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## **Leading a Country through a Pandemic: An empirical research on how leadership style used by male and female country leaders contributed to the success of their Covid-19 approach**

Molendijk, Rosanne

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# Leading a Country through a Pandemic

An empirical research on how leadership style used by male and female country leaders contributed to the success of their Covid-19 approach



Author: Rosanne Molendijk

Student number: 2725614

Supervisor: Prof.dr. S.M. Groeneveld

Second reader: Dr. J. van der Voet

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## PREFACE

After finishing my bachelor's degree in *Public Administration and Organizational Sciences*, the master *Public Administration: International and European Governance* has given me the opportunity to further delve into my interest for dealing with global challenges. I found it exciting to apply the knowledge I gained during the programme to a current issue.

I would like to thank my supervisor Sandra Groeneveld, Professor of Public Management at Leiden University, for providing me with personal, critical, and useful feedback. Her positive approach kept me motivated until the finish line.

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of Covid-19 has drawn attention to female leadership. Existing literature suggests that, in times of crisis and uncertainty, a transformational leadership style is expected to be more effective than a transactional leadership style. Transformational leadership style is generally considered to be more feminine, while transactional leadership style is generally considered more masculine. The aim of this research is to explore whether the use of a certain leadership style can explain the difference in success achieved by male and female country leaders. To assay my expectations, I analysed 41 speeches held by three male and three female country's leaders who achieved varying levels of success during the initial period of Covid-19. I coded these speeches in order to find out to what extend transactional, transformational and charismatic leadership style were used and whether they showed communal and/or agentic behaviour. The results suggest that using intellectual stimulation, which is a dimension of a transformational leadership style, to a certain degree explains the success of a leader's Covid-19 approach. However, there appears to be no difference between male and female leaders with regards to the leadership style employed. My findings call existing literature into question. I conclude this thesis with the limitations of my design and suggestions for future research.

## KEYWORDS

Covid-19; Leadership Style; Gender; Country's leaders; Speeches; Effectiveness

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND

It is almost impossible to ignore that the world is dealing with an exogenous shock: the Covid-19 pandemic. The virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS -CoV-2) (RIVM, 2021), started spreading in Asia around the end of 2019 (UNDP, 2020) and has entered every continent on planet Earth, except for Antarctica (UNDP, 2020). Covid-19 spreads between people, mainly when they are in close contact (World Health Organization, 2020). The virus can spread through the air in liquid particles, for instance when coughing or sneezing occurs (World Health Organization, 2020). Although the development of a vaccine already started at the beginning of 2020, there was no approved vaccine until early 2021. Therefore, in order to counteract the spread as much as possible, country leaders primarily implemented policies with a focus on social distancing (Buheji et al., 2020). Because of the need for such policies, the virus is not only causing health problems but also major socio-economic difficulties (UNDP, 2020). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic raised major challenges for political leaders (Collinson, 2020), promoting discussion about leadership in times of crisis.

The ongoing discussion about the possible relationship between the gender of a country's leader and the success of their Covid-19 approach is remarkable. In various media outlets, female country leaders have been praised for their successful Covid-19 approaches, e.g., Zenger and Folkman (2020), who argued that women perform better as leaders during Covid-19. Furthermore, according to Henley (2020), Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, and Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, are praised in various news articles for minimizing the number of deaths caused by Covid-19 in their respective countries. In scientific quarters, the subject has gained a similar attention. With the help of quantitative analysis, Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) found a negative effect of women's leadership on the number of COVID-19 deaths among U.S. governors: stay-at-home orders that were announced at an early stage were followed more consistently by residents under a female leader. This outcome corresponds to the theory that female leadership is preferred in times of crisis, based on the idea that female leaders are more likely to use a transformational leadership style and are therefore better leaders



in times of crisis (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Post, Latu and Belkin, 2019). This theory will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.

On the other hand, Windsor et al., (2020) have not found a statistically significant relationship between the gender of a country's leader and the number of Covid-19 deaths. A possible explanation is that there were not sufficient female leaders to enable detecting a statistically significant effect. The collected data do suggest a negative effect of female leadership on the number of Covid-19 deaths. It can be concluded that there is some uncertainty about the coherence between the gender of a country's leader and success achieved during the pandemic. Furthermore, even if there would be a significant relationship between the gender of the country's leader and the success of a country leader's Covid-19 approach, gender itself does not necessarily explain this causality.

The hypotheses posed by Sargent and Stajkovic (2020) and Windsor et al., (2020) are both based on leadership theory. Windsor et al., (2020) have not taken leadership style into consideration in their research. The same applies to Sargent and Stajkovic (2020). Their research shows that female governors used overall more empathy and confidence in their speeches. However, they did not investigate whether the use of empathy and confidence can explain the varying levels of success achieved by the countries' leaders. Good performance by female leaders might also be explained by other factors: 'a function of over competence, the disproportionate hurdles women need to overcome to be elected in the first place, or a disposition to seek out advice from experts in moments of crisis' (Piazza and Diaz, 2020, p.3).

In this qualitative research, I will analyse more in depth the relationship between a country leader's gender and the success of their Covid-19 approach. The possible relationship between the gender of a country leader and the level of success of their Covid-19 approach remains a puzzle. Instead of assessing the significance of this relationship on a national level, I will zoom in on the individual level by analysing a total of 41 speeches. These speeches were held respectively by three male and three female country leaders who achieved different degrees of success during the early stages of the pandemic. Specifically, I will take a look at how the leadership style that was used by a country's leader might explain the success of their Covid-19 approach. Furthermore, I will analyse whether this mechanism differs between male and female country leaders, both within and across countries.

First, I will discuss the research question and goal of my study, followed by the academic and social relevance. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on existing literature on the topic, whereafter I will present my expectations. Next, I will present my research design and the process of data collection and analysis. Then I will display the results of my study, followed by the conclusion and the implications of my findings. I will conclude my thesis with the limitations of my design and suggestions for future research.

## 1.2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH GOAL

The goal of this research is to explore whether the leadership style of male and female country leaders can explain the level of success of their Covid-19 approach. Since I will analyse speeches and data on Covid-19 cases from the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, this research will be executed retrospectively. The main research question I raise in this thesis is the following:

How does the leadership style of male and female country leaders contribute to the success of their Covid-19 approach?

## 1.3. RELEVANCE

### *1.3.1. ACADEMIC RELEVANCE*

For a long time, leadership was linked to stereotypically male behaviour. A leadership style that is often considered to be more masculine is called ‘transactional’ (Badura et al., 2018). On the other hand, Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) have presented evidence for an increasing preference for ‘transformational’ leadership, a leadership style that is more often associated with stereotypically female behaviour. Especially in times of uncertainty and crisis, a transformational leadership style is linked to good performance (Bruckmüller and Branscombe, 2010; Post et al., 2019). On a similar thread, Ryan and Haslam (2005) argue that this is what often happens in businesses: women are placed in leadership positions in times of crisis because stereotypically female characteristics are preferred in these circumstances. Research points out that the aforementioned phenomenon can be observed in the public sector

as well. For instance, Sabharwal (2013) has perceived this happening in various government agencies in the United States.

However, some literature suggests that agentic behaviour, consisting of traits such as being active and decisive, is often linked to professional success and especially preferred in times of crisis (Kulich, Iacoviello, and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018). In general, agentic traits are considered stereotypically male behaviour (Abele, 2003). The different hypotheses concerning gender and success in times of crisis make it interesting to dive deeper into this subject.

The aim of this research is to add new insights to existing leadership theory by analysing a new situation. Existing theory entails that certain leadership styles help achieving better results in crisis situations. (e.g., transformational leadership style is preferred in times of crisis). Since transformational leadership style is often linked to stereotypical female behaviour, it seems that often this is the reason why women are often placed into a leadership position when a crisis arises.

However, in my research, the country leaders hold already a leadership position at the onset of the crisis. It will be interesting to analyse the different reactions of respectively male and female leaders in these situations. As mentioned above, certain leadership styles are expected to be more effective during crisis situations than others. Combined with the fact that leadership styles are considered male or female to a varying degree, this makes for an interesting case to investigate the possible role of gender and leadership style in handling a crisis situation such as the current pandemic. If there is indeed a discrepancy between the success of male and female leaders, the use of a certain leadership style might explain this.

Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic is a very specific type of crisis, namely a health crisis. This exogenous shock might ask for a specific type of leadership style. Analysing how leadership style might explain the success of a country's leader's Covid-19 approach will provide us with more insights on leadership style in times of health crises.

### *1.3.2. SOCIAL RELEVANCE*

The Covid-19 pandemic will, in all probability, not be the last global virus outbreak that humanity will have to face (Frutos, Lopez Roig, Serra-Cobo and Devaux, 2020). Therefore, this study can make contributions of social value. The results might show if the type of leadership used by a country's leader explains the level of success of their Covid-19 approach. Country leaders can learn from these insights and use them in future health crises. Since this might help preventing infections and thus fatal cases, the social relevance of the outcome of this research might be substantial.

Furthermore, there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of diversity in leadership positions, for various reasons. According to Feeney and Camarena (2019), having women and people of colour in leadership positions might inspire other people to strive for such positions as well. Furthermore, diversity in leadership positions appears to help achieving more effective and better end results in businesses (Feeney and Camarena, 2019). With this increasing emphasis on (gender) diversity in leadership positions, it is interesting to investigate whether it could contribute to successful crisis management. This study might also reveal that there are no substantial differences between leadership styles of male and female country leaders, which would be an interesting insight as well.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

In defining the concept of gender, it is important to note that gender is not the same as sex (Deaux, 1985). While sex is the division between male and female based on biological characteristics (Deaux, 1985), gender means ‘the psychological features frequently associated with these biological states’ (Deaux, 1985, p. 51). Certain traits and characteristics are often linked to either men or women, so-called male and female stereotypes. These more feminine and more masculine traits are also called communal and agentic traits, respectively (Abele, 2003). Communal traits include caring, being emotional (Abele, 2003) and showing empathy (Hogue, 2016). These traits are more closely linked to biological sex than agentic traits (Abele, 2003). Agentic traits include being active, decisive and dominant and are often linked to professional success (Abele, 2003). Although agentic traits are generally considered masculine, women also show agentic behaviour in certain situations, for instance when they execute supervising roles (Abele, 2003).

Leadership style can be defined as the method used by a leader to interact with subjects (Bono and Judge, 2004), or a pattern of behaviour as recognized by followers (Erben and Güneşer, 2008). A distinction between leadership styles can be made in several ways, for example between ‘Authoritarian leadership style, Democratic leadership style and Free leadership style’ (Dewi and Wibowo, 2020, p. 2038). However, in this research I will take into account types of leadership style that differ concerning how messages are delivered to followers, and to what extent they are considered feminine or masculine: transactional, transformational, and charismatic. Besides these leadership styles, I will consider examples of non-leadership. This style is called *laissez-faire* and indicates the lack of taking responsibility (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003).

Transactional leadership is a more conventional way of managing, e.g., by using rewards and punishments (Eagly et al., 2003). Transactional leadership style consists of three dimensions: contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception (Bass, 1985). Contingent rewards entails that a leader clearly explains what is expected from the followers. Good behaviour is stimulated by the promise of a reward (Bass, 1998). Active

management by exception means, that a leader monitors the behaviour of followers and rectifies them when they deviate (Hasija, Hyde and Kushwaha, 2019). Passive management by exception differs from the active one in that the leader is more passive, and only acts when something goes wrong (Hasija et al., 2019). Two of the three dimensions of a transactional leadership style, namely active management by exception and passive management by exception, are considered to be typically male behaviour (Stempel, Rigotti and Mohr, 2015). Contingent reward on the other hand is considered a typically female behaviour (Stempel et al., 2015).

According to Rafferty and Griffin (2004), Burns (1978) was the first scholar to publish an article in which transactional leadership was distinguished from another leadership style: transformational leadership. Burns (1978) argued that a transformational leadership style mostly consists of inspiring and stimulating followers (Burns, 1978). In contrast to a transactional leadership style, transformational leadership is more long-term oriented, with a focus on encouraging followers to use their full potential (Eagly et al., 2003). In order to further develop the theory written by Burns (1978), Bass (1985) produced a model of transformational leadership style, consisting of four dimensions: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and charisma. Inspirational motivation entails that a leader motivates followers by articulating an idealized picture of the future (Hater and Bass, 1988). Intellectual stimulation can be described as a leader stimulating followers to solve problems in creative ways, e.g., by trying to make them well aware of the situation (Bass, 1985). Individualized consideration means that a leader coaches a follower individually (Bass, 1985). Charisma is also considered to be a dimension of a transformational leadership style. However, charisma is also distinguished as a separate leadership style, and as such it will be treated in this research. A transformational leadership style is in general considered to be typically female (Stempel et al., 2015) and also seems to be executed slightly more often by female than male leaders (Eagly and Carli, 2003). However, according to Stempel et al. (2015), the dimensions inspirational motivation and idealized influence attributed are considered gender neutral.

Charismatic leadership is to some extent comparable to transformational leadership style, e.g., concerning focus on vision and ideals (McLaurin and Amri, 2008). However, McLaurin and Amri (2008) emphasize that there are also differences between the two leadership styles. Although charisma is part of a transformational leadership style, transformational leadership also consists of other aspects: for example, it focusses on ‘creating and representing an inspiring

vision of the future' (Rowold and Heinitz, 2007, p. 121). Leaders who use a charismatic leadership style, on the other hand, emphasize why followers share the same interests as them (Rowold and Heinitz, 2007). Antonakis, Fenley, and Liechti (2011) argue that charisma is defined in various ways. However, they choose to stick to one definition of charisma, namely a 'symbolic leader influence rooted in emotional and ideological foundations' (Antonakis et al., 2011, p. 376). Conger and Kanungo (1998) wrote that charismatic leadership consists of a number of components. According to their model, charismatic leaders analyse and formulate the status quo of the situation. Subsequently, they formulate future goals and explain how these goals can be achieved (Conger and Kanungo, 1998). This is done by using 'personal example, risk taking, and unconventional behavior' (Somani and Krishnan, 2004). There is ambiguity concerning the link of this style to gender. According to Joosse and Willey (2020), who thoroughly analysed Weber's theory on charisma, Weber considers charismatic leadership style to be undeniably masculine. However, more recent scholars argue that women are to some degree more likely to be considered charismatic (Eagly et al, 2003; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr, 2014). This is based on the stereotype that women are more likely to be emotionally expressive, which is part of a charismatic leadership style (Banks et al., 2015).

In 'normal' times, or in other words during the absence of a crisis, men are expected to be more successful leaders than women (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Ryan and Haslam (2007) argue that it is a deep-rooted idea, in both men and women, that male leaders are more likely to possess the characteristics associated with good leadership. This is the so-called 'think manager - think male' effect (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). However, Koenig, et al. (2011) have found evidence for increasing preference for 'transformational' leadership style, which is considered to be typically female.

## 2.2. GENDER AND LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

In crisis situations, different leadership styles are expected to be effective in varying degrees. Somani and Krishnan (2004) argue that a crisis situation is a good circumstance for a charismatic leadership to be effective, since the chaos is a substantiation for the need of an extraordinary leader. Furthermore, Koenig et al. (2011) argue that a transformational leadership style is linked to good performance in times of uncertainty and crisis (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Post et al., 2019).

In existing literature, the glass cliff hypothesis is also being discussed. This hypothesis entails women are often appointed as leaders in companies with diminishing performance, since they are expected to show a transformational leadership style (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Although there is no scientific consensus about the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon, various researchers stated to have observed this in different sectors (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2013).

The hypothesis of the glass cliff metaphor entails that in a situation of crisis, women are often appointed to high positions that can be compared to a high cliff (Ryan et al., 2016). However, standing in such a position is risky: there is a chance to metaphorically fall off the cliff, which means assuming a glass cliff position can have negative consequences for these women (Ryan et al., 2016). Holding such a difficult position can be mentally draining (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, and Atkins, 2007). Furthermore, being associated with an underperforming company or organization can harm their reputation and therefore damage the rest of their career (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). Lastly, the phenomenon results in a more substantial, social problem: the association of female leadership with crisis situations creates less confidence in women and female leadership in general (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, and Haslam, 2014). The idea that stereotypical female behaviour is preferred in crisis situations is also spoken of as 'think crisis - think female' (Ryan and Haslam, 2007).

In sum, transformational leadership style, which is considered as more feminine, is linked to good performance in times of crisis. However, it is noteworthy that management literature suggests that agentic traits, which are considered as more masculine, are in generally more often associated with good crisis management than communal behaviour (Kulichet et al., 2018).

### 2.3. LEADERSHIP STYLE AND COVID-19

As mentioned above, Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) have found a negative effect of women's leadership on the number of Covid-19 deaths among U.S. governors. According to Sergent and Stajkovic (2020), stay-at-home orders that were announced at an early stage were followed better by residents with a female state governor, which corresponds to the theory that female leadership is preferred in times of crisis. Windsor et al. (2020) assumed they would find a



positive relationship between female leadership and Covid-19 as well. However, they were unable to establish this relationship, most likely because there were not enough female country leaders to test this hypothesis. However, the data they collected do suggest a negative effect of female leadership on the number of Covid-19 deaths.

Both the assumptions by Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) and Windsor et al. (2020) were based on above mentioned leadership theory, which entails female leaders are more likely to use a transformational leadership style. This would translate into better leadership and more compliance by residents in times of crisis (Windsor et al., 2020).

A previous study analysed 350 speeches about Covid-19 measurements held by U.S. governors and observed a positive effect of the use of charisma on compliance by citizens (Jensen, et al., 2021). Especially conservative citizens turned out to be sensitive to a charismatic leadership style (Jensen et al., 2021). Their research overall emphasizes the importance of using non-legal means of influence such as charisma during puzzling situations like the Covid-19 crisis. It is important to bear in mind though that Jensen et al., (2021) did not take gender into account as a variable in their research.

Furthermore, Binagwaho (2020) emphasizes the importance of compassionate leadership in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis, in combination with fortitude and the implementation of evidence-based measures. Her research is a single case study: she analysed her home country, Rwanda, and drew conclusions about leadership. Binagwaho (2020) argues that Rwanda is a good example of a country that responded skilfully to the Covid-19 crisis. The nation almost immediately went into a nationwide lockdown, strikingly providing at the same time the necessary social support (Binagwaho, 2020). However, it is debatable whether the success achieved by Rwanda can be attributed to the used leadership style, since it concerns a single case study.

## 2.4. GAP IN THE LITERATURE

Various researchers have analysed the possible relationship between a leader's gender and the success of their Covid-19 approach. Although the data suggests that there is a relationship between these two variables, not everyone agrees that the relationship is significant. Although

assumptions are expressed on the underlying mechanism that might explain the possible relationship between the gender of a leader and Covid-19 success, a real explanation is lacking. Furthermore, researchers have elaborated on different ways leaders and countries have dealt with the pandemic, and how this could have affected their different levels of success (Jensen et al., 2021; Binagwaho, 2020). However, a comparative research that could explain differences in achieved success of male and female country leaders, by looking at a wide range of leadership styles, is still missing.

In this research, I will evaluate the gender of a country's leader and level of Covid-19 success. However, as mentioned above, I will not test whether there is a significant relationship between these two variables. Instead, I will zoom in on the six different country leaders who achieved various levels of success at the beginning of the pandemic. I will analyse their country leader's speeches in order to investigate which type of leadership style they have shown. By doing so, I will assess whether it (partly) explains the success of the policies that were implemented to decrease the spread of the virus.

Existing leadership theory suggests that using a transformational leadership style at the beginning period of Covid-19 could explain good performance. Since transformational leadership is often associated with stereotypical female characteristics, this might explain the possible relationship between female leadership and success during the beginning period of Covid-19. Furthermore, people prefer when others behave following their stereotype (Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka, & Aritzeta, 2012). This means that a certain leadership style might explain for the success for female leaders, while this is not the case for male leaders, and vice versa.

However, besides leadership style, good performance by female country leaders could also be explained by other factors (Piazza and Diaz, 2020). Additionally, there is an apparent contradiction between gender and leadership in times of crisis, since more masculine, agentic traits are associated with good crisis management as well. Therefore, research is needed before conclusions can be drawn.

## 2.5. EXPECTATIONS

Based on the previous paragraph, I have come to a couple of expectations concerning the role of leadership styles in handling Covid-19. I expect a charismatic leadership style to contribute most to a successful Covid-19 approach, followed by a transformational leadership style. Secondly, my expectation is that primarily using a transactional leadership style explains a less successful achievement.

Besides the abovementioned expectations, I will take into account the gender of the country leader in this research. Based on the previous paragraph, I set the following expectations with regards to leadership and gender:

Firstly, I expect female leaders to use a transformational leadership style and communal traits more often than male country leaders, irrespective of their success. Then, I expect that the contribution of using transformational leadership to the success of their Covid-19 approach is more substantial for female than for male country leaders. Finally, when specifically comparing male country leaders to each other, I expect to find that the use of a transactional leadership can explain a more successful (or at least less negative) Covid-19 approach than the use of a transformational leadership style.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will elaborate on the methodology of my research. This includes the research design, the data collection process and the process of data analysis.

### 3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

#### *3.1.1. CASE SELECTION*

The goal of this research is to analyse the possible role leadership style played in the success of a country's leader Covid-19 approach, in combination with the gender a country's leader. In order to attain this goal, I will execute a small-N comparative research.

The research design is a combination of a most similar systems design and a most different systems design. My aim is to control for as much variables as possible but differ concerning two variables: gender of a country's leader and level of achieved success during the beginning period of Covid-19. This design enables me to dive into the level of the individual country leaders and expose the theoretical mechanism outlined in the previous chapter.

The first variable I take into account is the gender of a country's leader. Following the example of Windsor et al., (2020), I consider a country as led by a male or female by looking at the person who can command the military, since this indicates actual power instead of merely ceremonial power.

A country's regime or governance type might have affected how a country has responded to the Covid-19 crisis (Windsor et al., 2020). For instance, the thought of re-elections in the back of their mind might have affected the way a leader of a country with a free democracy handled the Covid-19 crisis. This may cause leaders of free democratic countries to feel more stimulated to provide for public goods such as healthcare (Windsor et al., 2020). However, one could also argue that in countries with an authoritarian regime it is expected to be easier for leaders to implement strict measurements that are met with compliance (Windsor et al., 2020). For example, residents might be more prone to follow restrictions because they are afraid of the possible consequences if they do not (Windsor et al., 2020). Furthermore, in strict regimes, a leader is not disturbed with likeability since they do not have to worry about being re-elected

(Windsor et al., 2020). This makes it easier to implement measurements that are, because of negative economic consequences, met with disapproval by residents. Windsor et al. (2020) found that countries classified as 'free' had more Covid-19 deaths at the beginning of the pandemic than 'not free' countries. Therefore, the level of freedom of a country will be a control variable in this research. Freedom House is a nonprofit organization providing data on the level of freedom of each country (Freedom House, 2019). They give each country a score based on a wide range of aspects, e.g., level of corruption and level of equal treatment for everybody. A country can be categorized as 'free', 'partly free' or 'not free'. I will take this categorization into account as a control variable.

Furthermore, Windsor et al., (2020) argue that overall free democracies tend to provide for public goods more extensively. They only use the Freedom House rating in order to control for this variable. However, I think it is also prudent to delve deeper into the accessibility of public services per country.

Esping-Andersen (1990) classified modern, capitalist nations into three types of welfare regimes: liberal, social-democratic and conservative. These types of welfare regimes mainly differ regarding how accessibility to welfare services is regulated. E.g., in a country with a social-democratic welfare regime, people have equal accessibility to welfare services. In liberal regimes, welfare services are mainly regulated by the market. Accessibility to welfare systems affects the extent to which people stay at home instead of going to work (Greer, King, Massard da Fonseca, and Peralta-Santos, 2020). Therefore, it is important to have the type of welfare regime in a country as a control variable as well.

Moreover, Windsor et al., (2020) emphasized that it is not sufficient to take only contemporary leadership into consideration. They argue that a country's preparations for situations of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, should be considered as well. It seems like countries with a female leader are on average more prepared for disasters. Windsor et al. (2020) argue that this relationship can be explained by an underlying cause: social-cultural norms. The reason is that in countries where a woman was elected, chances are that social-cultural norms are more feminine as well, which means there are more policies that aim at contributing to communal well-being. These feminine social-cultural norms contribute to a country being more prepared for situations of crisis (Windsor et al., 2020).

Hofstede (2011) created a framework that helps analyse the culture of a country. The framework consists of six dimensions: ‘Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Long/Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence/Restraint’ (Hofstede, 2011, p. 2). On his website, Hofstede published accessible datasets with information on the cultures of different countries (Geert Hofstede, n.d.). Windsor et al., (2020) established that the cultural dimensions that affect the success of Covid-19 measures are power distance and individualism. Less power distance and less individualism, which are generally considered feminine social norms, lead to fewer Covid-19 deaths. Therefore, these two dimensions of culture are also considered as a control variable in this study.

Table 1: Covariational table

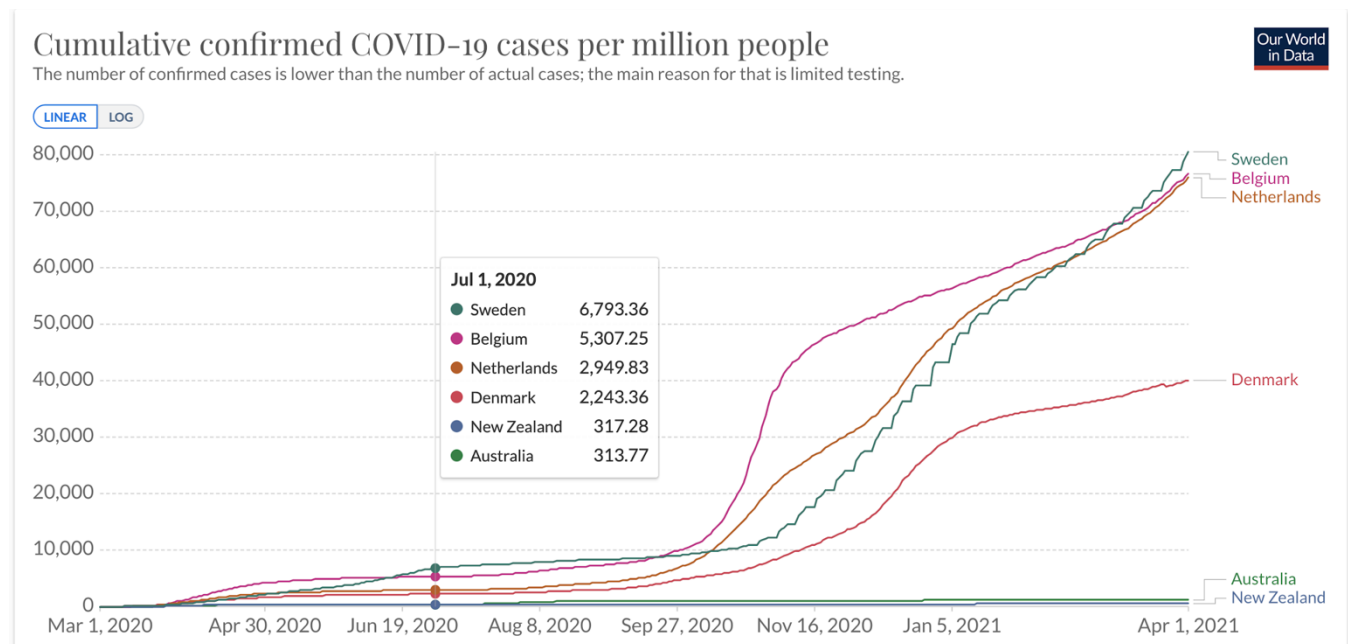
Variable	Possible values	Australia	New- Zealand	The Netherlands	Den- mark	Sweden	Belgium
Gender country's leader	Male / Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Level of freedom	Free / Partly free / Not free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free
Type of welfare regime	Liberal / Social-democratic/ Conserative	Liberal	Liberal	Social-democratic	Social-democratic	Social-democratic	Social-democratic
Culture							
Individualism	Individualist/ Collectivist	Individualist	Individualist	Individualist	Individualist	Individualist	Individualist
Power distance	Small/ large	Small	Small	Small	Small	Small	Small
Number of Covid cases	Low/ Middle/ High	Low	Low	Middle	Middle	High	High
Used leadership style	Transactional/ transformational/ Charismatic						
Type of behaviour	Agentic / Communal						

The country leaders were selected with the aim of fitting into this research design. I will take into account the leaders of Australia, New-Zealand, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Belgium. These countries are all considered to be free countries (The Freedom House, 2019). The type of welfare regime is based on the classification by Esping-Andersen (1990). He classified Australia and New Zealand as countries with a liberal welfare regime and The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Belgium as countries with a social-democratic welfare regime. Lastly, the level of individualism and level of power distance was retrieved from the data collected by Geert Hofstede (2020). According to his data, Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Belgium are all individualist countries with a small power distance. The cases and the values of the control variables are presented in table 1.

For the number of Covid-19 cases, I looked at the first four months of the Covid-19 pandemic (March, April, May, and June 2020). During these few months, the three country pairs (Australia and New Zealand, The Netherlands and Denmark, and Sweden and Belgium) were

quite evenly matched concerning the order of magnitude of the number of Covid-19 cases. Both Australia and New Zealand had relatively low numbers of Covid-19 cases and are therefore classified as highly effective. The Netherlands and Denmark were relatively in the middle and are therefore classified as moderately effective. Finally, Sweden and Belgium both had a relatively high number of cases, and are therefore classified as being less successful. These pairs enable me to compare between and among three levels of achieved success. Chart 1 was retrieved from Our World in Data (n.d.), where a lot of research and data can be found.

Chart 1: Cumulative confirmed Covid-19 cases per million people



I retrieved the gender of the country leaders from the article by Windsor et al., (2020). On the one hand, Australia, The Netherlands, and Sweden all had male country leaders. During this period, the Prime Ministers of these countries were respectively Scott Morrison, Mark Rutte, and Stefan Löfven. New Zealand, Denmark, and Belgium, on the other hand, had female country leaders (Windsor et al., 2020). The Prime Ministers of these countries were respectively Jacinda Ardern, Mette Frederiksen, and Sophie Wilmès.

### 3.1.2. CONCEPTS AND OPERATIONALIZATION

In this research, the independent variable X is the gender of the country's leader. This binary independent variable can either be 'male' or 'female'. There is some discussion about the meaning of the term gender. Monro (2005), for instance, argues in favour of a gender spectrum

instead of a binary grouping. However, for reasons of parsimony, this research approaches gender as a dichotomous variable, following the approach by Jensen et al. (2021). Hence, I maintain only two values for this variable: male or female.

The dependent variable is the successful Covid-19 approach. There are different ways to operationalize this variable. In order to decrease the spread of the Covid-19 virus, many country leaders held speeches announcing measures. These measures were mostly aimed at social distancing. The goal of social distancing is to reduce the number of Covid-19 infections by stopping social contact, hence the further spread of the virus. This is supposed to be the most effective measure to prevent as many deaths as possible (Harvard Health Publishing, 2020). Physical distancing leads to less mortality: ‘... a 10% increase in physical distancing would result in a 6.1% decrease in Covid-19 fatalities.’ (Jensen et al., 2021, p. 12). The website ‘Our world in data’ (n.d.) collected a lot of data concerning Covid-19. Some previous research analyses the number of fatal Covid-19 cases in order to judge a leader’s Covid-19 approach (Windsor et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2021). However, I think it would be more accurate to analyse the actual number of Covid-19 cases, and not only the fatal ones. In fact, the actual number of cases provides us with relevant data on the extent that people listened to stay-at-home recommendations. The number of Covid-19 deaths is dependent on many other factors, such as the quality of healthcare of the nation under consideration.

The leadership style used by a country’s leader is the variable that might help explaining the level of success of a Covid-19 approach. I will analyse speeches of the six country leaders to see if I can find patterns in the use of leadership style and the spread of the virus. This approach enables me to explore whether differences in success achieved by male and female country’s leaders can partly explain the success of female country leaders (if proven) in minimizing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The operationalisation of leadership style in this research stems from the theoretical framework as outlined in the previous chapter. This implies that transactional leadership style consists of three dimensions: contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. Transformational leadership style consists of four dimensions: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Furthermore, charismatic leadership consists of several components: articulating the status quo,



having strategic vision, taking personal risk, and showing unconventional behaviour. Lastly, *laissez-faire* leadership is characterized by a lack of taking responsibility.

Besides these leadership styles, I will consider also agentic and communal traits. Agentic traits include being active, decisive, and dominant and are in general linked to professional success. Communal traits instead include caring, being emotional, and empathy.

### 3.2. DATA COLLECTION

In order to pursue my research goal, I analysed 41 speeches and press conferences held by the six country leaders between March and June 2020. In order to prevent selection bias, I selected these country leaders based on control variables, rather than the availability of data.

By solely focussing on the beginning of the pandemic, I largely avoided learning effects. Gaining experience in leading a country through a pandemic might cause changes in leadership and communication style, which would influence the outcome of this research. The speeches and press conferences that I have analysed are listed in the appendix.

Transcripts of speeches and press conferences held by the leaders of Australia, New-Zealand, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden are well captured, easily findable, and accessible online. In the case of Denmark, more effort was required to retrieve and collect these documents. In the case of Sweden, I was able to analyse only one speech, since only one speech was held during the period under research. For Belgium, the number was eight. For the remaining countries, Australia, New-Zealand, The Netherlands, and Denmark, a greater number of speeches was available, respectively 15, 31, 34 and 11. Due to the limited time of this research, I selected eight speeches for each of these leaders. In order to cover the full research period, I selected the first and the last speech. The other speeches were selected randomly. This data collection led to an analysis of 41 speeches in total.

Concerning the speeches held by Sophie Wilmès, former Prime Minister of Belgium, I was only able to find videos of her speeches on YouTube, which required me to transcribe them myself. The speeches and press conferences held by the other country leaders were already transcribed. Since the speeches from Australia and New-Zealand were held in English, and the speeches

from The Netherlands and Belgium (partly) in Dutch, I was able to analyse the original words. The speech from Sweden was translated in English already by The Local, a European news outlet (The Local, 2020). The only speeches I had to translate myself, with the help of Google Translate, were the ones from Denmark. The translations were not perfect, but nevertheless sufficient to understand the content of the speech.

Since the speeches that were used for this research are public and available to everyone, I did not have to face issues of privacy and anonymity of the respondents. I stored the data locally on my laptop and online on Google drive. The appendix conveniently displays all of the used data. This enables interoperability with other research projects and replicability for future projects. The possibility of replicability contributes to the reliability of this research (Van der Velde, Jansen, and Dijkers, 2018). For the operationality of this research, I followed the example of Jensen et al. (2021) to a certain extent, and applied this method to my own research, only for multiple leadership styles. In order to ensure the internal validity of my research, it is important that the research tool measures the right values (Scheepers, Tobi, & Boeije, 2016). I decided to, eventually, link the codes to the existing theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, in order to be able to make statements that are in line with this theory. By ensuring that by the research results could also apply to other, similar situations, the external validity can be increased (Scheepers et al., 2016). The relatively large number of speeches analysed per country leader to some extent filtered out coincidences and enabled me to see if there were real patterns to be recognized. However, research on a larger scale is needed to filter out all coincidences, which I will elaborate upon in the final chapter.

### 3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to answer my research question, I investigated to what extent each country leader has used transactional, transformational, and charismatic leadership style. Moreover, I analysed to what extent these leaders show agentic or communal behaviour. In order to execute this qualitative data analysis, I utilized the computer program ATLAS.ti.

#### 3.3.1. CODING PROCESS

I uploaded the literal texts of press conferences and speeches held by the six country leaders to ATLAS.ti. First, I read the texts thoroughly and started with open coding, which means I

labelled pieces of data in order to summarize a quote (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During this phase, I have attempted to look at the literal texts as openly as possible, and I attached codes to the quotes without following the theory.

The process of open coding led to 59 codes. However, some codes were not included in my analysis, since they were irrelevant for the goal of this study. Examples of codes that were assigned frequently are ‘restrictions / directions’, ‘substantiation approach’, ‘announcement approach’, ‘addressing responsibility’, ‘modus operandi’, ‘compliment/ thankful’, and ‘compassion/ showing empathy’. In addition, codes that were assigned to a lesser extent are for instance ‘symbolic language’, ‘decisive’, ‘reward for behaviour’, ‘status quo situation’, and ‘positive about the future’. After open coding all of the 41 speeches, I created a document group for each country leader consisting of the speeches held by him or her. This enabled me to draw conclusions per country leader.

Subsequently, I started with the next phase of my data analysis: axial coding. The goal of axial coding is to connect the codes to each other (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and to the theory outlined in the previous chapter. I subdivided the codes and placed them under a subcategory. The subcategories are the dimensions and aspects of the different leadership styles and behaviourisms. E.g., the code ‘compliance is being checked’ was categorized under the dimension ‘active management by exception’, since I considered actively checking compliance as a form of checking performance and directing someone who is not performing as supposed to. Another example is the code ‘stressing seriousness situation’, which was categorized under the dimension ‘intellectual stimulation’. The substantiation is that, by stressing the seriousness of the situation, a country leader appeals to a resident’s intellectual capacities to make ‘the right’ decisions. ‘Goal of approach’ was categorized under both ‘charisma’ and ‘inspirational motivation’, since formulating a goal is a sign of articulating a positive vision of the future. I organised in a table the dimensions of the various leadership styles, each consisting of several codes. This table will be presented in the next chapter.

Together, the subcategories form the main categories, which are leadership styles and behaviourisms. This hierarchical system, with subcategories and main categories, was brought together in multiple code trees, which were added to the appendix.

## 4. RESULTS

In this chapter, I will present the results that emerged from my data analysis, supported by quotes from the speeches and press conferences.

### 4.1. DESCRIPTION RESULTS

Table 2: The occurrence of dimensions in the speeches

		1. AUS 8 814	2. NZ 8 777	3. NL 8 761	4. DK 8 676	5. SWE 1 30	6. BE 8 499
1. Contingent Rewards	4 447	5.355,00 12,86%	3.412,9... 8,19%	4.483,45 10,76%	4.186,1... 10,05%	1.723,9... 4,14%	7.669,4... 18,41%
2. Active management by exception	2 34	193,00 0,46%	148,001 0,36%	569,389 1,37%	180,85 0,43%		84,784 0,20%
3. Passive management by exception	2 67	751,00 1,80%	201,415 0,48%	1.069,7... 2,57%	103,723 0,25%	232,964 0,56%	873,043 2,10%
4. Inspirational motivation	6 338	1.913,00 4,59%	2.835,3... 6,81%	1.997,4... 4,80%	2.405,57 5,78%	6.243,4... 14,99%	1.491,7... 3,58%
5. Intellectual stimulation	12 1556	14.613,0... 35,08%	18.477,0... 44,36%	18.702,0... 44,90%	17.086,0... 41,02%	12.813,0... 30,76%	10.957,0... 26,31%
6. Individualized consideration	0 0						
7. Charisma	20 1007	8.429,00 20,24%	8.399,3... 20,16%	6.826,1... 16,39%	8.502,6... 20,41%	8.153,7... 19,57%	8.077,3... 19,39%
8. Laissez-faire	1 4			65,147 0,16%			
9. Agentic	3 500	5.601,00 13,45%	3.920,3... 9,41%	4.114,7... 9,88%	4.457,4... 10,70%	1.397,7... 3,36%	7.625,95 18,31%
10. Communal	6 476	4.799,00 11,52%	4.258,6... 10,22%	3.825,46 9,18%	4.731,3... 11,36%	11.089,0... 26,62%	4.873,9... 11,70%
Totals		41.654... 100 %	41.654... 100 %	41.654... 100 %	41.654... 100 %	41.654... 100 %	41.654... 100 %

Table 2, which I made with the help of ATLAS.ti, shows to what extent the dimensions and aspects of different leadership styles emerged in the speeches and press conferences of the six country leaders. The percentages show the use of a certain dimension in comparison to the other dimensions per country leader, based on the amount of words a certain code was applied to. The number of words is ‘normalized’, which enables me to compare the countries even though their speeches do not have the same length. I do not examine the exact numbers, since this is a qualitative research, and I do not evaluate the significance of a causality either. Instead, the table helps to give an overall idea of possible patterns between leadership style, gender, and the level of success of a country leader’s Covid-19 approach.

#### 4.1.1. SIMILARITIES

Although there are some differences between the country leaders, it seems that they primarily show similarities. In their speeches, none of the leaders employs a *laissez-faire* leadership style.

Furthermore, for all leaders, the focus of their speech is mostly on intellectual stimulation of their residents. Charismatic leadership is also quite widely used by each country leader. By contrast, active and passive management by exception do not appear to be commonly used.

#### *4.1.2. DIFFERENCES IN EFFECTIVENESS*

What stands out is that the leaders of Belgium and Sweden, the countries which are ranked as being ‘less effective’ concerning their Covid-19 approach, use intellectual stimulation to a relatively lesser extent in comparison to the leaders that are considered to be ‘more effective’, namely the leaders of Australia, New Zealand, Belgium and The Netherlands.

Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden, has relatively shown more communal behaviour than the other country leaders, and scarcely any agentic behaviour. However, this ratio does not apply to Sophie Wilmès, former Prime Minister of Belgium: in her speeches she showed relatively more agentic behaviour and an ‘average’ amount of communal behaviour. Furthermore, Sophie Wilmès has used contingent reward to a relatively greater degree than the other country leaders, while the opposite is true for Stefan Löfven, who employed it less.

#### *4.1.3. DIFFERENCES BY GENDER*

When comparing the male and female country leaders, it comes to my attention that there is no essential difference or pattern that can be recognised here. Overall, the male and female leaders of these countries use leadership styles that correspond to a great extent.

### **4.2. RESULTS IN RELATION TO THE EXPECTATIONS**

#### *4.2.1. EXPECTATIONS IN RELATION TO EFFECTIVENESS*

Firstly, I expected that a charismatic leadership style followed by a transformational leadership style would contribute most to a successful Covid-19 approach. My results show that all male and female country leaders used a charismatic leadership style, regardless of performance. For example, I considered this quote by Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, to be charismatic:

‘Yes, you’ll be pleased to know that we do consider both the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny to be essential workers. But as you can imagine at this time, of course they are going to be potentially quite busy at home with their family as well and their own bunnies, and so I say to the children of New Zealand: if the Easter bunny doesn’t make it to your household, then we have to understand that it’s a bit difficult at the moment for the bunny to perhaps get everywhere. But I have a bit of an idea: that maybe in lieu of the bunny being able to make it to your home, you can create your own Easter hunt for all the children in your neighbourhood’ (Beehive.govt.nz, 2020).

In this example, Jacinda Arden tries to reach her goal while using an unconventional way of delivering her message, which is one of the aspects of a charismatic leadership style.

It is remarkable that intellectual stimulation, which is one of the dimensions of a transformational leadership style, seems to play a greater role in the speeches of country leaders that are considered to be more successful. This is in line with the theory that a transformational leadership style is preferred in times of uncertainty and crisis. Thus, my results indicate that achieved success during the early months of Covid-19 can partly be explained by the fact that a country’s leader extensively appealed to people's common sense. The following quote by Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia, is an example of intellectual stimulation:

‘If you ease off too quickly, too early, then you end up making the situation even worse, and I don’t just mean in health terms. If you move too early and the health response gets out of control, then the economic consequences will be even worse’ (Rev, 2020).

In this extract, Morrison appeals to the common sense of Australians, by explaining the problem and stressing why it is important to act.

My second expectation was that, in countries with an unsuccessful Covid-19 approach, the country’s leader had mainly used a transactional leadership style, and to a lesser extent a transformational or charismatic leadership style. However, the results show that the six country leaders that I included in this research, all used transactional leadership style less than they used a transformational or charismatic leadership style. Furthermore, the leaders classified as highly successful and moderately successful used transactional leadership style to a similar extent. The

less effective leaders deviate slightly from the rest, but in a different way: Sophie Wilmès has used contingent reward to a relatively greater degree than the other country leaders. In the following example, Sophie Wilmès articulates that there is a reward for ‘good’ behaviour:

‘Daarna hebben we lange periode van transitie voor de boeg die ons tijdelijk in staat zal stellen onze meest fundamentele vrijheden te herwinnen. Misschien ook wel een bepaalde vorm van normaliteit. Vanavond heeft u een relatieve visie gekregen op onze toekomst op korte termijn. Deze visie zal ons moeten motiveren. Het moet ons aanmoedigen om door te gaan met onze inspanning dat is heel belangrijk. Omdat de inspanningen die we doen lonen. Ze zijn niet voor niks’ [After that, we have a long transitional period ahead that will temporarily enable us to regain our most fundamental freedoms. Perhaps, a certain form of normality. Tonight, you have been given a relative view of our near-term future. This vision should motivate us. It should encourage us to continue with our effort which is very important. Because the efforts we make pay off. They are there for a reason.] (NVR CNS, 2020).

In this example, Wilmès promises that efforts might be rewarded with returning to a certain form of normality. In contrast to Wilmès, Stefan Löfven used contingent reward less often than the other leaders, relatively speaking. Therefore, no explanation for the degree of success is found here.

#### *4.2.2. EXPECTATIONS IN RELATION TO GENDER*

One of the goals of this research was to investigate whether the use of a certain leadership style might explain differences in success achieved by male and female country leaders. Existing theory led to a number of expectations. Firstly, I expected that female country leaders would more often use a transformational leadership style, while male leaders would more often use a transactional leadership style. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the differences between the leadership styles of the male and female led countries included in this research did not differ substantially.

When looking at Belgium and Sweden, the countries considered less successful, it stands out that Sophie Wilmès from Belgium has used contingent reward more than all the other country leaders, especially in comparison to Stefan Löfven from Sweden. This is in line with the theory

that contingent reward is considered a typically female behaviour. However, it is not possible to recognise a clear pattern when looking at the other countries. Secondly, I expected that the contribution of transformational leadership to the success of their Covid-19 approach would be more substantial for female than for male country leaders. However, although intellectual stimulation seems to play a role in the effectiveness of a Covid-19 approach, I did not find a considerable difference of this contribution between male and female leaders. Thirdly, when specifically comparing male country leaders, I expected to find that a transactional leadership style could explain a more successful (or at least less negative) Covid-19 approach than a transformational leadership style. No country leader used a transactional leadership style to a greater degree than a transformational leadership style. However, when it comes to male country leaders, it seems that using more transactional elements in speeches might explain a more successful (or at least less negative) Covid-19 approach. The male country leaders of the better performing countries, Scott Morrison of Australia and Mark Rutte of The Netherlands, did use a transactional leadership style to a higher degree than their colleague Stefan Löfven in Sweden.

I also analysed to what extent the male and female country leaders used communal and agentic behaviour. In general, there is no large difference between the male and female country leaders. The analysis of Stefan Löfven and Sophie Wilmès' speeches shows results that slightly differ from the other country's leaders. Stefan Löfven shows relatively more communal traits than the other leaders. A good example of this can be found in the following extract from one of his speeches:

‘I know many are worried. Worried about how our society is going to cope. Worried for yourself, for someone you love who belongs to a risk group, or that you will lose your job. I understand that. The next few months will be stressful. But our society is strong’  
(The Local, 2020).

In this fragment, Löfven show empathy and expresses compassion with the Swedish residents, which are communal aspects. In addition, he uses relatively less agentic behaviour than the other leaders. These findings correspond to the theory that in general, agentic behaviour is more often associated with good crisis management than communal behaviour. However, Sophie Wilmès shows more agentic behaviour than the others, and about the same amount of communal behaviour as the moderately and highly effective country leaders. Therefore,



according to my research, the use of communal and agentic differences does not explain the level of success achieved by countries' leaders.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Stefan Löfven only held one speech during the period under research, while the leaders of the other countries held at least 8 or even 30 speeches. Löfven's assumption may have been that the Swedish residents can be trusted to rely on their sense of responsibility. However, the lack of speeches and press conferences can also attest to a *laissez-faire* leadership style, where simply no or little responsibility is taken by the leader. It can be inferred that this leadership style did not contribute to a successful Covid-19 approach. In relation to this conclusion, it is noteworthy that the speeches held by Wilmès were relatively short in comparison to the other speeches. Therefore, it may be assumed that her approach also contained aspects of a *laissez-faire* leadership style.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The current pandemic sparked discussion in the media about gender and leadership. According to existing literature, different leadership styles are, in times of uncertainty and crisis, effective to varying degrees. Furthermore, these leadership styles differ from each other to what extent they are perceived to be stereotypically male or female. The goal of my research was to assess if, if women were more successful than men during the first period of Covid-19, this could be explained by the use of a different leadership style. This led to the following research question:

How does the leadership style of male and female country leaders contribute to the success of their Covid-19 approach?

In order to answer to this research question, I carried out a qualitative analysis. After analysing a total of 41 speeches held respectively by three male and three female country leaders, I was able to discern possible patterns in the use of leadership styles and the level of success of a country leader's Covid-19 approach. This has led to both the confirmation and the rejection of some of my expectations.

It can be concluded that using intellectual stimulation, which is a dimension of a transformational leadership style, contributes to the success of a country's leader Covid-19 approach. This finding is in line with existing theory suggesting transformational leadership style to be effective in times of crisis. The contribution of using intellectual stimulation did not differ between male and female leaders.

Although the results show a slight difference in the effectiveness of leadership styles, it is interesting that, in this specific situation, I could barely find differences in the use of leadership styles between male and female leaders. These findings suggest that there is not much difference between male or female leadership: achieved success should rather be attributed to the use of effective or less effective leadership qualities in relation to certain circumstances. This points towards the idea that gender is not so important and that both men and women can 'simply' be good or bad leaders.

My findings substantiate the position of Janka Stoker, professor in leadership. She argues that the differences in leadership style used by male and female leaders are not substantial (Gommers, 2021). Furthermore, she argues that stereotypes form obstacles make women having to fight harder to reach the top (Gommers, 2021). This means that women who do reach the top are generally quite skilled (Gommers, 2021), which might also explain achieved success during the pandemic (Piazza and Diaz, 2020). The (media) discussion about this topic might be explained by the fact that female leadership is still exceptional, and therefore attracts more attention.

Furthermore, these findings are in line with the theory that transformational leadership style has become more popular than a transactional leadership style in general. For this reason, perhaps transformational leadership style has also become more common for male leaders. This casts doubt on the theory that people prefer when others behave according to their stereotype. On the other hand, one of my findings is in line with this theory. The data suggests that for male country leaders, using aspects of a transactional leadership style did contribute to a more successful (or at least less negative) Covid-19 approach.

Besides the abovementioned presumptions, the absence of differences leadership styles between male and female leaders could be explained by the limitations of my research design.

## 5.1. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The research design largely controls for confounding variables, which enabled me to make a convenient comparison between the six selected countries. Therefore, I was able to comment on the existence of a theoretical mechanism in this specific situation: the contribution of different leadership styles in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis, for male and female country leaders. Furthermore, executing a small-n comparative research consisting of only six countries enabled me to perform an in-depth, qualitative analysis of 41 speeches.

However, a research design like the one presented here comes along with some typical limitations. The conclusion drawn from my results applies to the existence of a theoretical mechanism in a specific situation. The results are not generalizable, since this was not the goal

of my study. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to explore whether it was possible to find coherence: no statements can be made about causality.

Although the research design controls for as much confounding variables as possible, it was not possible to keep all factors constant. Moreover, the research does not consider differences on an individual level. Due to time limitations, only one case per case type was considered in this study. Since a country's leader could show a deviant personality, compared to other country leaders, this could play a considerable role in the level of achieved success. In order to filter out random individual differences, more cases per case type are needed.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the process of coding was executed by only one researcher. I coded all speeches based solely on my discretion. This research would benefit from having more researchers coding the speeches and comparing them, as it was the case in a similar research conducted by Jensen et al., (2021). For their research, the speeches were coded independently by multiple researchers who hereinafter compared the similarity, which resulted to be quite high. This approach would help correcting potential bias. However, the design and scope of this study did not allow for such an approach.

Lastly, the research I conducted covers only a limited period. Only when researched in the long term, it can be established whether a country's leader approach was effective or not.

## 5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of my design create a demand for further research on a larger scale. A more time-consuming analysis (a larger number of countries and different control variables) could enable the generalizability of findings on this topic. In addition, future research could also analyse a longer period, which would reveal more plausibly the effectiveness of the different approaches.

Furthermore, future research could zoom in even further on the leaders' personal level and conduct interviews with country's leaders on the strategy behind their approaches.

Lastly, it would be interesting to conduct a more experimental study on how people react to different leadership styles during a health crisis. E.g., speeches could be shown to participants, after which they would need to complete a survey on how they perceived the message.

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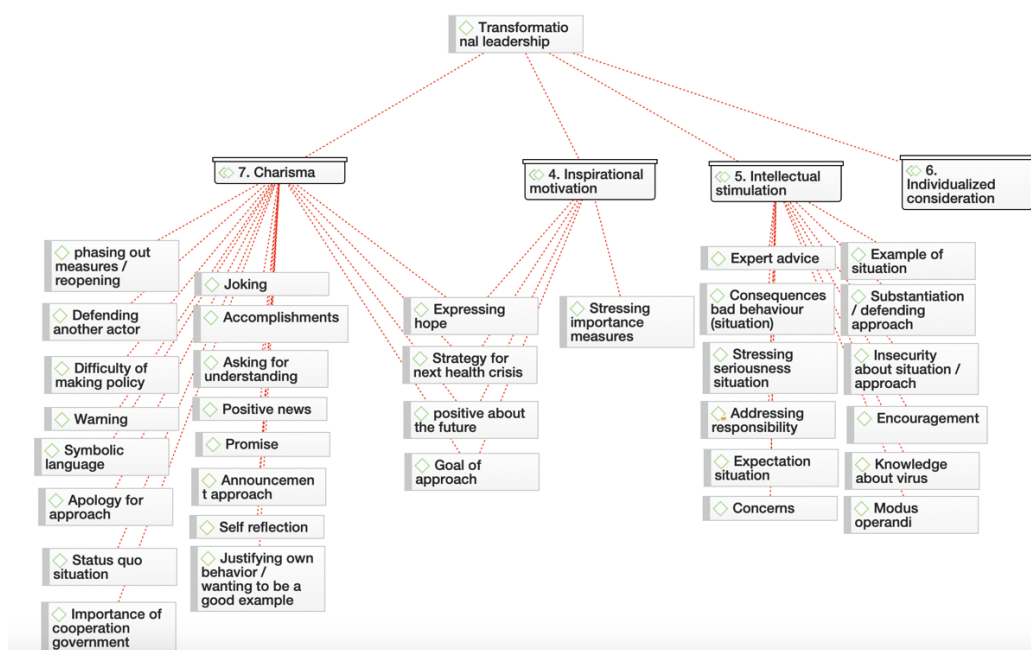
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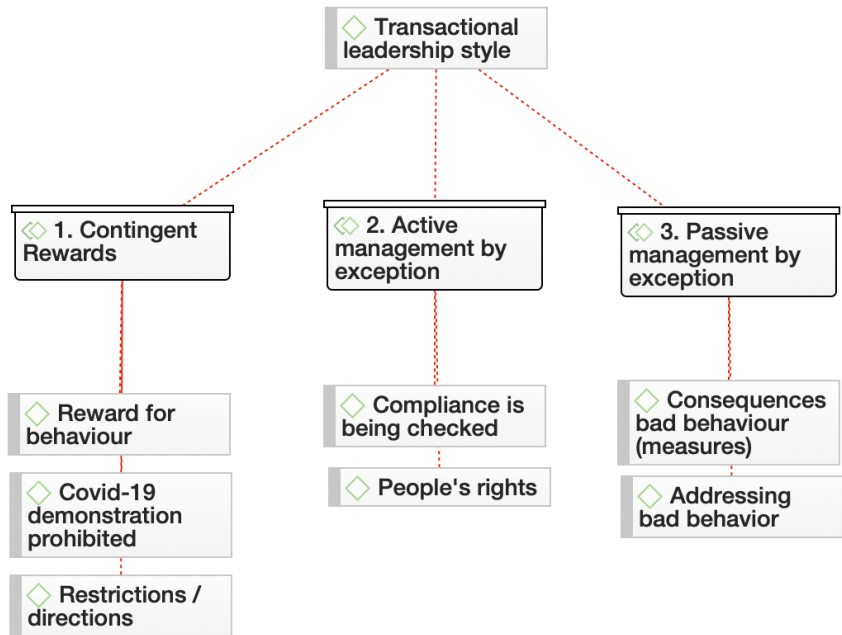
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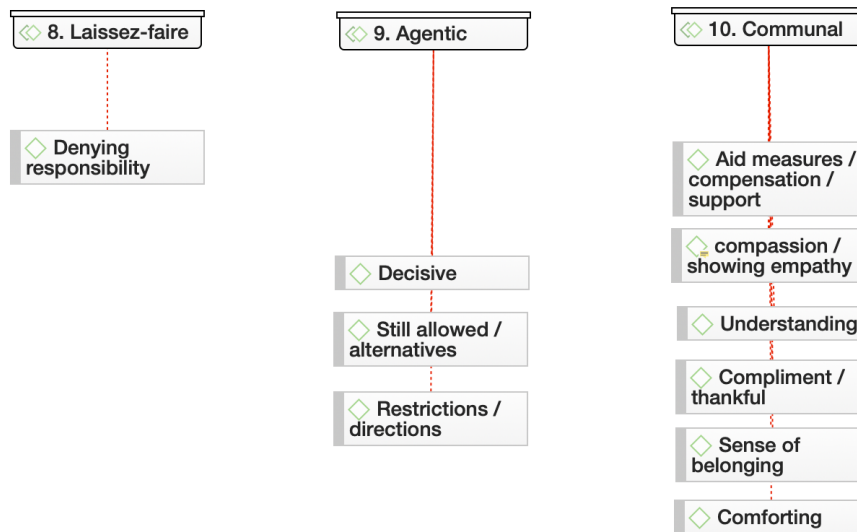
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# APPENDIX

## CODE TREES







## LIST OF ANALYSED PRESS CONFERENCES AND SPEECHES PER COUNTRY

### *THE NETHERLANDS*

Transcripts of speeches were retrieved from

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/coronavirus-covid-19/documenten?trefwoord=&startdatum=&einddatum=&onderdeel=Alle%20ministeries&type=Mediatekst>

- 09-03-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie minister-president Mark Rutte en directeur Jaap van Dissel (Centrum Infectieziektebestrijding) na afloop van crisisberaad kabinet.
- 12-03-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie minister-president Rutte en minister Bruins naar aanleiding van de maatregelen tegen verspreiding coronavirus in Nederland.
- 16-03-2020. TV-toespraak van minister-president Mark Rutte.
- 25-3-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie minister-president Rutte en minister De Jonge na afloop van crisisberaad kabinet.

- 03-04-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie na ministerraad 3 april 2020
- 09-04-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie na ministerraad 9 april 2020
- 29-05-2020. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie na ministerraad 29 mei 2020
- 26-06-2021. Letterlijke tekst persconferentie na ministerraad 26 juni 2020

### *NEW ZEALAND*

Transcripts of speeches were retrieved from <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/feature/covid-19-updates>

- 24-03-2020. Press conference: Tuesday, 24 March, Prime Minister
- 27-03-2020. Prime Minister's press conference: Friday, 27 March 2020
- 31-03-2020. Press conference: Tuesday, 31 March
- 06-04-2020. Post-cabinet press conference: Monday, 6 April, 2020
- 13-04-2020. Prime Minister and director-general of health press conference: Monday, 13 April 2020.
- 16-04-2020. All-of-government Covid-19 response press conference: Thursday, 16 April 2020
- 12-05-2020. Press conference: Tuesday, 12 May 2020
- 20-05-2020. Post-cabinet press conference: Wednesday, 20 May

### *AUSTRALIA*

Transcripts of speeches were retrieved from: <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcript-tag/australia-coronavirus-briefing-transcripts>

- 19-03-2020. AUS Prime Minister, Scott Morrison COVID-19 Update 3/19 2020
- 22-03-2020. Australia PM Scott Morrison Coronavirus Briefing: Closing Pubs, Restaurants and Churches March 22nd, 2020
- 24-03-2020. PM Scott Morrison Australia Coronavirus Briefing Transcript March 24: PM Announces New Bans, Restrictions, March 24th, 2020
- 29-03-2020. Scott Morrison Australia Coronavirus Briefing March 29th, 2020
- 02-04-2020. Australia PM Scott Morrison COVID-19 Briefing Transcript April 2nd, 2020
- 16-04-2020. PM Scott Morrison COVID-19 Briefing Australia April 16th, 2020
- 24-04-2020. PM Scott Morrison COVID-19 Briefing Australia April 24
- 15-06-2020. Australia PM Scott Morrison “State of the Nation 2020” June 15 Digital Forum

## *DENMARK*

Transcripts of speeches were retrieved from <https://www.stm.dk/statsministeren/taler/>

- 06-03-2020. Pressemøde den 6. Marts 2020
- 10-03-2020 Pressemøde om COVID-19 den 10. marts 2020
- 11-03-2020. Statsminister Mette Frederiksens indledning på pressemøde i Statsministeriet om corona-virus den 11. marts 2020



- 13-03-2020. Pressemøde den 13. marts 2020
- 15-03-2020. Pressemøde den 15. marts 2020
- 17-03-2020. Pressemøde den 17. marts 2020
- 12-05-2020. Pressemøde den 12. maj 2020
- 29-05-2020. Pressemøde den 29. maj 2020

### *BELGIUM*

Speeches were retrieved from

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcQRvqDvTY\\_b\\_aDOgE9IBbw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcQRvqDvTY_b_aDOgE9IBbw)

- 17-03-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 17 March 2020
- 27-03-2020. Conférence de presse suite au Conseil national de sécurité 27 March 2020
- 15-04-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 15 April 2020
- 24-04-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 24 April 2020
- 06-05-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 06 May 2020
- 13-05-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 13 May 2020

- 03-06-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 03 June 2020
- 24-06-2020. Persconferentie naar aanleiding van de Nationale Veiligheidsraad 24 June 2020

*SWEDEN*

Transcript of speech was retrieved from <https://www.thelocal.se/20200322/in-english-prime-minister-stefan-lfvens-address-to-the-nation/>

- 22-03-2020. In English: Prime Minister Stefan Löfven's address to the nation 22 mrt. 2020