

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN TURKEY AND THE WORLD AT THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The coronavirus pandemic ensues a virus that is racking many people who are fighting to save their lives. Despite all efforts, the origin of the virus is still unknown, and the search for a vaccine is still in progress. The COVID-19 pandemic affected all countries' health care systems and caused unilaterally aligned politics. It represents a massive health crisis mediates for global political struggles. The virus has affected the economy negatively and has put global politics at risk. This unforeseen virus paralyzed the world through a butterfly effect. The COVID-19 has sparked many debates among experts, politicians, and governments that are trying to cope with a sense of lack of control. In terms of political psychology, all experts are discussing permanent interchangeability in the world during the post-pandemic period. This study investigates the effect of the COVID-19 virus in world politics and especially the psychological effect of the virus amidst politics in Turkey and abroad. While the first section is studying the COVID-19 nitty-gritty, the rest of the paper is discussing the cause of events epidemic and reasons the virus is up to paralyze the world. Additionally, the psychological effect of the virus in foreign policy and the events that took place after the virus is discussed by declaring the strides taken by politicians around the world.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Coronavirus, Politics, Psychology, Turkey,

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Coronavirus is consisting of a group of RNA viruses that cause a varied paratyphoid in humans and may all living creatures. It causes infection in the upper throat, nose, and sinus. The World Health Organization identified a new type of Coronavirus in early 2020 following an outbreak that first started in China in December 2019. The virus spreads from person-to-person, and it takes around 14 days to show deadly symptoms—like fever, coughing to loss of smell, or taste—in an infected person. The virus quickly spread around the world, and herewith, the World Health Organization declared the virus a global pandemic across multiple continents. The virus goes by the name of deadly because there is no confirmed cure, the vaccine, or balks at leading to pneumonia and respiratory failure, which results in mild or extreme cases.

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With millions of stricken cases and over many hundred thousand confirmed deaths, the virus has impacted the world socially, politically, psychologically, and economically. Many countries had to ground all means of transport to stop the spread of the virus. This is known as the incubation period, which is the time taken to catch the virus and having symptoms of the virus. Now, all eyes are on the steps that politicians plan to take for the good of their nation. The World Health Organization is assessing the ongoing researches on the spread of COVID-19, and while efforts are underway to develop pharmaceutical interventions for the virus, social and behavioral sciences can provide valuable insights for managing the pandemic and its impacts.

### **1. SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19**

While all countries are closing their borders, and governments are implementing lockdown procedures, the COVID-19 virus has psychologically impacted the millions around the world. The mass tacticity to digital platforms has resorted to folks to communicate online to share their fear, stress, and widespread concern. Gradually people became plagued, depressed, and anxious while many people have died in isolation in asunder. At the time rare recession-proof jobs finessed the situation, a majority of people lost their jobs, while they have been left with little to no means of supporting themselves and their families financially. One expert of economics predicts, “although the pandemic is expected to be under control worldwide in 18 to 24 months, in the worst-case scenario, the repercussions could last for years” (Lima, 2020).

The effect of the COVID-19 virus on mental health is affecting those who already have mental illness unfavorably. The virus has caused a raise in discrimination against the Asian minorities in Western countries. It is apparent that in order to control the virus, an alternative view to the social behavior against minorities is needed. People should get clued to a piece of accurate information in order to reduce panic and control the flow of fake news. However, Trump policy, such as calling the Coronavirus the “Chinese virus” repeatedly, with a racist manner through repeating, “It is not racist at all,” (Trump defends, 2020) causes racial discrimination against Eastern minorities in the U.S. and the West at large. Furthermore, “the impact of policies” must be revised “to manage the pandemic on unemployment and poverty, which plays a role in mental health problems” (Davis, 2020).

The pandemic has significantly impacted those who are struggling for life. The people who are in a tight corner, see no means of making an income while it impairs and drains them mentally. The pandemic has brought to light social inequalities in terms of access to resources. Those who are homeless cannot shelter in one place; besides, families that stay in places without access to clean water—they cannot access any natural sources in the purest form—even cannot wash their hands when people in poor health cannot apply to a hospital to seek treatment, for many people, the virus will indeed leave lasting consequences mentally, emotionally, economically, and politically.

## 2. PSYCHO-POLITICAL EFFECTS OF COVID-19

The virus has placed a strain on politics and politicians around the world. Here and now, fake news and conspiracy theories have flourished. Politicians like Trump downplayed the virus and wasted time until it crushed the health care systems. Trump stated that a majority of Americans would be able to go back to work by Easter (Liptak, Vazquez, Valencia, & Acosta, 2020) in April 2020; however, it was nothing of the kind. On the one hand, the Mexican President encouraged the Mexican people to eat out, and the Brazilian president compared the virus to cold in order to prevent panic. While on the other hand, the leader of South Korea and Germany dealt with the outbreak immediately and were honest with their grassroots about the steps that needed to be taken by common consent, apart from the fact that the virus is a dangerous threat, but the most significant threat is political leaders who made no account of scientific understanding.

Chinese authorities failed to acknowledge the outbreak of the virus. They downplayed the virus and withheld information about the outbreak that could have been vital in controlling the pandemic. The virus did not—and does not yet—fit into many leaders’ agendas. The policy of bid defiance by populist leaders is a testament to a pattern of behavior in which “[A] new political leader brings with him or her a new way of viewing the world. Anything that falls outside of that view tends to take a back seat to the leaders’ main concerns, regardless of how important that back-seat issue may prove to be” (Ward, 2020). It is a signal for the reason why many politicians failed to control the outbreak and deal with public sentiment.

Epidemiology<sup>3</sup> is not at the forefront of any political leader’s knowledge because they are not experts in that field. Populist leaders have no reason to deal with science, but only their political views. Although it takes time for symptoms of this virus to show up themselves, it is intolerable when politicians did not care whether the consequences could be dire or not. Psychologically, leaders failed to familiarize themselves with the virus, unlike leaders of South Korea and Saudi Arabia, who remembered and dealt with the SARS and the MERS epidemic. They took immediate action against the COVID-19 to combat its spread.

The quick response taken by the leaders of South Korea and Saudi Arabia increased their popularity, and their people instilled hope and trust in their leaders. As a result of South Korea’s quick response during the pandemic, South Korea became the first country to hold an election during the pandemic, while “the decisive legislative victory provides Moon with a political boost during the remaining two years of his term and enhances the likelihood that Moon’s Democratic Party will retain political power in 2022” (Snyder, 2020). Apart from Moon-Jae and his administration’s quick response to the virus, the president had to make a referendum on crisis management.

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<sup>3</sup> Branch of medicine which deals with the incidence, distribution and possible control of diseases and other factors relating to health.

Unlike South Korea, other countries had delayed giving reaction to the pandemic, and in countries “like Iran and Turkey, inadequate, delayed, and fragmented responses have resulted in their becoming epicenters of the spread of the virus” (Solomon, 2020). Because of the delayed response of leaders to the pandemic, people were endangered. However, some leaders who realized the Coronavirus as a “threat,” “saved” their nation’s lives (Ward, 2020). Many people died because of the delay in taking precautions to the virus or take advantage of health care service due to fear of retribution. The response of the leaders to the virus impacts the way the particular nation reacts to the virus—based on methods of getting a grip on the situation.

The impact of COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa took a sore turn. Before the pandemic, many Middle Eastern and African countries were already suffering from poverty, war, starvation, and diseases, and with this, “war-ravaged Libya and Yemen, meanwhile, have no capacity to control the virus” (Solomon, 2020). Because of the rudimentary infrastructure, these countries cannot shape the facilities to isolate and entreating the people who are affected by the virus. However, response to the virus in Africa is diversified from country to country, while the deficiency of forestall to social isolation in some countries is also unfeasible because they are stricken by poverty and war.

In Africa, reactions to the virus leap out more than any other continent. While Ethiopia postponed the August votes, Guinea went ahead with a disputed referendum with the highest rank of participation. On the other side of the continent in Malawi, no later than infections had been recorded while President Mutharika closed down schools and banned public gatherings and put a stop on elections. Although it seems that he took a resolution to protect his people and the health care system, but experts believe that the Malawian president placed the country under lockdown to fulfill his agenda; “Experts now believe it could be a matter of time before the poll, scheduled for July 2, is delayed and Mutharika buys himself more time in office” (Mohamed, 2020).

Leaders turn the crisis into an opportunity while they take advantage of the pandemic to extend their political agenda, no matter they harm their countries or infest their people. The virus has impacted elections, not only in Africa but also all around the globe. In contrast “at least fifty-six (56) countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone national and subnational elections due to COVID-19, out of which at least eighteen (18) countries and territories have decided to postpone national elections and referendums;” (Special reports, 2020). In the U.S., experts have weighed that President Trump may be taking advantage of the pandemic to further his political agendas while “he continues to be irresponsibly unresponsive to the crises caused by COVID-19. One reason may be that, however inadvertently, the arrival of the pandemic has helped green-light plans and projects he’s held dear to his heart and that had, before the crisis, repeatedly encountered opposition” (Greenberg, 2020).

When a considerable change takes over, relational patterns go through a tremendous amount of change. Politically the pandemic has affected the world and the views of the people who took their leaders at their word; “The coronavirus pandemic marks the end of our romance with market society and hyper-individualism. We could turn toward authoritarianism” (Klinenberg, 2020). The uneasiness, after the results brought by the epidemics, also caused world leaders to suffer from acrophobia of losing the game. While other countries are deciding on a safe way to hold elections, South Korea managed to hold a safe election for voters; “Over the long term, as election officials grapple with how to allow for safe voting in the midst of a pandemic, the adoption of more advanced technology-including secure, transparent, cost-effective voting from our mobile devices-is more likely” (Brotherton, 2020).

Focusing on the impacts of withholding elections, politicians paid less attention to the vaccine and the healthcare systems. The emerging developments demonstrated that “the COVID-19 pandemic has also intensified the focus on healthcare policy outside the U.S., particularly as governments face increasing fiscal constraints on their ability to provide such benefit” (Dauba-Pantanacce, 2020). Countries like Italy and Spain—at the epicenter of the virus—experienced many grueling moments with their health care system. The Coronavirus has ripped open the fragile healthcare systems and the responses of medical personnel during the pandemic.

The exposure which is caused by the pandemic social problems, saliently propounded by changing the political world—depending on how politicians deal with the virus. Now, majority of leaders are discussing the post-COVID period and how it would be different; “The possibility of the E.U.’s three largest economies (Germany, France, and Italy) shifting toward authoritarian-nationalist politics, and upending the liberal settlement of the world’s biggest economic block, means the political fall-out from COVID-19 could influence events around the world for decades to come” (Martin, 2020). While politicians, globally, faced problems head on, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, succeeded in leading her people with perfect stride. Merkel was a scientist until she gave up the scientific career to pursue a political map, and decades later, she managed to lead the country without stress her nation out; as Miller says, “Without initiating or succumbing to a pandemic of the mind, one politician is less a commander in Chief and more a scientist in Chief: Angela Merkel” (Miller, 2020).

Merkel’s scientific background allowed the German people to place their trust in her. Her political experience, paired with her scientific knowledge, is paying off politically and scientifically for the chancellor. She used her science background to explain the Coronavirus, as well as the lockdown strategy. Before the pandemic, Merkel had many critics who did not appreciate the way she handled things for the German people; “[I]n the middle of the coronavirus crisis, even her critics have come to appreciate a politician who is on safer ground explaining the importance of decimal places than projecting great visions of the future” (Oltermann, 2020). Unlike other politicians who stuck to their political agendas, the chancellor followed a different route in which she stood at the forefront of the pandemic and dealt with the issue at hand.

Instead of finding a cure and vaccine for COVID-19, it seems the race for the virus has switched from science to politics. According to Nuki (2020), “the race is with the virus but ‘vaccine nationalism’ threatens the drive for international agreement and cooperation.” The stakes to finding a vaccine have become higher, while more people are dying and getting infected every day. National wealth and millions of lives—among the many things—are at risk, aside from geopolitical power and status for many different countries. The inadequate healthcare systems of many countries have become exposed. As a result of international politics, producing the vaccine has proven to be a challenge.

The virus has exposed the greed of politicians, while the president of the United States had cut the World Health Organization research funds; “President Trump announced he was suspending U.S. funding for the World Health Organization which helps coordinate the “Flu-Network” and other initiatives, including vaccine research for the novel coronavirus” (Farell, 2020). Funds cut from health care systems are placed into creating weapons and war machines. The pandemic has exposed it to be futile. While scientists are collaborating with institutions, government systems keep showing little signs of working together. Various governments are announced that they gave their all to speed up their research, or they are decided on the terms of worldwide allocation of vaccines; however, they gained no favor.

### **3. THE POST-COVID PERIOD**

Some experts in economics claim that the unemployment percentage has now exceeded the decimal numeral in many countries. In the U.S., for all that global economic force, every four-person lost their jobs. The future of Europe and China, as well as the U.S. elections’ results, sets the new era’s state of affairs. From the international perspective, influential policymakers predict that the COVID-19 will cause a world war. The current crisis and its aftermath will be the beginning of the developments in the political economy and the change of the global blockade. To how extent the current situation will continue is unknown. Will the epidemic cause severe, but short-term disruption, or will it create long-term economic and political crises in the economic structure of all countries is in the spots.

The Chinese and American governments downplayed the effect and spread of the virus—leaving behind lasting consequences for many countries. As a result of the pandemic, political polarization may feasibly take place in two aspects: On the one hand, attitudinal polarization, which concerns the partaking of extreme opposing issues, is presumptive. On the other hand, active polarization—the disliking and distrusting of those from opposing parties—is estimated. The consequences are stemming from believing false information and lack of trust. An effect of polarization is that it may lead to people who are coming to a different conclusion. As Bavel & others (2020) educe from Haslam & others, “A large body of research suggests that people tend to prefer leaders who cultivate a sense that ‘we are all in this together’” (Haslam, 2011).

Although in international relations, only realist policies are beyond the pale, these days, idealist ideas no longer seem to be very symbolic when the countries struggle for restoration to review their foreign diplomacy. The economic situation of the twenty-first century, globally, should cover a distance to get utility through international policies. The United States and capitalism, in the aggregate, are failed miserably to handle the epidemic, and the world of capitalism is unable to cope. The devaluation of stocks and the disruption of trade balances have generally brought about new attitudes to be adopted in powerful countries. The recession in the current year will take effects in 2021. Financial experts have a hunch that the result will be more severe than the global financial crisis of 2008 and 2009.

In the current world economy, the main focus is on diplomacy. The G20 countries and their political-economic games display the implementation of diplomacy in the economic blockade. Europe, China, and the United States are more affected by the COVID-19 epidemic than any other enterers, such as India and Brazil. In the economic wonkiness caused by the epidemic, instead of the national military defense capacities, the national, regional, and global mobilization is to counter the epidemic and protect humanity and the world monetary-financial balance. The COVID-19 epidemic negatively affected the power structure by pacifying significant sectors, including production, distribution, and services, by severe changes in the realm of globalization. In the post-COVID period, the few parameters in the globalization phenomenon will take a decisive role in balancing world power. Maybe China will be a significant economic power after the post-crisis era; however, all bets are off.

After World War II, the European Union (E.U.) has benefited from wartime crisis at the utmost while policies have been tantamount to tackling the effects of the predicted new, “Great Depression.” Competitive wars in various fields by E.U. is a cliché to secure the interests of the European Union. France, Germany, and the whole E.U. today are embroiled in the epidemic crisis while the dismissal of people from their jobs, the economic downturn, and rising unemployment have raised a question mark in the minds of European leaders while the E.U. is incapable of controlling and cutting their losses.

Political crises after the epidemic will end with an irreparable damage related to the loss of exports that gives rise to the predictable reduction in revenues and the national budget of countries. Unemployment and the disruption of the employment chain in countries like Turkey—in which it depends on tourism—will cause historical economic turmoil; consequently, they will lose their position in global markets. The high spot in Turkey’s economic situation is dependent on revenues from tourism services, real estate, and exports that are stagnated, due to the occasional quarantines after the global epidemic.

#### 4. PSYCHO-POLITICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN TURKEY

In Turkey, the spread of the new virus concluded with a displacement of Syrian refugees; “The onset of the coronavirus pandemic has forced Turkey to recalibrate its usual approach to displaced persons and how it takes advantage of circumstances in Syria” (Erdemir, 2020). Although the epidemic was overshadowed initially, amidst the pandemic, articles have recorded that Turkey released murderers from prison while they criticized the government did not release their political opponents; “tens of thousands of academics, journalists, politicians, civil servants” (Kuru, 2020). Some media members are testing the idea that in the twenty-first century, where free speech should be practiced, the Turkish government would instead allow gangs to roam the streets and make power plays while critical thinkers are banned.

Initially, the Turkish government made the country more resilient to the virus and distributed eau de cologne as a disinfectant to the virus. Then, the Turkish Health Minister announced that the virus infects the low number of people. On March 9, 2020, the Daily Sabah issued Dr. Fahrettin Koca, Minister of Health’s issues, when he announced that there was no case of Coronavirus in Turkey, and Turkey should be a model for the world in dealing with the deadly virus. He states about “laggardness of [Turkey’s] neighbors” (IHA, 2020) in the fight against the virus, coinciding with the sending some medical equipment to some countries to fight the Coronavirus promised hope in Turkish society.

Comparing the death toll from the Coronavirus with Europe, Turkey cited its resource as a success, then. However, it is not clear why Turkey has become the epicenter of the COVID-19 virus in the zone while taken precautions, made the sorry show for the people. When Iranian government—after political sanctions by the U.S.—set its people at naught, the main reason that caused Turkey to pass Iran in the number of COVID-19 cases—in the World Health Organization coronavirus disease dashboard—is unknown.

Dr. Güle Çınar, an infectious diseases specialist from Ankara University’s Ibni Sina Hospital, expressed that “the ones who returned to Turkey from umrah (an Islamic pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia) changed the course of the outbreak.” (BIA, 2020) She hoped that Turkey would not become second Italy, and the prevalence of the COVID-19 is much higher than the figures shared by the government. Her remarks were secretly recorded by one of the attendees and posted on social media. Gradually, her denial of the allegations, as well as the assurances of the Turkish Health Minister, were useless. Later, the government’s statistics provoked distrust in the country, and the public criticism has been spread on social media sources.

Government officials are now in the midst of the outbreak of the disease have to tinker with the current health crisis, while lifting of restrictions is the only way to save the economy. President Erdoğan, whose national currency has depreciated sharply in recent days, has called for immediate action to speed up the economy, and thereby, the Turkish government cannot help but straighten out Turkey’s economy.



Correspondingly, Minister of Trade, Ruhsar Pekcan, announced that the Agricultural Machinery Exhibition, in collaboration with Selçuk University in Konya, will be held online. For the first time, a virtual exhibition brought facilities for participants in the virtual exhibition, such as online, face-to-face seminars and meetings to sign a contract.

Over and above, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism calls for the reopening of hotels in the summer—as a significant priority—in reviving the tourism industry. A unique health certificate—a codified precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19—is required for restaurants, transportation services, and other tourism services. According to the protocol set for hotels and accommodation centers, the presence of a qualified person is required to monitor the implementation of health measures for passengers and employees. The plan is being implemented while Turkey is at the forefront of countries infected with the virus.

The Turkish currency has about 20 percent of its value in the first half of 2020. In 2019, the Turkish lira lost 40 percent of its value against the dollar, primarily due to escalating political tensions with the United States in 2018. For the past five years, the Turkish lira has always been declining. In 2015, each U.S. dollar was worth 2.5 Turkish lira—although in 2006, each U.S. dollar was worth 1.34 Turkish lira—and since then, the value of the lira has depreciated. The devaluation of the Turkish lira is again coming to the fore, although Minister of Finance and Treasury, Berat Albayrak, announced that the country's currency is at the right level and Turkey is among the top 20 countries economically. (Bakan Albayrak, 2020)

Political developments after the epidemic that depends more on the dire economic situation in Turkey will define the political agents' position in the future of Turkey by and large. President Erdoğan's political stance depends more on the number of unemployed youth and economic growth than on his party's foreign policy. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in the world, the Turkish media—which is almost in favor of the central government—has taken action against the government in the face of this epidemic. Confident attitude of leaders within this framework was resonant. President Erdoğan donated his salary national struggle against viruses, footballers, singers, and other celebrities gave countenance to the project.

Turkey's washout in controlling the Coronavirus had become increasingly apparent since April 10, 2020, when the government imposed some restrictions on social activities, only on weekends. Immediately after nettlesome caused by playing things by ear, the minister of the Internal Affairs, Süleyman Soylu, announced his resignation to the president, but President Erdoğan refused to accept it. The economic crisis after the Coronavirus epidemic was an opportunity for to opposition of the government to build up opposition block against governmental policies. The Turkish lira recently hit its lowest rate against the U.S. dollar. If the pandemic period does not last in summer 2020, and organizations and institutions continue to be shut down, some sectors cannot get through taxes and unexpected expenses. The laid damages will be further than several hundred billion liras, and Turkish political maneuvering cannot stagnate in the air.

One critical problem in Istanbul and Ankara is the severe political disagreement between the mayor and the government. Mansur Yavaş, the mayor of Ankara, and Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of Istanbul, summoned the public to donate cash to support low-income families, but the government evaluated it as an illegal try to structure a parallel government. Apart from internal conflict between the government and the opposition, Ali Babacan, the former Minister of State and also Foreign Affairs in president Erdoğan's party and the founding leader of the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) has shared the results of a poll in Ankara and Istanbul with the media. He announced that half of the supporters of the leading party are dissatisfied with their party's current performance, and intend to support another political party. Besides, Ahmet Davutoğlu—the former prime minister of Turkey and a leader of the dominated party in Turkey from 2014 to 2016—founded the Future Party as opposition against President Erdoğan's party, which he already earned reputation.

The epidemic has been partially disarmed Turkey in eastern Syria, Iraq, Qatar, and Libya. Airstrikes in Iraq and helping refugees to leave the country and enter Greece and military operations in northern Syria obliged Turkey to go through the changes in foreign policy after the epidemic. Besides, the officials of the Ministry of National Defense in Turkey have announced that the installation of the S400 missile defense system has been postponed, due to epidemic, while U.S. officials have announced that the non-installation of the S400 in Turkey has nothing to do with the virus, but an agreement is underway.

Turkish COVID-19 numbers have surpassed a hundred thousand, while at the moment, Turkey is researching to develop and vaccine and a successful method of treatment. Although with the epidemic, young people and senior citizens are afraid, and thus, they comply with the restrictions. The country is under lockdown while the pandemic hampers the Turkish economy even more, and as a result, the economy risks a second recession. Many studies estimated that in order to limit damage to the economy, Turkey had to impose and nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of the virus. The lockdown has to get equal protection with politics to save the economy. The COVID-19 has exposed the political fallout and tensions with the supreme political party. It is a time for politicians to either shine or get eaten up by the public.

## CONCLUSION

The unpredictable problems came out of the left-field after the epidemic made heavy weather of circumstance for governments to take significant steps to alleviate the economy. The outbreak of the COVID-19 aggravates the problem of the social state of health, as well as the global economic crisis. Governmental attempts to minimize this turmoil to provide financial resilience is bounded by the individual-social austerity program—for a few months. Flagrantly in the medium to long term, the pressures of financial and monetary inefficiency will be compounded by trade and recession. The pandemic has tested the world, and given the number of cases recorded, it will leave behind many lasting effects. Psychologically and politically, the virus has paralyzed the world, and it has tested the health care systems of many countries, and Turkey, as it is specified.

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