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Populism and the Pandemic: A Cross-National Analysis of Coronavirus Responses

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Abstract

In the midst of the current coronavirus pandemic, there has been a wide array of policy responses from different countries as leaders attempt to find the right balance between public health, the health of the economy, and people's personal freedoms and liberties. This begs the question: what explains the variation in different countries' approach to handling the pandemic? Using a sample of 64 countries' data on COVID-19 protective policy responses, this paper looks at populist leaders as a potential explanation to this question. More specifically theorizing that countries with populist leaders will respond less swiftly and effectively to the pandemic because of their tendency to deny science, distill distrust in institutions, and spread disinformation. Secondly, this paper considers ideology alongside populism, with the understanding that right-wing and left-wing ideology may not look the same. Thus, the second theory suggests that right-wing populists in particular will respond less swiftly and effectively since anti-establishment and cultural populism seem to manifest on the right. The partial support for the findings of this research illuminate the potential weaknesses of populist leadership in the midst of a public health crisis. However, further research should be conducted to gain more insight into the relationship between the populist leadership style and crises responses.

1. Introduction

On January 20th, 2020 the United States diagnosed its first patient with the deadly coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. The virus had already proven to be spreading in other parts of the world; however, when it reached the United States there was still some hesitance to believe that the virus could get that bad. This feeling was in part because of the U.S. government's slow response to the virus and the president's denial of the severity of the issue. By January 31st, the President banned most travel from China, where the virus originated, but it wasn't until March 11th that the ban was extended to Europe where much of the spread was coming from. In the meantime, the president claimed many times that the virus would disappear even though he knew that it was much more deadly than he was stating publicly. Fast forward to November 2020, the United States has more cases and more deaths than any other nation.

In contrast, New Zealand experienced their first case of the coronavirus on January 28th of 2020. However, New Zealand's government was already fast at work addressing the pandemic; it introduced health and safety measures three days after the World Health Organization announced the virus as an international health emergency on January 30th, 2020. The prime minister emphasized a strong testing and contract tracing system and learned lessons from Europe which was seeing significant community spread. Thus, the prime minister took more stringent approaches such as implementing a national lockdown and other policies which were guided by the existing science at that time. Unlike the United States, New Zealand has been able to eradicate the virus from their shores twice and ranks 160th on total coronavirus cases and 165th in total deaths as of early November. Obviously, bigger populations will have more cases, but New Zealand's handling of the virus is certainly admirable.

These two countries exemplify how vastly different countries' responses to the virus have been. The different approaches from the two government's exemplified above clearly show that varying policy responses can affect the

country's ability to prevent spread of the disease and death. However, what exactly explains the variation that we observe in coronavirus responses cross-nationally? I argue that a leader's policy responses have the potential to save lives. In the face of any crisis, whether it be concerning public health, the economy, or foreign affairs, people want someone in charge who will look out for their best interest, protect them, and be a strong leader. Therefore, having the right person in power to handle the big issues like the current pandemic can be the difference between returning to life as "normal" and prolonged shutdowns and mass casualties. For those in democratic nations, voting for a leader who can take on the big tasks and crises is incredibly important because of these stakes.

In particular, I argue that what truly explains the variation we observe in coronavirus responses cross-nationally is the current wave of populist leaders who are not taking the pandemic seriously or responding swiftly and effectively. Populist leaders, particularly right-wing populist leaders, may be more likely to employ anti-establishment and cultural populism tactics like discrediting experts and blaming other countries for the coronavirus. I tested my claims on a sample of 64 countries using data on COVID-19 protective policy responses in order to measure the effectiveness of countries' responses and the swiftness of a country's responses. I find some support for my hypothesis that populist leaders respond less effectively to the virus; however, I did not find any support for my claims on swiftness. Furthermore, in controlling for other variables, clearly there are many factors at play in explaining the variation in coronavirus responses. Though, as emphasized above, understanding the implications of populist leadership is important as the leaders in charge have the power to put in place policies that could potentially save lives.

In what follows, I lay out the current arguments and consensuses in the existing literature on populism and crisis leadership, provide my hypotheses on how populist leaders will respond to the pandemic, and conduct an empirical analysis of the relationship between populist leaders and the effectiveness and swiftness of their responses. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of populist leadership and how this research may be advanced in the future.

2. Literature Review

In analyzing the effect that populism may have on the variation in coronavirus responses cross-nationally, the existing literature can illuminate key debates and/or consensuses regarding what populism truly is, how it may interact with other concepts, and how leadership style can affect a country's response to crisis. For instance, the literature seems to agree that in handling a crisis, whether that be a crisis in health, foreign policy, or domestic politics, leadership style is key at the national level (Genovese 1986, Blomdahl 2020). This may be through rhetoric, actions, policy, or planning ahead, but, regardless, in desperate times, people need a leader who can unite the country and make the right decisions under pressure. As such, there is reason to believe that populist leadership style will have certain effects on a country's response to the current pandemic. Indeed, based on the findings of Speed and Mannion (2017), there already seems to be observable effects of populism on healthcare.

Before we can understand the relationship between populist leaders and their respective coronavirus responses, we must first and foremost understand the debate around how to define populism, which has been highly contested. To Albertazzi and Mueller (2013), populism is a loose ideology that pits "the people" against elites who are said to be depriving the people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and/or voice. Though there may be some sort of consensus that populist leaders pit two groups of people against each other, whether or not populism fits neatly into the neat and tidy box of an ideology is up for debate. Others conclude that populism is better described as a political style or a "performative repertoire" in which there is an ideological element; however, the ideology is so thinly-based that it loses validity (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Nai and Coma (2019) seem to echo the idea that populism reflects a style of leadership as they look into whether populist figures share certain personality traits, insinuating that populism is reflective of the political style or personality of that leader.

While the nature of populism is debated, there is more consensus on the effects it has on communities and institutions. For instance, many agree that populism can incite fear of 'the other,' encourage distrust in experts, and provide a mouth-piece for "fake news" (Speed and Mannion 2017, Thomas and Campbell 2020). Inciting this fear and distrust allows populist leaders to stoke division between groups and convince citizens that they must support and keep that leader in power to ensure their safety and/or stability in society. Speed and Mannion (2017) highlight that this has significant impacts on the science community and health care as a whole since the problems mentioned before may limit access to health care for marginalized groups and spread unsafe misinformation. Thus, if populism can have such effects on healthcare and the science community, it may be reasonable to assume there could be similar issues in coronavirus responses. Albertazzi and Mueller (2013) also highlight that populism poses a threat to liberal democracy itself due to its tendency to distill distrust in institutions and challenge the establishment. Even current news articles

agree that populist leaders have been trying to spin the truth by denying the seriousness of the pandemic, instilling distrust in institutions and experts, and turning away from the global, collective community, which has affected their ability to respond early and well to the pandemic (Thomas and Campbell 2020, Leonhardt and Leatherby 2020). Thus, there seems to be some consensus around the fact that populism has the potential to create problems for the community of experts and establishment politicians who are seen as the "elites."

3. Theoretical Foundations

Building on the extant literature, I examine populism through the lens of a political style based on the arguments of Moffitt and Tormey (2014). I assume that the defining aspect of populism includes the pitting of people against each other, manifesting in an "us" versus "them" mentality (Albertazzi and Mueller 2013, Kyle and Gultchin 2018). This can take many forms, whether that be socio-economic, cultural, or anti-establishment, which is define below based on the work of Kyle and Gultchin (2018):

- *Socio-Economic populism* takes the form of the working class versus the wealthiest elites in a nation or big business. Usually anti-capitalist themes encourage the solidarity of the working class.
- *Cultural Populism* consists of the "native" members of a society or country versus the "non-natives" who are potentially dangerous religious and ethnic minorities or cosmopolitan elites.
- *Anti-Establishment Populism* is the hard-working, honest people of a nation versus the political elites who are corrupt and/or weak leaders controlled by special interests.

However, since there is still a large debate in the literature surrounding what populism truly is, I will acknowledge how populism can vary across the ideological spectrum for the sake of being thorough and all-inclusive.

I also assume that in any kind of crisis, strong leadership is vital in resolving the issue swiftly and efficiently. In order to prevent crises from becoming a worst case scenario, leaders must work quickly, keep the best interest of the people at heart, and have a qualified, trustworthy team who can provide him/her with the best information to make the right decisions (Genovese 1986). Thus, knowing that leadership is so vitally important in dealing with crises, it raises the question of how populist leadership styles are faring in the COVID-19 crisis. As aforementioned, there are agreed upon qualities that populist leaders share. These include denying science and expertise, sowing distrust in institutions, turning away from the global, collective community, and creating a tension between the people and some common enemy. This, in turn, must have direct effects on how these populist leaders handle crises. Leaders who do not listen to the experts and actively deny science cannot effectively lead their country through a global pandemic because they refuse to recognize the stakes of the crisis and either do not have or do not listen to the information they need in order to make a swift and good decision. In fact, these qualities make populist leaders less likely to act on the pandemic and use rhetoric that will convince the public to listen to public safety guidelines. In a perfect world, leaders would do their best to work with the global community and local experts to decide the best plan on multiple levels based on what the experts find; however, because the political style of populist leaders denies this expertise, they will be less likely to enact the policies necessary to help curb the virus. Furthermore, citizens will be less likely to take it seriously or know who to trust, allowing the virus to spread more. This already goes against the ideas that Genovese (1986) indicates must happen in order to deal with a crisis effectively.

Another key tendency of populist leaders mentioned is distilling distrust in institutions. Because the leader of the nation holds a position of great power when they speak, the people listen. Therefore, just like if the leader of a nation denies the science, if he/she tells citizens they cannot trust the institutions built to protect them, then this will lead to confusion and mixed messaging within an administration. For instance, in the United States, President Trump constantly questioned and challenged the information being put out by pillars of health and safety such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, leading to mass confusion in the public as to who to listen to and what guidelines to follow. If citizens are not able to trust institutions that are built to help them, there certainly will be problems instituting any kind of plans should people not see these institutions as trustworthy or looking out for their best interest. In fact, they would be far less likely to heed public health advice and protocol. With this in mind, I hypothesize:

> *H1: The political style of populist leaders will hinder their ability to respond to the coronavirus effectively and swiftly.*

However, as aforementioned, though populism may align better with being categorized as a political style, there still may be an ideological aspect to populism. Though populism can occur on either the right or left side of the ideological spectrum, right-wing populism, in particular, may not fare as well in handling the pandemic. In many instances, left-wing populism manifests in the form of anti-establishment and socio-economic where the leader claims to stand up for the people's minority rights and to fight against the political and/or economic elites in the country. Consider Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador or U.S. Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. These forms of populism appear less likely to have an effect on coronavirus responses because these leaders are more focused on making enemies out of the systems of oppression and big business elites rather than the science community or foreign people/communities. Thus, the tendencies of anti-establishment and/or cultural populist leaders like denying scientific expertise and distilling distrust in the public health institutions seem to occur more so on the right side of the ideological spectrum recently. This right-wing populism may use anti-establishment rhetoric to suggest that bureaucrats representing health agencies are not to be trusted or are corrupt. In addition, the right-wing populism may stoke fear through cultural differences to suggest that China is solely at fault for the spread of this virus in order to deflect any blame from the leader. For this reason, I hypothesize:

H2: Right-wing populist leaders will have a slower and less effective coronavirus response.

4. Empirical Analysis

Using data from the Institutional Origins of COVID-19 Protective Policy Responses Project (2020), I will conduct a quantitative analysis on my hypotheses of interest. The unit of analysis is the country, and there are 64 countries included in the dataset. It is noteworthy that the data set lacks representation from Asian countries, and I assume this is because data reporting from this region was lacking and/or patchy since the data relied on such information to be compiled; however, this adds certain limitations to my analysis. Furthermore, based on data availability, the time period examined spans from January through April of 2020.

My analysis includes two dependent variables, the first of which is the effectiveness of a country's coronavirus response. For this variable, I relied on data from the Institutional Origins of COVID-19 Protective Policy Responses (2020). They coded this variable, which they denote as National Protective Policy Response, by computing the sum of the stringincies announced by the national government on a variety of policy categories and normalizing these values on a range from 0 to 1. The data was collected daily to show how the response may have varied over time, but in order to get the best sense of how a country responded, I only collected the highest (or the most stringent) value for each country in the time period examined. Some of the policies considered in the construction of the variable include instituting the closure of international and domestic land, air, and sea borders, the closure of schools, restaurants, and non-essential businesses, personal mobility restrictions, self-isolation and/or quarantine requirements, and the mandatory wearing of masks/PPE, to name a few. Looking at the data, Slovenia had the minimum observation for effectiveness with a score of 0.025 and South Africa had the maximum observation at 0.95. However, the average country had an effectiveness score of 0.53 based on the scale from 0 to 1.

The second dependent variable measured is the swiftness of a country's coronavirus response. By measuring swiftness, I aim to highlight the importance of acting early in response to the public health emergency since a strong response may be futile if enacted too late. In the data provided by the Institutional Origins of COVID-19 Protective Policy Responses, the national policy response was computed daily; therefore, I was able to find the first change in response from no action to action--or from 0 to any given number based on the strength of the response--in order to record when policies were first implemented. Furthermore, based on records from the World Health Organization, I obtained the first date of infection for each country in the dataset. Thus, in order to measure the swiftness of any given country's response, I computed the number of days from the first recorded COVID-19 infection to the first day that policy action was taken at the national level. In some cases, countries have negative values because the government acted before there was a case recorded in their country. With this in mind, the minimum value observed from Nepal, which is -54, suggests that of the countries in the sample Nepal acted the most swiftly by enacting policies at the national level 54 days before their first case of coronavirus. On the other hand, both Finland and Canada acted the least swiftly given that they have the maximum value of 48, meaning that it took 48 days after their first recorded case for both nations to enact a national policy response. Though, the average country took about 4.44 days to respond to the virus after experiencing their first case.

For my first hypothesis, the independent variable of interest is whether or not the leader of a country is populist. For this data, I relied on the Tony Blair Institute's list of populist leaders that are in charge during the pandemic. While

there were 17 leaders they identified and deemed populist who were in charge at the beginning of 2020, only the 13 populist leaders whose countries were included in the Institutional Origins of COVID-19 Protective Policy Responses dataset were incorporated. I also coded two supplemental cases, Pakistan and Slovenia, which were found to have populist leaders through further research. The Tony Blair Institute classified leaders as populist based on an ideational approach in which a leader "frame[s] politics as an existential conflict between the 'true people' on one hand and corrupt elites and lesser outsiders on the other" (Meyer 2020). I used a dummy variable to show the 15 leaders that align with the populist approach. Some of these leaders include U.S. President Donald Trump, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

For my second hypothesis, the independent variable is the ideological slant of a country's leader. Once again, I used a dummy variable to show which countries' leaders had an ideological slant to the right, which was denoted by the number one, and which leaders were either independent/nonpartisan or left-wing, expressed as zeros. I gathered this data by researching who each leader is, the party they belonged to and what ideological slant that party claimed to be. In some cases, countries still had a monarchical system with a king-like head of state who did not have a party, and, in those cases, further research into the make-up of their legislature and/or other main state policy figures informed how to code for ideology. Overall, the data consists of 29 countries where the main leader(s) ideology ranged from center-right to far-right.To evaluate hypothesis 2, the ideology variable interacts with the populist leader variable to show the effects of right-wing populism. Some countries, such as the Czech Republic, India, and Israel, have right-wing populist leaders captured by this interaction.

Lastly, I control for variables which may confound my results of interest. First, I control for the gender of the leader because current news articles have noted the female leaders have responded particularly well to the pandemic. This was coded through a dummy variable which is coded as 1 for female and 0 otherwise. There are 8 female leaders in the sample. Second, I control for democracy because democratic countries may be more compelled to respond well to the pandemic since leaders are accountable to the public and may need to provide a certain level of transparency that authoritarian leaders may not. The Polity V (2018) dataset which rates countries from -10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic) informed this part of the data. The measure considers factors like the competitiveness of political participation, constraints on the chief executive, and the openness and competitiveness of executive recruitment. The minimum observation for this variable was -10 which included Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Both these nations have a monarchy system, which would explain the lack of democratic practices. Multiple countries such as Austria, Chile, and Denmark observed the maximum value: 10. On average, countries scored a 6.1 on how democratic their practices were. The third and final control variable, a country's wealth, was measured using GDP per Capita from the World Bank. I control for this variable because wealthier nations may have more resource availability and access to deal with the pandemic. Yemen has the lowest observed GDP/capita at $968.20 and Switzerland has the highest GDP/capita at $81,993.70. However, the average GDP/capita is $23867.90.

5. Results

5.1 Swiftness

To test my hypotheses of interest, I first use a measure of swiftness, the length of time between a pandemic response and the first case in a country, as the dependent variable. I expect that populist leaders, especially right-wing populist leaders, will have a positive effect on the outcome of interest. That is, I expect them to respond more slowly to COVID-19 cases. The results from the regression analysis to test this part of my hypotheses can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Swiftness Regression Results

Variable	Coefficients	Standard Error	P-value
Intercept	-4.88	5.45	0.37
Populist	-9.39	10.79	0.39
Right-Wing	-0.86	6.66	0.90
Gender	-11.31	9.06	0.22
Democracy	0.77	0.50	0.13
GDP/capita	0.00038	0.00013	0.01
Right-Wing Populist (interaction)	-2.56	13.69	0.85

Table 1: Both the populist and right-wing populist interaction variable had a negative effect, which I did not predict. I expected populists, particularly right-wing populists, to respond more slowly to the crisis.

The results of the regression do not show much support for my hypotheses. First, the intercept, -4.88, suggests that if all other variables were kept at zero, countries would respond around 4.88 days before their first case. For the first independent variable, whether or not a leader is populist, the coefficient shows that populist leaders have about a 9 day faster response than non-populist leaders. Therefore, the direction of this effect is inconsistent with my hypothesis as I predicted a populist leader would have a slower response. This effect is substantive given that the average swiftness of a country in the sample was approximately 4 days. However, the effect is not statistically significant since the p-value, 0.37, is not lower than 0.05, suggesting that there could potentially be no real world effect.

In hypothesis 2, I predicted that right-wing populists especially would respond slower to the pandemic. The results show that right-wing countries responded a little under a day faster than non right-wing countries. There were no predictions on the direction of this effect in isolation and the effect is not statistically significant. The right-wing populist interaction variable is a better indicator of measuring hypothesis 2. The coefficient on the interactive variable is the additional effect of a right-wing populist leader on top of the independent effects of being right-wing and having a populist leader. The direction of this effect was not as anticipated as right-wing populist countries had around a 12.5 day faster response than non-populist, not right-wing countries. I predicted a positive effect, or, in this case, a slower response. The effect is substantive since it is faster than the average country's response, but again it is not statistically significant since the p-value is lower than 0.05.

As for the control variables, gender has a negative relationship. This means that female leaders responded about 11 days faster than male leaders. This effect is in the direction predicted since female leaders acted more swiftly and thus had a negative relationship. The effect is substantive since it is more swift than the average but not statistically significant. The effect of the next control variable, democracy, is not in the direction anticipated since a one unit change in how democratic a country is resulted in about a 1 day slower response to the pandemic, and I predicted that democratic countries would have a faster response. This response is not incredibly substantive as even a 6 point change in democracy would make countries about 4 days slower, and the standard deviation of swiftness responses in the sample is about 23 days. This effect is also not statistically significant. Lastly, the effect of the control for a country's wealth, or GDP per capita, is not in the direction anticipated given that wealthier nations seem to have a slower response. Based on first glance, it is hard to decipher if the effect is substantive since it is reported as a per dollar effect. However, the product of the coefficient and the standard deviation of GDP per capita shows that for every $22,645.86 change in GDP, there is about an 8 day slower response. Once again, in the sample the standard deviation

is approximately 23 days, but an 8 day change is a fairly decent effect. However, unlike the others thus far, this effect is statistically significant since the p-value, 0.006, is smaller than 0.05.

5.2 Effectiveness

The second part of my hypotheses looks into how effective the coronavirus responses were for each country, the second dependent variable. The variable in this case is represented on a scale from 0 to 1, for how stringent the public health policies were. Thus, I expect that populists, especially right-wing populist leaders, will have a negative effect on the outcome of interest. In other words, they will have less effective responses. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis conducted to test the second part of the hypotheses.

Table 2. Effectiveness Regression Results

Variables	**Coefficients**	**Standard Error**	**P-value**
Intercept	0.57	0.05	6.2E-17
Populist	-0.22	0.10	0.02
Right-Wing	-0.00012	0.06	1.00
Gender	0.09	0.08	0.25
Democracy	0.01	0.004	0.03
GDP/capita	-0.0000032	0.0000012	0.01
Right-Wing Populist (interaction)	0.07	0.12	0.57

Table 2: Populism in this case has a negative, substantive effect. The right-wing populist interaction variable has a positive effect, but it still leads to a negative overall effect. These results largely support my arguments.

Unlike the regression for swiftness, the results for effectiveness slightly more directional support for the hypotheses. First off, the intercept tells us that if all else were held at zero, countries would have a score of about 0.57 on a scale from 0 to1 according to the Institutional Origins of COVID-19 Protective Policy Responses (2020). Moving on to the independent variables, the results for populist leaders shows that for a change from a non-populist leader to a populist leader, the effectiveness of their response will drop about 0.22. This negative relationship supports hypothesis 1 where I predicted that populist leaders would have a less effective response to the pandemic. This effect is pretty substantive considering that a change of that magnitude could represent about a quarter of a country's score since it is on a scale from 0 to 1. Furthermore, this effect is statistically significant as the p-value, 0.02, is lower than 0.05, meaning that this outcome is likely not caused by chance.

Next, look at the right-wing variable, which as described before is not explicitly what hypothesis 2 measures. The effect here suggests that right-wing countries had a response 0.00012 less effective than left-wing, independent, or non-partisan countries. I had no predictions about this variable in isolation; however, the effect is incredibly small and not statistically significant. The right-wing populist interaction variable, on the other hand, is more valuable when it comes to interpreting the effect of hypothesis 2, which states that right-wing populist leaders especially might have a less effective response than others. In this case, the interaction variable tells us that the additional effect on top of the individual effects of being right-wing and populist is 0.07. This is not the directional effect anticipated, but it still means that right-wing populists had a 0.15 less effective response than non-populist and non right-wing leaders. This is relatively substantive, though not as large an effect compared to populism alone. The effect is also not statistically significant.

For the control variables, I will start by looking at gender. The coefficient for gender tells us that female leaders had a 0.09 more effective response than male leaders. This effect is in the direction predicted, but it is not a large effect. Furthermore, the effect is not statistically significant because its p-value is larger than 0.05. The second control variable, whether or not a country is a democracy, had a positive relationship as anticipated. However, the effect is not substantive given that a one point change in democracy brings about a 0.01 change in effectiveness. Therefore, even a 6 point change in democracy would only bring about a 0.06 change in the effectiveness of a country's policy responses. Though the effect is not substantive, it is statistically significant. The last control variable, the wealth of a nation as measured by GDP/capita, had a negative effect. The product of the coefficient and the standard deviation of GDP/capita shows that for every $22,645.86 change in GDP, the effectiveness of a country's response decreases by 0.07. This effect is not substantive, but it is statistically significant. Taken together, the results lend partial support to my hypotheses. Leadership matters in the effectiveness of the response, but not in terms of the speed of the response.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that the current wave of populist leaders, particularly right-wing populist leaders, responded less swiftly and effectively to the coronavirus pandemic. More explicitly, I expected populist leaders to have less stringent policies enacted to prevent the spread of the virus and to enact these policies more slowly than most countries after experiencing their first case. My analysis did show some support for the idea that populist leaders' responses were not as effective as non-populist leaders. Right-wing populist leaders also had less effective responses; however, these responses were not worse than the individual effect of being a populist leader. On the other hand, I did not find any support for my claim that populist leaders, right-wing or not, responded less swiftly to the pandemic. Interestingly, in collecting the data on swiftness, it appeared as though countries who experienced their first case of COVID-19 later on were able to react more quickly, even previous to their first case, since they were able to observe other countries who had less time to react. Therefore, this may have been a confounding variable or the true story behind the swiftness of a country's response. More research should be done in this area to see if this is truly the case. Furthermore, the control variable, gender, may tell a compelling story about strong female leadership in the midst of the pandemic.

As for the implications of my results, the fact that populist leaders had less effective responses to the pandemic speaks to their ability to manage crises. Since this paper looks at populism as a political style, these results suggest that this style of political leadership is potentially dangerous and not ideal for protecting citizens and protecting institutions and expertise. Thus, for countries who are able to hold their elected leadership accountable, citizens should be aware that populist tendencies have the potential to be harmful with regard to the current pandemic, and they may want to be careful in re-electing or electing figures who exemplify this type of leadership during this trying time. However, the current understanding of the relationship between populist leaders and crisis is limited to the current health crisis, so testing this phenomena on other crises or events to see if this style of leadership sees negative results in other areas could be impactful. I would also suggest further research on the coronavirus and its relationship with different government policies and how effective they are at preventing spread.

Additionally, looking at case rates and mortality rates to compare the actual severity of the pandemic in different countries could bring more light to this issue. I also acknowledged earlier that the data had some limitations. For example, the sample lacked representation from Asian countries and further research should include a more diverse and inclusive sample to see if the observed effects still stand. And lastly, the countries in the sample were only examined from January through April of 2020, so extending the data through the present could give a better sense of the countries' overall responses.

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