

## WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS IN PANDEMIC TIMES: COMPARING JACINDA ARDERN' AND DONALD TRUMP'S REPRESENTATION OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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**Abstract:** In the context of the Covid-19 meta-crisis, leadership styles have emerged as a key factor for determining a country's ability to contain the contagion and recover. In what follows, we want to explore the features of such leadership styles by taking a gender perspective. This article argues that women leaders have successfully governed the crises originated by the pandemic not only because of their inherent ability to build relationships, enhance community bonds, and "tune" with the anxieties of citizens; the women leaders' approach to science has proven to be decisive as well. Contrarily to common-sense expectations, when compared with men leaders, women have demonstrated to be more responsive and attentive to scientific advice, and to use their understanding of science as a factor of legitimacy. Our data are based on a wider research project granted by the Italian Ministry of Research and coordinated by prof. Saccà. We have analyzed the discourses of two case studies, Donald Trump and Jacinda Ardern, as they identify ideal-typical features of two opposing leadership styles as far as science is concerned. The analysis of rhetorical formulas and frames highlight the differences in their discourses and approaches and proves how the women leaders' ability of listening to experts' advice and the needs of specific sectors of the population has been decisive for the success of the measures of containment of the virus.

**Keywords:** women leaders, communication, Covid-19, science, politics.

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**Introduction.** As some have already pointed out, the pandemic can be read as a meta-crisis, i.e. a crisis that comprehends many other sub-crises, such as the crisis of the Welfare State (and particularly of the public health care system), the crisis of economy, and most of all the crisis of political legitimacy and decision-making when confronted with science. In this view, the pandemic has catalyzed trends that were already at play in the contemporary political landscape, namely the reinforcement of political leadership (i.e. leaderization), and the increasing importance of communication as a simulacrum of a direct, disintermediated relationship between the leader and her/his constituencies [1; 2].

In such a critical momentum, leadership styles have emerged as a key factor for determining a country's ability to contain the contagion and recover. In what follows, we want to explore the features of such leadership styles by taking a gender perspective. This article argues that women leaders have successfully governed the crises originated by the

pandemic not only because of their inherent ability to build relationships, enhance community bonds, and “tune” with the anxieties of citizens; the women leaders’ approach to science has proven to be decisive as well. Contrarily to common-sense expectations, when compared with men leaders, women have demonstrated to be more responsive and attentive to scientific advice, and to use their understanding of science as a factor of legitimacy.

In respect to science, we can identify two ideal-types of leadership styles: the first is anchored to a populist rhetoric and strategy, performing a muscular-masculine style that does not tolerate scientists’ caution, and tends to represent the pandemic as a war to be fought. The second one is focused on concepts of precaution and solidarity, and sees the pandemic as a serious challenge that needs people to take care of themselves and of others. The two ideal-types are embodied in the figures of Donald Trump and Jacinda Ardern. We have collected and analyzed all the speeches they have given during the first wave of the pandemic in order to compare their styles. We argue that their discourse and performance has influenced the social representation of the pandemic and of its scientific base, thus influencing the efficacy of their policies and decisions.

**Political Leadership and Science: A Gender Issue.** The concept of leadership has been addressed by many disciplines. Sociology tends to interpret leadership as a matter of performance rather than of ontological or psychological attitudes [3]. From this perspective, leadership is built through the relations that take place within social groups and can vary according to the situation; in the terminology of Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model [4], the interaction context (i.e. the frame) influences the agents’ (i.e. the actors) behaviors. Most frames are applied unconsciously and in a stereotyped fashion, because humans tend to simplify the complexity of reality and absorb new information in already known schemes. This process is described by Goffman as typicalization [4].

Applied to political leadership, this model suggests that political communication is similar to a show, where many characters have a role to play. No matter what the content of such communication is, every move has a performative nature, aiming at embedding reality in the most favorable frame for the leader. A long strand of literature (probably started with Nichols [5], but with origins in the psychological account of schizophrenia) has highlighted how the typical frames in which women have been embedded for centuries can be condensed into two opposing models: the mother/angel model on the one hand, a model that depicts women as persons who deserve protection by men and who, on their turn offer men their caregiving services; and the “prostitute” model on the other hand, where a woman’s freedom and independence has been seen as a potential threat to men, morality and society. The sexual references underpinning this interpretation are appropriate in the context of societies that have always used sexuality as a field into which social control should be exercised; gender bias and power inequalities are often justified through sexual dispositives [6; 7]. The case of the United States, for instance, has inspired the “motherless” State’s critique [8], in which women leaders can be found in the private sector, while in the public and political arena they continue to hide behind traditional role-models also due to the absence of social welfare policies capable of relieving their maternal duties. Indeed, the theory of the double bind can be read as a contemporary readaptation of the witch hunt: women accused of witchcrafts were tortured to confess, and they were punished if they did so and if they did not as well [9]. Contemporary women leaders, ranging from private management to political organizations, suffer the same clichés: competence is framed as the opposite of femininity [10]. The case of Hillary Clinton is archetypical of this mechanism [11].

Although leadership has been historically tied to masculine personality traits, the increasing number of women leaders in both the private and the public sphere is

suggesting a reversal of this assumption. The qualities that a leader must possess are rapidly changing, theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the transformational leader’s model include the ability to engage the members of the group into a collective project – in other words, a transformational leader must be able to transform each one’s interests in an inclusive vision [12], and this is in contrast with transactional modes of in-group relationship. Although echoing some traits of the charismatic leader [3], the transformational leader negotiates its power and builds its legitimacy in an inter-subjective agreement. Practically, people’s perception about the attributes of leadership are shifting. Figure 1 takes the case of the United States as an example of how Western culture is adapting to women leaders.

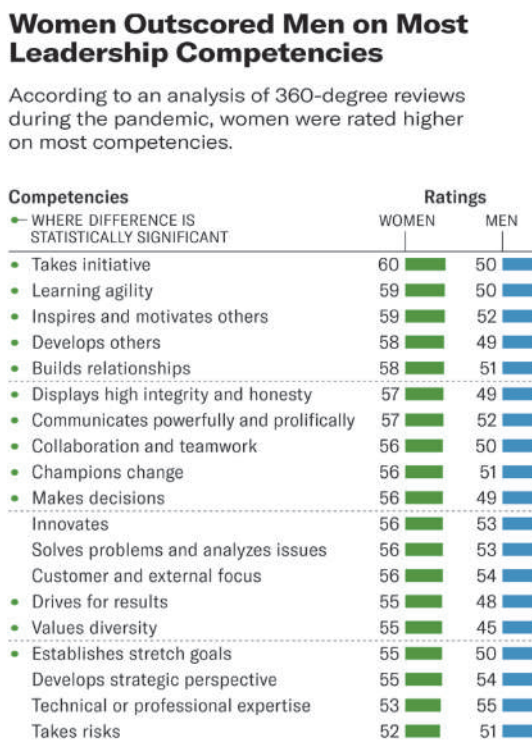


Figure 1. Qualities of leaders according to people working with them (US only).

Source: Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. Research: Women Are Better Leaders During a Crisis [13].

Albeit limited to one country, those data suggest that women leaders are reversing the gender bias in their own favour: the diversity between men and women is not denied, but sees women winning the comparison. Of course, it is not a biological or psychological determined diversity, but rather the result of centuries of education in which empathy and care have been the exclusive domain of women; and during a disastrous pandemic, it turns out that those competences are pivotal. Nor should we underestimate the impact of feminism on changing political cultures and democratic institutions, that are now more than ever inclined to see women leaders as role-models.

There is another aspect in which women leaders have excelled more than men: the extent to which their policies and decisions were informed by scientific advice

has contributed to the successful management of the pandemic. A comparative study has demonstrated that the 19 countries led by women (only <10% of the total) have systematically reported less cases and less deaths during the first wave of Covid-19, as compared with countries led by men [14]. The study shows that countries led by women have some background characteristics that might favour the management of crises: those are richer, more populated, older, with stronger welfare states, more equitable. All those characteristics are sufficient (although not necessary) to see a woman in the most powerful position. However, it is interesting to notice, that even in comparison with countries that have the most similar characteristics, when women were in charge, the country could count – on average – between 15 to 20,5 thousands cases of infections and about 1,6 thousands deaths *less* than the countries led by men. Although we have not analyzed public policies against the Covid-19, we can still present some examples about the measures undertaken by women leaders worldwide; table 1 lists them at a glance.

Table 1

**Examples of public policies against the Covid-19 by women leaders worldwide**

Leader	Country	Measure
Sheikh Hasina	Bangladesh	Immediate release of a package supporting economic recovery
Tsai Ing-Wen	Taiwan	Timing response thanks to an updated pandemic plan and infrastructure; design of digital tracking systems based on QR codes
Katrín Jakobsdóttir	Iceland	Early adoption of digital tracking systems and rigid border control
Sanna Marin	Finland	Early adoption of digital tracking systems and use of social media to spread knowledge of the virus
Angela Merkel	Germany	Clear instructions to the population and strict reliance on epidemiological data
Erna Solberg	Norway	Press briefings with children, giving instructions about personal hygiene

*Source:* data from PRIN 2017 Tuscia University's research unit coordinated by Prof. F. Saccà, within the national research project "The Transformations of Democracy: Actors, Strategies and Outcomes in Opposing Populism in Political, Juridical and Social Arenas", granted by the Italian Ministry of Research. Coordinated by prof. Carlo Ruzza (University of Trento).

This evidence suggests to investigate the peculiarities of women leaders performing their power and authority during the Covid-19 pandemic. In what follows, we are going to illustrate some of those features.

**Comparing Political Discourses and Power Performances.** This study relies on a mixed-methods approach to political speeches that employs quantitative analysis of words, frame analysis and discourse analysis [15-16]. Indeed, critical discourse studies have pointed at analyzing political speeches in terms of rhetorical formulas, choice of words, use of distinctive phrasing, and emotional repertoire; what critical discourse studies postulate is that all such elements cannot be understood without taking into consideration the wider context in which speeches are pronounced. Hence, we move on a double track: from the one side, we aim at comparing how men and women leaders have communicated during the pandemic; from the other side, we investigate how their communication and performance of power has contributed to diverging representations of science and politics.

We have retrieved all oral speeches pronounced by both Donald Trump and Jacinda Ardern during the first wave of the pandemic. The corpus includes 75 speeches by Trump given from February 26, and April 26, 2020, and 43 speeches by Ardern from March 14 to May 14, 2020.

Following Goffman's model, we can interpret speeches as situations in which leaders perform their power position; in setting up the frontstage, leaders assign a role to

other actors, such as allies, advisers and opponents, and all of them form part of a choreography [17-19]. In this perspective, we have analyzed the role of scientific experts in such performances. Both leaders have chosen to host daily press briefings, accompanied by top scientific advisors (dr. Andrew Fauci and dr. Deborah Birx in the case of Donald Trump; dr. Ashley Bloomfield in the case of Jacinda Ardern). Experts have been given the floor repeatedly during the briefings. Notwithstanding, their role has been questioned by Donald Trump, who has contradicted them and tried to downsize their warnings on many occasions. At the end of April 2020, dr. Fauci has eventually decided to suspend his appearances in Trump's press briefings. On the other hand, Jacinda Ardern has involved top scientific experts not only in press briefings but also in several "conversations" on her social media accounts. The outlet and the overall tone were colloquial and run with a plain language, to ensure full understanding by the public.

Finally, figure 2 depicts how scientists have judged the extent to which country leaders have taken scientific advice into account: United States and New Zealand are dramatically apart.

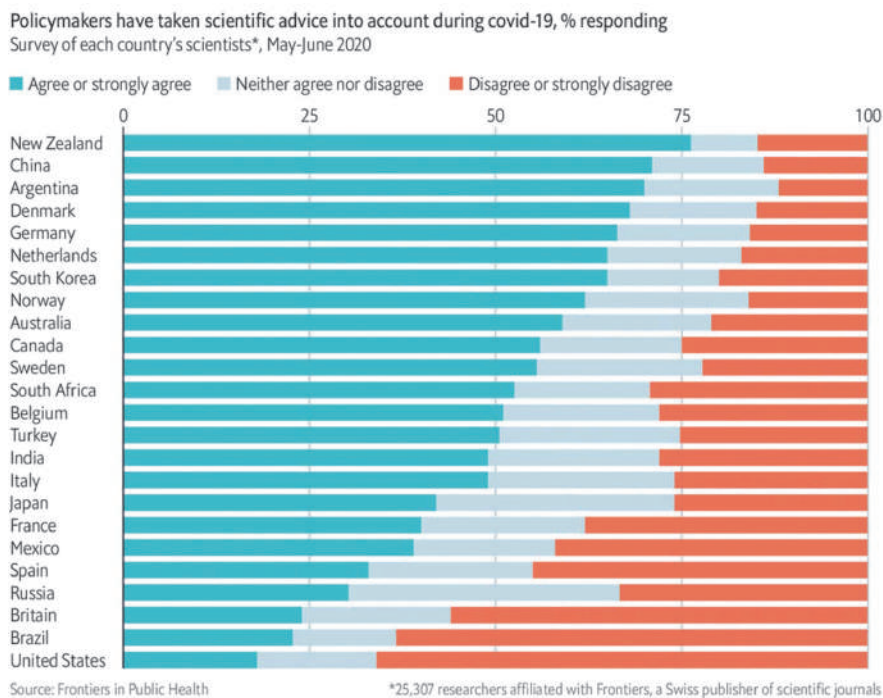


Figure 2. Survey data on country leaders' relationship with science.

Source: Are governments following the science on covid-19? *The Economist*. November 11, 2020. URL: <https://u.to/0D1TGw> (last request 12.03.2021).

The parts of the press briefings in which the two leaders intervene have been analyzed through a coding scheme created for the purpose. Each speech has been decomposed in segments according to the topics and sub-topics, and for every segment the coder has identified a frame. The topics' list includes: 1) the international crisis (i.e. references to the WHO, to international relations and relations with China in particular); 2) public health (i.e. discussion about the precaution principle, the sanitary measures, the characterization of nurses and doctors, the vax vs. no-vax disputes, the efforts to produce therapies and vaccines); 3) the economy (i.e. strategies for the recov-

ery and for contrasting unemployment, special measures in support of specific sectors through public funding and tax cutting, reconversion of national manufacturing to enhance medical supplies); 4) science (including the role of scientists, scientific disputes, and pseudo-scientific therapies); 5) politics (i.e. the characterization of the leader, of her/his opponents, of the government, of the country and of citizens, of foreign countries and of possible internal enemies); 6) the media (i.e. characterization of the media, discussions about the transparency of decision-making, disputes about fake news); 7) gender (i.e. characterization of women and LGBTQI+ communities, balance of work at home during smart working, domestic violence); and 8) education (i.e. characterization of the education system, children's safety at school, discussions about schools' closure and opening, characterization of teachers and e-learning methods). Figure 3 shows the distribution of the topics addressed by Donald Trump and Jacinda Ardern.

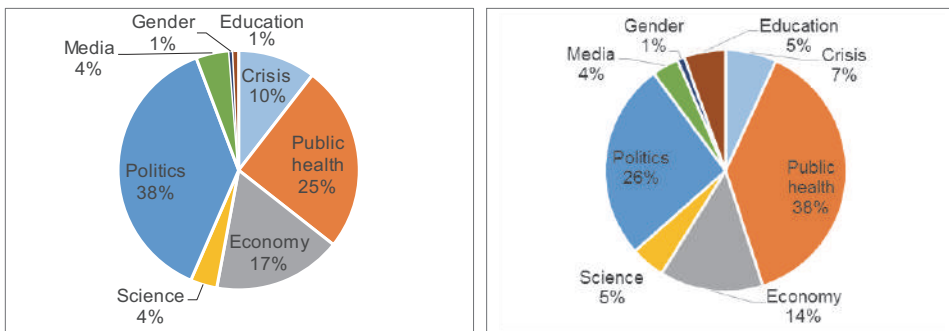


Figure 3. Comparison of the topics addressed by Donald Trump and Jacinda Ardern.

Source: data from PRIN 2017 Tuscia University's research unit coordinated by Prof. Flaminia Saccà, within the national research project "The Transformations of Democracy: Actors, Strategies and Outcomes in Opposing Populism in Political, Juridical and Social Arenas", granted by the Italian Ministry of Research. Coordinated by prof. Carlo Ruzza (University of Trento).

The most striking difference between the two leader lies in the different weight assigned to politics and public health. As we can see from fig. n. 3 the percentages are exactly reversed: Trump is much more focused on politics (38%) than on public health (25%), and Ardern is committed to public health (38%) more than politics (26%). For both leaders, the economy is the third topic to be addressed (17% for Trump and 14% for Ardern), followed by the international crisis (10% and 7%), the media (4% both), science (4% and 5%), and gender issues (1% both). Ardern is less concerned by the international crisis than Trump, but more attentive to the problems of the education system and the wellbeing of children not going to school (5% of Ardern vs. 1% of Trump).

**Trump's frames.** The features of Trump's discourse have been extensively analyzed prior the pandemic [15-16; 20]. He is the ideal-type of "angry populism", "shameless impoliteness" and of "a Manichean ideology, [where] there is a clear-cut contrast between 'attack and eliminate' phrases and 'protect and defend' phrases" [15, p. 189] that reduces all aspects of a nation's life to a matter of competition between the super-good and the super-evil. He has faced the pandemic coherently. We have traced three phases in his communication:

- 1<sup>st</sup> phase: February 26 – March 10: the discourse is oriented at calming down and reassuring citizens that the Covid-19 is like a seasonal flu. This argument is supported by flu mortality rate compared to those of Covid-19. The message addressed not only citizens but financial markets as well;



- 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: March 11 – April 6: the national emergency is declared, but the underlying message remains the same: the ability of the US to ensure a quick solution of the crisis. Scientific research on therapies and vaccines is transformed in an adventurous tale, where the hero (the leader and by extension the American people) confronts with many troubles but does not despair. The first results are presented with a complete repertoire of hyperboles, notwithstanding missing scientific evidence, and the private sector is exalted (the pharmaceutical industry, the supply chain and the ability of the whole system to reconvert itself to the critical context);
- 3<sup>rd</sup> phase: April 7 - 24: the quick solution has not arrived, and Trump begins to delineate the enemy. As in every crisis, the people is called to be unite and strong, and Trump does so by identifying a common enemy, which is not only the virus but also, for extension, the country the virus came from (China) and every single entity accused to side with it (the World Health Organization). Trump's famous claim for the first presidential campaign was "Make America Great Again": the pandemic has revived this motto by adding another dimension to the sense of deprivation that it suggests. In many circumstances, Trump has advocated for the US to reach a "pharmaceutical independence" from China's supplies. Thus, the "Washington establishment", "the Deep State" and the Democrats are marked as "defeatists". His policies follow this imperative too: the possibility of a lockdown is described as generating more death than the virus itself.

At the beginning of the virus spread in the US, he has justified his decisions by inviting the people to stay calm, relax, and have faith in what he was doing:

"Now, you treat this like a flu. [...] But there are certain steps that you can take that won't even be necessary. You know, in many cases, when you catch this, it's very light; you don't even know there's a problem. Sometimes they just get the sniffles, sometimes they just get something where they're not feeling quite right. And sometimes they feel really bad. But that's a little bit like the flu. It's a little like the regular flu that we have flu shots for. And we'll essentially have a flu shot for this in a fairly quick manner" (February 26).

After an initial harmony with his scientific advisors, since the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase onwards Trump underlines his disagreement with dr. Fauci and dr. Birx. He encourages the people to use pseudo-scientific methods and therapies, combined with a representation of science as divided in factions, non-exact, disputed and hence disputable. "Alternative facts" is the formula used to answer to contrasting evidence; media highlighting fallacies, contradictions or mistakes are then branded as "fake news", in the name of post-factuality where every thesis has an antithesis enjoying an equal legitimacy.

The source of legitimacy for the "facts" he is presenting is actually himself. He has constantly remarked that people could rely on him: for instance, he claimed that certain drugs or disinfectants could be effective (in particular hydroxychloroquine and UV rays), or he has recommended the use of face masks, but in the end leaving the people free to decide whether to wear them or not. Actually, he even claimed that masks can also be substituted by scarves:

"You know, you can use a scarf. A scarf is – everybody – a lot of people have scarves, and you can use a scarf. A scarf would be very good. And I – my – my feeling is if people want to do it, there's certainly no harm to it. I would say do it, but use a scarf if you want, you know, rather than going out and getting a mask or whatever. We're making millions and millions of masks, but we want them to go to the hospitals. I mean, one of the things that Dr. Fauci told me today is we don't want them competing. We don't want everybody competing with the hospitals where you really need them" (March 31).

Trump's is a quasi-magical, pre-modern approach to science: it is not based on evidence and on rigorous control by experts. Instead, pseudo-science is given a mark of reliability that depends on Trump's intuition, in a sort of transfer of competence from business to science (as if they were the very same thing):

“Look, it may work, and it may not work. And I agree with the doctor, what he said: It may work, it may not work. I feel good about it. That's all it is. Just a feeling. You know, I'm a smart guy. I feel good about it. And we're going to see. You're going to see soon enough. And we have certainly some very big samples of people, if you look at the people. You have a lot of people that are in big trouble. And this is not a drug that — obviously, I think I can speak for a lot of — from a lot of experience, because it's been out there for over 20 years. So, it's not a drug that you have a huge amount of danger with. It's not like a brand-new drug that's been just created that may have an unbelievable monumental effect, like kill you” (March 20).

Hence the American people is meant to rely on companies and on Trump himself.

“My administration is working very aggressively to pioneer new medical countermeasures to treat and prevent infection. Working on a lot of things. We must utilize our nation's scientific brilliance to vanquish the virus. We have to vanquish the virus as quickly as we can, because we have a lot of things happening in this country, and we have a great future, but we have to get back to work. This week, the FDA established the Coronavirus Treatment Accelerator Program, which is expediting the development of few anti- — antiviral and other therapies, and they're doing it on a very rapid basis. And I think we're having some very good results. We'll tell you about that” (April 4).

He has emphasized a war frame depicting himself as the commander-in-chief going to vanquish the virus.

“My administration is marshalling the full power of the American government, and we will do that, and that's what we've done, and we will continue to do it until our war is won. Economic, scientific, medical, military, and homeland security — all of this to vanquish the virus” (March 27).

“So let me be extremely clear about one point: We will move heaven and earth to safeguard our great American citizens. We will continue to use every power, every authority, every single resource we've got to keep our people healthy, safe, secure, and to get this thing over with. We want to finish this war. We have to get back to work. We have to get — we have to open our country again. We have to open our country again. We don't want to be doing this for months and months and months. We're going to open our country again. This country wasn't meant for this. Few were. Few were. But we have to open our country again” (April 4).

This trait was even accentuated during the electoral campaign, since May 2020 on, and especially after he recovered from the Covid-19 in mid-October, a couple of weeks before his defeat; the identification between the leader and the people has reached a new standard in that occasion.

**Ardern's frames.** Jacinda Ardern's communication of the crisis is the opposite of Donald Trump's. Some years ago, Ardern has described herself as being an “empathetic leader”, highlighting her will to get “in tune with” citizens, emotionally and operatively<sup>1</sup>. The pandemic has further stressed this trait.

She did not need to identify an enemy to nurture a sense of belonging and solidarity among the people. Instead, she has insisted on two related aspects: on the one side, the grief and sorrow for the loss of so many people and for their families that cannot give them the last goodbye:

<sup>1</sup> Jacinda Ardern: It takes strength to be an empathetic leader // *BBC News*. 14 November 2018. URL: <https://u.to/CjRTGw> (last request 12.03.2021).



“I’ve read messages from those who have lost loved ones that couldn’t come together to grieve for them. I’ve read stories of brand-new parents whose most joyful time has been made so difficult because of separation; businesses who are worried for their livelihoods, and for the family that are their employees. I am acutely aware of the pain many New Zealanders are feeling” (April 9).

On the other side, the pride and gratitude for the health care workers who were working so hard to contain the effects of the virus under the hardest circumstances.

The empathic side of her communication does not imply a “soft” approach to policymaking. Her response to the pandemic has been incremental and always relying on scientific advice. The government has created a four-phases system based on rigorous criteria:

“Alert Level One is where COVID-19 is here but contained. In this phase we prepare. The basics, like border measures, contact tracing, and cancelling mass gatherings are activated. You’ll see that this is where we have been when COVID first arrived in New Zealand.

Alert Level Two is where the disease is contained but the risks are growing because we have more cases. This is when we move to reduce our contact with one another. We increase our border measures, and we cancel events. This is also the level where we ask people to work differently if they can and to cancel unnecessary travel.

Alert Level Three is where the disease is increasingly difficult to contain. This is where we restrict our contact by stepping things up again. We close public venues and ask non-essential businesses to close.

Alert Level Four is where we have sustained transmission. This is where we eliminate contact with each other altogether. We keep essential services going but ask everyone to stay at home until COVID-19 is back under control” (March 21).

For each level (prepare – alert level 1, reduce – alert level 2, restrict – alert level 3, lockdown - alert level 4), a range of measures has been applied, from border closure to complete self-isolation. During her press briefings, she has always recapitulated the current phase and its features in terms of social activities that were allowed or forbidden. The shift from one phase to another was not automatic: all decisions “are based on science and evidence” (March 16), and taken under the principle of precaution:

“It is not the time to be relaxed or flexible: act as if you have Covid-19” (March 25).

“Media: what was your first reaction today when that zero figure hit your desk?

Ardern: First I heard the zero, and then I heard the one “confirmed” and the fact that it was transferred from a “probable”. I’m a perfectionist; I want to see those numbers after we’ve been in alert level 3 long enough for it to be a reflection of alert level 3. And so, at the moment, what we’re seeing is all of the good work New Zealand has put into the lockdown. This is the waiting room. This is where we check if we’re recovering well and that we’ve got it right. We need a few more days to check we have” (May 4).

Coherently, Ardern’s communication has been firm and severe, aimed at clarifying the dramatic moment without downplaying its seriousness. Citizens are motivated to respect the rules of containment given the gravity of the danger:

“I also said we should all be prepared to move quickly. Now is the time to put our plans into action. We are fortunate to still be some way behind the majority of overseas countries in terms of cases, but the trajectory is clear. Act now, or risk the virus taking hold as it has elsewhere. We currently have 102 cases. But so did Italy once. Now the virus has overwhelmed their health system and hundreds of people are dying every day. The situation here is moving at pace, and so must we” (March 23).

“Our numbers are going to go up and the modelling I’ve seen suggests that they will go up quite considerably. [...] So don’t be disheartened when you see that. Don’t be disheartened when you see that ongoing increase because of that lag, all of the efforts that we’re putting in should eventually show if we all follow the rules. Til then, do check in on your neighbours, do especially check on those who may be elderly. Give them a call see what their

needs are and if you can help them, go out and grab their essentials and pop them on the front door for them. I'm just remembering the way we can keep them safe is by keeping our distance. Remember, stay at home, break the chain and you'll save lives and it's as simple as that. That's everyone's job for the next four months" (March 26).

The empathic leadership does not leave room to misunderstandings in terms of scientific or legal knowledge. The consequences of the virus on the individual, on specific categories (such as children, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and New Zealanders abroad), and on society as a whole are clearly explained in a plain language, also with the support of experts.

"It is not realistic for New Zealand to have only a handful of cases. The international evidence proves that is not realistic, and so we must plan and prepare for more cases" (March 14).

"I want to reflect on an issue that has been front of mind for us during this period of lockdown, and that's the issue of mental health. I know there are some people who are feeling distressed, anxious, or worried at this time, and that is completely understandable. [...] That's why we will, tomorrow, release campaigns and resources with tips designed to help Kiwis cope with the stresses created by COVID-19, not just through lockdown but beyond that, too" (April 6).

While acknowledging the limitations of any possible enforcement of the rules of containment, Ardern has highlighted the surveillance strategies and the sanctions for violators.

"This is not just a situation where we are relying on people; we will enforce it, and we will enforce it strictly" (March 31).

"You will have seen an increase in police enforcement in recent days. I expect that to continue, including roadblocks in some places this Easter weekend. While most are doing the right thing, some are not. We cannot let the selfish actions of a few set us back, and we won't, especially after all that everyone has sacrificed to get us here" (April 9).

"Then it'll be a matter of us then checking in on those work sites. As you can imagine, there will be a large number opening—400,000 going back to work—and so it won't be possible to be present everywhere. This is a high-trust model" (April 22).

In Ardern's communication, "breaking the chains of transmission" and "flattening the curve" of contagion are the most important goals. All her political projects are condensed and subsumed within this framework. It seems like fighting the virus absorbs any other social issue. In her discourse, the economic difficulties experienced by the population depend on the pandemic, just as job losses and mental health problems do.

"Before I conclude, I want to dwell briefly on some of the discussion I've seen emerge over the past few days over what kind of public health response is best for the economy. I've said it many times before and I'll say it again: no matter what it is you favour, the solution is the same: fight the virus. A strategy that sacrifices people in favour of, supposedly, a better economic outcome is a false dichotomy and has been shown to produce the worst of both worlds: loss of life and prolonged economic pain" (April 5).

"Our priority, as it has been throughout these recent weeks is the health of New Zealanders, because that also the way that we can protect livelihoods. Of course, we've also put measures in place to cushion the economic impact by keeping as many New Zealanders in jobs as possible, and by providing assistance to ensure as many Kiwi businesses as possible remain viable. We'll continue to do this, but I know what everyone wants is a return to the day when that is no longer required, either" (April 27).

Her final message asking the population "to be kind" is meant to ask people to fight negative emotions and loneliness deriving from the necessary social distancing. She

repeats this concept in several occasions, alongside with expressing her empathy with people's pain and sorrow:

“What we need from you, is to support one another. Go home tonight and check in on your neighbours. Start a phone tree with your street. Plan how you'll keep in touch with one another. We will get through this together, but only if we stick together. Be strong and be kind” (March 23).

“I also want to re-emphasise the need for kindness and support” (March 29).

“I am acutely aware of the pain many New Zealanders are feeling” (April 9).

“We feel acutely the struggle that many New Zealanders are facing – it's about leadership” (April 15).

“We cannot forget that every number is someone's father, someone's mum, a relative, or a friend, and someone that we have all been united in an effort to protect and to save” (April 20).

Contrarily to the clichés, an empathic leadership does not weaken her authority. As her Ministry of Health, David Clark, is caught in infringing the lockdown, she makes it clear that she won't fire him only because of the current emergency but she still finds a way of stigmatizing his behaviour by moving him to the “bottom of the Cabinet rankings” (and he will eventually resign in July).

“I want to share with you what I shared with him: under normal circumstances, I would sack the Minister. What he did was wrong and there are no excuses. But my priority above all else is our collective fight against COVID-19. [...] Simply put, I determined that we cannot afford massive disruption in the health sector or to our response, because David Clark continues to possess what we require, as our health Minister, to take on COVID-19. For that reason and that reason alone, Dr Clark will maintain his role, but he broke the rules and he does need to pay a price. So, while he maintains his health portfolio, I have stripped him of his role as associate finance Minister and demoted him to the bottom of our Cabinet rankings” (April 7).

When the situation starts to look brighter, the lockdown gradually finishes and “a high-trust system” is established (April 22): all people are required to respect the rules of containment even in the impossibility of control and enforcement.

Also, thanks to the isolated position and the geographic distance from other countries, Ardern's strategy has brought New Zealand to eradicate the virus after two months from the first case. In the end, she and her party – the Labour party – won a full majority for the second mandate in the October 2020 elections.

**Conclusions.** The analysis of Donald Trump' and Jacinda Ardern's discourses on the pandemic crisis underlines how much they differ from each other; in this sense, they represent the purest form of their respective ideal-types of leadership. Given the particular nature of the Covid-19 meta-crisis (i.e. opening a space of reflection and discussion about already-existing crises while at the same time creating new ones), leaders are particularly under pressure. Trump's “war” narrative's frame might be successful when it comes to winning the elections under certain circumstances, but it has crashed dramatically against the pandemic. On the contrary, the complexity of messages related to science, the need for patience and sacrifice in the light of a better future that were brought by the pandemic, seem to have rewarded Ardern's style of communication and, more generally speaking, of leadership.

In this article we have shown how this efficacy is anchored to a specific leadership style, but it is not just a symbolical or cultural matter. Data coming from multiple sources confirm that this kind of pact between women leaders and the population is

grounded in a stricter compliance to rules of containment and to more efficient responses to the meta-crisis.

For those reasons, we bet that the present generation of women leaders, those who won against the Covid-19, will constitute an essential point of reference for future leaders (hopefully not only for women). Despite the differences among them and among their countries, those women are characterized by the ability to nurture multiple syncretisms: between power and empathy, between scientific rigor and the widest possible divulgation of science, between economic efficacy and care. For the whole history of humanity women have been associated (and confined) to the concept of care, as if their only social function was assisting the partners, children, elders and ill people, and for extension the places where they live (i.e. home). This generation of women leaders have overcome this suffocating prejudice just for the mere fact of having reached the top and for holding such high positions of power.

Various scholars and opinion leaders have tried to formulate different hypothesis on why and how women leaders worldwide have been more effective in managing the crisis [21-24]. Sadly, it must be noted that in most cases they have lapsed into the cliché of supposedly traditional female skills and male interests. Women are seen as more inclined to be caring and men as more target oriented and more focused on economic issues. A non-biased analysis of the data actually shows that other skills seem to be crucial in producing better results during a crisis: the capacity to listen to experts and to timely react accordingly [25-27]. This capacity seems to be linked to a more horizontal and less vertical idea of leadership and to the courage it takes to change and take unpopular but necessary decisions.

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# ЖЕНЩИНЫ-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ЛИДЕРЫ В ПЕРИОД ПАНДЕМИИ: СРАВНЕНИЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ ДЖ. АРДЕРН И Д. ТРАМПА О КРИЗИСЕ COVID-19

*Работа выполнена на основе исследовательского проекта Университета Тушии (PRIN2017, рук. проф. Ф. Сакка) при поддержке Министерства просвещения и научных исследований Италии в рамках национальной исследовательской сети «Трансформации демократии: акторы, стратегии и результаты противостояния популизму на политической, юридической и социальной аренах» (рук. проф. К Ручца, Университет Тренто, Италия).*

**Аннотация.** В контексте мета-кризиса COVID-19 модели поведения политических лидеров стали ключевым фактором, определяющим способность страны сдерживать распространение инфекции и восстановиться. В связи с этим авторы поставили целью изучить гендерные особенности подобных моделей поведения. В данной статье утверждается, что женщины-лидеры успешно справились с кризисом, вызванным пандемией, не только благодаря присущей им способности выстраивать отношения, укреплять общественные связи и «настраиваться» на тревоги граждан; решающим оказался и подход женщин-лидеров к науке. Вопреки ожиданиям, по сравнению с мужчинами-лидерами, женщины продемонстрировали большую отзывчивость и внимательное отношение к научным рекомендациям, а также использовали свое понимание науки как фактор легитимности. Работа выполнена в рамках крупного исследовательского проекта, проводимого при поддержке Министерства просвещения и научных исследований Италии (координатор проекта проф. Ф. Сакка). В ходе работы авторы проанализировали дискурсы двух конкретных политических лидеров: Дональда Трампа и Джасинды Ардерн, поскольку они определяют идеально-типические черты двух противоположных моделей поведения в том, что касается науки. Анализ риторики и фреймов подчеркивает различия в их подходах к проблеме и доказывает, что способность женщин-лидеров прислушиваться к советам экспертов и потребностям конкретных слоев населения сыграла решающую роль в успехе мер по сдерживанию вируса.

**Ключевые слова:** женщины-лидеры, коммуникации, COVID19, наука, политика.

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