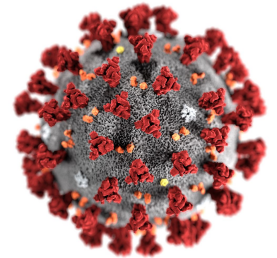# Containing Contagion: The Politicization of Pandemics Using IR Theory

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Introduction

- Since the 1970s, about 40 infectious diseases have been discovered and most recently, COVID-19.
- Significant gaps exist in global pandemic preparedness.
- Since China reported COVID-19 to the World Health Organization (WHO), political leadership and intergovernmental organization collaboration has been missing.

Research Question

To what extent are intergovernmental health agencies (IGOs) and political leadership collaboration effective in combating a pandemic?

Source: CNN

Source: CNN

Methodology

Hypothesis: *The greater the level of intergovernmental collaboration among health organizations and political leaders, the more likely a successful response to pandemics will be implemented.*

Proper Leadership and Coordination → Successful Response to Global Pandemic

Case Selection

- Compared the behavior of U.S. President Donald J. Trump (2016-Present) and New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (2017-Present) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Idea was to compare Trump and Arderns political leadership and IGO collaboration.
- Do the pandemic preparedness plans differ? Are they effective or not?

Research Design

To assess a successful response to COVID-19, Trump and Arderns leadership and coordination was looked through:

- **(IV) Quality of Leadership**
  - Rhetoric on IGOs and COVID-19
  - Proactive Pandemic Measures
- **(DV) Successful Response to Pandemics**
  - IGO Collaboration
  - Admiration for Crisis Management

Andrea Ucini

Source: The Economist

Literature Review

- Previous research notes three theories from International Relations (IR) as to why political leaders react differently to COVID-19 and IGO collaboration:
  - Realism
  - Liberalism
  - Constructivism

Source: UDaily

IR Theory

- **Realism**
  - During pandemics states should pursue their own self-interest and not use IGOs.
- **Liberalism**
  - Within pandemic planning *everything* is about international cooperation.
- **Constructivism**
  - Pandemic planning relies on gaining ideas from what working for other nations.
  - Stress on culture and identity of nations.

Data Discussion

Donald J. Trump

- Pandemic response led by realism.
- Looked at the W.H.O as incompetent → halted funding.
- Late response measures.
- Management strategies and misinformation have failed the public.

Jacinda Ardern

- Pandemic response led by constructivism.
- High collaboration with the W.H.O.
- Closely Followed Taiwan's model.
- Eliminated COVID-19 after 5 weeks of lockdown.

Analysis

Donald J. Trump

- Realist decisions were driven by personal interest and led to the spread of COVID-19.
  - Trump only cares about re-election, heavily criticized.
- Outcome: 1.54M cases and 90,694 deaths.

Jacinda Ardern

- Constructivist decisions were effective for eliminating COVID-19.
  - Ardern praised for curbing COVID-19 and being an empathetic leader.
- Outcome: 1,149 cases and 21 deaths.

Conclusion

- **IGO collaboration matters**
  - Leaders who followed W.H.O guidelines had positive and effective results
- **Political Leadership competency is important**
  - Trump lacked proper and effective leadership resulting in "Trump Lies People Die" protests.
  - Ardern exceeded expectations as a leader and set an example for other world leaders.
- **Both IGO and and political leadership are necessary in order to effectively combat a pandemic as depicted by Jacinda Ardern's constructivist measures.**