government is able to face the economic consequences caused by the coronavirus pandemic</i>
1 = completely agree	5.90%	5.00%
2	5.70%	4.30%
3	8.80%	8.60%
4	9.30%	8.10%
5	11.80%	10.40%
6	5.60%	5.90%
7	5.70%	4.80%
8	8.20%	8.70%
9	6.50%	7.20%
10 = completely disagree	32.40%	36.90%

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa mate, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

were more critical in their assessment. Thus, 41% of respondents agreed that the government is managing the risks associated with health and 36% of respondents agreed that the government is able to face the economic impacts caused by the pandemic. On the other hand, 58% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the government is able to handle the management of the health crisis and at the same time 63% of the respondents disagreed that the government is able to face the economic impacts of the pandemic. Last but not least, communication and explanation of the interventions that were taken related to taking measures to slow down the spread of the virus or responding to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Satisfaction with communication and communication of measures is presented in Figure 2.3.

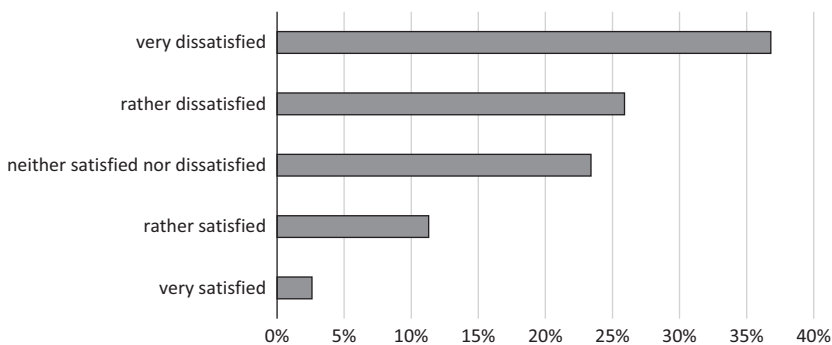
People’s dissatisfaction with the management of pandemic-related crises may also be related to lack of understanding of how





**Figure 2.3** Answer to question “When you think about how the current Slovak government is handling the coronavirus epidemic, how satisfied are you with what it has done so far?”

the various interventions were presented (Table 2.3). Almost 14% of respondents were satisfied with the government’s communication and up to 60% were dissatisfied with the government’s communication. The conditional formatting in the table represents the rating scale of the respondents, with the white cells representing positive



**Figure 2.4** Answer to question: “When you think about how the government and state institutions are communicating, how they are taking action on the coronavirus epidemic, you are:” from survey “Ako sa máte, Slovensko” in December 2020

AU: Please provide citation placement for the figure 2.4 and Table 2.5 in text.

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa máte, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

**Table 2.3** Answers to question “If you look at the following list: do you trust the institutions listed here very much, trust them less, or do you not trust them at all in relation to the crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus?” from the survey “Ako sa máte, Slovensko?” from December 2020

	<i>Health care</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Expert advisory committees advising the government</i>	<i>Scientific institutions</i>	<i>President of the Slovak Republic</i>	<i>Public media</i>	<i>Big employers</i>
1 = I don't trust at all	6.40%	35.10%	20.20%	9.60%	17.10%	24.10%	8.70%
2	6.00%	9.40%	6.20%	5.20%	5.00%	9.70%	6.40%
3	6.30%	9.40%	8.80%	6.40%	5.80%	9.40%	8.30%
4	8.40%	8.90%	9.80%	10.70%	7.80%	10.50%	10.80%
5	5.90%	6.30%	7.10%	7.70%	5.80%	7.00%	8.70%
6	15.40%	8.00%	12.10%	10.50%	10.70%	12.40%	17.80%
7	7.60%	4.70%	7.30%	8.20%	5.30%	6.90%	8.40%
8	9.80%	5.60%	7.30%	8.50%	8.10%	7.70%	7.70%
9	12.20%	4.70%	7.50%	11.00%	9.80%	4.90%	7.50%
10 = I trust very much	9.10%	3.20%	5.30%	10.00%	9.90%	3.20%	4.60%
11 = I don't know	6.40%	35.10%	20.20%	9.60%	17.10%	24.10%	8.70%

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa máte, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

reactions and vice versa, the black cells representing negative reactions and ratings, and the shades of gray representing positions in between the black and white.

Healthcare institutions, scientific institutions, and the President of the Slovak Republic emerged as the most trusted institutions in the survey done in December 2020. The lower credibility of the government and the public media can be explained by the high dissatisfaction with the way the interventions were communicated, mainly through frequent and conflicting press briefings by both government and opposition politicians.

Below we present the results of another survey “Ako sa máte, Slovensko—How are you, Slovakia?,” which was conducted in July 2022 on a sample of one thousand respondents. However, the questions of this survey differed slightly from the survey conducted at the beginning of the pandemic, the results of which we presented above.

First, we will focus on the analysis of specific leaders’ opinions and attitudes toward vaccination against Covid-19 (Table 2.4). At

**Table 2.4** Answers to question: “How do you rate the positions of the following politicians on coronavirus vaccination?”

	<i>Zuzana Čaputová —President</i>	<i>Róbert Fico</i>	<i>Eduard Heger</i>	<i>Peter Pellegrini</i>	<i>Igor Matovič</i>
I definitely agree with them	18.80%	14.90%	13.00%	9.40%	6.90%
I rather agree with them	18.60%	16.70%	17.60%	22.10%	12.40%
I rather disagree with them	13.80%	14.80%	13.80%	17.20%	17.00%
I strongly disagree with them	29.10%	29.60%	29.50%	27.00%	42.10%
<i>I don't know her/his opinion on vaccination</i>	19.70%	24.00%	26.10%	24.30%	21.60%

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa máte, Slovensko?” survey, 2022

the time of the survey, vaccination rates in Slovakia were low, especially among the group of retired people who are most at risk from this virus. Again, the conditional formatting in the table represents the rating scale of the respondents, with the white cells representing positive reactions and vice versa, the black cells representing negative reactions and ratings, and the shades of gray representing positions in between the black and white.

Regarding the opinions and recommendations of individual leaders on Covid-19 vaccination, respondents agreed most with the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, with whom 37% of respondents agreed. From the beginning of the pandemic, the president tried to motivate people to get vaccinated. Paradoxically, more than 31% of respondents agreed with Róbert Fico, the leader of the opposition party, who represented the anti-vaccination group. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents agreed with the former Minister of Finance turned Prime Minister Eduard Heger, who also motivated people to vaccinate. With former Prime Minister turned Minister of Finance Igor Matovič, only 19% of respondents agreed. On the contrary, 42% of respondents disagreed with the President, 44% disagreed with Róbert Fico, and 43% disagreed with Prime Minister Eduard Heger. The largest number of respondents disagreed with the former Prime Minister turned Minister of Finance Igor Matovič, with 59% of respondents disagreeing.

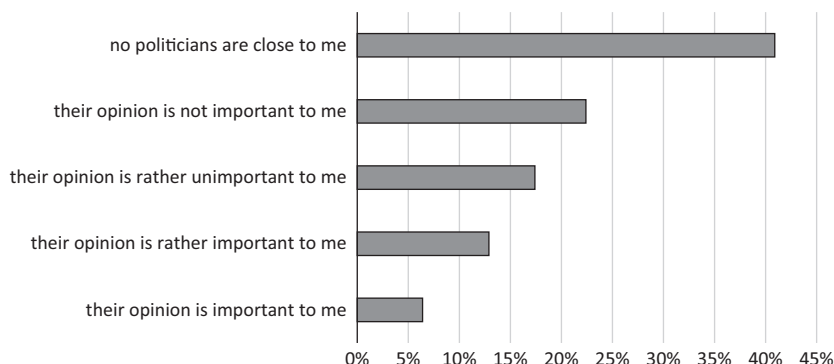
On the question of the importance of the opinion of the politician/leader for the respondents, the results are shown in Figure 2.5. For just over 19% of respondents, the opinion or recommendation of a politician/leader is important. On the other hand, for more than 39% of respondents the opinion of politicians is not important and for more than 40% of respondents, politicians are not close to them, which means that their opinion is irrelevant. The conditional formatting in the table represents the rating scale of the respondents, with the white cells representing positive reactions and vice versa, the black cells representing negative reactions and ratings, and the shades of gray representing positions in between the black and white.

With the new mutations such as Delta and Omicron, the society was more and more reluctant to comply with the measures, due to

**Table 2.5** Answers to question: “How confident are you about information on the Covid-19 vaccination from the following institutions and sources of information?”

	<i>Government of the Slovak Republic</i>	<i>Slovak scientists</i>	<i>European Union</i>	<i>My doctor</i>	<i>Information on the internet and social media</i>	<i>Information from friends and relatives</i>	<i>Information from public personalities</i>	<i>Information from national television and daily newspapers</i>
1 = I trust very much	4.30%	16.20%	5.20%	22.00%	3.00%	6.50%	3.80%	3.50%
2	9.70%	23.40%	14.40%	25.70%	7.10%	20.20%	9.60%	12.50%
3	23.00%	27.70%	27.40%	30.40%	31.10%	42.90%	31.10%	28.70%
4	16.10%	14.00%	16.20%	10.20%	24.50%	14.80%	19.40%	17.80%
5 = I don't trust at all	46.90%	18.70%	36.80%	11.70%	34.30%	15.60%	36.10%	37.50%

Source: Own elaboration based on “Ako sa máte, Slovensko?” survey, 2022



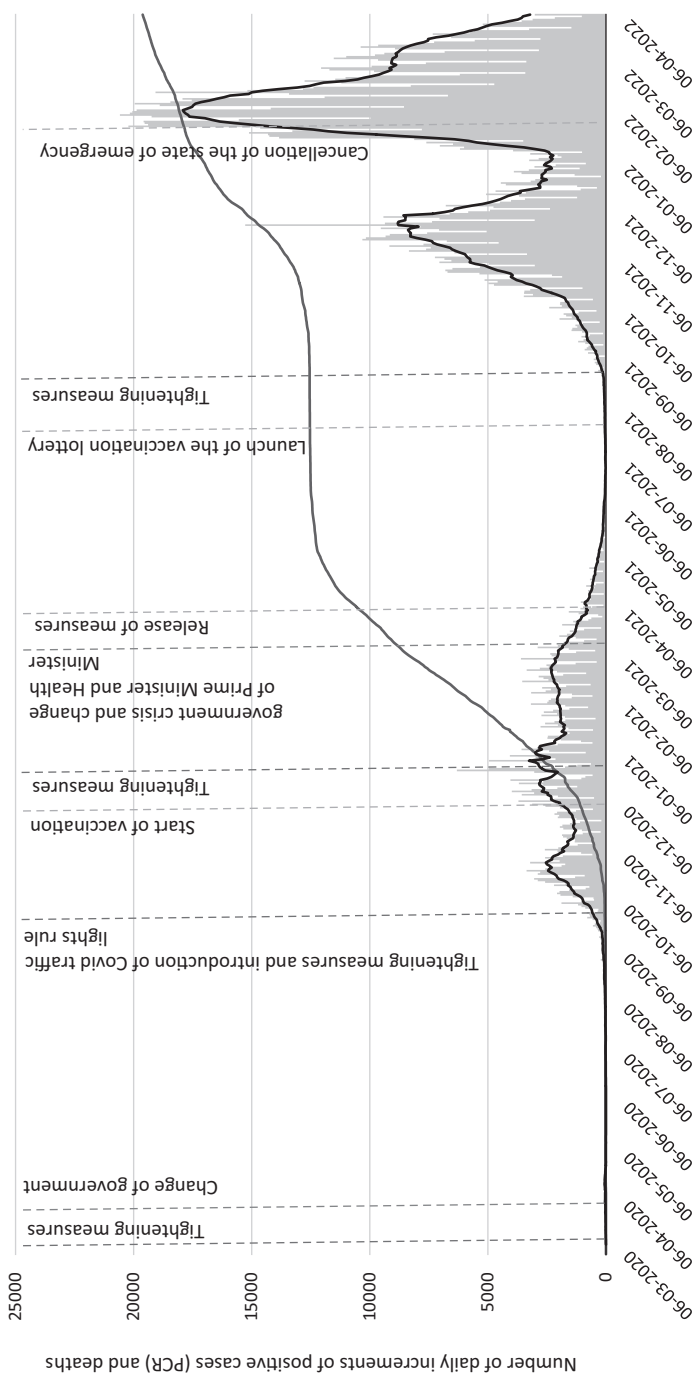
**Figure 2.5** Answer to question: “Is the opinion of politicians you like concerning vaccination important to you, or is their opinion unimportant to you?” July 2022

Source: Own elaboration based on Ako sa máte, Slovensko survey, 2022

some tiredness with the number of changing measures, long-term restrictions, but also due to the new characteristics of the virus. Despite the low vaccination coverage of the population, which is below 60%, with large regional differences, but lower occupancy rates in hospital beds, the government decided on February 23, 2022, to end the state of emergency. Subsequently, after the Easter holidays on April 21, 2022, the government canceled the compulsory wearing of masks and respirators, except in hospitals and social service facilities.

In Figure 2.6 we present the number of cases (gray color in graph), seven-day moving average (black line), and deaths (red line) with the main events of the crisis such as changes of government, Prime Ministers, and Ministers of Health.

After the first waves of the pandemic, the most prominent leaders, former Prime Minister Igor Matovič, Health Minister Marek Krajčí, and Chief Public Health Officer Ján Mikas, faced a wave of criticism from experts directed at the poor leadership and handling of the pandemic. This increasing criticism, together with poor results in vaccination and the pressure of a tired society facing almost daily press conferences from Prime Minister Igor Matovič who had taken



**Figure 2.6** Number of cases and deaths with main events

Source: Own elaboration based on korona.gov.sk data

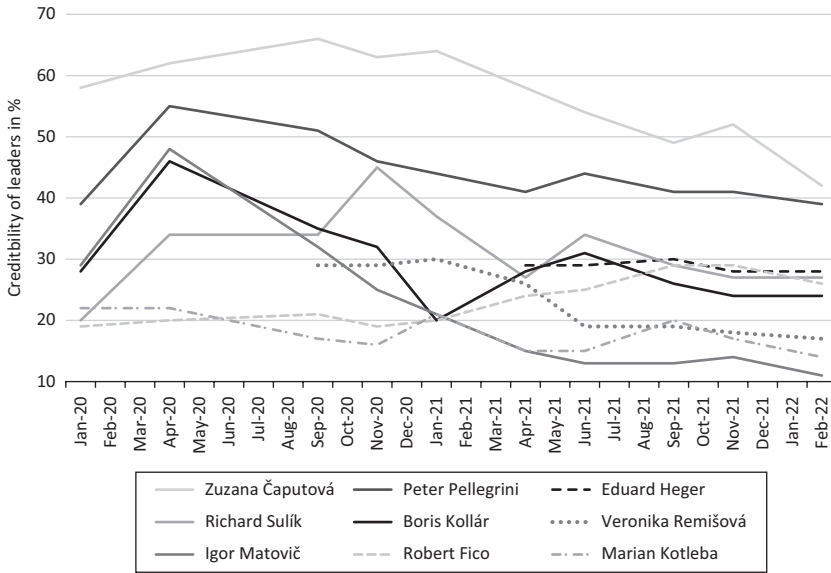
the leadership of the crisis into his hands, led to a coalition crisis and pressure for the replacement of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health. The main catalyst for the coalition crisis was the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines, which were not approved by the European Medicines Agency. The actual purchase of the Russian vaccines had been kept secret and the company and coalition partners only found out about this purchase from the Košice airport when the plane carrying these vaccines landed there. The way in which the unapproved vaccine was purchased and welcomed at the Košice airport, followed by a press conference without the presence of other coalition colleagues and diplomatic representatives, may show some signs of panic management. The result of the government crisis was the replacement of Prime Minister Igor Matovič by the Minister of Finance Eduard Heger; Igor Matovič took the post of Minister of Finance. Thus, there was a change in these two positions. At the same time, Minister of Health Marek Krajčí was removed and Vladimír Lengvarský, a military doctor who was in charge of the military hospital in Ružomberok, took his place as Minister of Health.

What is interesting is the actual evolution of the public's perception of leaders' credibility which has experienced several changes during the duration of the pandemic (Figure 2.7).

Leaders examined are:

- Zuzana Čaputová—the President of the Slovak Republic
- Richard Sulík—leader of the coalition party SaS and Minister of Economy
- Igor Matovič—leader of the coalition party OĽaNO and Prime Minister turned Minister of Finance
- Peter Pellegrini—leader of the opposition party HLAD-SD
- Boris Kollár—leader of the coalition party Sme Rodina and President of the Parliament
- Robert Fico—leader of the opposition party SMER-SD
- Eduard Heger—Minister of Finance turned Prime Minister
- Veronika Remišová—leader of the coalition party Za ľudí
- Marian Kotleba—leader of the opposition party ĽSNS





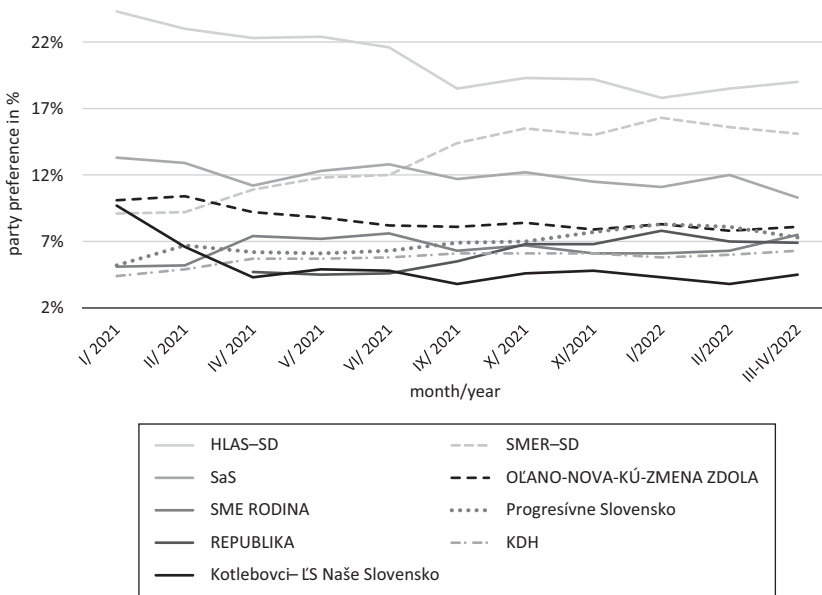
**Figure 2.7** Credibility of leaders in years 2020–2022

Source: Focus, 2022

From the survey on the credibility of leaders during the pandemic, we can conclude that the coalition leaders and the president faced a drop in their perceived credibility while, on the other hand, the opposition leaders' perceived credibility increased during the pandemic. Interestingly, the leaders of the opposition, especially Róbert Fico, Marian Kotleba, and, in some cases mainly at the beginning of the pandemic Peter Pellegrini, questioned the importance of vaccination, pointed to the side effects of vaccines, and doubted even the wearing of respirators. These opposition leaders, who throughout the pandemic have questioned the efficiency and safety of vaccines, the wearing of masks, and promoted the untested drug ivermectin as a drug that can help with Covid-19, despite the absence of medical recommendations or prior medical studies and testing, show signs of incompetent leadership and denying leadership.

On the contrary, since the beginning of the pandemic, the President of the Slovak Republic has encouraged society to vaccinate and has motivated the population to be patient and to respect the measures associated with limiting the spread of the pandemic.

## Slovakia: In the Shadow of Sputnik



**Figure 2.8** Party preferences in 2021–2022

Source: Focus, 2022

She has been steady in this approach throughout the pandemic. However, the most significant change is observed in the development of the credibility of Prime Minister turned Minister of Finance Igor Matovič, as his credibility has dropped by more than 30 percentage points.

The credibility of the leaders was also reflected in the preferences of the parties (Figure 2.8). Considering the credibility of the leaders described in Figure 2.7, we can say that since 2021, based on Focus polls, the more popular parties with growing support were those opposition parties (HLAS-SD, SMER-SD, Republika, and Kotlebovci—LSNS) that were often characterized by not supporting vaccination and organizing anti-government protests against compulsory vaccination or against dividing people into two groups—the vaccinated and the unvaccinated.

## Conclusion

In Slovakia, the pandemic is linked with elections, a change of government, and later the government crisis that occurred a year after

the elections, which led to the replacement of the Prime Minister and also of the Minister of Health. These circumstances were accompanied by the secret purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine and an initiative to increase people's motivation to vaccinate through a vaccination lottery, a middleman's bonus, and a vaccination bonus for the elderly. On the other hand, most of the opposition not only questioned all the government's actions, but also questioned the importance of vaccination itself. It can be assumed that the opposition's constant questioning of the efficiency and safety of vaccines or the rules put in place to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 infection have not helped the current government's position and credibility.

## Appendix 2.1 Overview of Selected Events

First case of coronavirus infection	March 3, 2020
Slovakia records first two deaths	March 6, 2020
Introduction of tightening measures	March 12, 2020
Airport closures and mandatory 14-day quarantine	March 13, 2020
Declaration of a state of emergency	March 15, 2020
Closure of retail shops	March 16, 2020
<b>Change of government</b>	<b>March 21, 2020</b>
Obligation to wear a mask	March 25, 2020
Restriction of free movement	April 8, 2020
End restriction of free movement	April 14, 2020
Phase 1 of the release of measures	April 22, 2020
Phases 2 and 3 of the release of measures	May 6, 2020
Phase 4 of the release of measures	May 20, 2020
Launch e-Quarantine for Android/iOS	May 23/29, 2020
Phase 5 of the release of measures	June 3, 2020
Cancellation of compulsory state quarantine	June 10, 2020
Introduction of the new pandemic plan	August 11, 2020
Introduction of Covid traffic light rule	August 26, 2020
New anti-pandemic measures	September 1, 2020
Tightening of measures	September 18, 2020
Declaration of a state of emergency	October 1, 2020
Tightening of measures	October 15, 2020

Curfew	October 24, 2020
Whole population testing	October 31, 2020
Curfew	December 19, 2020
Start of vaccination	December 27, 2020
Lockdown	January 1, 2021
Releasing measures according to the Covid traffic lights according to regional situation	Spring 2021
<b>Change of Prime Minister and Minister of Health</b>	<b>April 1, 2021</b>
Launch of the vaccination lottery	August 15, 2021
End of the vaccination lottery	October 30, 2021
Tightening of measures according to the Covid traffic light according to regional situation	Autumn 2021
Cancellation of the state of emergency	February 23, 2022
Cancellation of the obligation to wear respirators	April 21, 2022

## Chapter 3

### POLAND: A TWO FRONT BATTLE

IZABELLA ŁĘCKA, WERONIKA MICHALSKA,  
AND TOMASZ OCHINOWSKI

*Leadership means understanding the fundamentals of crisis management. A leader needs to have the ability to rally his or her team, project calm and empathy, take decisive action and, overall, communicate effectively.*

—Covid-19 RESOURCE HUB| *Financier  
Worldwide*

#### Introduction

The magnitude and extent of the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have mobilized numerous expert circles from different countries to prepare societies to respond rationally to similar situations in the future. Review studies of projects and recommendations published in the world showed the three most important areas that, in the opinion of their authors, should be developed first: leadership and actions of governments (44% of indications in published materials), the health system (37%), and financing (20%).<sup>1</sup>

In Poland, these issues were emphasized by the National Institute of Public Health in a publication summarizing the first two years of the pandemic across the world.<sup>2</sup> It was pointed out that the relationship between society, the economy, and health, especially in the context of prioritization procedures, must take place not only with the general participation and support of the political authorities,

1 Shao R. CINDI workshop, “Opportunities for the Evidence-Based Public Health in the Aftermath of the Pandemic” 8 September 2021 quoted in Włodarczyk and Juszczuk, “Public Health 3.0.”

2 Włodarczyk and Juszczuk, “Public Health 3.0.”

but also with the creative participation of experts enjoying guaranteed independence.

There is no single definition of leadership in science. Some researchers, like those in political science, treat leadership as power, emphasizing that it is a form of influencing others. And so, most researchers seem to agree that the social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic certainly include phenomena and processes concerning the sphere of power and politics (understood both as a “power game” and the process of formulating and implementing public policies).<sup>3</sup> Other researchers, however, like management specialists, assume that leadership, unlike power, requires a correspondence of goals between superiors and subordinates and does not focus on gaining obedience. It is the ability to influence the group in pursuit of specific goals. There are also researchers who, apart from the issue of power, point out that leadership can exist in two shades: positive and negative.<sup>4</sup> And further in the text we will follow such manifestations of leadership. Assuming that the Covid pandemic, surprising everyone, affected all aspects of human life, so something had to go well in mastering it (most people in Poland and in the world are still alive and have holiday plans) and something must have gone wrong, since the wave of various kinds of criticism continues. At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that a thorough analysis of the actions taken will be possible only after a long time, because their effects are not only unpredictable, but often when they occur, they seem to be unrelated to the decisions that would trigger them.<sup>5</sup>

As a member of the European Union, Poland follows the values of this organization, and the Council of Europe has an unequivocal opinion that responsible leadership is essential for the functioning of the governments of democratic countries. These governments should develop qualities such as adaptability and innovation.<sup>6</sup> In the course of the pandemic, the community could expect their lead-

3 “Pandemia-Covid-19-jako-wyzwanie-dla-nauki-o-stosunkach-miedzynarodowych.”

4 Laberschek, “Przywództwo w organizacjach kultury: autokraci, demokraci, demurgowie i kapłani.”

5 Jervis, *System Effects*, 79.

6 Council of Europe, “Report on Democratic Governance and Covid-19.”

ers to demonstrate an effective strategy and fight the threat, and to provide good practices. Public trust in the leaders of institutions such as parliaments, presidents, courts, political parties, and police forces is crucial in implementing these good practices. Political trust can be defined as the “belief that the political system or some part of it will produce preferred outcomes even if left untended.”<sup>7</sup>

In a study presented in *The Economist* magazine, it was shown from the example of past epidemics of the last 60 years (without analysis of Covid-19) that democracies contain epidemics most effectively. It is helpful that people believe politicians and are more responsive to lockdown measures. In authoritarian systems, when they cannot be sure that they know the real pandemic situation as these governments tend to manipulate data, they tend to bypass the restrictions introduced.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the countries of the European Union, it is worth noting the need for action, but also trust, at various institutional levels. As Marcinkowski observes,

The response to the public health crisis is complicated by the fact that it takes place on many levels at the same time. At the level of the state or regions, apart from functional logic, we also have the logic of power. At the European level, we have more of an appeal to functional logic with attempts to manage (but not govern) the crisis. The European Commission, despite even declared intentions in this area, did not take power over the crisis, but limited itself to coordinating the actions of EU countries and institutions, issuing recommendations or proposals. Decisions concerning internal restrictions (e.g. concerning the economy or civil rights) as well as external restrictions (e.g. temporary closure of state borders, quarantine for those entering, etc.) were in the hands of the Member States.<sup>9</sup>

7 Shi, “Cultural Values,” 401, quoted in Pastarmadzhieva and Angelova “Wpływ pandemii Covid-19 na zaufanie do Unii Europejskiej.”

8 *The Economist*, “Democracies Contain Epidemics Most Effectively.”

9 Marcinkowski, “Polityka antykrzysowa Unii Europejskiej w obliczu pandemii SARS CoV-2 w obszarze zdrowia publicznego w 2020 roku. W poszukiwaniu rozwiązań funkcjonalnych,” 191.

At the level of the European Union, the relationship between the adopted health policies of the various Member States has unfortunately become conflict-related, especially in the first phase of the epidemic. On the other hand, efforts were made to converge on the levels of cooperation in the field of health policy, such as scientific activities, non-pharmaceutical measures, medical equipment and personnel, vaccines, and information activities.

In the case of the former Eastern Bloc, the ineffective fight against Covid-19 was feared due to long-term internal problems of countries (including the Visegrad Group), such as underfunding of the health service, or one of the lowest rates of employed medical personnel in Europe in relation to needs.<sup>10</sup> However, as the situation evolved, it was noticed that an increasing number of factors should be taken into account when deciding how to respond to pandemic threats. Although it is impossible to directly compare economic, emotional, and health losses, taking into account ethical values or measures, apart from standard variables relating to health, economy, and social consequences, may give credibility to the decisions made by leaders and express themselves in the dimension of social trust in them. The implementation of the above postulate seemed possible when experts competent in their disciplines would provide information needed in decisions, and politicians would choose the optimal balance point between the size of benefits and losses.<sup>11</sup> In different countries, this optimal point was determined elsewhere, so the balance of benefits and losses is different. What was common to all turned out to be multidimensional losses resulting from Covid restrictions, especially financial losses that caused protests in many countries, including Poland. Controversial were restrictions limiting the activity and thus increasing the isolation of people, without any sentiment for respecting civil rights.<sup>12</sup>

Everyone around the world seemed to be expecting the Covid-19 vaccine as a miracle. And it happened in the late spring of 2021. Information on the benefits of vaccines has been published on

10 Santana 2017a, 2017b.

11 UN Shared Responsibility 2020.

12 EUAFR 2020.



the World Health Organization's (WHO) website.<sup>13</sup> It was indicated there that the most important positive effect is the protection of vaccinated persons from becoming ill or from a severe and life-threatening course of infection. A list was provided of commercially available vaccines that were found to be effective and safe: AstraZeneca/Oxford, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer/BioNTech, Sinopharm, Sinovac. However, it was stipulated that, regardless of the general approval of the WHO, the condition for using individual vaccines in different countries is their official registration by authorized bodies. And then something unexpected happened; some people, breaking ethical rules, tried to be the first to get vaccinated, but as it soon turned out it was not necessary, because with time it became clear in many European countries (including Poland) that there are more vaccines than people willing to take them. Authorities in many countries have considered the possibility of introducing incentives to encourage people to use vaccinations, considering various options (from a million-dollar lottery to free fast-food vouchers).

## Sources of Data and Background

With the spread of the epidemic of a new disease and the increase in the number of cases, it became necessary to create databases on the course of the epidemic both at the national and international level. Initially, information from hospitals or sanitary and epidemiological stations was collected by journalists and published immediately in online editions of newspapers and magazines. There were also individual enthusiasts who, researching Internet sources, also analyzed and summarized data, publishing their results on Internet forums and setting up blogs under the title of Covid-19. Sometimes these amateur sites became, for a time, the only substantial sources of information. And so in Poland, the private website Visualizations of Covid-19 contains visualizations made in Tableau Public based on data from Michał Rogalski and the Ministry of Health. The data source for Europe is Our World in Data and the source for

13 WHO Covid-19 Advice 2021.

vaccination data is the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Among this noble set of data suppliers is the very interesting Michał Rogalski, a Polish high school student and enthusiast, who was one of the first to start collecting and disseminating epidemic data, later cited by numerous scientific bodies, with the Polish Academy of Sciences at the forefront.<sup>14</sup> Student Rogalski tweeted “My actions are of a civic nature, as a form of opposition to the current information chaos.”<sup>15</sup>

It must be admitted after Duszyński et al. that public opinion has never been so “close” to the process of scientific research with all its twists and turns, breakthroughs, and successes.<sup>16</sup> Which, as it turned out later, was not for the benefit of generating respect for scientists’ knowledge. According to the public opinion, the experts were too often wrong and unsure of the results to be trusted. Hence the low social trust in expert knowledge, but not only in it, because the pandemic confirms the long-recognized low level of public-trust capital in Poland. According to international research by the YouGov group, Poland ranks lowest among the twenty-six countries surveyed when it comes to public trust in the media, governments, and among healthcare professionals and even friends and family.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the fact that global databases must draw data from Polish statistical institutions, and from medical institutions and surveys undertaken on an ongoing basis, in the following months of the pandemic American studies were willingly used, such as the Covid-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, or Harvard Medical School, Coronavirus Resource Center.

Of course, over time, large international institutions also offered data (including interactive models and simulations) at the highest level, which was eagerly received, including the United Nations, World Health Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, NATO, European Committee of the

14 Duszyński et al., *Understanding Covid 19*, 55.

15 <https://twitter.com/micalrg>

16 Duszyński et al., *Understanding Covid 19*.

17 Duszyński et al., *Understanding Covid 19*, 41.

Regions, EUROCITIES, as well as complementary national organizations, such as the Association of Polish Cities. Very usefully, the Our World in Data profile affiliated with the University of Oxford shares visualizations, data, and articles in open access under the most open sharing policy— the Creative Commons BY license.

In its subservient role to member countries, the WHO has taken the initiative to create the WHO Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN), which aimed to ensure that all interested parties have access to up-to-date, accurate, and easily understandable information and recommendations from trusted sources on public health events and epidemics.

### ***European Union***

Membership in the European Union places Poland in the organizational zone of this institution, and institutionally, the European Commission plays a key role in the EU health system, and within it the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety and his subordinate Directorate-General. There is also an early warning system for cross-border threats to health, in which the Health Security Committee has a coordinating role. The European Commission is supported by the European Medicines Agency and the ECDC. The above two latter organizations play a leading role in initiating the exchange of experience between experts from European Union countries. Scientific activity has a leading role in the moment of health crisis, because most decisions taken in the field of health policy have their sources in the opinions of experts and the exchange of experience within this group.

In March 2020, the European Commission established an advisory panel on Covid-19, an expert scientific panel on the pandemic. Initially, it was composed of seven experts in the field of epidemiology and virology, and later the composition was expanded. Members are appointed independently and act in the public interest of the Union. The panel deals in particular with advising on formulating adequate response measures and diagnosing gaps or inconsistencies in actions to contain the spread of the coronavirus, clinical management and treatment issues, as well as better coordination of crisis

management at the EU level. The work of the panel is supported by the Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Platform involving scientific experts from Member States. The European Commission has also launched special online platforms for collecting and sharing data useful in research on coronavirus, such as the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic or Covid-19 Data Portal.<sup>18</sup> Over time, the European Covid-19 Forecast Hub prepared short-term forecasts of Covid-19 cases and deaths across Europe, created by a multitude of infectious disease modeling teams, coordinated by the ECDC, which also regularly published simulations from the Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling (ICM) at the University of Warsaw in Poland.

Meanwhile, Worldometers reports and visualizes changes in statistical data in real time.<sup>19</sup>

## ***Poland***

The organization most predisposed to providing reliable data on the health sphere in Poland is the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), which also provides data to the eECDC.

However, on the basis of data from the NIPH (in Polish PZH), other centers as well as private individuals are working on the development of this data, visualization, and even simulation of the development of the pandemic situation and forecasts. It seems that over time, this activity has become a showcase of many expert centers and those people who aspire to this group.

According to the information provided in May 2020 by the communication office of the Ministry of Health, the minister's advisory group includes researchers representing six research centers in Poland:

1. National Institute of Public Health–National Institute of Hygiene: dr hab. Magdalena Rosińska and dr. Daniel Rabczenko;

18 Marcinkowski, "Polityka antykryzysowa Unii Europejskiej w obliczu pandemii SARS CoV-2 w obszarze zdrowia publicznego w 2020 roku. W poszukiwaniu rozwiązań funkcjonalnych."

19 Worldometers.info, "Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic."

2. Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics and Mechanics, University of Warsaw: prof. Anna Gambin, dr hab. Ewa Szczurek, dr hab. Błażej Miasojedow, dr Krzysztof Gogolewski;
3. Wrocław University of Technology, Faculty of Electronics, MOCOS Group (MOdelling COronavirus Spread): dr hab. Tyll Kruger, dr Marek Bawiec, Marcin Bodych, dr Agata Migalska, Tomasz Ożański;
4. Epidemiological Model Team of the Interdisciplinary Modeling Center of the University of Warsaw: dr inż. Franciszek Rakowski, Karol Niedzielewski, dr Łukasz Górski, dr Jakub Zieliński, dr Jędrzej Nowosielski, dr Magdalena Gruziel-Słomka, Marcin Semeniuk;
5. Catholic University of Lublin, Epidemiological Model Team: dr Rafał Bartczuk
6. Epidemiological Model Team of the University of Białystok: dr Jan Kisielewski.

At the University of Warsaw, the aforementioned Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling is constantly working on new ICM Epidemiological Models and Interactive Maps. It performs a role similar to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington. But while the American institute emphasizes that it works as an independent center, ICM advertises its research on Covid-19 as affiliated also with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland. The person who combines these perspectives is the center's manager, Dr. Eng. Franciszek Rakowski (Digital Transformation in the National Reconstruction Plan), who after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, responding to the need for a moment, left Samsung Electronics and returned to ICM UW (as he mentions in his CV), where he took over the leadership of the team preparing epidemic forecasts and developing methodologies started a decade earlier.

The “Covid-19 Pandemic in Poland. Psychological Perspective” is a collection of twenty-four reports from expert research, also initiated at the University of Warsaw.<sup>20</sup> They contain information

<sup>20</sup> Available at: [www.covid.psych.uw.edu.pl](http://www.covid.psych.uw.edu.pl)

about the goals and methodology of research, the most important conclusions, as well as comments and recommendations of experts. They were prepared by scientists from various fields of psychology including clinical psychology of the adult, clinical psychology of the child and family, health, developmental, educational psychology, neuropsychology, social and personality psychology, and economic psychology. Representatives of twenty-seven units joined the work: scientific centers, foundations, and companies, not only from Poland, but also from the United States, Italy, and Great Britain. The research included, for example, the social consequences of believing in conspiracy theories, the willingness to get vaccinated, who adheres to the restrictions, what people aged 60+ think about the pandemic, how young children and teenagers perceive it, how healthcare workers and teachers function during the pandemic, as well as illusions that help survive the pandemic. Researchers from the University of Warsaw also studied the quality of life and social functioning in conditions of changing the way of communication and daily rhythms. They wanted to understand the determinants of the socio-political attitudes, consumer attitudes, and economic behavior of Poles during the epidemic. They conducted research on the topic of changes in the styles of leaders in organizations during the pandemic, and looked at the change in the conditions of international cooperation, and even dealt with “pandemic sex.” The report “Love in Times of Plague: Sexuality of Polish Women and Men during the Covid-19 Pandemic” (Miłość w czasach zarazy, 2022) was published on February 14, Valentine’s Day.

Numerous scientific projects are also carried out at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, including as part of the “Covid-19 Research” program<sup>21</sup>: “Health Policies in the Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic: From Cooperation to International Competition”; “The Development of Economy 4.0 as an Instrument for Mitigating the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic with a Particular Focus on Changes in Employment Relations”; and “Media Coverage during the Covid-19 Pandemic as a Predictor of Disinformation and Social Fear.”

21 See <https://wnpid.amu.edu.pl/badania/badania-nad-covid-19>

The research carried out as part of the project Conspiracy Theories during a Pandemic, financed by the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, was aimed at checking to what extent the related conspiracy theories are common during the pandemic, how their intensity changed over time, and how much they were associated with negative behavior during the pandemic when the search for information was accompanied by a decrease in cognitive abilities caused by everyday exhaustion. Hence the popularity of conspiracy theories, even those largely irrational.<sup>22</sup>

Another very active institution in 2020–2022 (with the passage of time somewhat in opposition to the previously described support group for the Minister of Health) was the Polish Academy of Sciences, and especially very active from the beginning of the pandemic was the group Interdisciplinary Covid-19 Advisory Team at the President of Poland Academy of Sciences. “Chronicles of the Pandemic”<sup>23</sup> is a collection of reports from twenty-seven sites and a calendar prepared by that scientific body from July 2020. The chronicles substantively provided information on the course of the pandemic, commented on the dynamics of changes, and gave specific recommendations. Two large reports contained widely discussed key issues: after the first wave of the pandemic, “Understanding Covid-19” was issued,<sup>24</sup> and after almost two years “Public Health 3.0: Conclusions after the Covid-19 Pandemic, a Global Perspective.”<sup>25</sup>

The Polish Economic Institute conducted a lot of research on the labor market and the economic perspective. The Polish Institute of International Affairs presents the situation in Poland and in the world, and raises the issues of migration and Covid-19.

Many partners in the field of medicine and health care, together with medical universities and healthcare practitioners, run Covid-19 platforms aimed at the so-called ordinary recipient with explanations and advice on prevention and management after illness.

22 Głowczewski, Wójcik, Cichocka, *Spiski w czasie Pandemic – Preliminary Report on Longitudinal Survey*.

23 Academia, *Kroniki pandemii 2020, 2021, 2022*.

24 Duszyński et al., *Understanding Covid 19*.

25 Włodarczyk and Juszczyk, “Public Health 3.0.”

All Polish scientific journals have been recruiting texts on pandemic issues, sometimes forming a thematic coalition. Poles also published articles about pandemic problems in numerous foreign magazines, not necessarily profiled only on pandemic issues.<sup>26</sup>

### **Media**

The media play a special role in periods of social danger and unrest. They are not only a source of information about real and potential threats, but also shape ideas about risk and influence individual behavior and decisions.

One of the most important components of protecting the right to good information in the twenty-first century is the Internet. The Internet as a factor of civil society development should be considered a tool for political emancipation. These legitimate beliefs have been undermined by the great emphasis on the process of generating and disseminating information, including false information, during the pandemic. This flow of information was so large that it was given a specific name—infodemics, combining the syllable from the word “information” with the syllable from the word “epidemic.”<sup>27</sup> The WHO then dedicated a website to the disinformation pandemic. Infodemics involves filling the digital and physical environment with a lot of information, including false or misleading information. Over time, numerous Internet domains appeared, which included terms such as “coronavirus” or “Covid19” in their names.

The exploitation of the Covid-19 pandemic by cybercriminals has become the subject of a document prepared by Interpol.<sup>28</sup> Threats to relevant information during the pandemic have been reported in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia,

26 Łęcka et al. *Special Issue: Interdisciplinarity in Health and Health Care (Part II): Review, Management-Logistic-Risk and Prevention.*

27 “Managing the Covid-19 Info-demic.”

28 Interpol, “Covid 19 Cyberthreats.”



Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> The European Union has also suffered greatly during Covid-19. This also has an impact on national security issues, as evidenced by the intensified activity of China and Russia in the field of disinformation. The high impact of these countries and the level of threat from them is due to the fact that information activities are asymmetric. The European Union, based on civil values and freedoms, cannot resort to the same practices as authoritarian states.<sup>30</sup> However, it was pointed out that populist governments in the EU attempt to limit information or tend to transfer the problems of disinformation to the public sector. If, in a situation of risk, “official institutions are no longer able to provide sufficient protection against the challenges that await this society, and the power of persuasion of the center is weakening, then the field opens up for various conspiracy theories that use new information technologies to flood the world” (Walczak, 2022, 109–110).

In Poland, in response to the so-called fake news, a government online platform to fight false information was created, Service of the Republic of Poland, We fight false information (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, *Walczymy z fałszywymi informacjami*, 2020), as well as the website of the Ministry of National Defense—CyberDefence24.pl (Krótki przewodnik po fake newsach o koronawirusie, 2021).

Of course, all citizens who could benefit from English-language information had widespread access to global websites such as the World Health Organization’s Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) advice for the public: Myth busters.

One of the first outrageous false information claims in Poland concerned the possibility of contracting Covid-19 disease from pets and subjecting our pupils to euthanasia.<sup>31</sup> This information was handled by the National Medical and Veterinary Chamber.<sup>32</sup>

29 European Federation of Journalists, “Governments Must Ensure the Public’s Right to Know in the Covid-19 Pandemic.”

30 Orłowska, Pawłowska, and Rösler, “Europejska współpraca i rywalizacja w zakresie polityk zdrowotnych w dobie pandemii Covid-19.”

31 Krajowa Izba Lekarsko-Weterynaryjna, “Nie ma eutanazji na życzenie.”

32 Krajowa Izba Lekarsko-Weterynaryjna, “Nie ma eutanazji na życzenie.” There were other similar situations, for example, a message with information about the need to

Another type of information is recalled in the article of Jaśkowiec,<sup>33</sup> when on April 6, 2020, Polsat News reported the detection by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) of a bot farm disseminating false information about the situation in the country in connection with Covid-19 and encouraging the overthrow of the constitutional order. For this purpose, false personal data and accounts of over five thousand users in social media were used. According to Polsat, after the SBU announcement, hardware and special software for this task were acquired by Russian non-bank payment systems that are banned in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup>

### *Student*

In reporting, analyzing, and synthesizing information about matters related to the time of the pandemic, students and doctoral students of various universities and faculties have been widely involved. In Poland, it was probably the largest group numerically. Some published their studies as part of a compiled joint publication, others published individual articles, and the largest group wrote bachelor's and master's theses on topics specific to their discipline but related to the time of the pandemic. Geographers were the first to write about new cases, changes in the extent of the epidemic, and its intensity, and created maps.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, economists and future management specialists dealt with the economic situation in times of crisis and the condition of various industries. Young psychologists dealt with the mental health of society (especially employees); lawyers looked at the legal, constitutional side of the introduced regulations at the national level; and political scientists looked fur-

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purchase food products in advance, because the stores were to be closed as a result of the pandemic, and food products were to be in short supply. Here appeared the correction of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Development Jadwiga Emilewicz that Poland is one of the largest food producers in Europe, and the plants are able to produce and deliver the goods we need despite the pandemic threat.

33 Jaśkowiec, "Fake news w dobie pandemii Covid-19."

34 Polsat News, "Kierowana z Rosji farma botów szerząca fake newsy o Covid-19. Wykryły ją ukraińskie służby."

35 Geographia Polonica "Spatial Conditioning and Consequences of the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus Pandemic."

ther into the future, looking at the consequences of the pandemic in international relations. Not forgetting the large number of students of biological and medical faculties, participating in research on the new coronavirus, or working as volunteers at testing points, sample testing, and hospitals. The flow of information was tested by students of traditional and new media faculties. There is no place to quote them, but it is worth mentioning, for example, one large report (798 pages) “The State and Law in the Times of Covid-19”<sup>36</sup> published by the Think and Make publishing house. Issues on various scales and disciplines were raised there, such as:

1. Health protection: from the issue of determining the cause of death in the pandemic era (P. Duda) through the activities of the health care system in the face of a pandemic (Klich P.) to the World Health Organization as a supranational institution shaping the legal reality on the example of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Lewko M.);
2. Society and the State: From the Prime Minister’s Order issued in connection with counteracting Covid-19 (Aszkielowicz P.) to the strategic potential of the Polish state in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic (M. B. Woodpecker);
3. Legal: changes to the Code of Criminal Procedure introduced by a special act (T. Markiewicz) to administrative fines imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic and their relationship to criminal sanctions (N. Majewska);
4. Of course, about the media, e.g. fake news in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic (M. Jaśkowiec) or hate speech in times of a pandemic (M. Suska);
5. Economic: from the anti-crisis shield for the self-employed (D. Mikos); to
6. Improving the paralyzed world—changes in the functioning of capital companies in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic (A.M. Nowacka).

36 Stępnia, *Państwo i prawo w czasach Covid-19*.

Among the unpublished works, but available from the library of the University of Warsaw (as in other university libraries around the world), there are many pandemic topics. Among the economic sectors, there are, for example, those that consider the impact of a pandemic on specific industries, such as the impact of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the banking sector in Poland;<sup>37</sup> the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the development industry;<sup>38</sup> and organizational culture during the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic.<sup>39</sup> There are also numerous works relating to a broader context, such as “The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Society and Economy of the European Union.”<sup>40</sup>

The rest of this chapter will be broken down into two main sections. The first will present a broad analysis of the Polish government’s response to Covid-19 based upon the 5- point framework outlined in the introductory chapter:

1. Framing the problem: expressing a clear understanding of the adaptive and technical challenges involved.
2. Prompt decision making and coordination: evaluating alternatives, engaging debate, and involving people to take responsibility for the solution.
3. Transparency and communication: using and disseminating credible information, accepting feedback, and building a unifying identity.
4. Fostering collaboration across sectors: listening, giving the work back to the people with the problem, and aligning major responsibilities.
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future: capacity-building within the organization to learn from experiments, past mistakes, and best practices outside their own domain.

37 Parys, “Wpływ skutków pandemii Covid-19 na sektor bankowy w Polsce.”

38 Olak, “Wpływ pandemii Covid-19 na branżę deweloperską.”

39 Depko, “Kultura organizacyjna w czasie pandemii wirusa SARS-CoV-2. Analiza porównawcza pracowników centrali i oddziałów Banku Polska Kasa Opieki Spółka Akcyjna.”

40 Kincel, “Wpływ pandemii Covid-19 na społeczeństwo i gospodarkę Unii Europejskiej.”

The second section will present an interview analysis targeting small business owners and department heads from larger companies in Poland, examining their perceptions and experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be followed by a concluding discussion.

### **GENDER AND CRISIS**

The pandemic has had a noticeable impact on individuals based in part on gender. Various studies have shown that women were impacted economically, socially, and psychologically to degrees different from those experienced by men. Many of these effects persisted after lockdowns eased.

The pandemic, in many ways, highlighted and intensified existing differences within the home. As “traditional carers” in a time of extreme need, women saw more demand for that role. This extended to both direct care for the infected as well as more general care for those around them during this stressful time. What may have been an expectation to stay home with a child with a cold in the pre-pandemic times shifted into being the nurse, teacher, counselor, cleaner, cook, information source, and arbiter in an endless stream of days of crisis for an entire household. This role was, of course, on top of requirements for their employment, now also done from home.

Having had all of these roles before the pandemic was problem enough, but now there was no division of time and space and context. There was a demand to be all things at all times to everyone. This led to burnout of every kind, with little recourse available to help.

The effects have outlasted lockdowns. Jobs were lost or left, and demands in the home made finding new ones difficult. Some of the ill never fully recovered, and so the need of providing care continues. Energy and ability have been taxed. Relationships have been altered and even broken. This is all in addition to long-term medical effects of infection that seem to disproportionately affect women, and on which further studies are being made.

## The Polish Case

### *Framing the Problem*

In Poland, as in neighboring countries, the nature of the challenge concerned the balancing of activities: the protection of citizens' health and the protection of the economic foundations for existence and personal freedom.<sup>41</sup> During the first cases of the disease reaching Poland, the panic associated with the threat to health was so strong that economic matters took a back seat; even more so as there were cases of rapid deaths at the beginning of the pandemic. The immediately introduced quarantine for arrivals, a communication blockade, isolation regulations, and social and economic lockdowns proved to be really effective in stopping the spread of the virus. The mitigating measures seemed to be correlated with a smaller number of cases of the disease, compared to Western European countries, which led to assumptions about greater immunity among people from Central and Eastern Europe. Later global comparative studies, however, showed that wherever restrictions were introduced faster, the effect in stopping the massive increase in the number of cases was visibly better.

In Poland, restrictions began to be introduced on March 12, 2020. Soon entrepreneurs were calling for the lifting of restrictions on business, especially services, which were choked as a result of the lockdown. It was the beginning of a conflict between supporters of health protection and supporters of lifting restrictions on business operations (especially micro-businesses which account for 97% of employees in Poland). The relatively mild beginning of the epidemic in Poland, with cases and deaths among the lowest in the EU, allowed for an early gradual easing of restrictions in late spring, with an impressive rebound in economic activity in the summer. On May 18, economic activity was resumed, and, in a sense, personal freedom was restored.<sup>42</sup> However, in response to the second wave, the authorities gradually reintroduced limitations, introducing broad national restrictions in early November. The conflict of

41 Włodarczyk and Juszczak, "Public Health 3.0."

42 Statistics Related to Covid-19, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/covid/>

restrictive government policy versus entrepreneurs' appeals for economic freedom (as a result of various economic restrictions imposed and withdrawn over time) intensified in October and November 2020 and coincided with the second wave of illnesses. This wave was much larger and had more deaths, this time significantly exceeding the Covid statistics in Western Europe and Scandinavia. This trend lasted through subsequent waves of the pandemic until January 1, 2022, when the highest daily number of pandemic deaths was recorded.<sup>43</sup> The second wave of the epidemic saw endless waves of protests from corona sceptics and entrepreneurs, as well as mass protests of women due to the tightening of the anti-abortion law. The attitude of Poles toward the basic issues of anti-pandemic activities at that time is expressed in a study published on the Statista portal.<sup>44</sup> Poles suffered the most in financial terms, which had a significant impact on their mental health (in the end, a 30% increase in deaths from mental causes was observed compared to before the pandemic) according to research by the National Institute of Public Health.<sup>45</sup>

In response to economic problems, the government introduced an economic aid package generally called the Anti-Crisis Shield, a comprehensive package of government measures to counteract the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Among them are many solutions prepared by the Ministry of Finances for entrepreneurs, employees, and local governments.<sup>46</sup> The shield is based on five pillars: protecting jobs and safety of employees, financing entrepreneurs, health care, strengthening the financial system, and public investments. The government assumed the shield would stabilize the Polish economy, as well as give it an investment impulse.<sup>47</sup>

43 Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus#explore-the-global-situation>

44 Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1183411/poland-personal-experience-under-covid-19/>; Statista; <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1179001/poland-attitudes-towards-covid-19-pandemic/>

45 Wojtyniak, Stokwiszewski, Rabchenko, Madej, Juszczuk, *The Mortality Rate of the Population*.

46 [gov.pl/web/anti-crisis-shield](http://gov.pl/web/anti-crisis-shield)

47 Covid 19. Activities of the Ministry of Finance related to the pandemic in the field of taxes and customs.

Meanwhile, Polish entrepreneurs were not satisfied. The Polish Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP) loudly charged that the government did not just limit itself to banning the economic activity of entire sectors, but also introduced new burdens for entrepreneurs struggling with the effects of the crisis. Despite this, from January 1, 2021, the collection of retail tax was initiated, which was particularly burdensome for domestic enterprises.<sup>48</sup>

Another clash of values occurred due to the presidential elections between April 27 and May 22, 2020. The incumbent president associated with the ruling PiS party intended to run for re-election. The ruling party tried to prevent the postponement of the elections to a later date, fearing that it would be more difficult to win as the pandemic lasted. The media dubbed it “the envelope elections,” alluding to the need to conduct the elections by mail. The elections did not take place by the May deadline, but 70 million PLN was spent unproductively on ballot papers. On April 6, the Sejm received a deputies’ bill assuming that the elections would be held by mail. On May 5, the Senate (dominated by the opposition) adopted a resolution rejecting the law. A day later, the Sejm rejected the Senate’s resolution rejecting postal voting and referred the bill to the president, who signed it. Finally, the elections were held on June 28 and July 12, 2020, also with the possibility of voting by mail, but already on new ballots. The words expressed during the presidential campaign, also by the president and the Prime Minister, saying that the epidemic is in retreat, that people over 60 years of age are not in danger of visiting a polling station, and vaccinations are not necessary, cast a shadow on the communication between the rulers and the society. There was a caveat in the comments about the political instrumentalization of the pandemic<sup>49</sup>. Presumably, this is why the vaccination campaign that began a few months later failed.

### ***Prompt Decision Making and Coordination***

Both the government and expert groups remaining outside the government assessed that Poland was lucky at the beginning of

48 Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers. “Summary of Lockdown in Poland.”

49 Robert Schuman Foundation, *The Parliament in the Time of Coronavirus*.



the pandemic because of the semi-peripheral location of the country and its geographic and economic structure. Due to the semi-peripheral location, the first cases of Covid-19 appeared in Poland with a delay, which gave the government more time to prepare and implement a lockdown strategy. And the fact that approximately 40% of the population still lives in rural areas in Poland slowed down the transmission of infections. Non-governmental sources stressed that, contrary to the government's claims, they believe that the relatively lax approach to the economic blockade, low employment in services, well-developed small industry, and a bit of luck are the main reasons for the relatively good performance of the Polish economy at this time.<sup>50</sup>

Soon after the declaration of a pandemic by the WHO, Poland rapidly began to look for masks, respirators, and other material protection measures, partly buying them abroad, partly accepting donations from private companies or countries (Chinese tranche). There were fears of an ineffective fight against Covid-19 among the Eastern Bloc due to the long-term internal problems of the countries, such as the underfunding of health care or one of the lowest rates of medical personnel in Europe. In the first month, help was provided by international companies and individual entrepreneurs,<sup>51</sup> and even by ordinary citizens funding the so-called "suspended lunches and coffee" for medical staff working several hours a day in hospitals increasingly filled with patients.

The so-called "ventilator affair" (the purchase of 1,241 ventilators by the Ministry of Health in April 2020) reverberated widely. They were to be delivered by E&K, a company supposedly belonging to an arms dealer. The company fulfilled the contract, delivering only two hundred ventilators to Poland.

In conclusion, the reactions of the country's authorities were quick and effective. However, this effectiveness was partly related to other factors unrelated to the decisions of the ruling team, and partly (perhaps because of the haste) less than entirely legal.

50 Bukowski, Paczos, "Poland Has Managed to Avoid the Same Level of Economic Damage Experienced in Other European Countries During the Pandemic."

51 Łęcka, Kamran, "Corporate Social Responsibility."

### *Transparency and Communication*

Already at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a lack of consistency in regard to mask-wearing; the prohibition of access to parks, forests, and beaches; and even preventing minors from leaving home without supervision. Closed nurseries and kindergartens prevented families, especially women, from working. Those who could switch to remote work were in a better situation, but even they soon began to report the overload associated with combining the roles of parent and employee at the same time.<sup>52</sup>

There are numerous advisory teams (Government Crisis Management Team, Minister of Health's Monitoring and Forecasting Team, Advisory Teams in Ministries) and the most important Covid-19 Council consulting with experts from all over Poland. The Covid-19 Council is an auxiliary body of the Prime Minister. It consists of specialists from various fields of medicine and socio-economic sciences, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Health and other institutions. The main task of the Covid-19 Council is to analyze the current health status, but it also analyzes the economic and social situation in the country. The Council also presents proposals for action to combat the pandemic.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that the information on the Council's website does not have any date, so it is not clear what time it refers to, but it is not very up to date.<sup>54</sup> A lot of advisory bodies were formed, but these bodies often fell into conflicting views.

On December 15, 2020, the government adopted the National Immunization Program (NPS). Vaccination against Covid-19 is one of the biggest planning, organizational, and logistical challenges in the field of health faced by Poles<sup>55</sup> for several decades. Many actors are involved in the vaccination program. The unquestionable effectiveness of vaccines confirmed practically and in scientific circles, as well as the awareness of population immunity, prompted the Polish

52 Sevastianovich, "A Minor Will Not Leave the House without Adult Supervision."

53 <https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/rada-ds-covid-19>

54 <https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/szpital-e-tymczasowe-w-calym-kraju>

55 <https://www.gov.pl/web/szczepimysie/narodowy-program-szczepien-przeciw-covid>

authorities to consider sometimes improbable incentives. In addition to such considerations, among the politicians in the government, there was also an opposing trend (such a statement was made by the President of the Republic of Poland, from which position he quickly withdrew) denying the need to get vaccinated, which did not help in achieving high vaccination rates and getting closer to population immunity.<sup>56</sup>

As discussed in the above section on sources of data and background, much of the information circulated at the beginning of the pandemic was the result of the efforts of journalists or private individuals interested in gathering and sharing information. The government was not leading in this regard. During the pandemic, the pursuit of information was accompanied by a decline in cognitive abilities caused by daily exhaustion, leading to the great popularity of conspiracy theories. In Poland, in response to the “fake news,” a government online platform was created to fight false information on the website of the Ministry of National Defense—CyberDefence24.pl.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Fostering Collaboration across Sectors***

Numerous bodies have referred to the need for cross-sectoral cooperation in many aspects marked by the occurrence of the pandemic. The Interdisciplinary Covid-19 Advisory Team to the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences issued Stand No. 5 on November 3, 2020: “The epidemic is a social problem that can only be solved by the cooperation of the government, experts from many fields of science and the media.”

Summing up the first months’ experiences of the pandemic, Andrzej Rychard, sociologist and professor of the Polish Academy of Sciences, expressed this thought: “These institutions of the ‘highest order’, i.e. the institutions of liberal democracy, were weakened most simply, the ‘middle’ works relatively better, and society,

56 Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1238796/poland-reasons-against-vaccination-for-covid-19/>

57 Głowczewski, Wójcik, Cichocka, *Spiski w czasie Pandemic - Preliminary Report on Longitudinal Survey*.

including civil society, is perhaps not in such a terrible state.”<sup>58</sup> In some contrast, there is a history of sustained strikes and protests in the autumn of 2020 and an ineffective campaign to encourage vaccination on Covid-19.

### *Learning from Past Decisions and Preparing for the Future*

The magnitude and extent of the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic has mobilized numerous expert circles from different countries to prepare societies to respond rationally to the future in similar situations. Review studies of projects and recommendations published in the world showed three most important areas that, in the opinion of their authors, should be developed first: leadership and actions of governments (44% of indications in published materials), health system (37%) and financing (20%).<sup>59</sup> In Poland, these issues were emphasized by two large reports that included extensively discussed key issues: after the first wave of the pandemic, “Understanding Covid-19” was released; and after almost two years, “Public Health 3.0: Conclusions after the Covid-19 Pandemic, a Global Perspective.”

It was pointed out that the relationship between society, the economy, and health, especially in the context of prioritization procedures, must take place not only with the general participation and support of the political authorities, but also with the creative participation of experts enjoying guaranteed independence. However, the assessment of this cooperation was largely negative, which was also reflected in other publications of both Teams involved in the work.

Poland, as a member of the European Union, will follow the values of this organization, and the Council of Europe has a clear opinion that responsible leadership is necessary in the functioning of the governments of democratic countries. These governments should develop qualities such as adaptability and innovation<sup>60</sup>. In

AU: again, repeated almost word for word from earlier section

AU: as above

58 Magazyn Teraz Polska, “Leadership in Times of Plague: The Epidemic Exposes the Weaknesses of Institutions, but Also Gives a Chance for Change.”

59 Shao, “Opportunities for the Evidence-Based Public Health” quoted in Włodarczyk and Juszczyk, “Public Health 3.0.”

60 Council of Europe “Report on Democratic Governance and Covid-19.”

the course of the pandemic, Poles could expect their leaders to demonstrate an effective strategy to combat the threat and to be a source of good practices. Public trust in the leaders of institutions such as parliaments, presidents, courts, political parties, and police forces is crucial in implementing these good practices. Meanwhile, the Interdisciplinary Advisory Team on Covid-19 to the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences issued thirty-one positions during its tenure.<sup>61</sup> Although this body was supposed to advise the government, along with the development of the epidemic situation, a discrepancy between experts (scientists) and politicians was noticeable. This phenomenon is best observed by analyzing the main theses of the Team's positions, starting from the last one, published with the announcement of the end of the pandemic in Poland: "Is it significant that the end of the pandemic in Poland was announced on April Fool's Day?" (Stand No. 31 of April 8, 2022).

AU: as above

The sphere of good practices during the Covid-19 epidemic in Poland remained in the hands of entrepreneurs and experts, most often affiliated with non-governmental organizations, training and consulting companies, ordinary people, and bloggers. Few such suggestions were contained in government documents. One such continuous initiative was the ongoing economic analysis related to the presentation of suggested good practices in responsible leadership at both the state level and that of company leaders, presented in a series of Business Alerts. Business Alert is an initiative of the Open Eyes Economy think tank and the College of Economy and Public Administration of the Cracow University of Economics.<sup>62</sup>

The authors of the Business Alerts point out that:

[T]he government's unexpected withdrawal from previous regulations and commitments destroys the market and trust in the authorities, and without it no decision to invest is made. That is why it is so important that the government's intervention and protection activities disturb the market mechanism as little as possible. They must not lead

61 Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej, Polska Akademia Nauk, <https://bip.pan.pl/artykuly/209/2/25/stanowiska-zespołu-doradczego-ds-covid-19>.

62 All expert alerts are available at: <https://oees.pl/alerty-ekspertkie/>.

to unfair competition. Unfortunately, in this case too, it was done differently. Business people—entrepreneurs and managers—were and still are concerned about the statements of politicians who argue that the crisis shows that what is state is better than private, and Polish is always better than EU or foreign. However, the situation of state health care, state-owned banks, state-owned listed companies, and the increasingly transparent management of state assets (treated as prey for purely political purposes) show the opposite.<sup>63</sup>

*(Business Alert: Unfreezing the economy seriously)*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

We can assess trust on two levels: interpersonal (among individuals) and social (or institutional) trust. Interpersonal trust is how we commonly think of trusting someone. Social trust is the ability for a person to expect that they can rely upon other lesser-known individuals and groups. Trust is, in short, the latticework that holds up and makes a society what it is.

There are tangible material benefits to the existence of social trust, as well as tangible material costs to its absence. Studies have shown that social trust affects GDP and inflation rates, as well as legal compliance, material innovation, social tolerance, and overall democratic health.\* Greater social trust is a boon, while its absence is a cancer eating away at society.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we saw grave consequences connected to a lack of both interpersonal and social trust. A research study analyzed infection and fatality rates relative to population and other characteristics, and found that interpersonal and social distrust were major contributing factors. The research team found that

Measures of trust in the government [i.e. social trust] and interpersonal trust, as well as less government corruption, had

63 Bettman, Blikle, Bochniarz, Brzostowski, Budziak, Eichelberger, Erdman, Grzesiak, Hausner, Łabno-Fałęcka, Oblój, Powalacz, Voelkel, Zmysłony, “RAPORT BIZNES: Co dalej w biznesie? Jak pandemia zmieniła zarządzanie firmami i ludźmi.”

larger, statistically significant associations with lower standardized infection rates. High levels of government [i.e. social trust] and interpersonal trust, as well as less government corruption, were also associated with higher Covid-19 vaccine coverage among middle-income and high-income countries where vaccine availability was more widespread, and lower corruption was associated with greater reductions in mobility.†

As a general component of society, social trust is exceedingly important. As a tool to successfully navigate and overcome a crisis, even one on the scale of a global pandemic, social trust is vital. With so much attention paid to material and supply networks, essential as they indeed are, we should pay equal attention to the social networks that just as clearly and directly the outcome of a crisis response.

\* Brandt, M. J., Wetherell, G., & Henry, P. J. "Changes in Income Predict Change in Social Trust: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Political Psychology*, 36 (6) 2015; Knack & Keefer, "Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1997; Khanna, T. *Trust: Creating the Foundation for Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018.

† Dieleman, J. & COVID-19 National Preparedness Collaborators. "Pandemic Preparedness and COVID-19: An Exploratory Analysis of Infection and Fatality Rates, and Contextual Factors Associated With Preparedness in 177 Countries." *Lancet* 399 (10334) 2022.

## **Interview: The Attitude of Entrepreneurs in Poland during the First Wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic and after the Adoption of the Vaccine**

### **Concepts**

In the work that follows, several terms are used that, for better understanding, require unambiguous definition.

### **Standardized Interview**

This is the most common form of marketing research. It involves the use of a questionnaire containing scaled responses. It resembles

a standard survey, and the leader limits his activities to asking questions and taking notes. It does not require a specialist to conduct such interviews.<sup>64</sup>

### *Structured Interview*

This should be conducted on the basis of a structured questionnaire, which is built in such a way that the number, sequence, and form of the questions asked are predetermined and unchanged (standardized). An example is an interview questionnaire and a survey. The structured questionnaire, apart from questions, also includes multiple choice questions.<sup>65</sup> The purpose of the standardized and structured interview (questionnaire) is to conduct quantitative research to confirm the hypothesis. The purpose of the unstructured standardized interview is to collect executive definitions.

### *Taking Executive Definitions*

During a standardized and unstructured interview, this consists of preparing a list of questions for all respondents in order to orientate themselves in the meanings in the field (there can be only one question), for example, asking about the meaning of a concept or asking for the characteristics of one's own job position.<sup>66</sup>

### *Micro Entrepreneur*

Average annual employment is less than 10 employees; small entrepreneur—average annual employment is less than 50 employees; medium-sized entrepreneur—average annual employment is less than 250 employees; large entrepreneur—employs an average of 250 or more employees per year.<sup>67</sup>

64 Based on: <https://poradnikprzedsiębiorcy.pl>

65 Based on: <https://dobrebadiania.pl>

66 See <http://www.kostera.pl/>

67 See <https://6krokow.pl/>



### ***Sequence of Research Procedures and Methods***

The study was conducted in two stages at the turn of 2020 and 2021. A total of 203 respondents took part in it. They were owners of small businesses or heads of departments of large companies.

Initially, a questionnaire was created containing sixteen questions, both open and closed, with a ratio of 8 to 8 and a record. The study took the form of standardized structured interviews, with elements of unstructured interview in order to collect executive definitions. Interviews with entrepreneurs were conducted by a group of students of the University of Warsaw, who attended classes for one semester entitled “Organizational Culture and Intercultural Organization” in 2020–2021.

During the first stage of the research and the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland in spring 2020, eighty-two respondents were interviewed (N = 82). They were mainly foreign entrepreneurs from Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Turkey, who conducted business activities in Poland.

In the second stage of the research, in the spring of 2021, after the Covid-19 vaccine was introduced and disseminated, interviews were conducted among 121 respondents (N = 121), including Polish entrepreneurs.

Both during the first and second stage of the research, completed questionnaires from the interviews were posted on the Padlet Internet platform.<sup>68</sup> Then the obtained data was transferred to Excel spreadsheets and processed in tabular form.

The questionnaire for the interview consists of a record, which is designed to help in the classification of respondents' responses within the first and second stage of the study, according to gender, age of respondents, country of origin, and company size.

The next questions relate to personal feelings of respondents on the issue of coronavirus threats (How do you rate the risk of coronavirus for your industry/company?) and needs adaptation to working conditions during the pandemic (Has the coronavirus pandemic changed your company's organizational culture? During

68 Prepared questionnaire - see Appendix 1.

the pandemic, did you have to reduce employment in the company?). Respondents were also asked to indicate forms of assistance for their companies during the pandemic period, if they used any of them (During the pandemic, did you benefit from business support? as government help, business consulting, help from friends?).

The first question (How worried are you about the impact of the coronavirus on you personally?) and the second question in an interview (How concerned are you with the impact of the coronavirus on your company?) related to entrepreneurs' perceptions of the impact of a pandemic on themselves and their businesses. The third question (How easy or difficult is it for you to work effectively in the current epidemic conditions?) and the fourth (Assess the correctness of your decisions (on the Likert scale) in managing the company during the Covid-19 pandemic) concerned difficulties while working effectively in pandemic conditions.

In open questions—fifth (What are the three biggest challenges/difficulties you currently face while managing your company?), sixth (What are the three biggest challenges/difficulties you are currently facing while managing the personnel employed in your company?), and seventh (How often do you communicate with employees to provide information on the current condition of the company? (calculate days or weeks))—respondents should name three challenges they faced in managing the company and personnel during an epidemic, and determine the frequency of contacts with employees.

The next questions—eighth (How do you rate your competences (on the Likert scale) in supporting the staff employed in your company in the current times of the pandemic?) and ninth (Do you receive feedback from employees that they understand or criticize about crisis management?)—relate to personal competence of entrepreneurs connected with the employees' motivation and feedback from staff. The next set of questions—tenth (How do you support your employees nowadays?), eleventh (Did the employees struggle with problems while working remotely or rotating?), twelfth (How does your company try to introduce new employees to its organizational culture during the pandemic if they are working remotely?), and thirteenth (How do you, as an employer, control employee performance while working remotely?)—aim to check

how respondents cope with supporting their staff, integrating new employees, controlling the efficiency of their remote work, and the difficulties associated with it.

Recent questions make respondents wonder what would help them most to run their business better during a pandemic—question 14 (What would be the greatest facilitation for you to run your business better now?) and what changes have occurred in their companies since the start of the pandemic—question 15 (Summarizing the past time of the pandemic, what were the most important aspects of the change in company management that you introduced as a manager/leader in the company?). The sixteenth question relates to the decisions of entrepreneurs to terminate their business as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Due to the encountered difficulties and introduced restrictions, have you thought about quitting your business?).

This section presents the results of both the first and the second survey among entrepreneurs. The answers were classified on the basis of the following criteria:

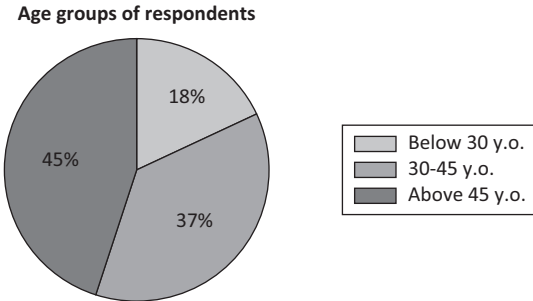
- gender;
- age of the respondents—for this purpose, the respondents were grouped into the following age categories: under 30, 30–45, over 45;
- the company size.

### ***The Results: First Study***

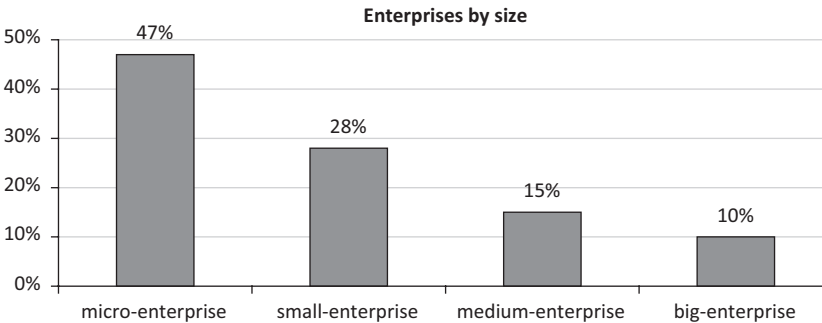
Among the respondents participating in the first study, 78% were men and 22% were women. Employers over 45 years of age (Figure 3.1) and micro-enterprises prevailed (Figure 3.2).

The most important results from the responses of foreign entrepreneurs to the interviews during the first wave of the pandemic are as follows:

1. Both some micro-enterprises and large companies judge the risk of coronavirus in their industry too high. However, this applies in particular to catering companies and companies providing



**Figure 3.1** Percentage of age groups of respondents in the first survey



**Figure 3.2** Percentage share of respondents in particular types of enterprises during the first survey

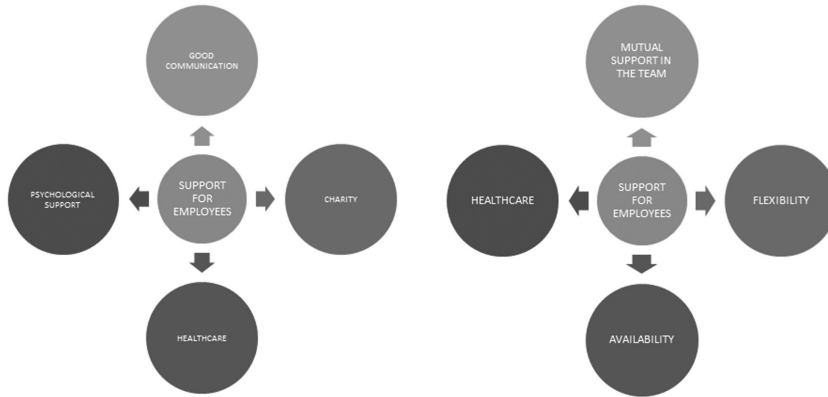
direct services such as hairdressers, beauty salons, and travel agencies.

2.

Due to the restaurant's inability to operate in its full form, I consider this risk very high. We operate only for personal collection and deliveries, which means that our restaurant's revenues are much smaller compared to the revenues in the same period from a year or two years ago.

The time of the pandemic is "freezing our industry". Our [beauty] industry was closed as one of the first, we could not accept clients or provide our services—the company had to

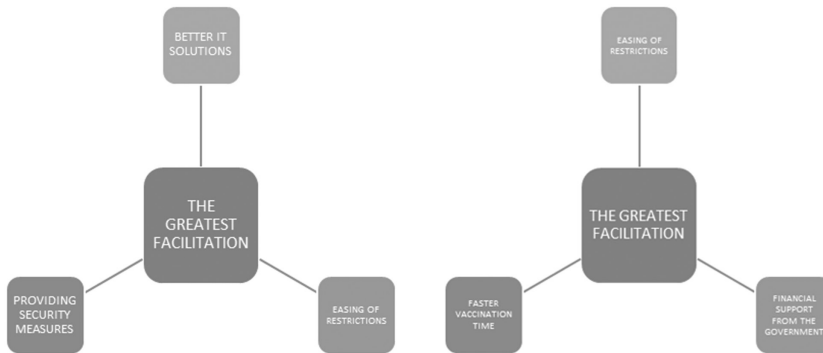
- close—that was the government’s announcement. We did not know how long it would last and what would happen to us now. We were left without work overnight. And that was just the beginning . . . Nobody saw how the pandemic situation would develop and when and how we could act again.
3. Among the surveyed respondents, there were cases of dismissal of employees as a result of job cuts, sometimes up to 50% in the case of moving companies, for which the demand decreased significantly during this period. “Yes. Due to the pandemic and less customer interest, I had to fire one employee. It was a difficult decision, but I fired the person who worked for me the shortest and that was her additional job.”
  4. About 15% of the surveyed respondents, including mainly representatives of micro and small companies, benefited from government funding in the form of an anti-crisis shield. Large companies also benefited from government assistance, but some described themselves as self-sufficient and did not need additional funding to operate. “NO—we have very good specialists and management who knew what actions to take, undergo training or implement processes.”
  5. The challenges faced most often by the management of the company and staff depend primarily on the specificity of its operation. They considered the number and speed of changes in regulations to be the greatest difficulties, in temporary work—the lack of staff and the need to recruit new employees, obtaining revenues—in the catering and tourism industries, motivating employees and the need to improve methods of digitization of work, and more effective communication with employees in the event of work distance. In establishments requiring stationary work, employers’ concerns about ensuring appropriate sanitary rules and compliance with them by employees grew.
  6. Employers supported their employees mainly through the availability and ability to communicate (especially in smaller companies), as well as psychological support (mostly in female-managed companies) and financial, healthcare, and team support (among male-managed companies) (Figure 3.3). “In response to this question, the respondent replied that he



**Figure 3.3** Support for employees during the Covid-19 pandemic during the first study (on the left—among women, on the right—among men)

supported his employees financially (by paying their salaries). I also occasionally conduct motivational meetings. And when the need arises, individual interviews.”

7. The greatest facilitation for the respondents running catering companies would be to loosen the restrictions; also more important is financial support from the government and in the case of companies selling goods, improving remote work and online sales. An extremely important action, often emphasized by the respondents, would be to accelerate the process of disseminating vaccines against Covid-19 (Figure 3.4), which would help to return to “a substitute for normality” sooner. “It would definitely be very helpful to make all workers vaccinated against Covid-19 or to be aware that the pandemic will end soon in 2021 (but I don’t believe it). A great facilitation could also be the restriction or prohibition of tax changes in this difficult period.” Sometimes, however, there were opposing voices, denying the need for vaccinations and maintaining restrictions, including restrictions on movement. “We don’t need great facilitations, we need to start traveling normally, with no flight restrictions, no testing or vaccine restrictions. The rest will continue to function as before.” (right-wing stance)



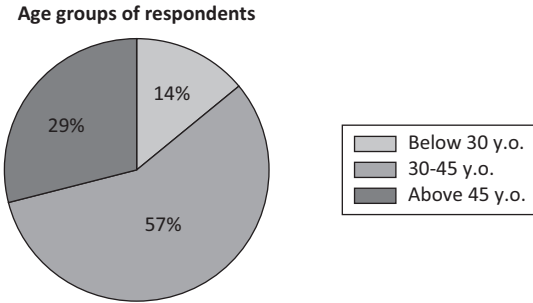
**Figure 3.4** The best facilitations for entrepreneurs in running a business in a pandemic during the first survey (on the left—among women, on the right—among men)

8. When asked about the difficulties associated with working effectively in the conditions of an epidemic, the respondents indicated that it is difficult, especially when direct contact with the client is necessary. Then there may be problems with compliance with sanitary rules, so be especially careful and use, for example, non-contact delivery of parcels or food.
9. In some cases, however, catering companies do as well or slightly better than before the pandemic, due to less competition in the marketplace.

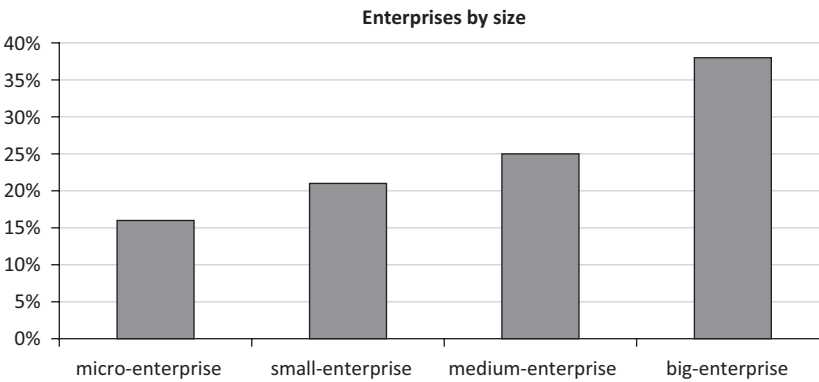
I have no opinion, the work in our restaurant is basically the same, so far we have handled take-away and stationary orders, at this point we only have take-out orders, so we have to put more care to ensure that the food is made quickly so that reach customers most efficiently.

### ***The Results: Second Study***

Of the respondents in the second study, 45% were men and 55% were women. The dominant group were entrepreneurs aged 30 to 45 (Figure 3.5), among which the largest percentage were department managers of large companies (Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.5** Percentage of age groups of respondents in the second survey



**Figure 3.6** Percentage share of respondents in particular types of enterprises in the second survey

During the second study conducted on entrepreneurs from Poland, the following results were obtained:

1. Compared to the first study at the beginning of the pandemic, representatives of small and large companies begin to perceive the risk of coronavirus for their company as much smaller or moderate. However, there are cases of companies that still record losses due to numerous lockdowns, quarantines, and temporary unavailability of their facilities, which is related to the uncertainty of the company's further operation. "The risk of coronavirus is very big for the industry in which we operate—fitness.



Lockdown, quarantines, temporary unavailability of objects have a negative impact on the results both in terms of revenues and operating result.”

2. As in the case of the first wave of the pandemic, there was usually no need to cut jobs in the respondents’ companies. In order to limit contacts with outsiders, entrepreneurs did not accept internships. “Fortunately not. As previously mentioned, our profits were much higher, so there was no need for that. I just have to mention here that we did not employ students for internships. Only the necessary positions were recruited.”
3. The difference, however, is in the use of government funding compared to the initial phase of the pandemic. The use of the PRF 1.0 shield, standstill benefits, exemptions from the Social Insurance Institution, and interest-free liquidity loans increased by almost ten percentage points. Micro and small enterprises prevailed, while large enterprises, often international ones, usually did not need such assistance. “No, the company had a lot of savings on the background that there was no need for a government bailout, and as a company selling bolts, it was selling well all the time.”
4. Entrepreneurs are also less worried about the impact of the coronavirus on their company, but in this case the opinions are somewhat divided. Enterprises (small or medium-sized) affected by Covid-19 in the first wave are now trying to rebuild their brand and attract customers.

Actually, I’m not worried—we operate in an industry that has not been greatly affected, and even the pandemic has turned out to be an opportunity for us to increase profits. At the moment, I don’t think I need to worry too much. Nevertheless, I believe that everything will be back to normal in the near future.

On the other hand, there are also those that, despite government support, do not see the future in the functioning of the company. It is puzzling that these are large companies that were doing well before the pandemic.

5. Coronavirus infection and possible complications have slightly decreased compared to the first wave of the pandemic. “A bit—personally I feel good. I try to approach the subject of the coronavirus rationally. I don’t panic and stigmatize myself with thoughts of the risk of infection. However, I follow the recommendations.” On the other hand, the concerns of people aged over 45 remain at a relatively high level, some of whom are still very much afraid of infection (around 30% of respondents compared to 55% in the first wave of the pandemic).
6. In the case of implementing remote work in the company and appropriate digital skills of employees, respondents enjoy effective work in pandemic conditions.

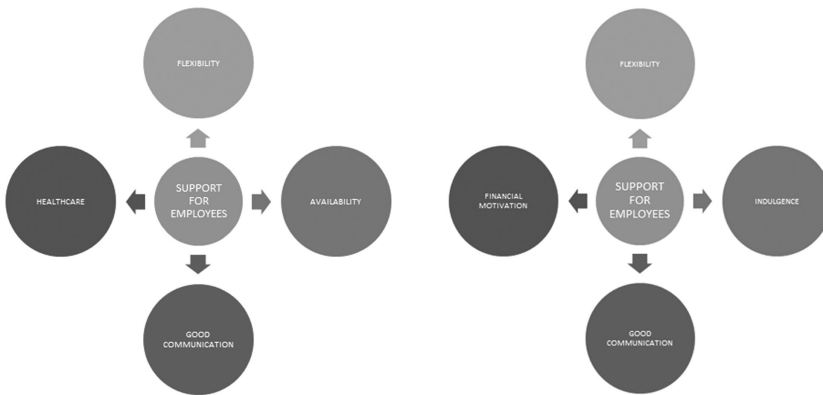
Very easy—I personally do not see any negative consequences of working from home. At present, we have developed all branches of communication allowing for this form of work. Since online meetings can be held, everything is under control. Moreover, thanks to this form of contact, it is possible to have more meetings with clients, as no time is wasted on the journey.

The companies whose specificity of activity do not allow for the implementation of alternative solutions and forms of work cope the most with effective work. Some respondents stated that they “have no opinion” on this matter. This may be because there is no need to change the nature and form of work from before the pandemic period.

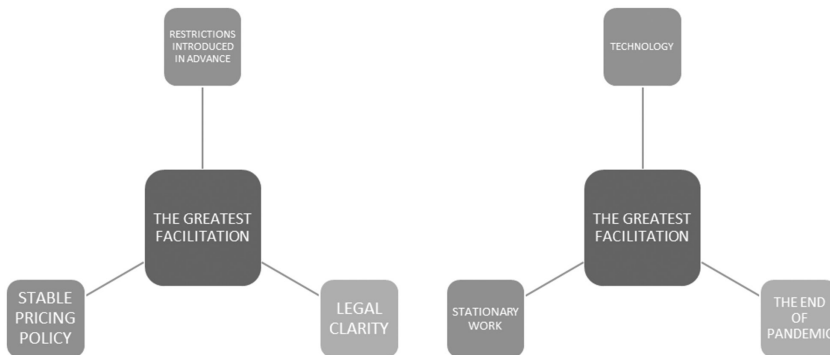
7. The most frequently mentioned challenges faced by company managers include rising prices of electricity, raw materials and products, difficulties while working remotely, rising inflation, transporting goods to customers and its costs, and ensuring sanitary safety for employees and customers. Especially medium-sized and large companies still have a problem with making current decisions regarding various projects, due to the unpredictability and uncertainty on the market related to the epidemic situation in the country.
8. Both among the owners and owners of companies, the main forms of employee support are flexibility, the ability to adapt the directions of the company’s operations to the dynamic

situation on the market and in terms of the restrictions of the Chief Sanitary Inspectorate and the Minister of Health, and the availability for employees. Indulgence, good communication, and further health protection also play an important role (Figure 3.7).

9. The greatest facilitation in running a business, according to the respondents, should be related primarily to the clarity of regulations and a stable pricing policy as well as the imminent end of the pandemic (Figure 3.8). Some entrepreneurs would prefer to



**Figure 3.7** Support for employees during the Covid-19 pandemic during the second study (on the left—among women, on the right—among men)



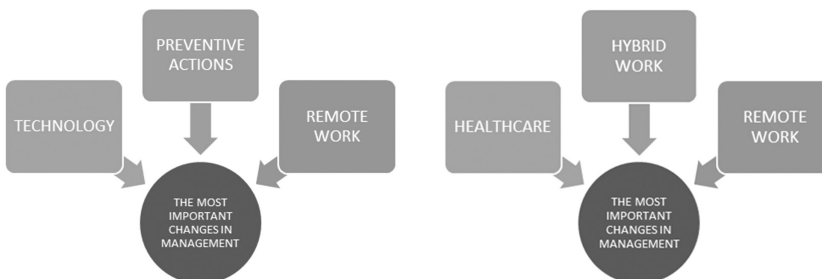
**Figure 3.8** The best facilitations for entrepreneurs in running a business in a pandemic during the second survey (on the left—among women, on the right—among men)

return to stationary work as soon as possible, while representatives of large companies where remote work is well developed, due to the convenience and lower costs of commuting to work, would prefer to retain this form of work as long as possible.

10. The most important aspects of the change in company management introduced by entrepreneurs in their companies can undoubtedly be remote or hybrid work, improving issues related to the IT industry, as well as a particular emphasis on protecting the health of employees and customers and various types of preventive measures (Figure 3.9). “Remote (hybrid) work is a new reality—a very difficult period for the company, for employees, but despite these difficulties, the company achieved its goals and employees quickly switched to new circumstances” (adaptive attitude).

One year into the pandemic, I have learned how to value the welfare of my employees more and how to be able to give them the best support possible in times like this. I have been conducting more training and seminars, both for work and personal aspects, so I can help them to cope with work and stress brought about by the situation.

I did not introduce significant changes in the management of the company, but changed the rules of behavior of employees, in such a way that I expect employees to be vaccinated—and everyone is. They have to work behind the plexiglass and we require protection from clients in the



**Figure 3.9** The most important aspects of changing company management during a pandemic during the second study (on the left—among women, on the right—among men)

form of masks covering the nose and mouth. Employees also wear masks and have liquids for disinfecting hands and flat surfaces. On the other hand, I did not change the way of managing the company, but only the guidelines for the safety of employees.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In the situation of an epidemic threat, both during the first and the second study, companies that previously worked remotely or hybrids fared best. On the other hand, the majority of business owners and entrepreneurs took an adaptive attitude, adapting their activities and prudent decision making to the dynamically changing market situation and sanitary restrictions.

During the second study, significantly lower concerns of entrepreneurs about their health and the health of employees may result from the introduction and spread of the Covid-19 vaccine, which many of the respondents were waiting for, according to their statements during the first wave of the pandemic.

The uncertainty related to the operation of companies depends largely on their initial budget and the type of business or services they provide. Nevertheless, the improvement could have been because of financial aid from the government in the form of anti-crisis shields or exemptions from social insurance fees.

The main losses that were caused by the pandemic period are related to the increase in the costs of electricity, raw materials, increased inflation, or technical problems while working remotely. In companies, mass quarantines are also burdensome and sometimes lead to a decrease in motivation to work. However, the positive aspects are, above all, a greater focus on the employee and his health, the introduction of remote work, sometimes permanently, which allows for lower transport costs, greater flexibility of working hours, and understanding on the part of employers.

When analyzing the statements of the respondents during the first and second surveys, it is sometimes possible to presume about their political views, manifested in a right-wing or left-wing approach to issues related to the pandemic, restrictions, and vaccinations.

The above material is a valuable source of information about the situation on the Polish market during various waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. A good direction would be to continue research in the post-pandemic period and compare them with the results obtained so far.

The pandemic has clearly shown the differences between efficiently and pseudo-efficiently managed countries. While in the former leaders made difficult decisions and communicated them to the public with explanations and justifications, in the latter we could observe hysterical and incompetent behavior of governments or political leaders, helpless in the face of a gigantic and unknown challenge and reacting with an escape into vocabulary and propaganda.<sup>69</sup>

Certainly, the positives in the fight against the pandemic should be noted, and the failures of the strategies adopted by governments should be taken into account. However, there is no doubt that the health systems functioning in various countries (not only in Poland) turned out to be unprepared to face the pandemic. Part of the responsibility for bringing about such a situation should be attributed to the public health paradigm, which allowed or even required various actions to be taken, while at the same time encouraging others to abandon them. According to Włodarczyk and Juszczyk (2022), events related to the Covid-19 pandemic make it necessary to adopt a modified/reformulated/redefined/expanded public health paradigm.<sup>70</sup> If this were not the case, then identifying the causes of organizational shortages, underfunding, or staff shortages would be relatively simple, and the ways to fix them would be obvious: more people, more money, better organization.

In the opinion of the National Institute of Public Health-National Institute of Hygiene (NIPH-NIH),<sup>71</sup> this is an essential set of con-

69 Bettman, Blikle, Bochniarz, Brzostowski, Budziak, Eichelberger, Erdman, Grzesiak, Hausner, Łabno-Fałęcka, Oblój, Powalacz, Voelkel, Zmysłony, "RAPORT BIZNES: Co dalej w biznesie? Jak pandemia zmieniła zarządzanie firmami i ludźmi," 68.

70 Włodarczyk and Juszczyk, "Public Health 3.0."

71 Włodarczyk and Juszczyk, "Public Health 3.0."

cepts and theories forming the basis for understanding public health as a science, and practice has proved insufficient to prepare health systems in such a way that they are able to respond properly to the onslaught of the pandemic. This diagnosis refers both to the situation in Poland and in other countries. Covid-19 revealed, for example, that in the context of a pandemic, health systems were able to maintain their ability to act to a very limited extent in relation to “ordinary” disease cases, i.e. those cases that decisively determine the level of overall mortality. As a consequence, the SARS-CoV-2 virus caused deaths not only from Covid-19, but also contributed to an increase in overall mortality rates.

Włodarczyk and Juszczyk also cite the arguments of the Managing Director of the European Public Health Association (EUPHA) who, among the challenges facing public health, pointed to the problem of political pressure on public health, the game of devastating particular interests, and new ethical and moral dilemmas.<sup>72</sup> This statement condemns the political pressure exerted today by populist forces, obstructing communication with the public and even questioning the validity of scientific discoveries and rational argumentation. There are accusations against powerful multinationals such as Internet companies in the document. These entities, taking advantage of their privileged economic position, often resulting from favored tax conditions, hinder the proper operation of the authorities and public health. In the ethical dimension, the document emphasizes the need to pay due attention to the mutual balance between health security and the freedom for economic activity. It was hoped that speculation about the failures of democratic systems would end compared to supposedly better-functioning autocratic regimes, which the empirical evidence unequivocally contradicted.<sup>73</sup> However, in the discussion of the political aspects of the pandemic response, it was emphasized that defending liberal democracy as a constitutional framework for governance cannot be equated with neoliberal economic views, according to which many decisions about public health are left to the market. The postulate

72 Włodarczyk and Juszczyk, “Public Health 3.0.”

73 The Economist, “Democracies Contain Epidemics Most Effectively.”

of political non-conformism was addressed to representatives of circles that are to perform expert functions, and to the entire society; in this case, specifically, not to succumb to the temptation to instrumentalize the threat of a pandemic, which consists in using the natural sense of threat as an argument to justify decisions about something completely different than health issues. Covid-19 poses a threat to human security and has created a very attractive temptation for governments to use it as an argument to justify their decisions, warned UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. Attention was drawn to the risk of closing down on reliable information, especially information that could reflect in a negative light the projects undertaken by the authorities, and also showing proud faith in the decision-making self-sufficiency of government representatives, without the support of the scientific community. Finally, attention was drawn to the need to systematically control the reluctance to take responsibility for decisions related to a pandemic by entities performing such a role. The authorities cannot be relieved of their responsibility for the decisions made in connection with a pandemic.

The concept of extending the powers of the European Union in the field of health of the citizens of the Member States has not yet been put into practice. The prospect of treaty changes has not appeared in the EU's action program in the field of health for 2021–2027 nor in the plans to establish the European Health Union, which only proposes a new regulation on serious cross-border threats to health and strengthening the European Medicines Agency and ECDC.<sup>74</sup> The long-term EU budget for 2021–2027 and the reconstruction package also does not contain any arrangements.<sup>75</sup>

In times of plague, the weaknesses of institutions can be exposed, but there are also opportunities for change. In *Magazyn Teraz Polska*, we can read regret that:

undoubtedly you can see today the deficit of leadership, in Poland, in Europe, and maybe in the world. [ . . . ] The

74 Orłowska, Pawłowska, and Rösler, “Europejska współpraca i rywalizacja w zakresie polityk zdrowotnych w dobie pandemii Covid-19.”

75 Consilium, “Long Term EU Budget.”



leadership deficit is now particularly dangerous because it can whet the appetites of various authoritarian contenders to try to reach for it. And this may be met with growing acceptance of such leadership. [. . .] The leadership deficit is clearly facilitated by a trust deficit. In Poland, it is visible, especially when it comes to politics and politicians. There is a factor exacerbating this deficit—priorities are often turned on their heads. The fetish of economic growth comes first. It is obvious that entrepreneurs must be protected—work and the well-being of employees depend on them. Hence the right ideas of various protective shields, more or less tight. But society is also citizens. It is also the need to protect their freedoms, the need to rethink the new role of the welfare state and the need to invent new public policies. This will not be done by individually distributed social benefits. The more so because the funds for their distribution are shrinking. In general, more socialized development is needed. Also in Poland. This need was not born in times of epidemics, but today it is becoming even more urgent.<sup>76</sup>

### **Appendix 3.1 Questionnaire Intended for the First and Second Stage of the Study**

#### ***METRIC***

Sex:

Age:

Country of origin:

How many people are employed in your company?

How do you rate the risk of coronavirus for your industry/company?

Has the coronavirus pandemic changed your company's organizational culture?

YES

NO

<sup>76</sup> Magazyn Teraz Polska, "Leadership in Times of Plague: The Epidemic Exposes the Weaknesses of Institutions, But also Gives a Chance for Change."

During the pandemic, did you have to reduce employment in the company?

YES (specify as a percentage) NO

During the pandemic, did you benefit from business support? as government help, business consulting, help from friends?

YES (of what?) NO

### ***QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW***

(choose one answer mark X unless otherwise indicated)

1. How worried are you about the impact of the coronavirus on you personally?  
 Extremely  
 Very  
 Some  
 Not so worried  
 Not at all worried
2. How concerned are you with the impact of the coronavirus on your Company?  
 Extremely  
 Very  
 Some  
 Not so worried  
 Not at all worried
3. How easy or difficult is it for you to work effectively in the current epidemic conditions?  
 Very easy  
 Rather easy  
 I have no opinion  
 Rather difficult  
 Very hard
4. Assess the correctness of your decisions (on the Likert scale) in managing the company during the Covid-19 pandemic:  
 0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 -----  
 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Possibly:

How confident are you in the company’s leadership team (on the Likert scale) to make the right decisions to manage through this crisis?

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 -----  
7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

- 5. What are the three biggest challenges/difficulties you currently face while managing your company?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
- 6. What are the three biggest challenges/difficulties you are currently facing while managing the personnel employed in your company?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
- 7. How often do you communicate with employees to provide information on the current condition of the company? (calculate days or weeks)
- 8. How do you rate your competences (on the Likert scale) in supporting the staff employed in your company in the current times of the pandemic?
 

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 -----  
7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
- 9. Do you receive feedback from employees that they understand or criticize about crisis management?
 

YES NO
- 10. How do you support your employees nowadays?
- 11. Did the employees struggle with problems while working remotely or rotating?
 

YES NO I DON'T KNOW
- 12. How does your company try to introduce new employees to its organizational culture during the pandemic if they are working remotely? (omit if not applicable)
- 13. How do you, as an employer, control employee performance while working remotely?



## Chapter 4

### HUNGARY: THE ENEMY IS EVERYWHERE

TAMÁS TÓTH AND ANNA UJLAKI

*Just because a state is not liberal, it can still be a democracy. And in fact we also had to and did state that societies that are built on the state organization principle of liberal democracy will probably be incapable of maintaining their global competitiveness in the upcoming decades and will instead probably be scaled down unless they are capable of changing themselves significantly.*

—Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the  
25th Bálványos Summer Free University and  
Student Camp, July 26, 2014

#### Introduction

Contemporary research has focused with increased attention on the populist communication styles of charismatic political leaders. Scholars kept scrutinizing the populist styles during the pandemic to contrast experiences of the pre-Covid era and the pandemic. This chapter analyzes the populist style of the Hungarian right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán from the following perspective: it scrutinizes to what extent antagonism, people-centrism, and the general will emerged in his live speeches (n = 51). We also measure how frequently nationalism, economy, conservatism, and other topics appear in the database. We used a dictionary-based, computer-assisted content analysis method to conduct our research. The findings suggest that people-centrism is the essential populist feature in the Hungarian PM's speeches. Furthermore, nationalist and economic topics outperformed populism as the pandemic kept surging in Hungary.

Even though populism is a hot topic within the research fields of social sciences, ongoing debates are still aiming to provide the most

accurate definition of this phenomenon. Probably the most frequently utilized and widely accepted definition was outlined almost twenty years ago as follows: “as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”<sup>1</sup> The definition above implies all of the core features of populism: the admirable people, the evil elite, and the general will. Other scholars also argue that horizontal populism implies minorities that are not part of the elite but, according to populists, are harmful and dangerous to the majority of the society.<sup>2</sup> Based on right-wing populist ideas, these groups could contain refugees, immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ people, etc. Populism relies on a Manichean worldview depicting the globe as a place where two irreconcilable groups fight each other: the evil and harmful minorities (including the elite and horizontal groups) and the pure people.<sup>3</sup> In this narrative, there is nothing in common between these circles. Ernesto Laclau argues in his influential book that if there were any mutual features within the groups above, the differentiation between them would not be radical enough.<sup>4</sup> In the following paragraphs, we characterize the features of populism to take the reader by the hand to follow our argument. At this point, we note that populism could attach to host ideologies, such as nationalism,<sup>5</sup> but we do not discuss this theoretical debate because we regard populism as a communication style, emerging regularly in current political leadership performances.<sup>6</sup>

Although populism is an elusive concept that is highly adaptable and has a chameleonic nature, most of the scholars agree upon

1 Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 543.

2 Hamelers, “A Typology of Populism.”

3 Mudde, “An Ideational Approach.”

4 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

5 Aslanidis, “Is Populism an Ideology?”; Cossarini, *Banal Populism*.; Waterbury “Populist Nationalism and the Challenges of Divided Nationhood”; Ruiz Casado, “Articulations of Populism and Nationalism”; Sheranova, “Why Populism and Nationalism Is a Successful Combination?”; De Cleen, “Populism and Nationalism”; Stanley, “Populism, Nationalism, or National Populism?”

6 Bobba, “Social media populism”; Bucy et al., “Performing Populism.”

the idea that it is unimaginable without its fundamental feature, namely the construction of an imagined community, the people.<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that the term “people” suggests that everyone is included in this group, the populist logic outlines the people differently.<sup>8</sup> In a nutshell, the “people” do not contain the “elite” or any “minorities” that could be dangerous for the “ordinary citizens.”<sup>9</sup> A populist admires the people and accepts its demands without a doubt because the masses’ glorification is a pivotal ingredient of populist logic.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, populists claim that the people used to be respected, but currently the antagonist agents disregard them. According to populists, the people’s sovereignty has vanished due to the elite’s harmful interests.<sup>11</sup> The populist logic outlines that the elite and other adverse minor groups focus on their interests, and the people deserve better leadership that listens to and fulfills their demands.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, a charismatic leader should fight the old-fashioned elite fueled by its self-interests that suppresses its “own people” and support alien others.

The “elite” is a broad concept, but it mostly refers to the political elite, especially the one that is part of the establishment.<sup>13</sup> However, ample evidence proves that oppositional political elites might also be the targeted antagonist agents of populists.<sup>14</sup> It is important to emphasize that the elite is a morally corrupt group that cannot be the true representative of the “good” people.<sup>15</sup> The populist logic argues that the elite lies to, steals from, and misleads the ordinary citizens in order to maintain its power. Interestingly, many elite groups could fit specific populist agents’ styles beyond the political

7 (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*; Jagers and Walgrave, “Populism as Political Communication Style”; Canovan, *The People*; Canovan, *Populism*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.)

8 Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name.”

9 Bonikowski, “Ethno-Nationalist Populism and the Mobilization of Collective Resentment.”

10 Tamás, “Populizmus nincs.”

11 Zulianello and Larsen, “Populist Parties in European Parliament Elections.”

12 Bonikowski, “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States.”

13 MacRae, “Populism as an Ideology.”

14 Csigó and Merkovity, “Hungary: Home of Empty Populism.”

15 Mouffe, “The ‘end of politics’ and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism.”

elite. Anti-media populism was apparent in and a regular feature of Donald Trump's communication, in which he blamed the "fake news media" for lying about himself to the American citizens.<sup>16</sup> Criticizing experts, for instance, the medical elite, for mandatory vaccinations might pave the way for populist discourse,<sup>17</sup> such as in the case of Italy, where a No-Vaccination movement emerged in 2017 protesting the scientific and medical elite.<sup>18</sup> The economic elite could also be part of the populist blame-game: for instance, the Irish Sinn Féin regularly criticizes the private health insurance companies for increasing prices and, consequently, excluding patients from having fair medical treatment.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly to the concepts discussed above, the general will is also a vague notion because the masses' demands might differ on an individual level.<sup>20</sup> However, populism relies on the credo that the people's general will has to be followed without any doubt.<sup>21</sup> Populists claim that the elite does not follow and fulfill the *volonté générale*; therefore, a change is needed.<sup>22</sup> For example, one of the core populist arguments of the Brexit referendum was that immigrants exploit the healthcare system and deprive hard-working people of having quality medical treatment.<sup>23</sup> The vulnerability of the healthcare system is one of the regular, if not the most, plausible populist topics by which the general will is threatened (see Donald Trump's criticism of Obamacare), and decent citizens could suffer from severe consequences due to the antagonist minorities' harmful activities.<sup>24</sup>

The rest of this chapter will be broken down into two main sections. The first will present a broad analysis of the Hungarian

16 Tóth, "The Conceptualization of Explicit and Implicit Populism."

17 Hameleers, "A Typology of Populism."

18 Pavolini et al., "Healthcare Governance, Professions and Populism."

19 Cunningham and Marsh, "Voting Behaviour."

20 de Nadal, "On Populism and Social Movements"; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*; Mudde, "An Ideational Approach."

21 Tamás, "The Mystery of 'populism' Finally Unveiled."

22 Bonikowski and Gidron, "The Populist Style in American Politics."

23 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*; Hughes, "It's the EU Immigrants Stupid!"

24 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*.



government's response to Covid-19 based upon the 5-point framework outlined in the introductory chapter:

1. Framing the problem: expressing a clear understanding of the adaptive and technical challenges involved.
2. Prompt decision making and coordination: evaluating alternatives, engaging debate, and involving people to take responsibility for the solution.
3. Transparency and communication: using and disseminating credible information, accepting feedback, and building a unifying identity.
4. Fostering collaboration across sectors: listening, giving the work back to the people with the problem, and aligning major responsibilities.
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future: capacity-building within the organization to learn from experiments, past mistakes, and best practices outside their own domain.

The second section will present a discourse analysis of Viktor Orbán's crisis communication during the pandemic in Hungary. This will be followed by a concluding discussion.

### **"GLAD TO SEE YOU"**

Not far from Anglo-American University, there is a pub. This pub is a classic basement Czech pub, popular with the various workers in the neighborhood (professors, artists, office workers, government and embassy people) as well as an increasing frequency of tourists. It has a limited, though delicious, standard menu as well as a rolling daily lunch menu. In the years before the pandemic, one had to be clever and lucky to find a table at lunch time on Schnitzel Fridays.

The pub is located in a central and touristy district of Prague, between the river and the castle. The pandemic, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and general fear presented it with an existential threat; as was the case for so many businesses. As the pandemic wore on month after month, memory of the pub that had

for years been so central in our daily lives receded to the edges of my mind. When the university finally truly re-opened, it took several days to think to go and see if this special place still existed.

First, I looked online, almost like checking the obituaries to see if a friend is still around to contact. The webpage was still up, but had not been updated since the first lockdown eased. Experience had demonstrated that this was an unreliable sign, as the Internet and maps and advertisements still suggested one visit places that had since disappeared.

Walking through the still deserted streets of the city center, I was filled with ever greater dread as I passed some two-thirds of shuttered and empty store fronts. To my surprise and delight, though, the pub was open when I reached it. I walked down into the pub, and caught sight of one of the main waiters from “before.” We recognized each other, and were a bit happier for it. I told him, “Glad to see you.” He replied “Me too.” I then took a table in the mostly empty pub. He came over and asked if I’d have my usual.

That day was more than a year ago. I am writing this at lunchtime on Schnitzel Friday in the pub. Things have still not returned to its pre-Covid normal. Half of the pub’s rooms of tables are often closed off for lack of need, including now. While I have seen more of the regular staff since that first day, there is one I have never seen again. Due to the circumstances, I am hesitant to ask about them. Throughout the years of the pandemic, many people have moved on to other places and other things. We all, though, know people who have not survived. Lunch comes with a bit of baggage, now, as do so many things while we transition to the new normal.

## **The Hungarian Case**

### ***Framing the Problem***

The Hungarian case is specific in the sense of how the government inserted the Covid-19 pandemic into a broader context. This specificity is related to the nature of the political regime itself. Since 2010, the subsequent governments of Viktor Orbán have been applying different narratives of crises. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, government communication transformed an essentially exogenous

shock into a partly political game. The early warnings highlight how the government attempted to implicitly channel the pandemic into an existing narrative of the battle against “illegal immigration” from the first wave when the first two confirmed cases of infected persons proved to be two foreign students from Iran. In the first weeks, in the official informational webpage of the government about the Covid-19 pandemic, news about Iranians who allegedly had not cooperated with public authorities, the deportation of some of them, and a travel ban for Iranian citizens were regularly released in the same framework. This has blurred the distinction between people whose traveling has been banned for reasons of breaching law and simply being a citizen of a country where the spread of the epidemic has been previously confirmed. It reassured the governmental discourse that there are multiple threats to the Hungarian nation that come from the outside world carried primarily by migrant people. Even though the narrative on the connection between immigration and the spread of the coronavirus emerged as early as March 2020, mixing the topic of immigration with the epidemic started to become marginal in Viktor Orbán’s and pro-government actors’ communication. The ongoing narrative against “Brussels” also appeared in the case of vaccines. While, in the beginning, the Prime Minister and the government claimed that the “vaccines are not a political question but a question of healthcare,” this framing soon changed to statements such as “it is not possible for Hungarian people to die because Brussels’ purchasing of vaccines is slow.”

Framing of the challenge has helped the government to formulate a seemingly legitimate claim to further restrict its political opponents as well. On the one hand, the government curtailed severely the scope of maneuver of local governments (especially district councils of the capital city with a majority of opposition members) by cutting their budget. From the end of 2020, the government declared a state of emergency empowering itself with a wide range of extensive powers for the period of the “special legal order.” Later, on the other hand, on the official page of the governmental pandemic measures, appeared signs of the narrative of the fight against what the government calls the “LMBTQ propaganda.”

With regard to identifying the main values and priorities in terms of health and economy, individual liberty and social responsibility, vaccines, tightening and suspending the restrictions, and online or in-person education were less consistently addressed by the government. During the first wave, protecting citizens' health was the most salient topic in the government's communication. Then, protecting jobs and the economy became another crucial topic in the second wave. Additionally, there were controversial positions about the reliability, effectiveness, and the possible combinations of the different vaccines. These topics were addressed by important figures of the pandemic measures such as the Minister of Human Capacities, the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Chief Medical Officer of Hungary, the Chair of the Clinical Epidemiology Working Group, or the Head of Infectology at the Central Hospital of Southern Pest who had been a speaker at the press conferences of the National Security Operative Board. There were no serious attempts on the part of the government to refine and synchronize these multiple interpretations regarding what needs to be changed. Rather only independent media called attention to these conflictual statements occasionally.

Accordingly, the level of technical expertise involved in the measures was relatively low in the sense that the Prime Minister channeled the decision on the end of the pandemic restrictions into its often-used governmental campaign tool called National Consultation. This suggests that the main aspects of the pandemic-related decisions were primarily *political* factors, and technical expertise was only of secondary importance. Moreover, in an extensive, government-financed campaign called "stay at home," many famous Hungarian celebrities were calling for the importance of individual responsibility in preventing a healthcare catastrophe.

### ***Prompt Decision Making and Coordination***

As the exceptional legal situation empowered the government with special powers, meaningful alternatives appeared fundamentally between governmental figures; however, there were no possibilities for these figures to support an alternative in the long term. The

government tried to show its uniformity, and possible alternatives died away quickly. The government created its system of networks with the National Security Operative Board and a working group for vaccine production; however, as discussed above, most decisions related to the pandemic were decided on the political, rather than the expertise level.

One of the most interesting conclusions of the Hungarian case study is related to the relationship between the decision process and authority figures. Although the decisions were primarily political, the decision making fit into the script of adaptive leadership. The nature of the regime requires the Prime Minister to appear as a head of pandemic decisions; the government had not relied overwhelmingly on particular authority figures in decision making. The decision-making processes were not transparent, but the *communication* of those decisions was following a pattern. First, in line with former studies, the Hungarian PM's style mostly relied on nationalist people-centrism rather than antagonism. In addition, the analysis differentiated between three types of announcements. The first type is when the Prime Minister announces the decision himself, the second type is when governmental authority figures announce the decision, and the third type is when the entire government or the Operative Board is set as the decision maker with no particular figure pointed out as a person in charge. The analysis showed that for those decisions that lead to presumed widespread public support, such as the announcement of the end of the restrictions, the Prime Minister was the primary announcer. However, with time, it became more and more important to Viktor Orbán that he maintain the impression of personally relying on the opinion of the Hungarian-American biochemist who played a huge part in discovering the RNA-mediated immune activation. These gestures of the Prime Minister toward academic and healthcare sectors primarily served a role of legitimization of government decisions. In effect, however, medical organizations and the academic community had little opportunity to substantially influence decisions; rather, they simply commented on events and decisions, which highlights that encouraging debate and multiple perspectives, as well as a commitment to involving those who have to implement the decision in the

decision-making process, were a low priority for the government throughout the pandemic. Decisions that were expected to be more socially divided were mainly disclosed to the public on lower levels. For example, restrictions on offline education and announcements about online education were often communicated by the state secretary for public education. More divisive decisions were communicated by the Operative Board.

### *Transparency and Communication*

The abovementioned strategy of the government regarding focusing on public legitimacy rather than inclusive decision making aligned with the transparency and communication during the pandemic. The research on the decision making of the Hungarian government has shown that the pandemic policymaking of the national authority has been a relatively closed process, similarly to many Central European countries. In other words, decisions were primarily following political rather than professional considerations. This connects to the fact that the government has withheld data on the pandemic on multiple occasions (even though members of the Parliament in opposition attempted to request these data of public interest several times), and there were occasions when the government only published data with delay, to prove success (i.e., when the number of vaccinated persons reached two million). Data retention was regularly commented on by members of the government with cynicism toward the credibility of scientific data and knowledge. As independent commentators from the academic sphere reflected, this move is highly problematic because in this way the government itself could provide the ground for different types of conspiracy theories connected to the pandemic and vaccinations that could have a serious effect on the control of the pandemic. However, skepticism toward Covid-19 has been explicitly and successfully used by Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement), a far-right opposition party that gained six seats in the Parliament at the national elections in 2022.

The levels of transparency were further decreased over time with the government first terminating the possibility of asking questions

from the Operative Board, then encrypting its decisions for ten years. The decision of banning media entrance to hospitals could have multiple considerations (e.g., avoiding public panicking); however, it can also be interpreted as a further distancing from transparent communication on issues of the pandemic as well as introducing low levels of reliance on feedback systems. It goes against the idea of adaptive leadership related to disseminating information that is easily understandable and accessible to multiple audiences.

A strong focus of the Hungarian case study was on the specific *unifying narrative and common identity* behind governmental communication, that is, a specific element of the populist style, which is people-centrism. The reason for this is the unique way the Orbán regime attempted to insert Covid-19 into the existing crisis narratives from the very moment of the confirmation of the first infected cases. The research investigated how the pandemic affected the populist communication style of the Prime Minister compared to his former campaign communication style. The results showed that the nationalist *in-group solidarity* overwhelmingly remained the most prominent topic in Orbán's communication, followed by the topics of *economy*. In that sense, the Hungarian PM is coherent in his communication style because both the 2018 general elections and the pandemic were fueled primarily by nationalist frames.

### ***Fostering Collaboration across Sectors***

The relatively closed nature of governmental decision making and communication of decisions are tendencies appearing simultaneously in cross-sector involvement. During the pandemic, the government was not proactive in terms of urging different (non-governmental) participating entities to share resources. However, it asked many celebrities to foster trust in the vaccines via as many communication channels as possible. The populist characteristic of Orbán's communication rather appealed to our common responsibilities and personal liabilities in the struggle against the pandemic than to the necessity of joining forces with institutional actors such as the opposition, health care, academic institutions, teachers' organizations, and the media. There is little empirical

and available evidence on whether the government was open to entering into dialogue with voices of dissent of different organizations (health and social workers, general practitioners, pediatricians, teachers' unions) nor other authorities (such as the former chief medical officer, the mayor of Budapest, or the Municipality of Budapest, although it is important to note that regarding local politics, only the capital city has relatively high membership of opposition politicians, including the mayor who replaced its predecessor who has long been an important figure of the ruling coalition). The general route for voices of dissent was by means of law. For retaining pandemic data and the mass evacuations of hospital beds, several opposition members of Parliament and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, a human rights NGO, brought lawsuits against the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Human Capacities, the National Public Health Center, and the chief medical officer herself.

The structure of coordination has been far from clear and consistent. On the one hand, the precise identities of the government's advisors usually remained unknown throughout the pandemic. On the other hand, governmental information often proved to be ambiguous on when, how, and which services, such as restaurants and gyms, could remain open. There were not only contradictory statements about the implementation of decisions, but the procedures of vaccination (in terms of eligibility and application) were far from smooth.

### ***Learning from Past Decisions and Preparing for the Future***

The last group of the examined characteristics of adaptive leadership is connected to the question of whether political leaders learn from their decisions and develop their later decisions according to past experiences. As well as the other case studies shown, this could not be comprehensively analyzed at the moment. However, there are general directions that can be established with confidence in the Hungarian case. In connection to the broad literature on the regime specificities of Hungary since 2010, the case study showed that specific "illiberal" or "hybrid regime" characteristics of Orbán's regime



make it undesirable for those in power to apply a “trial and error” type of experimental decision making.

This method, hand in hand with other characteristics of the ideal of the liberal democratic political leadership, such as officials presenting themselves as *accountable* for a broad range of their actions, or highlighting their *missteps* while formulating further decisions, that is, characteristics that are usual and often useful in a pluralistic society, is more likely to be seen as a weakness for a political leader with concentrated power. For the perceived success of the Hungarian government in public opinion, the communication of decisions is at least as important as the decisions themselves; therefore, as mentioned above, the communication of *how* they adjust and adapt their policies is less prominent. The riskier the decision (in terms of its popularity) the more it is announced at lower levels, leaving fewer possibilities to important governmental actors for making mistakes. However, there were several occasions during the pandemic when ministers or even the Prime Minister had to correct their former statements (e.g., in the case of restoring in-person education, the number of purchased vaccines, or the temporary inaccessibility of the online vaccination appointment booking system).

In summary, the case study showed that there are certain aspects of decision making by the Hungarian government connected to Covid-19 that follow the characteristics of adaptive leadership; however, most of its conditions do not apply to the Hungarian case, first and foremost because of the specificities of the regime.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The pandemic created a mental health crisis never before seen on such a scale. Nearly everyone was affected to some degree, though those degrees can vary widely. From having no social contact to having no privacy, from being unemployed to working from home, from daily stress to emerging mental illness, from isolation to abuse, the variety and examples of stress and trauma are never ending.

A line that runs through many of the examples is the simple lack of freedom. It was not possible to really go anywhere or do

anything or see anyone. To attempt such things would violate emergency orders put in place, and risk infection. These fears were more prominent in the first wave, although more and more people refused to be so restrained in subsequent waves.

There was the feeling of having been put in prison without having committed any crime, and the rest of the world was locked up as well. Daily routine was both a coping mechanism as well as a monotonous route to breakdown. For those who had free time, boredom could be crippling. For those who had no free time, perpetual exhaustion set in. For those who had or developed broken relations with others in lockdown with them, tension was more present. For those who were closed in with an abuser and cut off from help and escape, it was a unique hell. Ever present for everyone was the informational battle going on concerning infection rates, death rates, potential treatments, potential vaccines, media sensationalism, and a flood of misinformation from countless sources.

Years of being in this situation of constant and multifaceted stress have left their mark, even as life has returned to near normal. Many feel a drive to go and do as much as possible out and away from where they spent so much time. Many others were and remain reluctant to reengage with a world they tried so hard to get on without. Post-traumatic stress is also not infrequent, with stifling fear emerging when one is not able to go outside for some reason, or conversely not able to keep distance. Even now, with daily numbers of infections persistently low even through winter, it is common to see people of all ages still wearing masks in public.

The mental scars, like the physical and social and economic, will be with us for some time.

### **Discourse Analysis: The Communication Style of Viktor Orbán in the Epidemic**

This sub-chapter focuses on the political communication style of the Hungarian right-wing conservative Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, between March 5, 2020, and February 17, 2021, by analyzing his live speeches. Besides, to provide a comparative aspect, we also consider his speeches in 2018, when the campaign period lasted

before the Hungarian parliamentary elections.<sup>25</sup> One might argue that comparing the campaign period of 2018 and the first year of the pandemic is highly problematic. In turn, we argue that both periods were fueled by Viktor Orbán's crisis communication addressing different but sometimes overlapping issues, for instance, immigration, criticism toward Brussels, and the epidemic.<sup>26</sup> Even though we admit this comparative aspect's limitation, we suppose that the contrasting research aspect is reasonable.

We scrutinized fifty-one live speeches from Viktor Orbán because he is Hungary's most powerful and influential political agent. Besides his undoubtful power in Hungary, Viktor Orbán started to gain increased attention in international politics, the mass media, and social science research, when the refugee crisis started in Europe in 2015 and the Hungarian PM applied anti-immigration rhetoric to his agenda.<sup>27</sup> Even though several research papers analyzed Viktor Orbán's speeches, none have dealt with such a comprehensive database focusing on the pandemic's first year. This section aims to characterize the Hungarian PM's style by implementing the following topic categories that emerged in his speeches and were scrutinized in previous research:<sup>28</sup> conservatism, economy, immigration, law and order, liberalism, nationalism, populism, social issues, and war terminology. This section mainly focuses on the right-wing populist political communication style of Viktor Orbán<sup>29</sup> from theoretical and empirical aspects as well. Therefore, this study introduces a comprehensive literature review on the populist political communication style and former, related findings on the Hungarian PM's live speeches. We chose populism for two reasons. First, populism and charismatic leadership often intertwine.<sup>30</sup> Second, scholars

25 Tóth et al., "Protect Our Homeland!"

26 Merkovity, Bene, and Farkas, "Hungary: Illiberal Crisis Management."

27 Palonen, "Performing the Nation"; Baume "Orbán, Le Pen, Salvini Join Forces to Blast EU Integration"; Barigazzi and Bayer, "Orbán and Salvini, the Master and Pupil of EU Populism"; Ermakova and Gergely, "Macron Takes On Orbán and Salvini Over Europe's Populist Future"; Mischke, "Orbán and Kurz Promise to Continue Migration Fight"; Sprink, "Példátlanul nagyot zuhant a Fidesz és Orbán népszerűsége."

28 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."

29 Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*.

30 Schneiker, "Populist Leadership"; Kissas, "Performative and Ideological Populism."

have started to consider Viktor Orbán as a leader who implements the populist style in his communication.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that beyond the Hungarian PM, many politicians, such as Alexis Tsipras, Donald Trump, Hugo Chavez, Jair Bolsonaro, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, Mary Lou MacDonald, Pablo Iglesias, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Rodrigo Duterte, and Narendra Modi, are categorized as politicians who utilize the populist style to an increased degree.<sup>32</sup> Finally, studies also prove that many contemporary politicians insert people-centrism, the core element of populism, into their offline and online communication.

This research uses a dictionary-based and computer-assisted content analysis to scrutinize a large database and provide impeccable reliability. The goal of the section is twofold. First, we compare the share of the aforementioned issue topics in the analyzed speeches from 2018 and 2020 to discuss the similarities and differences between these periods. Second, our scrutiny also highlights the specific features of Viktor Orbán's populist styles. To provide a thorough analysis, we searched three components of the populist style: antagonism, people-centrism, and the general will. This subchapter has the following structure: we outline the main concept of populism as concerns its stylistic character, introduce former findings on Viktor Orbán's speeches, describe our methodology, and discuss our findings in detail.

### *The Populist Political Communication Style*

In the last decade and a half, more scholars started to argue that populism is a political (communication) style rather than an ideology.<sup>33</sup> Similarly to the ideational approach, the populist political communication style juxtaposes the people and the elite and emphasizes that the decision-making processes should be aligned

31 Hawkins et al., "Measuring Populist Discourse."

32 Hawkins et al., "Measuring Populist Discourse."

33 Jagers and Walgrave, "Populism as Political Communication Style"; Moffitt and Tormey, "Rethinking Populism"; Tóth, "Fractured Implicitness"; Hameleers and Vliegthart, "The Rise of a Populist Zeitgeist?"; Bracciale and Martella, "Define the Populist Political Communication Style."

with the general will.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, researchers who regard populism as a style argue that this communication phenomenon consists of irrational demands,<sup>35</sup> simplifications,<sup>36</sup> homogenization,<sup>37</sup> people-centrism,<sup>38</sup> utopian visions,<sup>39</sup> taboo-breaking topics,<sup>40</sup> emotionalization,<sup>41</sup> vulgarism,<sup>42</sup> the professional utilization of the media,<sup>43</sup> love,<sup>44</sup> anger,<sup>45</sup> anxiety,<sup>46</sup> zeitgeist vision,<sup>47</sup> antagonism,<sup>48</sup> anti-elitism,<sup>49</sup> antiestablishment rhetoric,<sup>50</sup> and explicit and implicit dichotomies.<sup>51</sup> Besides, the stylistic approach is more helpful if one aims to analyze to what extent specific agents utilize populism, while the ideational approach is useful to decide whether an actor is populist or not.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, the ideational approach is betrayed by “degreeism,” so the populist style is more efficient if scholars conduct content analysis.

On the one hand, comprehensive typologies might help scholars detect populist styles; on the other, the experience in content analysis shows a more sophisticated picture. Taggart argues that populism is not just a flexible complex but has an “inherent incompleteness.”<sup>53</sup> In line with the former claim, many research-

34 Tarragoni, “Populism, an Ideology without History?”

35 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

36 Bracciale and Martella, “Define the Populist Political Communication Style.”

37 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.

38 Jagers and Walgrave, “Populism as Political Communication Style.”

39 Fassin, *Populism Left and Right*.

40 Martella and Bracciale, “Populism and Emotions”; Mendonça and Caetano, “Populism as Parody.”

41 Gerstlé and Nai, “Negativity, Emotionality and Populist Rhetoric.”

42 Bracciale and Martella, “Define the Populist Political Communication Style.”

43 Krämer, “Media Populism.”

44 Martella and Bracciale, “Populism and Emotions”; Demeter and Tóth, “None of Us Is an Island.”

45 Jost, Maurer, and Hassler, “Populism Fuels Love and Anger.”

46 Zsolt, Tóth, and Demeter, “We Are the Ones Who Matter!”

47 Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.”

48 Gonawela et al., “Speaking their Mind.”

49 Mohrenberg, Huber, and Freyburg, “Love at First Sight?”

50 Csigó and Merkovity, “Hungary: Home of Empty Populism.”

51 Tóth, Demeter, and Goyanes, “Extend the Context!”; Tóth, “Target the Enemy.”

52 Aslanidis “Is Populism an Ideology?”

53 Taggart, “Populism and Representative Politics,” 275.

ers argue that the populist style is fractured and fragmented.<sup>54</sup> The fragmented style means that political agents avoid utilizing people-centrism, anti-elitism, and the *volonté générale* in their communication. Instead, they choose one of the features above and put it into their communication to (1) keep the message plain, (2) disregard ideological cleavages, and (3) avoid being labeled as “populists.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, we separately search the populist antagonism, people-centrism, and the general will in this study. However, we also aim to detect the features above when they appear together in the same content unit, namely the core sentences.

To provide an analysis conducted on many speeches, we followed previous studies’ methodologies<sup>56</sup> and applied a dictionary-based content analysis method. This methodology relies mostly on deductive logic and aims to detect populism by utilizing words or word combinations that might entail this style, such as the “elite,” “our people,” “we want.”<sup>57</sup> Even though the validity of the dictionary-based, computer-assisted methods is questionable, their reliability is perfect, and fine-tuned word combinations might increase the validity of the result.<sup>58</sup>

### **Previous Results**

We present the results that introduced the share of topic word categories within four speeches from Viktor Orbán during the campaign period preceding the Hungarian general elections in 2018. Tóth found that the most prominent category was nationalism (36%), followed by populism (25%) and economy (14%).<sup>59</sup> The remaining topic categories were conservatism (13%), immigration (4%), war

54 Engesser et al., “Populism and Social Media.”

55 Engesser et al., “Populism and Social Media.”

56 Rooduijn and Pauwels, “Measuring populism”; Pauwels, “Measuring Populism: A Quantitative Text Analysis”; Bruter and Harrison, *Mapping Extreme Right Ideology*; Gründl, “Populist Ideas on Social Media”; Bonikowski and Gidron, “The Populist Style in American Politics.”

57 Gründl “Populist Ideas on Social Media.”

58 Aslanidis “Measuring Populist Discourse with Semantic Text Analysis”; Gründl, “Populist Ideas on Social Media.”

59 Tóth, “Target the Enemy.”

terminology, law and order (2%), social (2%), and liberalism (0%). Considering the results above, we introduce our first hypothesis:

**H1:** Nationalism is the most frequent topic category characterizing Viktor Orbán's speeches.

Furthermore, we aim to investigate the shares of the topic categories in the Hungarian PM's speeches. So, we propose our first research question:

**RQ1:** To what extent do topic categories emerge within Viktor Orbán's speeches?

Another area of extended research revealed that the fragmented (implicit) populist style out-performs apparent "us versus them" dichotomies (explicit populism) in Viktor Orbán's speeches at the level of core sentences.<sup>60</sup> Besides, populist people-centrism is more frequent than antagonism in core sentences. Therefore, our hypothesis is the following:

**H2:** People-centrism is the most frequent feature of the populist style within Viktor Orbán's speeches.

Additionally, we analyzed to what extent antagonism and the general will appear in the scrutinized database. Therefore, we present our second research question below:

**RQ2:** To what extent do anti-elitism and the *volonté générale* emerge within Viktor Orbán's speeches?

Finally, we analyzed how many explicit dichotomies, the populist "us versus them" narrative, appeared in the speeches:

**RQ3:** How many explicit populist messages emerge within Viktor Orbán's speeches?

60 Tóth, Demeter, and Goyanes, "Extend the Context!"

In the following section, we briefly introduce our methodology and database.

### *Methodology and Data*

We analyzed fifty-one speeches from Viktor Orbán between March 5, 2020, and February 17, 2021. We chose this period because the first infected people in Hungary were detected on March 4, 2020. To provide a detailed picture of the political communication style of Viktor Orbán in the epidemic, we decided to scrutinize a more extended period than the end of the first state of emergency that lasted until June 18, 2020.<sup>61</sup> We collected speeches of Viktor Orbán from the Hungarian PM's official website, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/>. The database consists of extraordinary announcements, press statements, ceremonial speeches, opening speeches, parliamentary statements before the agenda, and speeches held at funerals.

In this study, we mostly relied on Tóth's populist dictionary,<sup>62</sup> but we also refined it to enhance validity. For instance, we excluded pronouns such as "we" from single word detection because the computer-assisted quantitative content analysis is not eligible to decide to whom the pronouns refer. In turn, we applied pronouns in word combination detection that could refine the validity of the general will. For example, "we wish" is also included in the content analysis method because this word combination attracts the *volonté générale*. We also added extra word combinations to capture the general will. Table 4.1 collects the utilized words and word combinations that might capture the populist style. Regarding the other topics besides the populist style, we did not change Tóth's topic dictionary.<sup>63</sup> For further details on the topic dictionary, see Tóth's study in which he analyzes topic categories in Viktor Orbán's speeches.<sup>64</sup>

We utilized Maxqda2022 to conduct a computer-assisted content analysis method. The program trawled the speeches by relying on populist phrases and expressions that might entail other topics.

61 Merkovity, Bene, and Farkas, "Hungary: Illiberal Crisis Management."

62 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."

63 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."

64 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."



**Table 4.1** Words and word combinations that might entail the populist style. Hungarian words are presented in parentheses

<i>Antagonism</i>	<i>People-centrism</i>	<i>General will</i>
Brussels (Brüsszel)	the people (nép, magyarok)	we want (akarjuk)
UN (ENSZ)	Hungarians (magyarok)	we need for (szükségünk van)
Soros (Soros)	homeland (haza)	we would like to (szeretnénk)
opposition (ellenzék)	laborers (dolgozók)	
migrant (migráns)	employees (munkavállalók)	
immigrant (bevándorló)	citizens (polgárok)	
immigration (bevándorlás)	voters (választók)	
background power (háttérhatalom)	our homeland (hazánk)	
its enemy (ellenfele)	Hungary (Magyarország)	
enemy (ellenség)		
ill-wisher (rosszakaró)		
communist (kommunista)		
communism (kommunizmus)		
bolshevik (bolsevik)		
socialism (szocializmus)		
socialist (szocialista)		
migration (migráció)		

Every hit based on the populist features was transformed into codes. We utilized the code relation browser to reveal the frequencies of explicit populist messages. This method seeks the co-occurrences of codes within a particular content unit. In this case, we chose the core sentences as content units to enhance validity because we supposed that the “us versus them” narrative could be captured with

higher precision at the level of single sentences. As this study lacks manual quantitative content analysis but implies an automated method that provides perfect reliability, but limited validity, there was no need for reliability tests.<sup>65</sup>

## Results

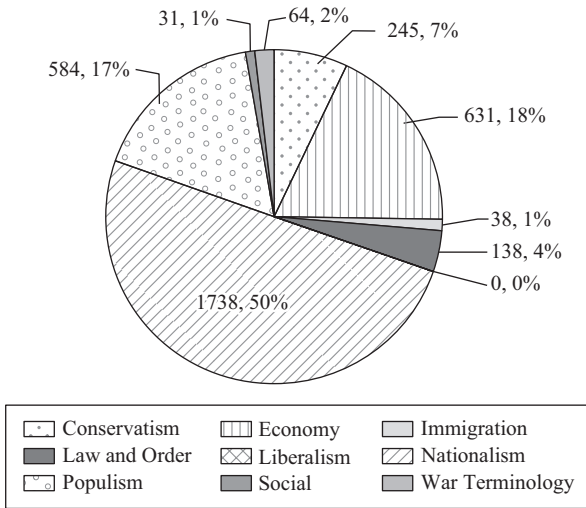
We summarized our results in Table 4.2, where every hypothesis and research question is addressed. First, we start with the outcomes supported by the frequencies and shares of the topic words and word combinations. In line with the outcome of previous research,<sup>66</sup> nationalism is still the most prominent topic in Viktor Orbán's political communication style (**H1**). In other words, in 2018 and 2020, the nationalist style outperformed the other styles of the Hungarian

**Table 4.2** Hypotheses, research questions, and the relevant answers

<i>Hypothesis/Research Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
H1	Validated; 50% of the topics are fueled by nationalism.
H2	Validated; 76% of the populist style contains people-centrism.
RQ1	Nationalism (50%), Economy (18%), Populism (17%), Conservatism (7%), Law and Order (4%), War Terminology (2%), Immigration (1%), Social (1%), Liberalism (0%).
RQ2	Anti-elitism has 18%, the general will gains 6% share of the populist style.
RQ3	Thirty-two explicit populist sentences were revealed.

65 Grimmer and Stewart, "Text as Data"; Krippendorff, *Content Analysis*; Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*.

66 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."



**Figure 4.1** Topic categories in Viktor Orbán’s speeches between March 5, 2020, and February 17, 2021

PM. In our analysis, contrasted to former research,<sup>67</sup> the nationalist style covered 50% of the database in 2020, while the same topic covered “only” 36% of the speeches in 2018. Regarding the rest of the topics, economy is the second, while populism is the third category in our results (see Figure 4.1). The former has 18%, while the latter has a 17% share of the database (**RQ1**). Interestingly, these two topic categories were among the three most frequently utilized styles in Viktor Orbán’s speeches during the 2018 campaign period as well.<sup>68</sup> However, populism was the second, and the economy had the third position that year. Furthermore, none of the remaining topic categories reached more than a 7% share of the data, and almost all remain under 3%. Our results suggest that three topics were salient in the Hungarian PM’s speeches: nationalism, economy, and populism.

Now, we turn our attention to the features of Viktor Orbán’s populist style and its specific features. The dictionary-based, automated content analysis suggests that people-centrism is the most prominent

<sup>67</sup> Tóth, “Target the Enemy.”

<sup>68</sup> Tóth, “Target the Enemy.”

**Table 4.3** Code co-occurrences in core sentences in Viktor Orbán's speeches between March 5, 2020, and February 17, 2021

<i>Code system</i>	<i>General will</i>	<i>Antagonism</i>	<i>People-centrism</i>	<i>Total</i>
General will	0	4	14	18
Antagonism	4	0	32	36
People-centrism	14	32	0	46

populist feature in the database as it has a share of more than three-quarters of the populist elements (**H2**). We caution the reader, however. It is important to note that single-word searches for pronouns (e.g. we, you, they) that might attract antagonism or people-centrism, were excluded because including these words could skew the results. However, we assume that words referring to the “good” people would still outperform pronouns that might target the “corrupt” enemy; thus, people-centrism’s dominance would remain. The descriptive statistics show that people-centrism’s mean is 14.10 and the median is 10 in the speeches. In line with former research, people-centrism unambiguously prevails in Viktor Orbán’s live speeches.<sup>69</sup> Regarding our second research question, the outcomes suggest that anti-elitism has an 18% (mean = 3.29, median = 1) share, while the *volonté générale* acquires a 6% (mean = 1.25, median = 1) share of the populist features (**RQ2**).

Our final research question connects to the explicit dichotomies: the presence of antagonism and the general will/people-centrism in the same sentence. We found that antagonist topics connected primarily to the topic of immigration (n = 39), followed by Brussels (n = 19), and the interior oppositional political elite (n = 11). Table 4.3 suggests that thirty-two sentences entailed explicit populism (**RQ3**). Our content analysis shows that sixteen speeches imply explicit populism, less than one-third of the entire database. In contrast, people-centrism, which is part of the implicit populist political communication style, was perceived in 92% of the speeches. In sum,

69 Tóth, Demeter, and Goyanes, “Extend the Context!”

similar to the findings of Tóth and colleagues,<sup>70</sup> explicit populism is outperformed by the implicit populist style of Viktor Orbán at the level of core sentences.

In a nutshell, nationalism is the most frequent topic category, followed by the economy and populism. Moreover, people-centrism is the dominant feature of Viktor Orbán's populist style, which relies on implicit populism. Even though immigration has a 1% share among the topics, it has the largest share among the antagonist agents.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Populism has become a popular research topic, if not an obsession, of scholars in the last two decades. Therefore, the populist styles have been investigated from theoretical and empirical aspects.<sup>71</sup> Many researchers accept that people-centrism is the fundamental element of populism and the populist political communication style that prevails in contemporary politics.<sup>72</sup> As our findings show, people-centrism is the most frequent feature of Viktor Orbán's populist style. This finding contributes to the theoretical part of populism studies from at least two perspectives.

First, scholars argue that the most frequent element of the populist style utilized by almost every political agent is empty populism, which relies on people-centrism.<sup>73</sup> Even though the "people" never cover the entire society due to the populist logic,<sup>74</sup> Viktor Orbán makes the public remember that the pandemic harms "the people," and the Hungarian government supports every Hungarian who accepts the authority's help. Communication-wise, people-centrism was a remarkable feature of the populist style that prevailed beyond Viktor Orbán's speeches in the media. The Hungarian government

70 Tóth, Demeter, and Goyanes, "Extend the Context!"

71 Tarragoni, "Populism, an Ideology without History?"; Mohrenberg, Huber, and Freyburg, "Love at First Sight?"; Hameleers and Vliegenthart, "The Rise of a Populist Zeitgeist?"

72 Jagers and Walgrave, "Populism as Political Communication Style"; Canovan, *The People*; Mudde, "An Ideational Approach."

73 Jagers and Walgrave, "Populism as Political Communication Style."

74 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

utilized the mass media, giant billboards, social media ads, and the help of Hungarian celebrities and experts to convince people to wear masks, keep physical distance, be aware of hygiene, respect the curfews, and register for vaccines. In this sense, people-centrism was not just the sole feature of the Hungarian political leadership's communication. We presume that the Hungarian PM and his party suggested that Hungarians should be people-centrist too by respecting measures during the pandemic and voluntarily utilizing the vaccines to protect themselves and others from Covid-19. Second, the dominance of people-centrism (e.g. the implicit populist style) proves that populism is a fractured communication phenomenon. Therefore, antagonism, people-centrism, and the general will rarely appear together at the level of core sentences.

The populist antagonism also appeared in the PM's speeches. Viktor Orbán outlined "a clear link between illegal immigration and the coronavirus epidemic,"<sup>75</sup> fueled by the news that the first two infected people were Iranian students. Even though the narrative on the connection between immigration and the spread of the coronavirus emerged as early as March 2020, mixing the topic of immigration with the epidemic started to become marginal in Viktor Orbán's and pro-government actors' communication. Mostly in the second half of 2020, illegal immigration started to become a re-emerging topic in Viktor Orbán's speeches. In that period, the Hungarian PM depicted immigration as a tool used by Brussels to conduct "an intellectual suppression" in Europe. In November 2020, Viktor Orbán argued that one nation that "defends its borders and protects its country from migration can no longer be considered a state of the law in Brussels." Briefly, the Hungarian PM suggested that Hungary is not respected in Brussels because many political elite groups do not welcome the ideological differences regarding immigration.

The general will frequently connected to the topic of economy, which had more visibility in Viktor Orbán's speeches than it has had before.<sup>76</sup> This outcome explains that the *volonté générale* could

75 Merkovity, Bene, and Farkas, "Hungary: Illiberal Crisis Management," 2.

76 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."

be aligned with a prosperous economy and the epidemic threatened the economy within and beyond Hungary's borders. The Hungarian PM regularly expressed the intention that Hungary, in the sense of unemployment ratios, aims to catch up with the Czech Republic to keep the country working. Additionally, there is an ideological-based narrative of the idea above. Viktor Orbán often declares that Hungary is a work-based society, suggesting that there is no free lunch for people who avoid labor.

In line with the results of former research, our outcomes suggest that appealing to the imagined national communities is paramount in Viktor Orbán's speeches.<sup>77</sup> We argue that our finding is important because previous research proved that in-group solidarity is the most remarkable distinctive attitude that characterizes Hungarians who support charismatic politicians relying on the populist communication style.<sup>78</sup> We assume that nationalist topics are fundamental in the Hungarian PM's live speeches for the following reasons. First, Viktor Orbán suggests that supporting and defending Hungarians' health, security, and culture is the primary goal that political leadership should be aware of. Additionally, Viktor Orbán also suggests that he and his party are the ones who fight for the homeland when, according to the Fidesz-KDNP's communication, several foreign forces attack Hungary at the same time. This leadership style implies a struggle-narrative, suggesting that a remarkable improvement has been perceived in the welfare and well-being of Hungarians, but immigrants, Brussels, and the puppet opposition could threaten this development. Moreover, the Hungarian PM emphasized the need for national unity to help defend against the virus.<sup>79</sup> In turn, Viktor Orbán also claimed that the Hungarian opposition unacceptably disregards national unity, which is vital if one aims to fight the virus and protect citizens' health.

The (populist) leadership style of Viktor Orbán followed a pragmatic logic during the pandemic. On the one hand, he aimed to keep his supporters together by utilizing nationalist topics in his speech, similarly to the previous years. On the other hand, when

77 Tóth, "Target the Enemy."

78 Zsolt, Tóth, and Demeter, "We Are the Ones Who Matter!"

79 Merkovity, Bene, and Farkas, "Hungary: Illiberal Crisis Management."

the economy started to be under severe pressure from the epidemic, he intensified issues regarding the Hungarian economy to suggest to the citizens that the government does everything possible to protect the results that had been achieved from the beginning of the 2010s. In line with this logic, people-centrism dominated the PM's populist style to suggest that the Hungarian government's role is unambiguously the same as it has been in recent years: protecting the homeland.



## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION: FOLLOWING THE LEADER

*JOSHUA HAYDEN, GEORGE HAYS II,  
AND MILADA POLIŠENSKÁ*

#### **Introduction**

The previous four case studies have provided valuable insights on two structural levels. First, they have each examined the unique scenarios in the individual countries according to the Adaptive Leadership framework developed in the introductory chapter. Second, they have each provided an individually focused study according to a unique method of an issue related to the decision making regarding the pandemic within the respective country. The focus of this chapter will be to examine the four case studies and to compare and contrast the information gleaned from them. This chapter will be broken up into three broad sections. First, there will be a meta-analysis concerning the Adaptive Leadership framework studies from each case (common method), followed by a discussion of the particular individual studies from each case (mixed methods). Finally, there will be a discussion of what these parts have to say regarding the continued legacy and health of democracy in the region.

#### **Meta-Analysis**

##### ***Adaptive Leadership (Common Method)***

As presented in the Introduction and recapitulated for each case, the Adaptive Leadership framework developed for this analysis examines the following five points:

1. Framing the problem: expressing a clear understanding of the adaptive and technical challenges involved.

2. Prompt decision making and coordination: evaluating alternatives, engaging debate, and involving people to take responsibility for the solution.
3. Transparency and communication: using and disseminating credible information, accepting feedback, and building a unifying identity.
4. Fostering collaboration across sectors: listening, giving the work back to the people with the problem, and aligning major responsibilities.
5. Learning from past decisions and preparing for the future: capacity-building within the organization to learn from experiments, past mistakes, and best practices outside their own domain.

We need to keep these points in mind together with the two phases of crisis decision making, that of acute and adaptive.

Taking all of this into consideration, we can see a few trends that emerge across the four cases. First, we see a common tension between health interests and economic interests. This tension is exacerbated by the recurring waves of the pandemic. Second, we see this tension being frequently and significantly attached to the individual-level political concerns of the decision makers. Third, we see the consequences of the first two points playing out across the waves of the pandemic, only to be arrested by the technological advancements of vaccines and therapeutics. Finally, all of this points to the predominance of decision making remaining within the acute phase. Across all four cases, this points to an absence of adaptive leadership and a potential danger to the first-generation democracies of the Visegrad group. Let's look at each of these points in turn.

### *Health Interests vs Economic Interests*

The tension between health and economic interests is significant throughout the first four points of the framework. First and foremost, it is the main component in framing the problem. We see the problem framed first as one of the health and health infrastructure of society. Slightly later, we see the emergence of ever stronger

economic concerns (related both to the pandemic as well as pandemic response). With two competing problem foci, the following three points of the framework get drawn into play.

Decision making and coordination are hampered by the emergence of two camps. Rather than having a single body seeking a single goal, there is a fractured body seeking different goals. This fractures and problematizes the entire process of crisis response. With two camps turning into two competing political power centers, information and its sharing becomes compromised as both “sides” push their points and compromise the other’s (purposefully or not). Both as method and effect, this counters collaboration and all of the practical benefits collaboration brings.

The beginning of the pandemic saw a multi-faceted shockwave roll across the individual and collective societies of the world. As such, it is problematic to focus solely on one aspect of this event. Existential fear of the unknown expressed itself in both solidarity and xenophobia, terror and service, isolation and community. When it comes to decision makers at the state level in the preceding case analyses, though, this fear of the unknown expressed itself in a more or less immediate lockdown of society for the purpose of preserving both the health and the health infrastructure of those individual societies. Almost immediately, the tensions of the cost-benefit analysis that resulted in those decisions became prevalent and impacted the rest of the pandemic decisions in the four states.

With so little knowledge at the beginning of the pandemic relating to transmissibility, severity, and legacy of infection, state-level decision makers reasonably chose to embrace a more traditional pandemic response: isolation within and among societies. This decision both saved lives as well as preserved the unprepared medical infrastructure to give it time to develop to face the incredible challenge. This decision had numerous and mounting costs, however. There was the cost of loss: lost economic activity, production, consumption, services, and so on. There was the cost of expenditure: purchasing supplies, equipment, hiring more essential workers, and social payments to those out of work. There was the social and psychological cost: isolation, breakdown of relations, education effects, abuse, drug and alcohol use, physical and mental health

effects that were no longer prioritized for treatment, and so on. These costs, and many more, all piled on pressures counterbalancing the benefit of low infection rates and low mortality rates. In the absence of horrific health costs in the first wave, the ever present economic and social costs were felt more intensely. This disparity would see relaxations in lockdown measures that would result in a tremendous reversal of infection and mortality rates in the four states going forward.

While each of the four states exhibit this trend, the case of the Czech Republic illustrates it most clearly and directly. Here, we see a revolving door of Health Ministers coming and going due to open conflict with the politico-economic policy interests of the Prime Minister's office. Mitigation measures are relaxed in order to allow for economic and social activity according to the socio-cultural calendar, rather than based upon existing and anticipated pandemic trends. This allows for schools to reopen, businesses to reopen, cultural events and social gatherings to commence, all according to "normal" timetables and holidays, only for the relaxations to be overturned in a few weeks or after the holiday, but much too late to have a positive effect on the infection rates.

The result of swinging between health-focused and economic-focused strategies to mitigate respective damage results in damage to both areas, as well as in damage to the public trust for the decision makers. This damage to public trust compounds all of the other costs heretofore mentioned, because it weakens the ability for the decision makers to effectively implement policies of any kind. This points to an important point concerning Adaptive Leadership.

It is not the case that either health or economic concerns are "better." Possible decisions need not be zero-sum. What is important and relevant for Adaptive Leadership is that the decisions are collaborative and responsive to the needs of the group's goals, not the result of in-group competition for the sake of "winning" over one's rivals for individual gain. It is precisely this dynamic that we see emerging in the subsequent waves of the pandemic and at the heart of the health/economic debate. We see a shift from a purer crisis response to a more classic political response.

*Individual Political Concerns*

In all four cases, but to different degrees and within different contexts, we see the impacts of the individual political concerns of the main decision makers play out. To some degree, this frequently interacts with the health/economic discussion above. That particular dynamic is not necessary, however. What we see in each case is an effort by the ruling actors to utilize the pandemic and the pandemic response to their personal political benefit.

Since the goal of the decision being made is to a certain degree adjusted by the individual political concerns of the actors making the decision, the framing of the problem becomes even more complex. There is a great difference between “resolve the pandemic with the least health and economic impact” (assuming a joint position to the first issue) and “resolve the pandemic with the least negative political impact to my rule.” Those are two different problems, and they imply two different strategies.

While decision making for either of the above-described problems could be prompt, the issue of coordination is problematized. This, in turn, will impact the points of transparency and communication, as well as collaboration seeking. Each of these points is conditioned toward the end goal, coopting transparency and collaboration toward that ultimate prize.

It is difficult to pick a “best” case to illustrate this point, and so the three best shall be provided. First to discuss is the case of Hungary. The case of Hungary illustrated an impressive operation to integrate the unforeseeable pandemic into the existing political discourse dominated by the Orbán government. Here, the emergence of a foreign disease and foreign-dominated mitigation measures for the disease were meshed nicely into reinforcing the existing message of individual greatness against external threats, so successively utilized by Orbán’s government. Here, it should also be noted that the Orbán government out-performed in its “Covid-elections,” supporting the message and strengthening the government.

Next in line is the Slovak case. Here is a far more difficult struggle. Having come in just as the pandemic began, the Matovič government had its work cut out for them. Matovič was also a populist as and when elected, though. This populist stance informed both his

strategy and his goal in the pandemic response. As the Slovak case illustrates, taking on the pandemic as a personal anthropomorphic adversary fits within the established political playbook, but it also introduced a degree of unfamiliarity and complication. In an effort to be the sole “hero,” Matovič embarked upon strategies that were more expensive, less effectual, and more problematic (especially in the vaccination phase of the pandemic). The results were negative in both pandemic as well as political effect.

The third to discuss is the Czech case. This case seems to mix the first two, though result in the outcome of the second. Initially, the Czech response was quite successful socio-politically in the face of the pandemic. It suffered significantly on the politico-economic front, however. This disparity influenced and inflamed the health/economic conflict to significant and public extent. Five health ministers (the first returning as the last) highlights the incredibly excruciating journey of Prime Minister Babiš to regain and maintain his “best in Covid” declaration. His government seemed to be perpetually and tragically following the pandemic rather than engaging with it, as a result of belatedly trying to be all things to both camps.

With the primary issue of there being a disparity between two goals, it is little wonder that individual political considerations should emerge and be so disastrously prominent. These approaches, noticeably, attempted to adapt to and utilize the acute phase of the crisis, however. The strategy, beyond ignoring Adaptive Leadership, also neglected the transformative role of the technological leaps in vaccinations and therapeutics (even where those goals were sought by the actors).

### *The Tech Effect*

Such a unique global issue invites both global response and global influence. Thankfully, this response and influence extended to the great powers researching, discovering, and producing various vaccines and therapeutics to alleviate the pandemic. These technological advancements extended from a scientific and medical infrastructure that was more developed and much larger than that possible for the capabilities of the individual states here analyzed. This resulted

in a significant degree of effect coming from outside the four states in terms of both mitigation and treatment of Covid-19.

This external interaction upsets the standard model thus far presented. The framing of the problem, from the international/global perspective, is heavily on the side of health interests. This would seem to be due to the fact that it is a global pandemic affecting health that has in turn affected individual health and economic concerns within states. It would also seem to be due to the fact that the health concern is the single uniform concern across all states, as opposed to the more differentiated economic concerns.

The result of this predominance of external support for the health side of the competing domestic tensions is that there is less room for maneuver among the state decision makers regarding either health or economic support. The relation to economic support is straightforward: if the international discourse is health focused, to shift from that focus too greatly is to invite doubts by the public about the goals and methods and motives of the decision makers. There is also limitation involved for those supporting a health focus, though. Whereas goals (and likely motives) would not be questioned, methods can differ. To differ too greatly, though, and be less successful than the “standard” results, would encourage questioning and doubt of the abilities of the decision makers. For both camps, it becomes a Catch-22. To follow the guidance of the external powers is to surrender a degree of autonomy while taking on the consequences of the results. To ignore the guidance of the external powers is to raise significant doubts within the society about the decision makers themselves. With those constraints, coordination, transparency, and collaboration are also affected.

The Czech and Slovak cases illustrate this well. As the first wave ended and the second began, Babiš made his famous pronouncement of being “best in Covid.” That belief encouraged him to think that he had done things differently than the external powers, and done them better. This hubris influenced a shift to a much stronger economic focus while ignoring the continued health concerns. The result was a severe pendulum swing in fortunes that saw the Czech Republic become the worst affected state by capita.

In Slovakia, Matovič sought to resolve both the health and the economic issues through securing vaccination for the country in novel ways. First, there was the means of obtaining vaccines. With a lack of approved Western vaccines on the market, Matovič turned to unapproved Eastern vaccines. This rebuff of the external powers' guidance led to a swift and substantive consequence, with Matovič losing his position as Prime Minister. Second, there was the effort of getting enough of the population vaccinated. The lottery route chosen in Slovakia, as discussed, was quite expensive, chaotic, and did not lead to significantly different results from standard vaccination programs used elsewhere.

Beyond this critique of the Slovak model, the role of vaccines and of broader knowledge/technological advancements related to the pandemic is essential to this analysis. As has been repeatedly demonstrated, in all four states there was a lack of Adaptive Leadership, which also limited the responses of the decision makers. Without the discovery and production of vaccines and treatments from outside of the decision makers' domains, it is quite doubtful that the cycles of the pandemic and pandemic mitigation measures would have abated as quickly and successfully as they have.

### *Phase Shift (or Lack Thereof)*

The above discussion concerning the trends in the four analyses all points to the absence of a phase shift from the acute to the adaptive at the level of the state decision makers. The acute phase, representing the immediate response to the crisis, was maintained throughout the period of pandemic response in each of the four states. This is because of failures involved in each of the points presented in the Adaptive Leadership framework.

To begin with, rather than a single complex problem being identified and engaged with, competing camps between health and economic concerns emerged and became more entrenched. As seen in the Hungarian example, the problem of the pandemic was actually coopted and integrated into Orbán's existing populist message of "Hungary vs the Outside." By having competing or entirely alternate understandings of the problem at hand, it was not possible to



move on to the adaptive phase, which entails collaboration and evolution of response. Indeed, as discussed in the immediately previous section, it was only the technological advancements coming from external powers that finally ended the acute phase.

The lack of a single true identified problem affects the rest of the Adaptive Leadership points. Decisions may be prompt, but they will emerge from silos that are in competition with other silos. This is the exact opposite of coordinated effort coming out of and being in support of broadly informed deliberation. Whether we look at the competition between the Czech Prime Minister and the various Czech Health Ministers, or at the surprise announcement of the purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine in Slovakia, we see clear effects of this.

The effects continue down into transparency and communication, where we should also include the effectiveness of communication. The problems of communication are in general of two types. The first is a lack of clear full transparent communication due to the competition between camps just discussed. The second is a lack of clear full transparent communication due to the lack of collaboration and coordination as a result of the internal competitions. The Polish example of a student's pandemic information collection hobby being the main source for complete information in the country is a tremendous, if chilling, example of this point.

Finally, we should look at how this fits in with learning. The Hungarian case would seem to be the clearest and most straightforward. Orbán learned from past experience to create an enemy and strengthen his grip. His method would seem to reside perpetually in the acute phase, and his success in post-pandemic elections would seem to suggest that he has little reason to alter his recipe. The case of the Czech Republic can, perhaps, be placed at the other end of the spectrum. While Covid-19 was only one of many aspects impacting the parliamentary elections of 2021, the Prime Minister was voted out of power and replaced by an opposing coalition. At the time of writing, former Prime Minister Babiš ran for and lost the election for the President of the Czech Republic. His opponent, Petr Pavel, won with the greatest mandate ever. It seems the Czech voters, at least, have learned from the past. Poland and Slovakia are

somewhere in between. After a difficult and controversial election in 2020, Polish President Duda won reelection. The vaccine scandal saw Matovič lose his position as Prime Minister and, at the time of writing, Slovakia is likely headed toward new parliamentary elections.

These political events and responses would suggest that, at least aside from Hungary, there have been signals made to both the decision makers and the would-be decision makers to make some alterations to their method. Whether or not that would lead to a more adaptive approach remains to be seen.

### ***Individual Cases (Mixed Methods)***

The second component of each chapter was the individualized studies conducted for each state. This approach allowed for a variation of more detailed analyses to complement and supplement the uniform method of the applied Adaptive Leadership framework. The result was four studies using four different methods and analyzing four different areas within the states. The Czech case used a questionnaire-survey method to examine perceived organizational responses in educational institutions, civic organizations, and businesses. The Slovak case was an in-depth study of public opinion concerning the government and other politicians during the pandemic. The Polish case used interviews to assess entrepreneurs' reactions to the first wave of the pandemic as well as to the rollout of vaccinations. The Hungarian case analyzed the discourse of the Prime Minister concerning the pandemic. Together, the individual studies present a broad body of information concerning different particular aspects of the pandemic and the pandemic response in the region.

The Czech survey provides some very interesting insights. Of greatest interest is that, both within the organization of the respondents as well as their perceptions of the government, communication practices and collaboration practices as envisioned by adaptive leadership were seen to be more beneficial and encourage belief in the viability of the organization/state. Seemingly related to this is the point that respondents generally had greater approval for their organization rather than the state. Size and proximity would

seem to impact the results, but the importance of engagement is clear. Finally, and related to the previous point, there was a slight but interesting disparity related to the level of actor in the organization and the assessment of the government. Those with higher levels of decision making were a little more understanding of the government, again suggesting a correlation between proximity to decision making and assessment of decision making.

The Slovak study analyzed opinion polling and voter trends. The results are starker than that of the Czech analysis. In the Slovak case, with regard to both health concerns and economic concerns, the lack of belief and support in the government is quite pronounced.

In terms of level of analysis, the Polish case is a bit closer to the Czech case. In the Polish case, though, the interviews targeted what was a lesser cohort in the Czech case, being higher-level decision makers within a business/organization. Interestingly, this resulted in more practical statements of material challenges and material relief from the government, while at the same time overlapping with the results of the Czech case in terms of the importance of communication and engagement.

The Hungarian case was very different, in that it analyzed the discourse of the main decision maker: Prime Minister Orbán. Even so, we see some common trends. While the discourse was heavily reinforcing the established trend of “Hungary vs the Outside,” the economic component so heavily discussed in the other cases is also found here. The economic angle of the pandemic would seem to be the method of choice to reinforce the populist-identity message. The very real and individual economic concerns of individual Hungarians were pooled together to re-establish and reinforce the national identity of “Hungarian-ness.”

Among the different studies, a common theme stands out, as it does among the common framework analyses: the importance of proximity. To a degree, the theoretical framework, regional application, and results from each of the independent analyses all highlight the importance of closing proximity within a social network. The style that achieves this is “adaptive.”

In both the theoretical and theory-dependent regional analyses, the key concepts can be understood in two ways. The first is in

terms of utility: the result of an approach. The second is in terms of identity: the result as the approach. Both understandings hinge on proximity. That which is more easily shared is more effective, and that which is more familiar is more easily shared.

At the core of the components of problem-framing, coordination, communication, collaboration, and experiential learning is the issue of proximity: proximity vis-à-vis utility, and proximity vis-à-vis self. Both in the theoretical as well as the practical studies, we see this play out. That which is more beneficial toward closing proximity is considered more beneficial outright. A single common problem, according to the theory, is a strong basis for effective resolution of that problem. As we have seen in the regional studies, such a common problem was not really ever framed, leading to a split in identification and the cascading of problems and inefficiencies that prevented an effective resolution. In the individual practical studies, we see a three-pronged trend illustrating the same point. In the Czech and Polish studies, we see that there is a benefit to closing proximity within the organizations in terms of communication and collaboration, as well as a benefit of sympathy that increases the closer the respondent is to the level of higher decision makers. In Slovakia, we see the negative effect of this same trend, where the decision makers are faulted for not being in proximity to the population. In Hungary, we see the concerted effort of the decision makers to shift the utility and identity of the population toward that of the elite via discourse. The consequences of this for democracy are clear and stark.

### **Adaptive Leadership and Democracy**

In the early 2000s, the Visegrad region was hailed as a story of triumph for democratization in general and for the former Communist East in particular. As the new century wore on, those sentiments became quieter before many reversing in both message and tone. By the time of the arrival of the pandemic, severe concern for democracy in the region (and beyond) had become increasingly common. Why ask about democratization in the region in this work, and what is the answer to the question?

To problematize the stability of democracy in the Visegrad region is, in many ways, an organic outcropping of the Adaptive Leadership theory applied to an existential crisis. The criteria of Adaptive Leadership lend themselves to the best practical strengths of liberal democracy: clear understanding of the problem, effective and efficient strategizing to resolve the problem, unified response to enact the strategy, and all stemming from a sense of communal identity-*cum*-responsibility. Again, we can see here the presence and importance of proximity.

Both Adaptive Leadership (as here outlined and utilized) and democracy see value in the closing of proximity and seek to accomplish this result. The argument for this from the side of theory was discussed above. The argument for this regarding democracy is intrinsic to the concept. As a structure of political decision making within a society of any appreciable size, a functional democracy acts as a conduit between the larger masses and the limited decision makers. This conduit is both a funnel going toward the decision makers and an amplifier going toward the masses. It allows for effective information gathering (funnel effect) as well as information dispersal (amplifier effect), while binding both sides into a common identity. In short, both in terms of utility and identity, democracies close proximity.

As regards the funnel effect, democracies rather easily resolve one of the main problems of autocracies, and that is knowing the reality of the socio-political landscape. Whether we look to the Visegrad states on the verge of revolution in the 1980s, or any other modern autocracy that faced a relatively swift downfall, one of the quintessential questions in retrospect relates to how the existing regime did not see the writing on the wall, in order to act accordingly. The answer is that without liberal democratic structures, it is exceedingly difficult to see the said writing. Democracies allow for relatively true and reliable information to go from the broad population of the state toward the central decision-making bodies of the state. To put this in terms of our theoretical framework, though juggling the order a bit, democracy allows for a greater degree of transparency in communication (going all directions), which will provide a clearer understanding of the problem, effective and efficient strategizing to

resolve the problem, unified response to enact the strategy, while coming from and reinforcing the existence of the communal identity, which helps to construct and perpetuate the system. The efficient communication helps to build a common reality, and within that the common identity, and so practically and identifiably holds the people and the decision makers closer together.

As regards the amplifier effect, through the relationship allowed for by the funnel effect, democratic centers gain a degree of legitimacy that allows for an exponential leverage of power from policy into action. Through common understanding of a problem, this leverage of legitimacy allows for effective, efficient, and unified response. Again, what is essential is the role of communication within a shared identity, which allows for and encourages the continuation of the two sides being held close together.

Now arises the second question, what does all this mean for democracy within the four states of the Visegrad region? When we look to the theoretical as well as practical studies, we can get an inkling of the answer. Adaptive Leadership, like democracy, is not a binary switch, but rather a spectrum. In both the areas of leadership as well as democracy, this spectrum and its consequences are presented by the studies of the four states.

At the far end, the most concerning point on the spectrum is the extreme anchor, Hungary. The Hungarian case demonstrates that the decision-making leadership is not just adverse to an adaptive approach, but is also adverse to a democratic approach. This is evidenced by the leadership's concerted efforts to pull the people into its identification, as opposed to responding to the identifications created by the people. This practice strikes at the core of democracy. It is the leadership sculpting the key lever of legitimacy in the reverse direction, determining who is and who is not part of the polity "us."

The remaining three states are in a similar position with each other at the moment of writing, as elections are in the offing and the outcomes remain to be seen. At the moment, next in the spectrum would be Poland, followed by Slovakia, and then the Czech Republic. This ordering is based upon two broad points. First, all three states are in a tenuous spot regarding Adaptive Leadership, and by extension their democratic health. Second, to qualify the positions,

we look to electoral responses. This measure also helped to place Hungary as the anchor on the extreme of the spectrum. Poland has had a contentious presidential election returning the incumbent, but no other real tests relevant to the pandemic. Slovakia has gone through a removal of the populist Prime Minister, and now a vote of no-confidence in the government. The upcoming election cycle will be critical. The Czech Republic has had parliamentary elections that replaced the governing coalition from the time of the pandemic, and the populist former Prime Minister lost in the run-off for the Czech Presidency.

For the foreseeable future, Hungarian democracy is going to be in danger. Orbán was clearly successful in affecting the discourse of the society, protecting himself and his message of illiberalism. There are material carrots and sticks to be wielded in support of democracy in Hungary, certainly, but such a foundation is not stable enough to support the weight of the formal and informal institutions that underpin democracy. The letter of the law, once its spirit is stripped away, is more malevolent than protective, as past events in Hungary have demonstrated.

This democratic danger very much goes hand in hand with the lack of adaptive leadership style. Communication and collaboration are the hallmarks of each. A proper and accurate understanding of the problems facing the society is also critical. With the Hungarian decision makers keeping themselves and Hungary perpetually in the acute stage of this and other crises, Orbán is able to determine what “the problem” is, and is able to make sure that the problem is not identified as his rule.

Poland would seem to be in a better spot, though as already stated, the truth and stability of this remain to be seen. As with Hungary, both carrots and sticks have been and continue to be used in regard to supporting Polish democracy. The results have been a bit more encouraging. On top of this, as demonstrated in the Polish study, the people are very much determined to keep the spirit of democracy alive, through protests and elections as well as through taking on responsibilities for problem-solving themselves. There is clearly a great and active body here, ready to play its part in an adaptive phase, should any leader thus engage also.



The more fertile ground for the adaptive phase goes together with Poland's democratic strength relative to Hungary. There is still competition in the political environment, even if it is less dynamic and equal than it should be. There is space and opportunity for an Adaptive Leadership-minded cohort of decision makers to emerge and utilize the approach to aid, not only Poland's interests, but also in rehabilitating its democracy. What is significant is that this avenue is also open to the current leadership. By not being as far on the spectrum as Hungary, it is possible for Duda's group to shift from the acute phase into the adaptive phase without necessarily falling because of the shift.

Slovakia would seem to be at an inflection point. Slowly and steadily, they have been working themselves out of and away from some dark paths leading away from stable democracy. From Mečiarism to Gorila, on to the removal of Fico's group and now that of Matovič, Slovakia has been trying to turn away from populism and worse since its inception. The public and political responses to Matovič's group have been surprisingly quick and intense, especially when compared to the history that preceded him. Here again, there is an active society ready to embrace and work with Adaptive Leadership.

While there does not seem to be an opportunity for Matovič's group to shift like that of Duda's in Poland, the opportunity for a new actor to emerge is present. This latest round of populism has given a shock to society in new and significant ways, likely leading into early elections. The combination of the unique crisis and acute phase response, combined with the political and social pushback, would also seem to encourage a transparent and collaborative decision maker to emerge.

Should Slovakia go this route, they would be following the path that seems to be emerging in the Czech Republic. The Czech parliamentary elections were held in a similar (though less extreme) atmosphere of the unique shock of the pandemic combined with the lack of Adaptive Leadership. As such, the points of transparency, communication, and collaboration were large themes in the election. The result was the Babiš group being moved to the opposition.

Just as this work is being finished, Babiš's attempt to return as President has failed. What is perhaps more important than his loss



of the election to Petr Pavel is the resounding nature of his defeat. This is significant, as Pavel campaigned on points of transparent communication, respectful dialogue, and social responsibility. It is early stages, but the turn in the Czech Republic would seem to be the most impressive in support of democracy, as well as that most in line with adaptive leadership.

In each of the four cases, a shift to Adaptive Leadership would strengthen not only decision making and crisis response within each state, but the democratic culture within each state as well. Non-democracies are given to patterns of decision making and of rule according to the acute phase of crisis decision making. And acute phase decision making is given to reinforcing non-democratic regimes. The adoption of components of Adaptive Leadership would thus aid in achieving, maintaining, and strengthening democratic culture. Even if the efforts do not come from the decision-making elite, as history has demonstrated, if an alternative that does fulfill the adaptive criteria emerges with enough support and at the right time, democracy can emerge.

## **Conclusion**

The Covid pandemic is not just a health emergency, but also a societal shock that will have repercussions long after focused attention shifts away. With this in mind, we asked two questions:

1. What has the pandemic response been among the Visegrad states, and how effective has that response been in aiding the Visegrad societies to navigate the health and societal effects of the pandemic?
2. How can an adaptive leadership approach better aid the Visegrad societies to navigate the health and societal effects of the pandemic?

To the first question, we have shown in detail that the responses of the four states have been varying degrees of populist in nature, keeping the crisis response in the acute phase and failing to shift into the adaptive phase. This response has been in part due to the absence

of certain qualities present in adaptive leadership, such as transparent communication and collaboration toward problem identification and resolution. The response has also been in part due to the perceived individual political benefits of the acute phase for populist and authoritarian-minded actors. The response was therefore both a consequence and a purposeful decision of the various leaderships. The result was a more chaotic and less effective approach to responding to the pandemic, which saw several of the states swing wildly from some of the fewest cases in the first wave to some of the most cases in subsequent waves. The ineffective response was only halted by the discovery and dissemination of vaccines and therapeutics from external powers.

To the second question, an adaptive leadership approach would have, at the very least, aided in the development of a unified identification of the problem. So many of the subsequent problems in each case stemmed from this particular initial failure to identify what was the problem the society was facing. In addition, the lack of transparent communication had both health and social consequences. Miscommunication and lack of information both hampered people's efforts to protect themselves as well as led to a weakening of trust and attention paid to the decision makers (which in turn had further health consequences). These social consequences in particular became critical once vaccines were available and the governments had to convince the public to use them. An adaptive leadership approach would have identified a singular problem and worked with society as a whole to respond to that problem, adapting strategies as necessary throughout the evolution of pandemic waves, research, and technological advancements.

An effective government response needs to look at both the medical and societal impacts of the pandemic in a holistic manner. This work problematized the pandemic response of the Visegrad states in the context of the spectrum of emerging anti-democratic trends in the region. While the Visegrad was the analytical area of focus, it also served as a microcosm of issues affecting the democratic world. Each of the four states is under different levels of threat from democratic backsliding as well as illiberal influences from abroad. Both of these points have been exacerbated and utilized during the

pandemic respectively. It is precisely this problematization of pandemic responses in the Visegrad context that makes the research resonate globally.

Authoritarianism and the politics of fear are attractive to policy makers the world over, but such routes threaten to erode civil society and trust in democratic institutions. This situation calls for a leadership approach that enables policy makers to confront the adaptive challenges inherent in a pandemic, not to mention the rest of the gambit of crises facing the world. Addressing adaptive challenges, however, means renewing a commitment to democratic principles, mobilizing participation, and experimenting with new approaches with an emphasis on learning. Just as this pandemic was predicted, it is predicted that others will come. At this critical point, policy makers need the active involvement of multiple constituencies that represent societal rather than just national interests, in order to minimize the negative socio-economic and health consequences of both this pandemic and future crises.

Adaptive leadership theory suggests that people thrive when they participate in a process of problem-solving that engages their deepest held values and enables them to distinguish between solutions based on technical expertise and solutions that involve a change in norms and loyalties, and therefore motivates citizens and public officials to take action and learn new ways of public life. This path to public leadership has great relevance to the Covid crisis. Covid-19 is, in many ways, a novel crisis; but in other ways the lessons of history, especially in Central Europe, can aid the current response in the present.



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## **List of Contributors**

### **Joshua M. Hayden**

Joshua M. Hayden, EdD, is Chair of the Department of Social Sciences in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and lecturer in Leadership Studies at Anglo-American University in Prague, Czechia. Joshua Hayden earned his doctorate in higher education leadership and policy from Vanderbilt University in the United States and has published and taught in the field of leadership studies for the past ten years. He is experienced in corporate, nonprofit, and public sector leadership consulting and training, and has worked with community, educational, and organizational leaders in Haiti, India, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Brazil. His research interests are moral psychology, Václav Havel and Charter 77, leadership ethics and change, and decision making. Most recently his academic work has focused on spiritual leadership and the ethics of hope as well as the role of trust among leaders and followers.

### **George Hays II**

Dr. George Hays II is Chair of International Relations in the School of International Relations and Diplomacy at Anglo-American University in Prague. He received his doctorate in International Relations from Charles University in Prague. Dr. Hays lectures in the areas of International Relations theory, war studies, Central European politics, and Post-Structural analysis. He has published works analyzing identity formation in both American and Czech discourses, as well as works that analyze Czechoslovak history, and numerous commentaries on contemporary politics and international conflicts.

**Izabella Łęcka**

Dr hab. prof. Izabella Łęcka specializes in the management of public health and medical care and also in socio-economic geography of developing countries. She works at the Center for Health Care Management at the Faculty of Management at the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her degrees are in the field of medical geography, including a doctorate in epidemiology and a habilitation in social sciences (in the field of telemedicine in Africa and Asia). She studied in Warsaw and Cairo, had an internship at Kent State University (USA), and a scholarship from the Open Medical Institute (A Program of the American Austrian Foundation, Salzburg). She was a member and later head of field research in Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Tanzania, and the United Arab Emirates. She was a member of the Steering Committee of the International Geographical Union's Commission on Health and Environment (2008–2016) and is author of a number of expert studies and presentations at academic conferences. She is currently a jury member at The Innovation in Politics Award, Democracy technologies issue (<https://innovationinpolitics.eu/>).

**Weronika Michalska**

Weronika Michalska is a master's student in geography at the University of Warsaw and teacher in primary and secondary schools. She is the author of conference speeches and scientific articles concerning didactics of geography and environmental protection. She is secretary of the Warsaw Branch of the Polish Geographical Society, co-organizer of events in the field of promoting geographical knowledge, winner of the Rector's Scholarship of the University of Warsaw for high academic performance and scientific activity, and a volunteer and social activist.

**Nikoleta Jakuš Muthová**

Nikoleta Jakuš Muthová, PhD, is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics at the Department of Public Economy and Regional Development, Matej Bel University in Slovakia. Her research activities are focused on the application of behavioral economics in the public sector, experimental economics, consumer preferences in the consumption of public goods, and the use of

innovation in the public sector. These activities are documented by several monographs, many research studies, and articles published in current academic journals and conference proceedings at home and abroad. Her research activities include cooperation in projects of international and national significance (RSAI Engines of Scientific Career, Erasmus+, VEGA, APVV, COST, International Visegrad Fund, etc.). The most significant contribution of her research on the theoretical and practical levels includes outlining the recommendations and guidelines for the application of behavioral economics in the public sector.

### **Tomasz Ochinowski**

Dr hab. prof. Tomasz Ochinowski is Chair of the Department of Psychology and Sociology of Management at the Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw. He is a psychologist, organizational consultant, and social skills trainer. He graduated and holds a doctorate in psychology and is a habilitated doctor of management sciences from the University of Warsaw, Poland. He has a long career as university lecturer and administrator at several universities in Poland. In 2004–2020, he was Chair of the Department of Sociology of Organization and Business History at the University of Warsaw. His academic experience abroad includes the University of Houston (USA), Vlerick Ghent Business School (Belgium), several universities in Taiwan, and the University of Trnava (Slovakia). He was awarded several prestigious scholarships and honors, such as from Central European University, was an expert of the European Union in the field of local development, and is a member of several academic boards. He has authored many publications in the fields of management, entrepreneurship, and professional development.

### **Milada Polišíenská**

Prof. PhDr. Milada Polišíenská, CSc, is Distinguished Senior Lecturer and Provost Emerita at Anglo-American University in Prague, Czechia. She specializes in modern history of Central and Eastern Europe and diplomatic history. She joined Anglo-American University in 2003, served in several top administrative positions including provost (2008–2017). She is author of nine monographs and a number of articles and book chapters published in the Czech

Republic and internationally. Prof. Polišíenská has taught as visiting professor at universities in the United States, Taiwan, and Thailand, and has been awarded several major research grants, scholarships, and fellowships, most recently Senior Fernand Braudel Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and Senior Jan Patočka Fellowship at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen/Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, Austria. She is a member of academic boards at several universities and of expert panels. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of the series *Anglo-American University: Past, Present and Perspectives*, and author of *American College 1990–2000: Against All Odds*, published in 2022.

### **Mária Murray Svidroňová**

Doc. Ing. Mária Murray Svidroňová, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Department of Public Economics and Regional Development of the Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University. Her pedagogical and research activities are focused on the economics and management of the nonprofit sector and public and private nonprofit organizations. She is particularly interested in social innovation issues in the area of public service provision, e.g. through co-creation, community building, and civic activism. She is active in several international studies dealing with public service innovation and civic engagement (7RP LIPSE, H2020 SOLIDUS). She participates in university education for students in the field of social economy. Mária Murray Svidroňová is a recognized expert not only in the academic field but also in practice—she has been involved in research that led to legislative proposals in the area of providing social housing by nonprofit sectors. In cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for the Development of Civil Society, she participated in the preparation of legislative changes in the field of financing NGOs. She runs her own civic association and was the chairperson of the Mayor’s Council of Banská Bystrica for non-governmental nonprofit organizations (2015–2019). She is a member of the Accreditation Commission for youth work.

### **Tamás Tóth**

Tamás Tóth, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Public Service. His research interests include populist political

communication styles, journalism studies, and academic knowledge production. He has published in journals such as the *International Journal of Communication*, the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Communications*, the *European Journal of Science and Theology*, and *Scientometrics*.

**Anna Ujlaki**

Anna Ujlaki is a junior researcher at the Centre for Social Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence, and a PhD candidate at Corvinus University of Budapest. Her research interests include political theory, migration, and artificial intelligence. She also has teaching experience in political philosophy, comparative political science, and feminist political theory.

