

Abstract

Governments utilize the media in order to communicate with the public. During COVID-19, government websites and Twitter are forms of media that leaders utilized to spread information about the pandemic. The aim of my thesis is to investigate communication strategies of governments in Poland and Czechia during COVID-19. Specifically, this thesis will answer the questions: How have Poland and Czechia utilized the media to convey state policies toward COVID-19? To what extent have their approaches been similar or different and what accounts for these similarities and differences? Both Poland and Czechia have made efforts to inform the public and convey state policies toward COVID-19, specifically policies related to personal hygiene and social distancing. I hypothesize that these two countries will have different media strategies due to differences in their level of democracy and degree of media censorship. I argue that this is because differing levels of democracy and censorship create different incentives for politicians and government organizations to spread information, which accounts for the differences in communication strategies. Where the level of democracy is low and the degree of censorship is high, the government is less likely to be concerned about transparency because there is a lack of non-official news sources competing with the official sources.

Title of Thesis: The Media During Lockdown:
 A Study of Poland and Czechia during COVID-19 and their
 Government Communication Strategies

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The Media During Lockdown:
A Study of Poland and Czechia during COVID-19 and their Government Communication
Strategies

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Forever Go Blue.

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Discussion on Translations

The Polish Government website (gov.pl), which entails the COVID-19 information included in the figures in Chapter 3, was translated using the translate function that came up on their website. The Polish Tweets, by Andrzej Duda (@AndrzejDuda), were translated using the Twitter translate function. Both the website and Twitter translations were checked over by me, a native Polish speaker, to make sure they are correct. The Czech COVID portal (<https://covid.gov.cz/en/>), provides an English version of the website. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Twitter (@CzechMFA) was already in English. All Tweets are in their original form.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Question and Argument

The aim of my thesis is to investigate communication strategies of governments in Poland and Czechia during COVID-19. Specifically, this thesis will answer the questions: How have Poland and Czechia utilized the media to convey state policies toward COVID-19? To what extent have their approaches been similar or different and what accounts for these similarities and differences? Both Poland and Czechia have made efforts to inform the public and convey state policies toward COVID-19, specifically policies related to personal hygiene and social distancing. Despite their similarities, including past communist governments as part of the Soviet bloc, each country adopted distinct communication strategies that varied according to three criteria: clarity, consistency, and coherence.

In this thesis, I hypothesize that these two countries will have different media strategies due to differences in their level of democracy and degree of media censorship. I argue that this is because differing levels of democracy and censorship create different incentives for politicians and government organizations to spread information, which accounts for the differences in communication strategies. Where the level of democracy is low and the degree of censorship is high, the government is less likely to be concerned about transparency because there is a lack of non-official news sources competing with the official sources. Citizens are therefore unlikely to encounter information that contests the government's version of events. Conversely, when the level of democracy is high and the degree of censorship is low, the government is more motivated to be transparent because the public has greater access to non-official or alternative sources that compete with and may contest the government's account. A lower level of democracy and a higher level of censorship accounts for leaders and government organizations

to not feel as compelled to be transparent because they can't access unlimited and unfiltered information, whereas the opposite, a higher level of democracy and a lower level of censorship provides more of an incentive to be transparent. More specifically, because Poland has a low level of democracy and a high degree of censorship, I expect that its scores for clarity, consistency, and coherence scores will be lower than in Czechia, which has a high level of democracy and a low degree of censorship. I develop my argument by conducting comparative case studies, focusing on how the government in each country utilized two forms of media: official websites and Twitter accounts.

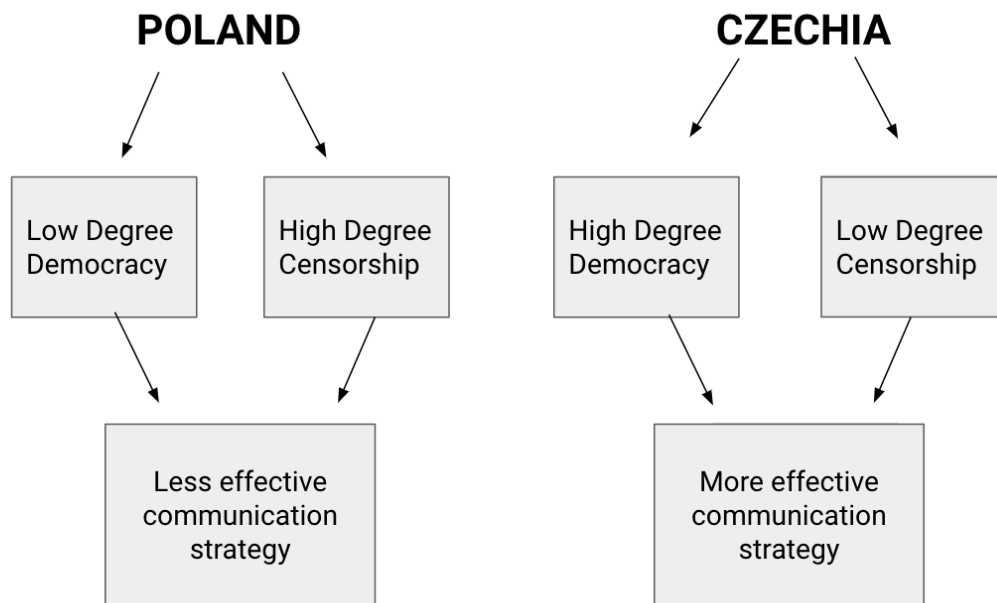


Figure 1: Summary of Main Argument

Poland and Czechia are viable case studies to analyze the government's impact on the spread of information about COVID-19 due to their similarities in geographical location and communist history. Since both countries fell under the Soviet sphere of influence after World War II, they were exposed to communist regimes and had to rebuild after the end of the war. Due to a similar timeline in terms of falling under the Soviet bloc, to then experiencing the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, both countries then were left to adjust to a new lifestyle and government. Poland and Czechia are both democracies that are now European Union members with market economies that are reasonably well integrated into the global economy (Sil 2017).

In each case study, I will introduce how the historical and communist background of both Poland and Czechia have affected the current censorship levels and degrees of democracy. With this research, I will then provide a timeline of the spread of COVID-19 in both countries between March and the end of April 2020, and I then detail the strategies of the country's leaders that impacted the media response to COVID. The analyses in each case study will address the clarity, consistency, and coherence in the approaches when it came to conveying state policies through the media platforms by the state leaders in Poland and Czechia. This research is significant because the COVID-19 pandemic is the deadliest pandemic to occur in this century where media is as widely used as it is. Since the media is a developing source for sharing information, evaluating its impact is helpful in understanding how individuals in Poland and Czechia get information and how valuable that information is.

Methodology

In this thesis, I use case studies of Poland and Czechia to critically examine their governments' utilization of the media to inform the public about COVID-19. I focus on how the

respective countries' government websites and social media platforms have been utilized to spread information concerning the virus and health directives.

In order to identify the broadest extent of the effect of the media on the population during the early months of the pandemic, I made the decision to focus on government websites and Twitter. The choice to research the government website stems from its wide access to the public. Government websites have many benefits for constituents as they provide information directly from the country leaders. There is a great ease of obtaining services, mobile access, easy access to updates, live help, and real-time video-recorded council meetings (Einstein, 2020). Government websites allow individuals to have readily accessible information that is a primary source of updates from officials. The Polish government website contains an entire COVID-19 section, with a menu of wide variety to ensure the public is being informed. There is an option to learn about general information, hospitals, travel, temporary limitations, and questions and answers. All press conferences that have been held in the country are posted and updated on the website with summaries. The Czechia government has its own separate website dedicated to COVID-19 that is sponsored by the government.

Twitter is the other form of media that I investigate in my thesis to analyze how effectively the government was able to communicate through the presentation of information. The public sphere, which includes social media, is tied to the growth of states and its development. Living in a globalized world that is unavoidably growing, society is significantly impacted by social media, specifically Twitter (Weller et al. 2013). With access to the news and multiple media outlets on smartphones, information spreads within seconds. The political atmosphere is shaped by news outlets and social media such as Twitter, including in Poland and Czechia, but the influence of Twitter stems out into the entire world and affects the politics of

other states as well (Jungherr 2014). Twitter has become increasingly political as COVID-19 has swept over the entire world (Banda 2021). Because Twitter is used primarily to share information and opinions, politicians are able to effectively share their thoughts. It is a source of media that has become more developed and utilized and entails the interaction with constituents, which differs from how the government websites operate.

I collect and generate evidence of differences in each government's media strategy by navigating through the official websites and posts on Twitter accounts/Twitter feeds. The government websites that I researched are: www.gov.pl and <https://covid.gov.cz/en/>. These websites are the official sources of information that those from the respective countries use to find information about COVID directly from the government. As for Twitter accounts, I investigated Andrzej Duda (@andrzejduda), the President of Poland, and the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (@CzechMFA). I chose these accounts because they are either verified by Twitter, meaning they are official accounts of the leaders/organizations and provide information directly from them, or the most widely followed and recognized.

For the government websites, I focus on social distancing and hygiene/vaccines as the main aspects of information spreading as a way to organize the messages being spread to Polish and Czech citizens. My thesis is centered around communications regarding policies related to personal hygiene such as mask wearing and vaccines, and social distancing policies such as avoiding large gatherings and the closure of businesses. My Tweets focus on ones that pertain to COVID, since these Twitter accounts contained other news. These aspects were essential approaches to mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and contained information that changed quickly as rules and regulations were put into place and new policies were being implemented by various institutions.

I evaluated the communication strategies according to the following dimensions: clarity, consistency, and coherence (see below). Based on my conceptualization and measurement (see below), I analyze each country's official government websites and Twitter posts.

- Clarity refers to how transparent the message is. It will be measured by whether data is used to support the information being shared.
- Consistency refers to the accuracy of the message being shared. It will be measured according to the availability of information and the regularity of updates through the media platforms.
- Coherence refers to the presentation of the message, specifically whether it is presented in a way that is easy to follow. It will be measured according to how well the messages being shared are organized.

I then provide an aggregate score for each country's media strategy based on their scores for each of these dimensions. If a country receives a Low score on two of the three dimensions, then the aggregate score would be Low. Similarly, if a country receives a High score on two of the three dimensions, then the aggregate score would be High. Substantively, an aggregate score of Low means that the category was not displayed within the media source, a score of Medium indicates that the category was present, but lacked additional information, and a score of High indicating that the media strategy was strongly developed and is not missing any criteria (see Table 1 below for details).

Table 1: Substantive Meaning of Aggregate Scores

SCORE	CRITERIA
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LOW	The message is overall ineffective; contains incorrect or partially incorrect information; no data to support claims; flawed reasoning
MEDIUM	The message contains overall effective information but is not developed to its full extent; possibly lacks data or further explanation; unfocused details
HIGH	The message contains significant information of high quality with details; message is clear and specific; well developed structure

To demonstrate that there are differences in the levels of democracy over time in both countries, I will utilize the online database V-Dem¹. V-Dem enables me to compare the decline in democracy levels in both countries. The different levels of democratic decline is important because it affects the difference in the structure for spreading information in each country. To demonstrate the different degree of censorship in each country, I will use existing academic literature released that analyzes the degree of censorship in the respective countries. The degree of censorship is important because it impacts the amount of information shared with the public and the quality of that information .

My research focuses on the government websites as they are presented online. I am limiting my analysis to the March 2020 to September 2020 timeframe when it comes to Twitter. I chose this timeframe because it covers the initial start of shutdowns in both countries, as well as the first major peak of the pandemic. The media was given a major task of covering a global event that would be continuously covered until present day. Six months is a long time frame with many changes that were adjusted and it was the start to many policies being instated;

¹ Varieties of Democracy, V-Dem, is an online database used to measure democracy within different countries; <https://www.v-dem.net/>

additionally, since there was little information about COVID-19 at the start, information was quickly coming out and changing frequently. This time frame demonstrates the early adjustment to informing the public of brand new information regarding COVID-19 and the best practices on how to avoid it.

In the rest of this chapter I provide a literature review to justify my focus on the media during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 2 justifies my case selection. It provides the historical background of Poland and Czechia, focusing on their similar communist legacies, and provides evidence for the two key differences that I expect to result in different media strategies: 1) different levels of democracy; and 2) different degrees of censorship. Chapters 3 and 4 present the case studies of Poland and Czechia, respectively, focusing on the government websites and Twitter accounts. In Chapter 5, I compare and contrast the two cases and briefly discuss the implications of my findings.

Literature Review: Why Study the Media during COVID?

This thesis focuses on the media during COVID because it has been a crucial part of learning about the spread and impact of the pandemic. The media has great control over what information goes out to the public and is able to censor information and impose bias. Any misinformation or bias that the media inflicts has contributed to the politicization of the pandemic. Social media, television, print media, and the internet have all been imperative to inform the public of how to properly protect themselves as well as learn about the effects of COVID-19. It contributes to existing literature by examining the role of the media in two relatively new democracies that are understudied: Poland and the Czech Republic. More

specifically, my research helps to assess the impact of the media in these two countries on spreading information about COVID to the public and how effective it was in doing so.

Infectious Disease and the Media

When assessing the influence of the media, there are many factors to consider that may impact how people learn and interpret what is shared with them. Zaller (2003) lays the foundation for how the media shapes the political information that reaches the public. He claims that democracy will suffer if the public isn't able to get political information that is independent of the government and politicians. The media is crucial in the spread of information in which people form opinions from what they see, how they talk about it, what they learn from it, and if they are able to see the bigger picture (Zaller 2003). Social media, specifically, is able to spread information quicker than ever before and is a tool used by individuals around the world to spread information about global health issues. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, from July 24, 2014–August 1, 2014 (9 days), 42,236 tweets mentioning Ebola were posted and disseminated to 9,362,267,048 people in real time, spreading breaking health news, with most of these tweets sent 3 days before the official outbreak announcements (Kullar et al. 2020). Individuals consider infectious diseases that receive repetitive media exposure to be more severe and have higher disease-like status than diseases of comparable objective severity that receive less media attention (Young 2008).

SARS-CoV-2 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Since then, there has been a great shift in the digital world during this global health crisis. It has been deemed that the pandemic will continue to be highly disruptive in the near terms and unpredictable in the long term across many microtrends, especially in the digital space. The

pandemic may come to change the course of the future by impacting populations, economies, businesses, education, governments, and the health system (Brannen, Ahmed, Newton 2021).

Samuel Brannen, Habiba Ahmed and Henry Newton (2021) have analyzed macro trends in the use of social media. According to their research, as of January 2020, 49% of the world's population are active on social media, which is a 9% increase from 2019. This number is projected to increase each year. Due to this increase in social media usage across the globe, there is greater exposure to fake news. Disinformation and misinformation have been directly associated with the information spread during the pandemic causing potential harm in miseducating the population. This is not the first time this has happened. The authors share the example of 2016 during the Zika outbreak, there was more false information being spread, outpacing the real scientific facts and data, and with the assistance of social media, the false news spread faster and reached more people than the credible news sources.

Similar to this trend during the Zika outbreak, this is expected to continue with COVID-19 with the issues faced by states, society, and global organizations and having to stay ahead on spreading correct information (Brannen, Ahmed, Newton 2021). Not only are individuals spreading misinformation, but states themselves are doing so in order to spread fear. In this article, the authors describe how China, Russia and other countries are using social media to spread false news about COVID-19 to instill fear in the United States and Europe and to spread conspiracies to undermine confidence in strategies to combat the pandemic. This makes it difficult for individuals around the world to trust the media -- the same rely on the media for COVID-19 updates and public safety measures. .

Matteo Cinelli, et al. (2020) describes the misinformation phenomenon during the management of a disease outbreak "as an infodemic," due to its influence on social response to

information that is spread on the media. The authors use the example of CNN. The news station shared a story of a rumor that Lombardy, a northern Italian region, was possibly going on lockdown, causing a mass exodus of people. There were uncontrollable groups of people infiltrating airports and trains in an attempt to leave the city (Cinelli, et al. 2020). This suggests that it is important to determine the way people find or ignore information and how their behavior is impacted by the media.

The Role of Twitter in Spreading Information About COVID in Poland and Czechia

Twitter is a form of social media that is widely used by individuals around the world. Society is significantly affected by social media in the globalized world that is constantly growing and changing. With advancing technology and an increase in connection and communication with individuals around the world at one's fingertips, information is spread quickly and efficiently. Politics is shaped by news outlets and social media around the globe.

Any user of Twitter can share their opinion and voice through 280 characters per "tweet." Each twitter account holder can follow other accounts and automatically see when the accounts they follow post a new tweet on their timeline. By engaging with another user's tweet by retweeting it, the tweet has an even further reach, in which the user that retweets a tweet spreads that tweet to their followers. One tweet can reach millions within seconds.

The influence of Twitter during COVID-19 was prominent due to politicians and leaders being able to spread information to the public while also interacting with other users. Tweets, in the political sphere, can be informative but also are often heavily opinionated and demonstrate the demeanor of the tweeter. The access to a large audience and the feasibility of interaction with everyday people has caused a spike in Twitter usage (Cooper, 2020). As a result of lockdowns,

increased unemployment, and the increase of Twitter users including politicians, Twitter became a way to gain information about the pandemic as well as spread it. Since Twitter is easily accessible to those who have access to the internet, the access to what is available on Twitter is equal despite gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age. The development in accessibility of information thanks to Twitter has impacted how individuals around the world have reacted to COVID-19.

Conclusion

COVID-19 changed the world in a matter of days and policies were implemented extremely quickly as a global health protection measure. The government played an essential role in protecting its people and implementing the best policies possible. Its ability to utilize the media effectively to spread information about the pandemic played a significant role. Yet, we know little about why governments adopt different strategies toward the media. My thesis is a first step toward furthering our understanding about how two relatively new democracies in Eastern Europe with similar backgrounds developed approaches that are distinctive concerning their clarity, consistency, and coherence.

Chapter 2: Historical Background and Case Selection

This chapter serves as a historical background of Poland and Czechia in order to examine the common historical background that led to the current regimes, the different levels of democracy as well as their differences in censorship. I argue that these factors should lead us to expect different media strategy and communications in each country.

The decision to compare Poland and the Czech Republic stems from their many similarities, including a Communist past and transitions to democracy that have stalled (Ekiert 1998). Although the government is labeled as democratic, Poland's leadership has authoritarian tendencies due to the rise of the conservative Law and Justice Party. The Czech Republic leadership under Zeman is center-left populist, and technocratic, meaning that a leader is chosen through a process that is based on their skills and performance, where Zeman, the current President, was the first President to win by popular vote (Ekiert 1998).

Common Historical Background

Poland's communist past and transition into capitalism and integration into the European Union happened in only one generation, with great economic growth (Piatkowski 2018). Communist rule in Poland began in 1947 when it was named the Communist People's Republic after Soviet-run elections, under the ruling of Boleslaw Bierut. In 1952, Poland was renamed the Polish People's Republic after World War II. After the Holocaust, Poland was left a homogenous ethnic country. Poland's post-war borders provided hope for the development of it due to the natural resources within it, such as a long seacoast, harbors, and an abundance of coal and zinc (Piatkowski 2018).

After Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet bloc faced issues when it came to its stabilization. Within the next decade, economic reform slowed and intellectuals were handed the responsibility to make changes to have Poland prosper. Demonstrations occurred by students to attain greater intellectual freedom. In 1956, Gomulka, a Liberal Communist leader, took over Poland. In the 1960s, economic issues continued and political issues continued to be difficult as well. When Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978, he made the opposition to Communism in Poland even greater due to his beliefs. Leading up to the 1990s, Poland began a shift to a mixed economy (HBR 1995).

In 1990, the Polish government began working towards radical economic reform that was the most far-reaching than any country during the century (HBR). The country would no longer have a communist economy and would now have market allocation of resources with the allowance of private ownership. According to Harvard Business Review, there are three reasons why entrepreneurship is so important in the reform of the transition from communism to a mixed market economy, which are the comprehensive reorganization of work and a complete overhaul of management practice and organizational structures and systems, turning around the economies of shortage that communism created and liberalizing them, and the flexibility to allocate labor and capital to activities that are most profitable. This reorganization has allowed Poland to transition to the new economy.

As the transition to a new economy occurred, Poland faced major opposition by the public due to the corruption of the ruling party. Despite these changes following the collapse of communism, Poland still faces immense corruption within its government. The religious and conservative beliefs of the leading political party, PiS (Law and Justice Party), continues to affect the level of censorship and media coverage that is allowed. The systemic corruption in

Poland is tied to the politicization of the Constitutional Tribunal due to the appointment of purely political nominees as judges. Some judges in the current Polish Constitutional Tribunal in violation of the constitution. Since the ruling party, PiS, has control over the Constitutional Tribunal, changes have been made in Poland that would normally be deemed unconstitutional. According to Makowski, the Law and Justice Party and its satellites use their power to protect their own interests and expand their power, even covering up their own corruption scandals. In 2021, Poland achieved its lowest score in Corruption Perceptions since 2012, according to Transparency International. This downward trend can be attributed to not only the conservative party, but the government's response to the COVID-19 crisis (Makowski 2021).

On the other hand, focusing now on the Czech Republic, what was once Czechoslovakia, was not absorbed in the Soviet regime as other countries were in Eastern and Central Europe. In 1945, Soviet troops arrived in Prague and in 1946, the Communist Party came to power when Klement Gottwald became Prime Minister. As communism reigned the country, in 1989, peaceful protests occurred in Czechoslovakia and eventually Marian Calfa became the prime minister in a government that was not majority communists. The following year, Czechoslovakia was renamed to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, and in 1993, Czech Republic and Slovakia officially became two separate independent countries.

In the Czech Republic, the fall of the Iron Curtain was the beginning of the liberation of the press within the country. From 2014 to 2018, the Czech Republic's journalists were labeled by the Worlds of Journalism Study as originally free, then partly free (Rupar, et al. 2019). Rupar et al. describes the press in the Czech Republic as newly independent, only since 1989.

Zemen, the President of the Czech Republic, has been said to demonstrate violence against journalists and verbal attacks. He has been strategic with his media presence, in which he

limits his appearances on television and chooses outlets that would help him avoid problematic topics to discuss (Dvorakova 2020). Due to his stances and negative light on the media, this influences the public trust in the media and polarizes society by instilling fear. Zemen claims that journalists are evil, and with the combination of the largest governing party owning a majority of the media, it has become highly politicized and difficult to keep independent (Dvorakova 2020).

Due to how COVID-19 was handled by the government, Czechia received criticism that was reported in the media. The main critiques focused on the lack of protective equipment, low number of tests administered, and delayed action of the Government (Spacek 2020). The distribution of medical supplies, such as respirators began on March 13th, 2020. Many of these deliveries came from China. A multitude of Czech companies stated that the government ignored their offers or did not approach them, meanwhile they had an abundance of supplies to contribute to the shortage in hospitals. Spacek also claims that “companies linked to government members of the ruling ANO party were involved in the distribution of supplies from China and licenses for disinfectant production were also granted to companies” (Spacek 2020).

Differences in Levels of Democracy

When communism collapsed in Poland, the level of democracy increased until the conservative right-wing PiS party came to power in 2015. The traditional voters of PiS are composed of rural, less educated, economically less successful voters, but also of people who want to protect traditional values and a strong state (Matthes 2016). Hence, the outcome of the elections is rather an expression of the liberal–national and urban–rural divide regarding values and not only material circumstances, since people who have jobs and can make their living may nevertheless fear the changes in a globalized world (Matthes 2016).

To demonstrate that there are differences in the levels of democracy over time in both countries, I will utilize the online database V-Dem. V-Dem enables me to compare the decline in democracy levels in both countries. The different levels of democratic decline is important because it affects the difference in the structure for spreading information in each country. To demonstrate the different degree of censorship in each country, I will use existing academic literature released by Polish and Czech government agencies, journal articles, and credible news sources. The degree of censorship is important because it impacts the amount of information shared with the public and the quality of that information .

Poland has fallen to 63rd place in the V-dem Liberal Democracy Index in 2021, the lowest European Union country ranking, with only Hungary below them. The new report notes that among “the major autocratizers” (countries whose score has fallen the most over the last ten years) Poland “has taken over [from Hungary] the dubious first position with a dramatic 34 percentage-point decline” from 2010 to 2020 (Tilles 2021). With the new conservative regime in power, the PiS party has taken over the ruling administration and has attempted to cover up conspiracy theories (The Economist 2018).

With the new regime in power in Poland since 2015, a decrease in Liberal Democracy has been on a steep decline, as seen in the V-Dem model below. This data presents the trend of Liberal Democracy over the years 1990 to 2021 on the scale provided in the V-dem codebook. Liberal Democracy increased after 1990 due to the collapse of the communist regime. As a new democracy was emerging, the level of Liberal Democracy stayed constant until 2015 when the PiS party came to power, causing the decline in Liberal Democracy due to its conservative policies.

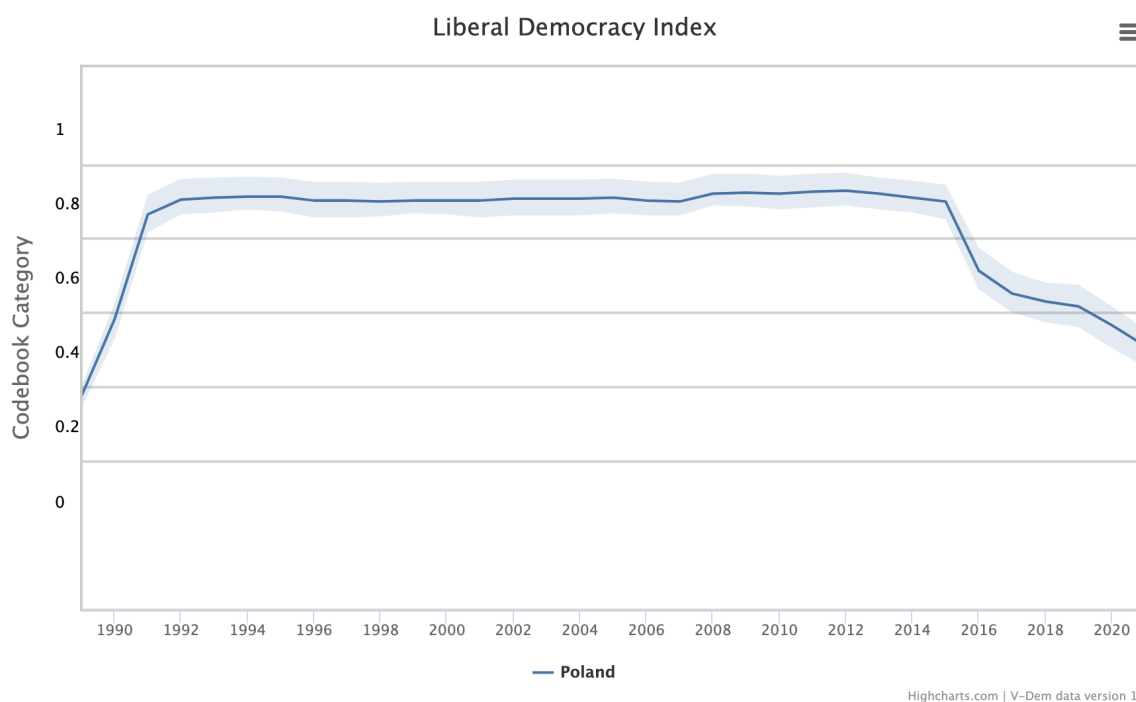


Figure 2: Liberal Democracy Index in Poland from 1990-2020

In Czechia, the Liberal Democracy Index shows a decline in democracy, however not as steep as Poland's. After the resignation of the former Prime Minister Babiš, protesters in 2017 claimed that Babiš is hiring members of his administration that will not go against his leadership and will support his wrongdoings that do not support the rules of the European Union (Milada Anna Vachudova and Jan Rovny 2017). This was proven when Babiš was found violating the European Union rules in 2017 (Milada Anna Vachudova and Jan Rovny 2017).

In the past 2 years, however, the Liberal Democracy Index has stayed constant, as seen in the V-Dem model, from after the collapse of communism to 2020. There has been a slight decline due to Zemen coming to power in 2013 and the increase of conservative policies and implementations of conservative values. The Czech Republic is still a democratic example for

other countries categorized in “Eastern Europe,” though. Only Estonia performed better than the Czech Republic in this year’s survey, and no Eastern European country achieved “full democracy” status (Natrass 2022).

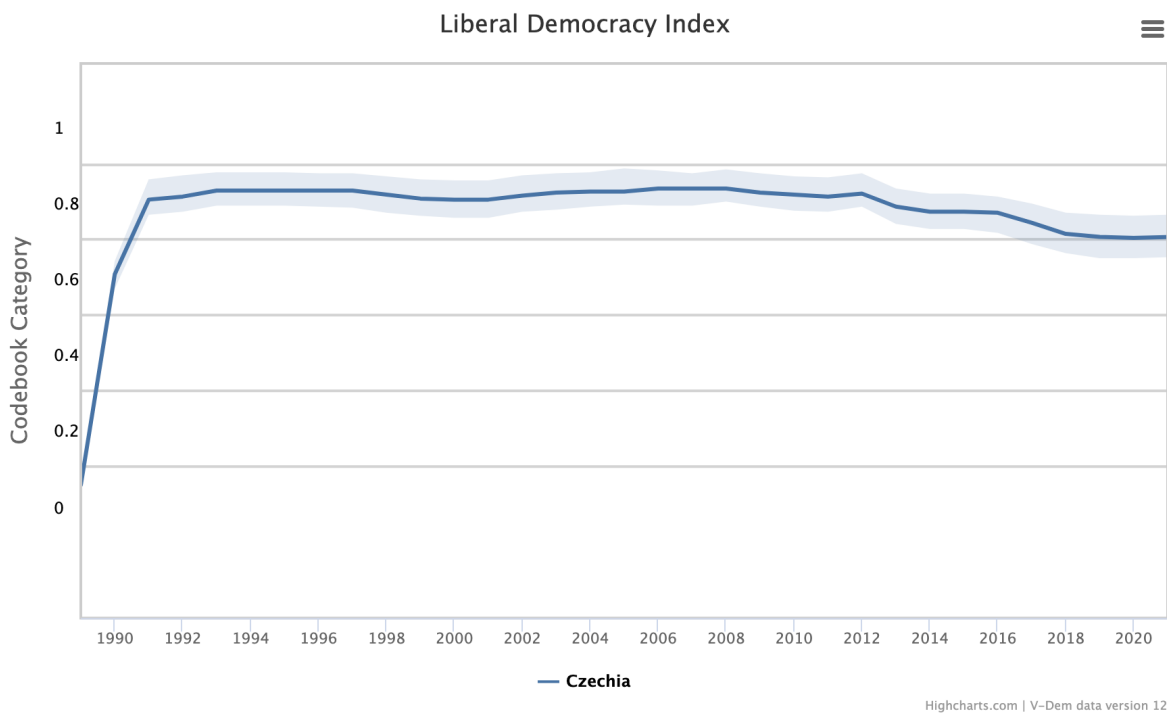


Figure 3: Liberal Democracy Index in Czechia from 1990-2020

The graph below shows the two countries together in order to visualize the difference in the Liberal Democracy index. It can be seen that there has been stability in the level of democracy in the two countries until the mid-2010s due to the new conservative regimes that took over, with Poland at a steeper decline.

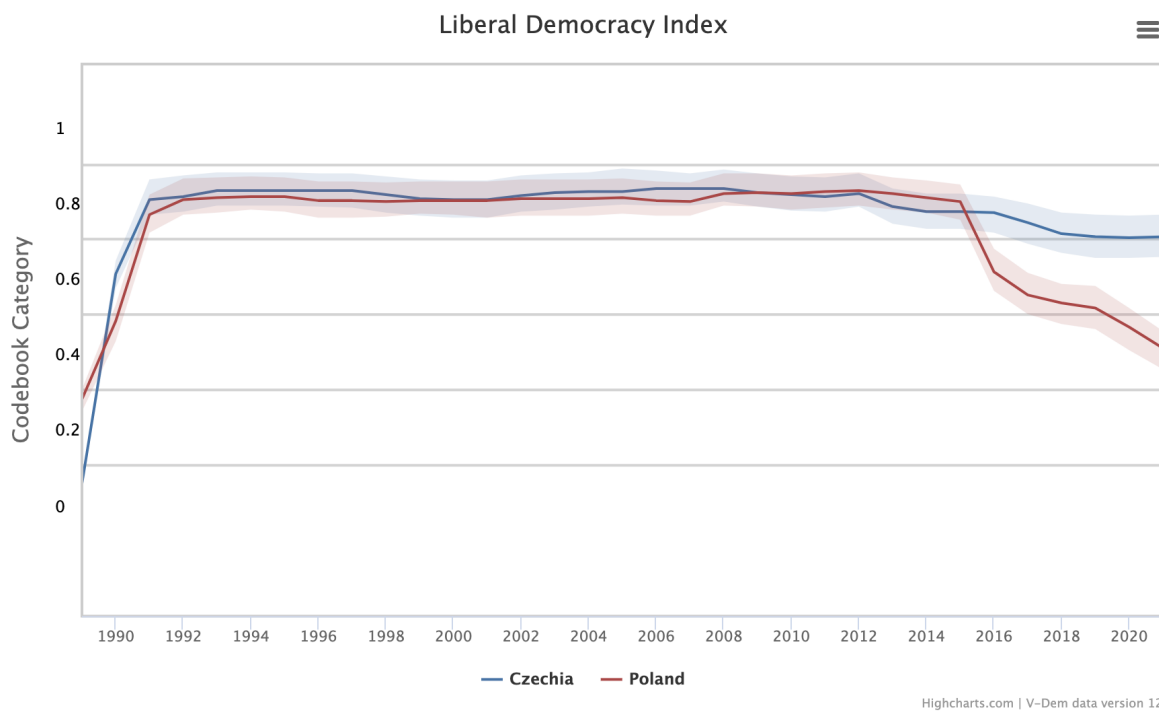


Figure 4: Liberal Democracy Index in Poland and Czechia from 1990-2020

Differences in the Degree of Censorship

Press freedom has been a major concern in Eastern Europe since the downfall of communism and there have been many government attempts to alter the information being spread about the coronavirus. As authoritarianism rises in the region, press freedom has been decreasing, causing a distrust in the media.

Poland has gone through many changes in the last century, emerging out of Communism and becoming a new democracy with a developing media sector. The conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland has had parliamentary control of the media and has added to the struggle of press freedom. Poland has not been successful in the development of media, with not only the conservative party controlling the media, but also foreign owners, such as Germany,

controlling 75% of the Polish media market (Chapman 2017). Chapman analyzes the polarization and bias in Poland due to the country's political divide between PiS and the other parties. TV Polonia (TVP) is one of the two most popular media outlets in Poland, and it has become a mouthpiece for the PiS party, causing news coverage to become even more partisan (Chapman 2017).

Ever since PiS came to power in Poland in 2015, advertising revenue has increased toward right-wing publications. Chapman claims that there are reasons to believe that the government could possibly be limiting the circulation of critical publications due to the decrease in certain newspaper sightings around Poland. The PiS party has been assisted in coming to power by social media in 2015 and has been able to spread its political agenda by strengthening its presence on social media and becoming a propaganda outlet for the government through this usage (Chapman 2017).

Due to the lack of the transparency of the press in Poland, the spike in cases over time has caused a decrease in public confidence in liberal governments, which could result in an increase in the favoring of non-liberal politicians (Remmits and Sweijjs 2020). Socio-political fragmentation is expected to continue with societal unrest in Poland due to the rise in authoritarianism. Remmits and Sweijjs also reflect on the political instability and how it worsening due to the economic crisis. These factors have caused the flaws in the media and the information being spread to the population.

Mia Speier (2021) has analyzed multiple countries in Eastern Europe and how their press freedoms, or lack of freedoms thereof, has been impacted by the pandemic. In Poland, there have been hundreds of lawsuits against journalists, which has been heightened due COVID-19, and in the Czech Republic, there have been journalists that have earned the public the ownership of the

media (Speier 2021). In a chart shown in her literature, showing how press freedom has declined significantly in Eastern Europe, in which Poland's rank fell from 22 to 62 since 2013, and the Czech Republic's fell from 16 to 40. Only Slovenia's rank improved in that time frame, from 35 to 32. Speier blames this phenomenon on authoritarianism and the leaders imposition on controlling information about its outbreaks.

Censorship can be defined as media suppression and the filtering of information in order for messages to be, or not to be, spread to the public. Censorship is typically used by countries with lower levels of democracy. In Poland, the PiS party "has taken control of the country's largest public broadcaster, but has also vowed to 'repolonize' the national media. Critics say this is code for turning them into government propaganda outlets" (Schmitz 2021). By having this control over the public media, Poland is able to control the communications to its citizens, whether that is spreading fake news or purposely not including information to alter the entire truth. TV Polonia (TVP) is Poland's largest channel that is taxpayer funded, that used to be independent, but since the PiS party has been in power, the party has changed the editorial leadership and replaced some members, all now under the control of the National Media Council (Schmitz 2021). With the decrease in the level of democracy and increase in censorship due to the conservative party, the communication methods have been altered. As a result of the corrupt government, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was affected tremendously by the monopoly positioning of the PiS party and their desire to stay in power. The presidential election in Poland was held in a rush due to the spread of the pandemic and the PiS party wanting to make sure they stayed in power. The Law and Justice party has been attempting to bring foreign-owned media outlets under the government's control, leading to those who oppose the party to blame the party for silencing the media.

In Poland, changes, such as a crackdown on judicial independence and controls over media, have been driven by the governing Law and Justice Party, which rode to power on a platform (Lewandowski 2017).

The changes in the regime in 2015 to a more right-wing party, has caused censorship to prevail in the media, even though it is decreasing from previous years. According to Reporters Without Borders:

“Under the discussed “repolonization” law by Andrzej Duda, foreign investors would be limited to a stake of between 15% and 30% in Polish media, while “deconcentration” would limit the number of media outlets that any one media group can own. The Polish government’s pressure on the public media, which helped it to win the presidential election, is not easing up in the meanwhile. Under a new regulation adopted by the Polskie Radio President Agnieszka Kamińska on 20 July, all employees are systematically required to notify management about any contacts with or invitations by other media, in which they are now forbidden to appear and talk without the board’s prior consent. And if they are given permission, they are forbidden to express any personal views on political, religious or ethical issues”

An act that was passed by the PiS in Poland in 2016 put the Ministry of Treasury in charge of the National Broadcasting Council, which gave the Ministry of Treasury the power to control directors’ employment and bring in new media staff at their convenience (Cichowlas 2016). With this legislation in place, the censorship level continues to be high in the country as the government is in charge of the public media and is able to legally regulate its employees.

Similarly in Czechia, the public service media is dependent on the politicians that elect those that work for the media and their fundings. As discussed in the literature review, the Czech media is also influenced by the government regime as it is owned by the government in a similar manner. With the re-election of Milos Zeman, who is the right-wing president of Czechia,

ensorship still exists in the country. However, although the media is influenced by the government regime to an extent, it is not in control of what is released in the media, as censorship has improved in Czechia.

Due to the global decline in trust as a result of censorship, caused by polarization, communication is flawed and the measures put in place by the government are not always believed by the public. However, in Czechia, censorship is on the decline. A law is in the process of being passed, “that would criminalize social media firms if they ban content that is deemed to be in the public interest” (Hutt 2021). Even the right-wing supporters in the country are fighting against media censorship and there is a uniform movement to have free press and media. According to the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, Poland scores 64 out of 180 countries in the world rankings, and scored 62 in 2020, at the start of COVID, meanwhile Czechia scored 40 in both years (Reporters Without Borders 2021). After the collapse of communism, unlike Poland, “only the Czech Republic passed a new press law, in 2001, while [...] Poland continued with the amended versions of [its] old press laws originating from the Communist era” (Gulyas 2003).

The Czech Republic currently operates under the Press Law, which was first passed in 1966, and the most recent version was amended in 1990, making censorship inadmissible (Smid et al. 1996). The country also has several councils, such as the Council for Radio and Broadcasting and the Council for Czech Television to ensure that uncensored information is being given to the public (Duricic 2018).

Conclusion

Poland has less regulations against censorship as well as a more authoritarian leadership that makes the country rank lower in the World Press Freedom Index than Czechia. Czechia has

more legislation in place to promote free speech, as well as a higher Liberal Democracy Index.

Due to the lower level of democracy in Poland and the higher degree of censorship, as a result of the government control over the media, the government is motivated to spread information pertaining to COVID that is less clear, consistent, and coherent, as opposed to the Czech government that is motivated to be more clear, consistent, and coherent. Due to these motivations, individuals' ability to access non-official news sources results in the level of censorship.

Chapter 3: Poland Case Study

This chapter serves as the layout of the Polish government website and Andrzej Duda's Twitter account. I will evaluate the website in terms of two sections: hygiene, which includes vaccination information and masks, as well as social distancing. I will be evaluating a series of Tweets released to the public. After the evaluation of the information available, clarity, consistency, and coherence of the information will be measured on a scale of low, medium and high based on how well the website presents these elements.

COVID-19 Experience

Most Western European countries experienced an exponential increase in the spread of COVID-19 in the first stage of the pandemic, meanwhile Poland had a more linear progression (Krakovsky 2020). Like other Central European countries, Poland took part in containment measures and closed borders from the first outbreak in the country. In order to map out the communication strategy for the policies put in place, the timeline of the development of COVID and the government response is important to evaluate. This chapter serves as the layout of the Polish government website and will evaluate the website in terms of two sections: hygiene, which includes vaccination information and masks, as well as social distancing. After the evaluation of the information available, the clarity, consistency, and coherence of the information will be measured on a scale of low, medium, and high based on how well the website presents these elements. The degree of democracy and media censorship will be tied into the evaluation to discuss how these factors impact clarity, consistency, and coherence.

Marcin Matczak (2020) describes the mistakes that the Polish government made when it came to pandemic response. He claims that Poland responded to the pandemic quickly and

protected the lives of many citizens, but did a poor job at their economic management and coming up with a viable exit strategy from business restrictions that were put in place. Poland responded to the initial wave of the pandemic in March 2020 with immediate protection and strict lock-down measures (Matczak 2020). Because there was a presidential election during the pandemic, this was an influential factor in the course of handling the pandemic.

Matczak outlines the timeline of the pandemic and government response to COVID-19. Patient zero tested positive on March 4, 2020 and by March 10, all large events were canceled and on March 12, schools and universities shut down and the borders began to close on March 15. Many of Poland's decisions were based on the experiences of Italy, and authorities have claimed that Poland's response and institutions of its policies is a prime model of what other countries should have done.

Matczak (2020) also describes the challenges that the Polish government faced due to the pandemic. Health systems such as hospitals and doctor's offices struggled due to the lack of equipment and lack of testing. This led to the public criticizing and lacking trust in government, especially since there was an ongoing presidential election, which invalidated the severity of the pandemic. The press conferences held by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health that were held by the government and public health officials has been seen to be respected by the public, where information was provided about measures being taken, the reason for these measures, how to follow them, amongst other useful and new information (Matczak 2020). Although this supposed transparency of information was given to the public, Matczak (2020) describes the possibility of dishonesty and the questioning of the government's true intentions in these hearings. Poland had a lack of testing, so it is likely that the reporting of numbers was inaccurate, and because the presidential election was still being held, many suspected that the government

was being dishonest so that this election could move forward and that the pandemic was being handled well.

The table below outlines the initial spread of COVID-19 in Poland. It begins with the first policy up until the State of Emergency had remained a constant until further notice. The purpose of this table is to lay out the progression of the shutdown and so it can be understood how quickly decisions were made and the development of the COVID policies.

Table 2: Timeline of Initial COVID-19 Spread in Poland	
Date	Event
March 2, 2020	An emergency law was put in place by the Polish government, which was adopted as the first preparation for mitigating the spread of COVID.
March 4, 2020	The first COVID cases in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia were confirmed.
March 9, 2020	Health checks implemented at Polish borders.
March 10, 2020	The first ban on gatherings was set in place: no more than 1,000 people allowed in open spaces and no more than 500 people allowed in closed spaces.
March 12, 2020	Schools and universities shut down, except for research teams and administrative offices. Teaching has moved to remote fashion. The first death as a result of the coronavirus is recorded in Poland.
March 15, 2020	Restaurants, bars, and clubs close but home deliveries remain available to the public. Gatherings are capped at a maximum of 50 people, including religious ones. Businesses still remain open, however many begin to transition to remote work. Citizens of Poland and foreigners residing or working in Poland that have recently returned to the country are required to complete a 14-day quarantine.
March 20, 2020	The Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki declares Poland as a country in a state of epidemic threat even though the number of people infected per capita is lower in Poland than the other countries in the European Union. 100,000 tests are purchased from Hong Kong to be supplied in the country.
March 25, 2020	Family gatherings are capped at 2 people and religious ceremonies such as masses and funerals are limited to 5 people, and exercising outdoors is permitted for a maximum of two people.

March 28, 2020	An economic support plan is established by the Polish Parliament worth 50 billion euros, which is 10% of Polish GDP.
April 1, 2020	New restrictions are put in place, including 6 feet of social distancing and outings at a maximum of 2 people. 2,600 people have tested positive since the first case, and 45 have died.
April 6, 2020	Postal voting has become approved by the lower house of Parliament for the Presidential elections being held on May 10 and 24 of 2020.
April 9, 2020	The closure of schools is announced by the government to continue until April 26, while the borders remain closed until May 3. The 14-day mandatory quarantine for travels remains in place and face masks become mandatory in public spaces.
April 10, 2020	An economic plan is put in place in Poland by the European Commission, that totals 115 million euros for the economy to be supported during the pandemic.
April 14, 2020	Vending machines now sell face masks and screening tests are introduced.
April 16, 2020	A lockdown exit schedule is proposed by the government, with the first phase being on April 20.
April 20, 2020	The number of people allowed at religious gatherings increases from 5 to 50 people. Outings to parks and other recreational areas are now allowed with social distancing and face masks.
April 23, 2020	10,000 cases recorded in the country.
April 24, 2020	Border closure extended to May 9. Another aid program is approved by the European Commission worth 700 million euros to support companies affected by COVID-19.

Source: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/europe-versus-coronavirus-poland-between-reactivity-and-opportunism>

Poland's government website (www.gov.pl) is the service of the Republic of Poland to provide a range of information and services for citizens. The website is organized in a way for users to find information on the Council of Ministers, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Ministries, Offices, institutions and offices of the Republic of Poland, services for the citizen, business services, services for the clerk, services for the farmer, as well as Coronavirus information and recommendations.

Because of the recent pandemic, the website has become infiltrated with useful information to inform the public about COVID rules and regulations with frequent updates, including personal care such as vaccination information and mask wearing. This information was imperative in understanding how this media source was able to portray information given by the government and how consistent, coherent, and clarifying it was.

Vaccine Information

In the “Vaccine against COVID-19” section of the website, there three main links to choose from with the hashtag: #SzczepimySię which translates to “we are getting vaccinated.” The three links can bring an individual who is seeking information about the booster, registration for a vaccine, or vaccines for children ages 5-11 to the right spot to become educated on how to go forth with the process.



Figure 5: Vaccine information on Poland’s government website

The booster dose link provides the information needed to understand the necessity and benefits of getting the booster as well as the severity of not being vaccinated against the coronavirus. Within the third-dose link, it outlines the eligibility requirements for the booster dose. In the second paragraph, there is a section that states that the coronavirus vaccination is the most effective weapon in the fight against severe disease and death. This is followed by stating that the risk of death due to COVID-19 among unvaccinated people compared to those who are vaccinated is almost 60 times higher.

Mask Information

As for masks, there are rules listed under the “Current rules and restrictions” tab that is easily accessible on the main COVID page on the website. It is clearly bolded and stated that covering the mouth and nose in confined spaces is obligatory throughout the entire country and only a mask can be used, not veils, visors, nor scarves are allowed. This section also contains a list of mandatory spaces where masks are needed such as communal property, public transportation, shops, churches, etc. Also listed are places where masks are not needed such as open air, in forests, parks etc. as well as exemption from the obligation such as having a pervasive development disorder, or a disability.

COVERING YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE ONLY WITH A MASK IN PUBLIC SPACES

Covering the mouth and nose in confined spaces is obligatory throughout the entire country.

You may only use a mask to cover your mouth and nose. Veils, visors and scarves are not allowed because they do not fulfil their primary function, which is to provide protection against the virus!

It is mandatory to cover your mouth and nose in such places as:

- on communal property (e.g., in a stairwell),
- in buses, trams and trains,
- in shops, malls, banks, markets and post offices
- in workplace, if there is more than 1 person in the room (unless the employer decides otherwise),
- in workplace, while providing direct service to customers/clients,
- in cinemas and theatres,
- at physician's offices, in outpatient clinics and hospitals, in massage and tattoo parlours,
- in churches, at schools and universities
- in government offices (in court, cultural institutions, banks, post offices, etc.) and other civic centres

Figure 6: Mask information on Poland's government website

Social Distancing

Poland's government website also outlines social distancing measures for the following: business activities/meetings and events, churches and religious attractions, education, and the movement of people. This organized manner encourages individuals looking for rules to find them feasibly and by category. By separating into different links based on groups of individuals, the website is easy and clear to navigate.

The meetings and events section, which include assemblies, meetings, weddings, communions, consolations, and other celebrations, outlines the exact distance individuals must keep from each other in a room of 100 people maximum at 1.5m away. This section is solely rules based and does not provide information on the reasoning or science behind the distancing. As for religious meetings, this section is extremely short, which is surprising due to the

religiosity of Poland, in which it is one of the most religious countries in Europe, with around 87% of the population identifying as Roman Catholic, according to the European Commission (European Commission). This section solely states, “There is a limit of people in places of religious worship - a maximum of 30% occupancy.” with the grammar error included (www.gov.pl). In terms of education, there are no rules outlined other than stating that “all students returned to full time teaching”, but then underneath that statement states that from December 20, 2021 to January 9, 2022, learning in schools will be conducted remotely, which is contradictory with the initial statement.

Travel has been a major concern during COVID times, with the virus crossing borders and spreading around the world. Poland has taken measures to mitigate the spread and close borders when necessary. This section outlines the locations to which travel to is prohibited, as well as the quarantine measures when returning from travel.

Twitter as a Media Strategy

In Poland, President Andrzej Duda, with a following of 1.6 million people owns a Twitter account that he uses almost every day to reach his constituents. Since the emergence of COVID in March 2020, President Duda has used Twitter as an outlet to reach his people.

In mid-March of 2020, borders began closing, schools shut down, and lockdowns became the new norm. In Poland, the Presidential elections were to take place in June 2020 and the PiS party worried that the pandemic would affect the outcome of the election. President Duda utilized Twitter as a way to show citizens that although a pandemic is unfolding, as the elections were continuing to be imperative to the future of Poland. Duda thanks the people of Poland and does not acknowledge the pandemic, having the elections continue how they would in a pre-

pandemic world. This demonstrates the PiS party's lack of prioritization of protecting citizens from COVID and instead continuing elections as scheduled during unprecedented times.

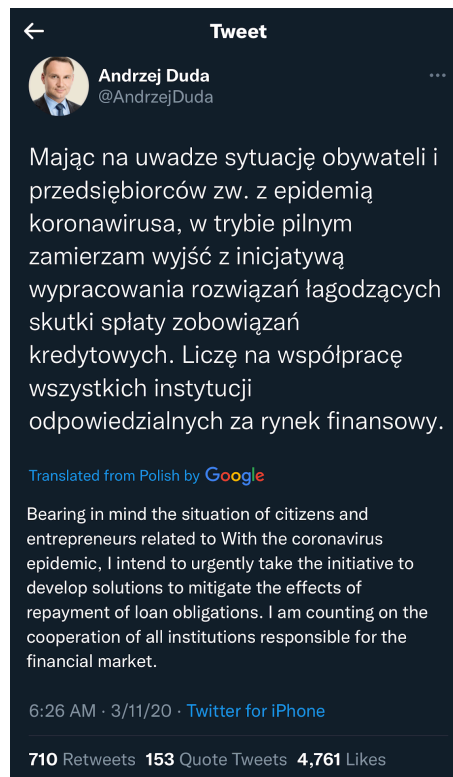


Figure 7: Tweet on Andrzej Duda's Twitter

This above tweet demonstrates the President's financial stance on the effects of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, Duda announced on Twitter that he will be developing ways to help Poles repay their loans. He tweeted this on March 11, 2020, which was the very beginning of the pandemic, before closures even began to occur. It can be argued that Duda tweeted this to gain a greater following and more support to benefit him in the election and also increase citizens' willingness to comply with upcoming covid rules.

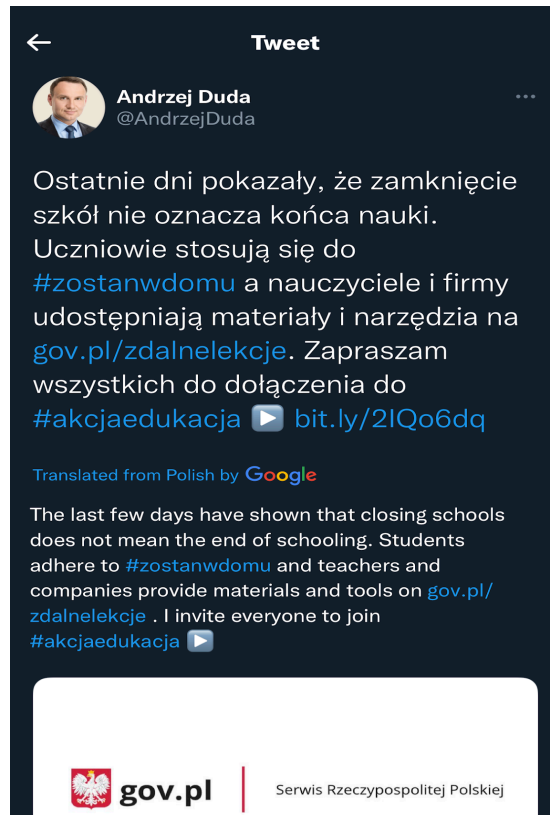


Figure 8: Tweet on Andrzej Duda’s Twitter

In the above tweet, Duda uses the hashtag “#zostanwdomu” for the first time. As the lockdown policy has been put into place, the creation of this hashtag spreads the word about the policy and allows followers to engage with Duda and other citizens. With a hashtag in place, information is able to be spread faster with a greater sense of togetherness. This tweet also includes the link to the government website that has more information about COVID-19 policies. Those who use social media as their primary source of information are able to be exposed to another source where more information can be found.



Figure 9: Tweet on Andrzej Duda's Twitter

This above tweet is directed to English Prime Minister Boris Johnson when he had COVID. This demonstrates the support Poland has for other leaders and countries during these unprecedented times. By tagging Boris Johnson, it brings forth a connection between leaders. Poland is following other leaders and is in support of them during the unknown and unpredictable times. This is relevant to the larger argument because it demonstrates that Poland wants the rest of the world to side with them as elections approach. Duda shows support to Johnson, but his tweets do not show this sort of support to those dying in his own country.

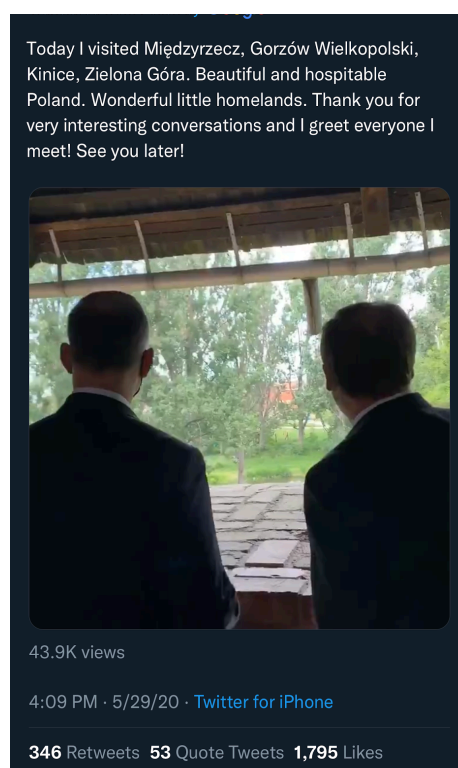


Figure 10: Tweet on Andrzej Duda's Twitter

In this tweet, Duda shares with his followers that he visited multiple cities in Poland as a part of his campaign. This once again demonstrates how he prioritizes the elections due to the video included and the language he uses. By having conversations and greeting individuals, he is disregarding the country's social distancing measures and prioritizing his campaign.

Evaluation of Media Strategy: Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence

The statement regarding eligibility requirements for the third dose has been shared across different sources and has not nearly been as drastic as the risk of death being 60 times higher as a result of not getting vaccinated. However an article published by the NPR, published September 10, 2021, states that unvaccinated people are 11 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated and WebMD states that the unvaccinated are 20 times more likely to die of COVID (Romo, 2021)(Crist, 2021). There are varying statistics that have been shared by different media sources. The Center for Disease Control, as of October 29, 2021, stated, "no studies comparing mortality rates within the general population of vaccinated and unvaccinated persons have been conducted." Therefore, there is no conclusive evidence that the statistic posted on the Poland official government website is a true representation of the influence of the vaccine. This discrepancy may un motivate individuals to get their third dose and may place distrust within the population. The statistic posted on the Polish website is not cited, therefore promotes non-credible information on a serious topic.

Despite this false information, the following information in the booster section provides accurate information that has been released by other government agencies, such as the booster being administered to those after 6 months of the completion of the other two doses, and provides a simple registration for the vaccine, including a helpline, SMS, nearby vaccination point, or a website option in order to schedule the booster. There is a separate section under the #SzczipiemySię section that provides explanations for each option, as well as videos to give a visual representation of how to make an appointment, making it feasible for visual learners.

It is imperative for the government website to act as a reliable source of media for citizens, especially when it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccine hesitancy is a problem that exists in Poland, where it has been reported that those who are reluctant are those who fear the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, they are also people who have not been affected by the coronavirus and are healthier and more physically fit. These people tend to be conservative, as measured by the degree of religiosity and the number of people in the household (Sowa, 2021). Due to the large number of individuals with this mindset in Poland, the website should address these issues and market the vaccine in a way that would combat this mindset in the vaccine section. Although this information is not listed in this section, there is a fake news combatting portion on the website as a separate entity.

When it comes to outlining personal care on the government website, specifically vaccine information and mask regulations, clarity, consistency, and coherence are important in educating individuals and gaining their trust.

Clarity

Clarity includes the transparency of information and data utilized. Poland scores low in clarity because each page on the website does not have a published date, making it difficult for those seeking information to know how updated it is and determine the quality of information. Of the tweets evaluated, none of them contained data. When dates are posted and updated information is clear, the quality of information is greater. The quality of information increases with dates because it is apparent how recent the data is and how relevant the information is.

Consistency

The consistency of information on Poland's government website scores low due to the lack of real data supported by scientists. Statistics are used that are not only incorrect, as examined in the vaccine information section and described above. The Tweets also do not provide regular updates, as they are less focused on policies.

Coherence

Poland scores medium in coherence due to the amount of messaging available on the website and its aesthetic, however it would benefit more from being a separate website that is dedicated to COVID. Of the Twitter page examined, there were many topics covered, but not useful visuals. However, it scores medium and not low because the presentation was colorful and contained data, but the data was not presentable in an eye-catching manner, and there were no tweets with numerical data involved. Having tweets with numerical data allows Twitter users to be able to quantify the severity of the pandemic and the margin by which it is affecting the country.

Conclusion

Due to Poland scoring medium in one category and scoring low in the other two categories, the aggregate score for Poland is low.

Table 3: Scores in Poland of Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence

	Score
Clarity	Low
Consistency	Low
Coherence	Medium

Chapter 4: Czechia Case Study

This chapter serves as the layout of the Czech government website and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Twitter account. I will evaluate the website in terms of two sections: hygiene, which includes vaccination information and masks, as well as social distancing. I will be evaluating a series of Tweets released to the public. After the evaluation of the information available, clarity, consistency, and coherence of the information will be measured on a scale of low, medium and high based on how well the website presents these elements.

COVID-19 Experience

In the Czech Republic, there have been positive responses to how COVID has been handled by the government. Kouril and Ferencuhova (2020) analyze the successes of the strict policies, which were influenced by the steps taken by the Korean and Singaporean governments. There haven't been nearly as many deaths in the Czech Republic as other countries, resulting in less pressure on hospitals and health systems. In their analysis, Kouril and Ferencuhova provide three ways in which the Czech Republic went about handling the pandemic: blanket quarantine, smart solution, and smart quarantine.

Blanket quarantine was the initial approach to mitigate the coronavirus, in which mass events and large gatherings, as well as in-person school became prohibited. Travel was also restricted to and from high-risk countries as well as international railways becoming suspended. The Czech Republic was unique and effective in that it placed preventative measures immediately rather than as a last resort like Italy, China, and the United States (Kouril and Ferencuhova 2020). However, a flaw of this approach was that this preventative measure limited

citizens' self autonomy in making decisions, however when the public reacted negatively, officials listened and changed the strategy.

The smart solution was a strategy to the pandemic that entailed preventing the effects of the blanket quarantine that were criticized. This approach was a mix of measures set up by managers of large Information and Communication Technology (ICT) corporations and state and local institutions, which allowed for the digital integration of companies to make information more accessible (Kouril and Ferencuhova 2020). This brought hope to the population and placed trust in the government.

The smart quarantine design is the newest and most recent as developed by Kouril and Ferencuhova (2020), which is an approach that is set to accelerate the return to normal life with as little of an economic impact as possible. The smart quarantine design has three components to be able to tell which individuals have come in contact with COVID: location data from mobile phones, card payment data, and information gathered from an application called eRouska (emask) (Kouril and Ferencuhova 2020). This technological advancement has been an innovative approach to the way that the Czech government has been able to revolutionize access to the public so that citizens can stay informed.

Table 4: Timeline of Initial COVID-19 Spread in Czechia	
Date	Event
February 27, 2020	The emergency board of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs discussed the care of the elderly and other vulnerable groups to plan for shortages of labor.
March 1, 2020	The first three cases of COVID-19 were reported in Czechia with no further plans reported.

March 2, 2020	The National Security Council (BRS) met and recommended the suspension of direct flights from South Korea and northern Italy.
March 4, 2020	Eight more cases of COVID were confirmed and further measures were being discussed by the BRS. A ban on the export of respirators was put in place by the Health Ministry in Czechia.
March 6, 2020	Those returning from Italy were now required to see a doctor upon arrival to determine if quarantine is necessary.
March 9, 2020	Temperature checks have been enforced at the border.
March 10, 2020	All cultural and sporting events of over 100 people were banned. Public schools announced that they would be closed the following day, with 60 confirmed cases in the country.
March 12, 2020	118 confirmed cases; 30-day state of emergency was declared, and 8 restrictive measures were adopted by the government to prevent the spread of the virus. These rules were adjusted throughout the following few days.
March 13, 2020	Schools and university events were forbidden.
March 14, 2020	Access to swimming pools and tourist information centers is forbidden to the public. Retail sales and sales in business centers are also forbidden.
March 16, 2020	Movement is limited, except for to and from work.
March 19, 2020	A state of legislative emergency was declared by the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, as requested by the government. Mask mandate is instated.
March 30, 2020	“Smart Quarantine” was put into place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
April 1, 2020	The Chamber was asked by the Government to extend the state of emergency another 30 days. This state of emergency was extended and remained until May 17, 2020.
April 9, 2020	218 resolutions were adopted by the Government, three times more than the previous year.

Source: <https://www.vlada.cz/en/media-centrum/aktualne/measures-adopted-by-the-czech-government-against-coronavirus-180545/>

Unlike the Polish government, who has COVID-19 information as a section of their government website, the Czechia government has a website dedicated to information related to the coronavirus. This website, <https://covid.gov.cz>, is referred to as the “COVID Portal,” has information about life situations, current measures, vaccination, and even contains a search bar so that individuals can search for the information they are seeking.

Vaccination and mask wearing are essential when it comes to following rules and regulations in the Czech Republic. The Czech case of preparation and capability to do so was highlighted by the approach taken by the central government and the intensity of the steps take to mitigate the virus (Spacek).

Vaccine Information

The Government COVID-19 portal of Czechia has an entire section on the website dedicated to information about vaccination. This accessibility of information to citizens makes it possible to understand how to register for the vaccine, how to get vaccinated, as well as information about the vaccine. The vaccine information is the first tab on the homepage, so it can be easily found by anyone using the website.

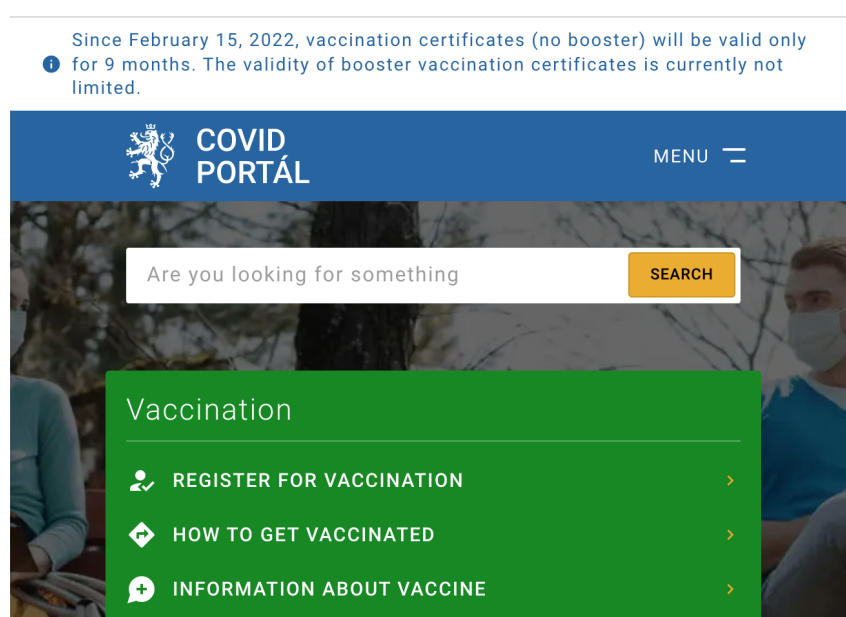


Figure 11: Vaccine Information on Czechia's COVID portal

The first tab, Register for Vaccination, brings the website user directly to the website of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic. This seamless transition from the database to the sector of government responsible for administering authority when it comes to health. This allows for citizens to trust the reliability of the registration when wanting to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

Central covid-19 vaccination booking system
registration to the system

- 1 Telephone Number verification
- 2 Enter verification PIN code
- 3 Fill-out and save registration
- 4 Confirmation of valid registration
- 5 Waiting for the invitation SMS to book a vaccination appointment
- 6 Log in to the covid-19 vaccination appointment booking system
- 7 Covid-19 vaccination appointment choice
- 8 Valid covid-19 vaccination appointment booking confirmation

Central Registration System is open for persons aged 5 or over.

The registration form allows you to register for both, **THE FIRST DOSE** as well as **THE BOOSTER DOSE** of covid-19 vaccination. The system itself evaluates your eligibility for the **BOOSTER DOSE**.

You can also create a **BOOSTER DOSE** registration from your original first dose registration. To enter your original registration, use the "Registration Management" tile at <https://crs.mzcr.cz>.

For a booster dose registration **use that same phone number** you used for your first vaccination registration or the phone number you use to access your certificates at <https://ocko.uzis.cz/>.

Booster dose registrations will be released at each vaccination site for all registrations for persons over 12 years of age -> after 5 months from completion of previous covid-19 vaccination.

The list of vaccination centers is available here: <https://ockoreport.uzis.cz/>.

COVID-19 VACCINATION APPOINTMENT BOOKING
If you have already registered for covid-19 vaccination and you have received an invitation SMS with PIN 2, go to the covid-19 vaccination appointment booking system via <https://crs.mzcr.cz>.

COVID-19 VACCINATION APPOINTMENT CANCELLED
If your covid-19 vaccination appointment was cancelled, please wait for a new invitation SMS to book another appointment.
Your PIN 2 and covid-19 vaccination registration remain in effect.

REGISTRATION MANAGEMENT
You can edit or change your covid-19 vaccination registration here <https://registrace.mzcr.cz/detail>

CRS - VACCINATION MANUAL
A manual on the central covid-19 vaccination booking system that includes descriptions of the rules, information flow, frequently asked questions and solutions to non-standard situations can be found [here \(Czech only\)](#).

NEW VACCINATION REGISTRATION
Enter your telephone number below. A one-time verification PIN code will be sent to this telephone number immediately.

If you are not insured in the public health insurance system in the Czech Republic or other EU countries, please go to [REGISTRATION FORM FOR UNINSURED PERSONS/SELF-PAYERS](#).

Telephone Number +420 Your Telephone

For a booster dose registration use the same phone number you used for your first vaccination registration or the phone number you use to access your certificates at <https://ocko.uzis.cz/>.

I hereby consent to the [personal data processing](#) as a part of covid-19 vaccination registration, including automated processing as a part of prioritization for covid-19 vaccination.

SEND

Figure 12: Vaccine information on Czechia's COVID portal

This is the Central Registration System available for those over the age of 5 and is an 8-step process to schedule a vaccination. This registration system allows an individual to schedule a first dose, as well as the booster dose, making it clear that one must return to this website to complete both the first dose and the booster. It also clearly states the timeline between receiving the vaccination and then the booster, however it does not outline the time between the first and second dose.

The registration is completed by entering a phone number and verifying by entering a pin. Included are also instructions on how to reschedule a canceled vaccination appointment.

The second tab, How to Get Vaccinated, provides tabs with information for vaccination of immobile patients, booster and additional dose, certificate of vaccination, FAQs, glossary of terms, how to help an elderly register, list of vaccination centers, telephone assistance for seniors, vaccination timeline etc. This is broken down into organized sections to help citizens navigate through information related to vaccines.

The third and final tab addresses information about the vaccine itself, focusing on what could be classified as frequently asked questions about the implications of how the body reacts to the vaccine. There are tabs included relating to the possibility of death due to the vaccine, the effect on fertility, details about AstraZeneca, the development process of the vaccine, and turning down conspiracy theories such as the vaccine altering DNA, etc.

These three tabs included in the vaccine section on the COVID Portal allows Czech citizens to navigate through all the necessary information to schedule a vaccine as well as facts about the vaccine.

Mask Information

There is no section on the homepage associated with rules pertaining to masks. However, when “mask” is typed into the search bar, 98 results come up pertaining to information on masks. The results are broken down into “masks” in life situations, with 92 results, and “masks” in current measures, with 8 results.

The life situations section provides a link to a separate part of the website titled, “face masks and respirators,” which originally was not included on the home page, so likely those seeing this page are those who specifically want information on masks and perform a search.

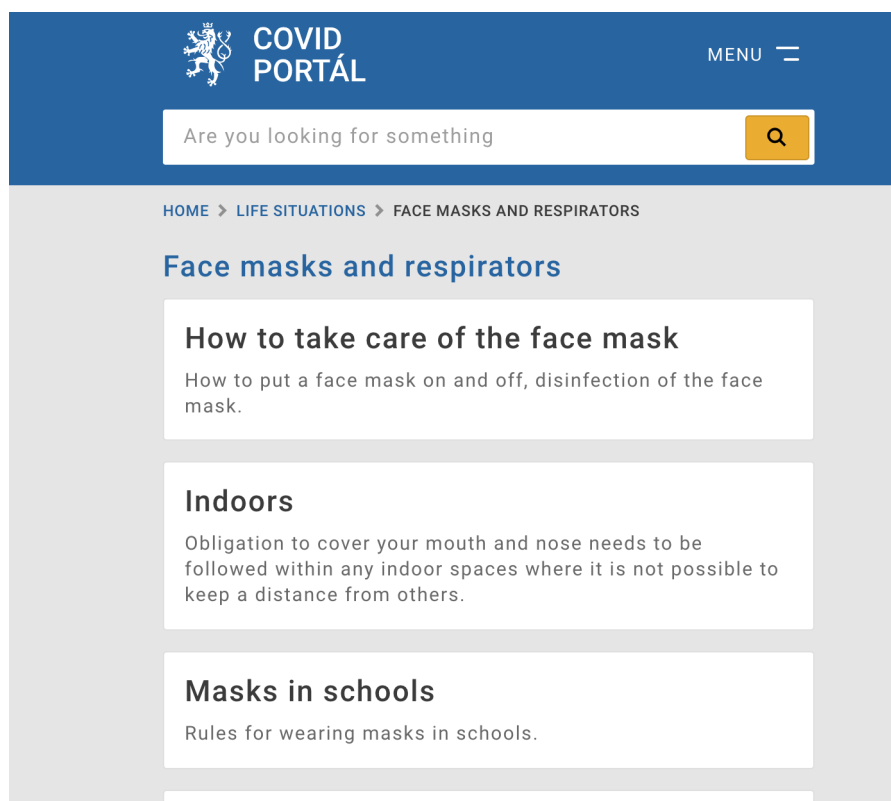


Figure 13: Mask information on Czechia’s COVID portal

Users of this website can find information on different types of mask wearing. For example, if one would like information on public transportation and taxis, they can scroll until they find something that relates to their information search. Under this section, there is an abundance of information about the rules and regulations surrounding mask wearing.

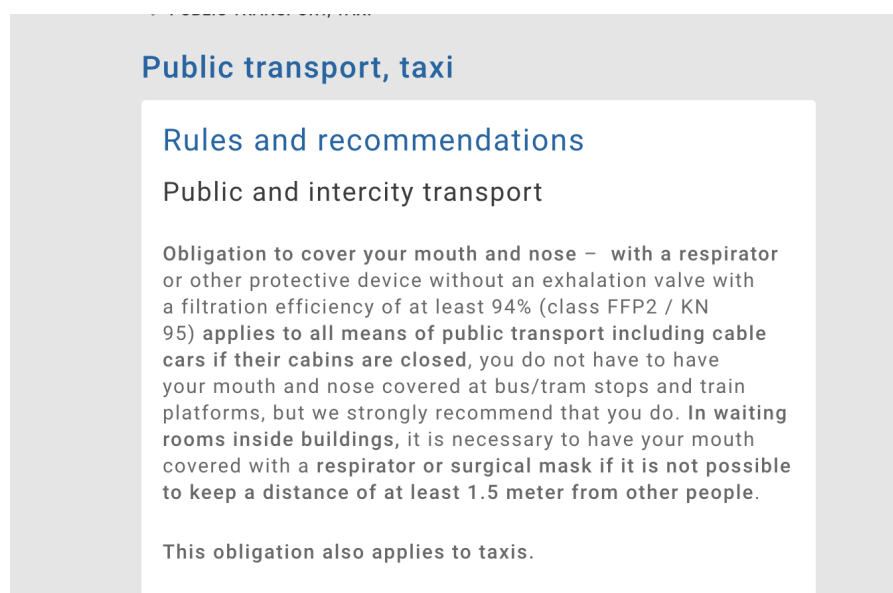


Figure 14: Social Distancing information on Czechia’s COVID portal

This section of the website entails all the information needed on the subject, which includes statistics on mask wearing, which is mirrored by information provided by other sources, such as the NIH, in which the organization states, “KN95 is GB 2626-2019-approved with 95% filtration efficiency” (Yim 2020).

Social Distancing

Czechia has social distancing measures in place that are outlined in the “Measures” section on the homepage on the website. The social distancing measures outlined on Czechia’s website includes: culture, leisure time, offices and institutions, outdoor activities, retail and

services, and traveling abroad. This organized manner encourages individuals looking for information regarding social distancing in a navigable way.

Twitter as a Media Strategy

Czech Republic President, Milos Zeman does not have a Twitter account, however the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an account that spreads information to the public in Czechia. It is a verified account with almost 22,000 followers.



Figure 15: Tweet on Czech MFA Twitter

This tweet above from March 14, 2020 is the first tweet that the Czech MFA released about the pandemic. It was an infographic about travel information, which is extremely helpful to

those wanting to become educated on traveling based on citizenship and if they may enter/exit. An infographic is beneficial because it catches the attention of those scrolling due to the colors and organization of the information needed to simplify the message.

On March 26, 2020 Czech MFA tweeted about the aid they are providing to Italy and Spain. By providing the number of masks, Twitter users are able to quantify the amount of aid that their country is providing to other countries. By tagging the Twitter accounts of the respective countries, users are able to learn from other foreign media sources.



Figure 16: Tweet on Czech MFA Twitter

On May 15, 2020, the Czech MFA tweeted about malicious activities in cyberspace and how that could get in the way of combating COVID in Czechia. By doing this, Czech MFA is able to show its partnership with the United States and how they are allied in their efforts. By tweeting about the support of the United States, followers and Twitter users are able to see the consistency in allyhood between the countries.



Figure 17: Tweet on Czech MFA Twitter

On April 10, 2020, the Czech MFA informed the public on Twitter about how they have been helping North Macedonia receive masks. This donation exemplifies the clarity that the government is giving the public, in which they are able to give to other countries and it is clear to citizens where resources are being transported. The usage and inclusion of photos demonstrates the “togetherness” aspect of providing for others during the pandemic.



Figure 18: Tweet on Czech MFA Twitter

Evaluation of Media Strategy: Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence

Czechia's COVID Portal was an innovative way to separate their COVID information from their regular government website. This website made it more organized as opposed to utilizing their government website and having COVID just be a portion of it. As for their Twitter, because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is verified, this was a trusted source that covered a variety of topics regarding COVID. Based on what was found on the website, clarity, consistency, and coherence were evaluated.

Clarity

Czechia scores medium in clarity due to the transparency of its messaging about how the government policies are being implemented and quality data is used to support the reasoning of these policies. For example, the efficiency of masks is provided on the website, making it clear to those browsing the website that masks do work and the reasoning behind the mask policies is clear. Additionally, in the Tweets, numbers were provided to show how many masks were donated to other countries in order to quantify the amount of help given to others. However, it scores medium and not high in clarity because there isn't a developed reasoning for the policies, although there are statistics involved, a lot of the rules are instructional instead of justifying why these policies are in place. The rules are laid out without justification.

Consistency

Czechia scores high in consistency because the data shared is accurate on both platforms analyzed. The data is consistent with other sources and has been deemed to be trusted by citizens. With the spreading of correct information, the public is able to trust data that is shared since it has not been proven otherwise.

Coherence

Czechia scores high in coherence due to their helpful charts that are easy to read and well presented on both platforms. For example, on the vaccination booking system, there is organized information that is presented in a way that is able to be understood by citizens. The information is segmented based on categories such as booking, cancellations, general information, etc., which is a coherent way of spreading information. In addition, the table presented in the Tweet section is another example of a high level of coherence because it is organized at a high level with a high

quality of structure. The chart presented in the tweet on March 14, 2020, has the rules laid out in a coherent way that is easy to understand without an overwhelming amount of words.

Conclusion

Due to Czechia scoring medium in one category and scoring high in the other two categories, the aggregate score for Czechia is high.

Table 5: Scores in Poland of Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence

	Score
Clarity	Medium
Consistency	High
Coherence	High

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My thesis explores the question: How have Poland and Czechia utilized the media to convey state policies toward COVID-19? To what extent have their approaches been similar or different and what accounts for these similarities and differences? Both Poland and Czechia have utilized a government website as well as Twitter to spread information about COVID-19 and their clarity, consistency, and coherence varied, which can be attributed to the differences in their degree of democracy and censorship. Poland's Liberal Democracy Index has been decreasing at a faster rate than the Czech Republic, while the Czech Republic has greater government media censorship in practice, despite their similar post-communist background.

In Poland, when it comes to outlining personal care on the government website, specifically vaccine information and mask regulations, clarity, consistency, and coherence are important in educating individuals and gaining their trust. Clarity includes the transparency of information and high quality of information and data utilized. I argue that the clarity of information on Poland's government website is low, on the scale due to the lack of real data supported by scientists. Statistics are used that are not only incorrect, but do not have a source. Poland scores low in consistency, due to the lack of unified messaging of how to acquire a vaccine or where masks should be worn that aligns with the rules of other countries. There is a lack of holistic messaging present, especially when giving clear directions and stating clear policies. Poland scores medium in consistency because the information given is updated in terms of comparison to other countries. Due to the wide access of information on the website and Twitter, the clarity score in Czechia is medium. The information on both media platforms contains high quality information that was significant while navigating policies about COVID.

Having a more developed reasoning for the data provided in terms of why the policies were structured the way that they were would have been helpful. As for consistency, the platforms also earn a high score because of the updated information that was regularly being posted within the website. For coherence, the platforms earn a high score. This is due to the messages being feasible to read and follow in an organized manner.

Table 6: Scores for each country per category

	Poland	Czechia
Clarity	LOW	MEDIUM
Consistency	LOW	HIGH
Coherence	MEDIUM	HIGH

Table 7: Aggregate scores for each country

	Poland	Czechia
Aggregate Score	LOW	HIGH

Due to the overall scoring in terms of clarity, consistency, and coherence for each country and Poland scoring low in two categories and medium in one, its aggregate score is LOW. For Czechia, in terms of clarity, consistency, and coherence, scoring medium in one category and high in two categories, making its aggregate score HIGH.

With these scores, in which Poland has a lower level of democracy and higher level of censorship, and Czechia has a higher level of democracy and a lower level of censorship, the

differing levels create different incentives for politicians and government organizations to spread information, which accounts for the differences in communication strategies.

The implications of this during a time like COVID impacts the trust individuals have in the government. With COVID-19 changing the world due to lockdowns and the spread of the virus itself, many people relied on their government to keep them safe and create policies to mitigate the spread. Analyzing governments communication strategies using different forms of media and factors affecting their strategies is essential in understanding how information is spread. The level of democracy and degree of censorship in a country affects government communication during a public health crisis. Due to the differing levels in democracy and censorship in Poland and Czechia, the leaders had different incentives to be clear, consistent, and coherent in their communication strategies due to the difference in access to alternate media sources, impacting the effectiveness communication strategies. Therefore, Poland was less effective in conveying state policies, while Czechia was more effective.

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