

DEMOCRACY AND PANDEMIC



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Erosion of trust: science and populism in the post - truth era

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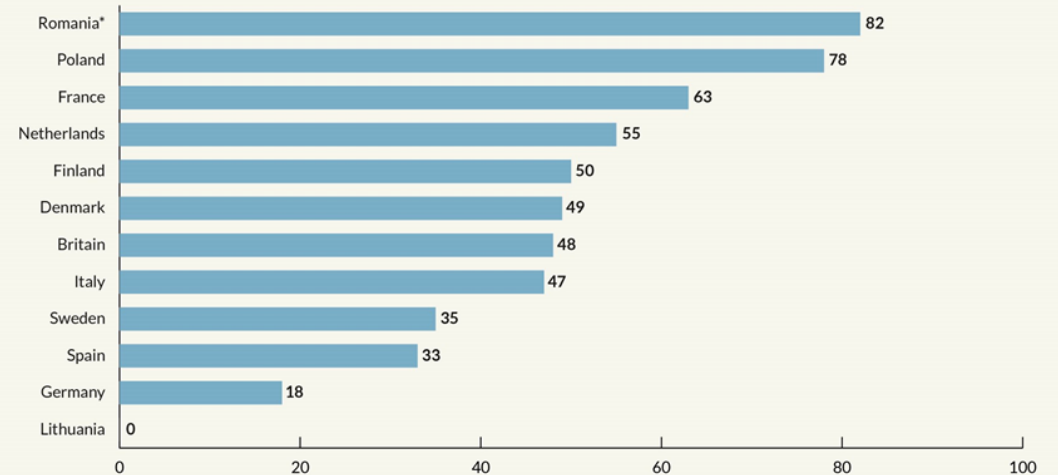
Populism

- Political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want
(<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/populism>)
- Populism is a “thin ideology”, one that merely sets up a framework: that of a pure people versus a corrupt elite.

(Cas Mudde, University of Georgia, 2004)

FIGURE 1: Authoritarian populism (AP) across Europe

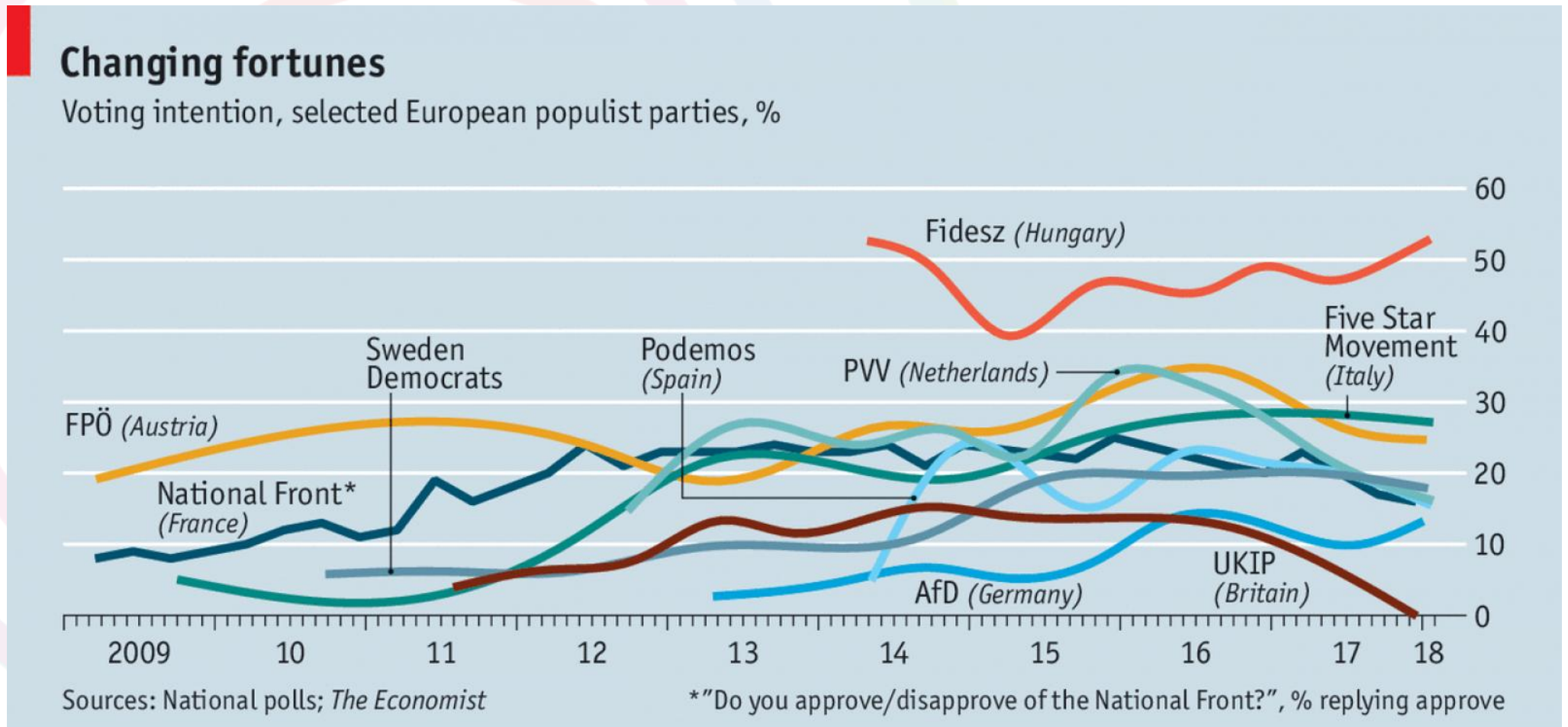
% of voters with AP views



* all AP groups in Romania are pro-EU

Source: yougov.com, October 2016

Populist parties in the EU



Post-truth

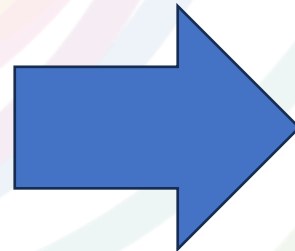
(Adj) Relating to or denoting circumstances in which **objective facts are less influential** in shaping public opinion than appeals to **emotion and personal belief**

Source: English Oxford living dictionaries




Science in the populist and post-truth landscape

- Populism provides a framework for polarization between «**the pure and the corrupt**» and post-truth provides information that is governed by the **influence of emotions** rather than facts.
- Devalue competence



proportion of
public opinion



1. Uncertainties
about the origin

Smallpox lab leak in UK, 1977



Influenza in the last 100 years

1917-18 Spanish Flu H1N1

1957 Asian Flu H2N2

1968 Hong Kong Flu H3N2

1977 Russian Flu*H1N1

2009 Swine Flu H1N1**



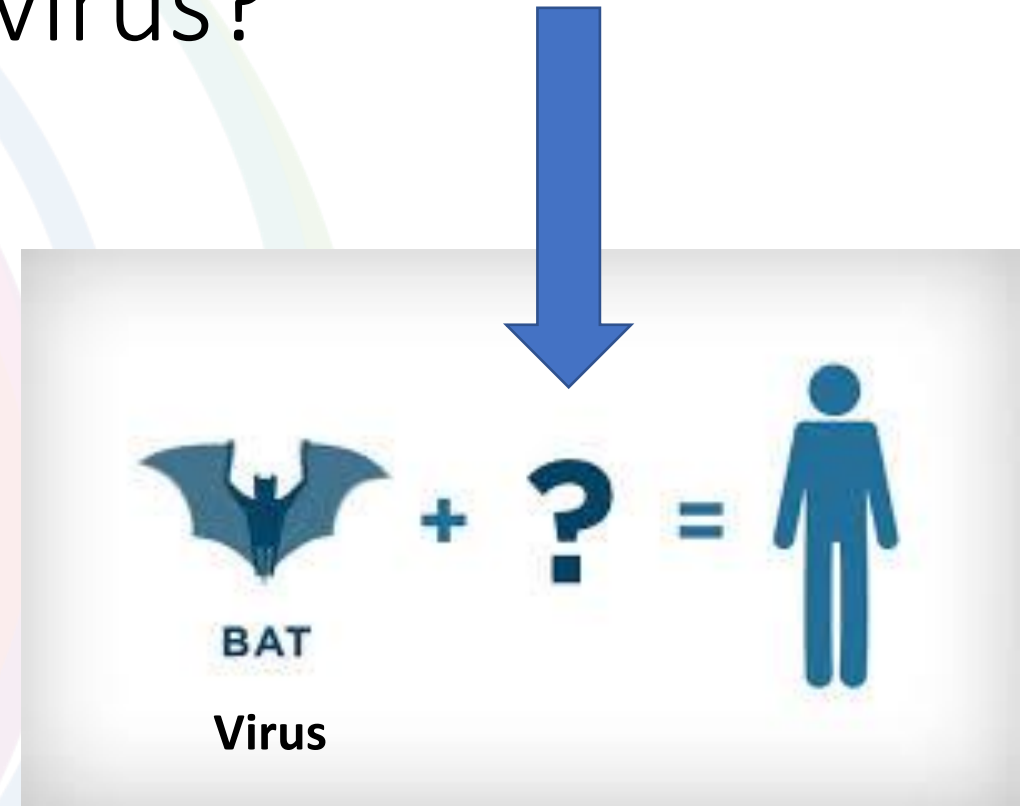
H1N1 1977 Russian flu is believed to be a lab leak
(unintentional release of vaccine candidate)



Source : The Times

Natural or manipulated virus?

We still do not know with certainty whether Sars CoV2 is a natural or a laboratory manipulated virus.



Natural virus

Laboratory manipulated

[nature](#) > [news](#) > article

NEWS | 14 February 2023

WHO abandons plans for crucial second phase of COVID-origins investigation

Sensitive studies in China were intended to pinpoint the source of the pandemic virus.

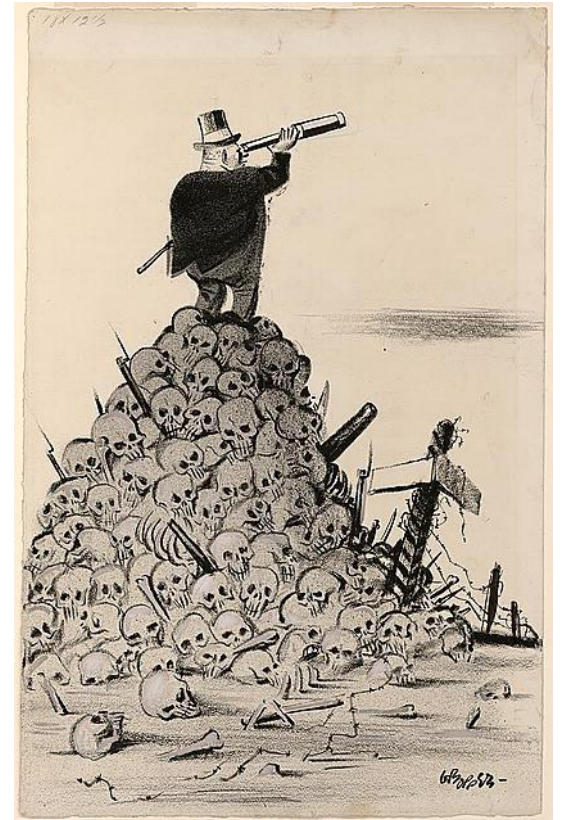
[Smriti Mallapaty](#)



«Important to prevent future outbreaks»

The World Health Organization (WHO) has quietly shelved the second phase of its much-anticipated scientific investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, citing ongoing challenges over attempts to conduct crucial studies in China, *Nature* has learned.

Researchers say they are disappointed that the investigation isn't going ahead, because understanding how the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 first infected people is important for preventing future outbreaks. But without access to China, there is little that the WHO can do to advance the studies, says Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Canada. "Their hands are really tied."



Techniques of Science Denial



F
Fake
Experts



L
Logical
Fallacies



I
Impossible
Expectations



C
Cherry
Picking



C
Conspiracy
Theories

2. Denialism

Denialism: what is it and how should scientists respond?

Pascal Diethelm, Martin McKee

European Journal of Public Health, Volume 19, Issue 1, January 2009, Pages 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckn139>



Institutional science-denial causes

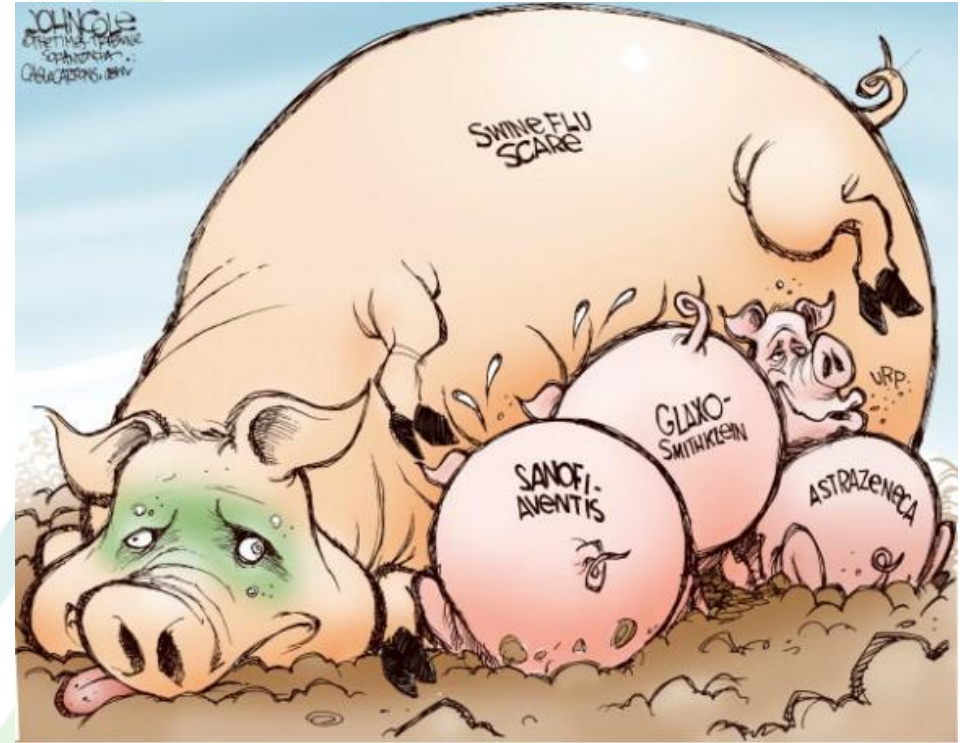
- Polarization of beliefs
- Loss of institutional trust
- Development of conspiracy theories
- Failure of management strategies

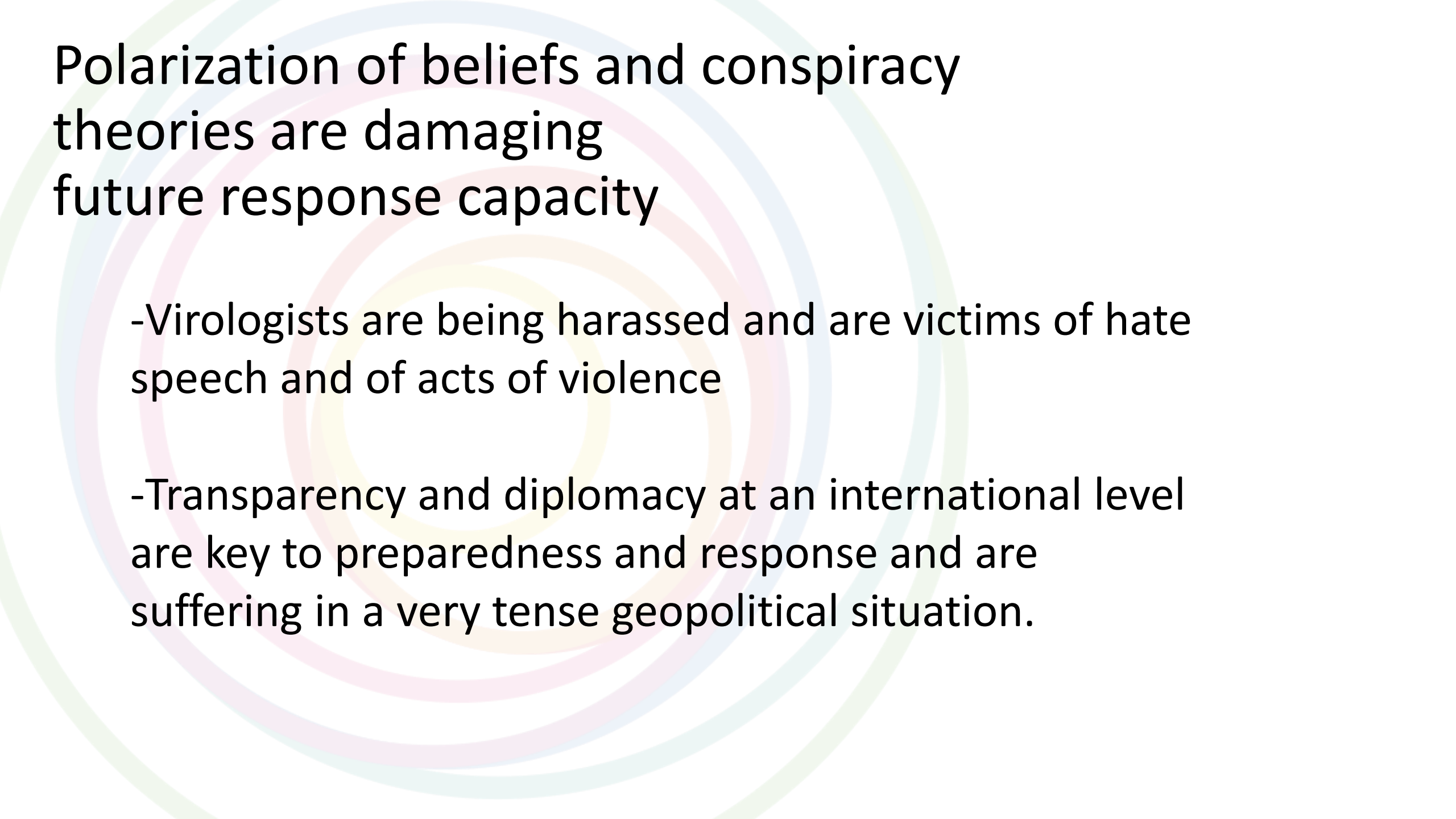


“Coronavirus response chief Dr Deborah Birx looks stunned as President Trump suggests injecting disinfectant”

Source: The Independent Apr 24, 2020

Swine Flu H1N1 2009 from denial to conspiracy



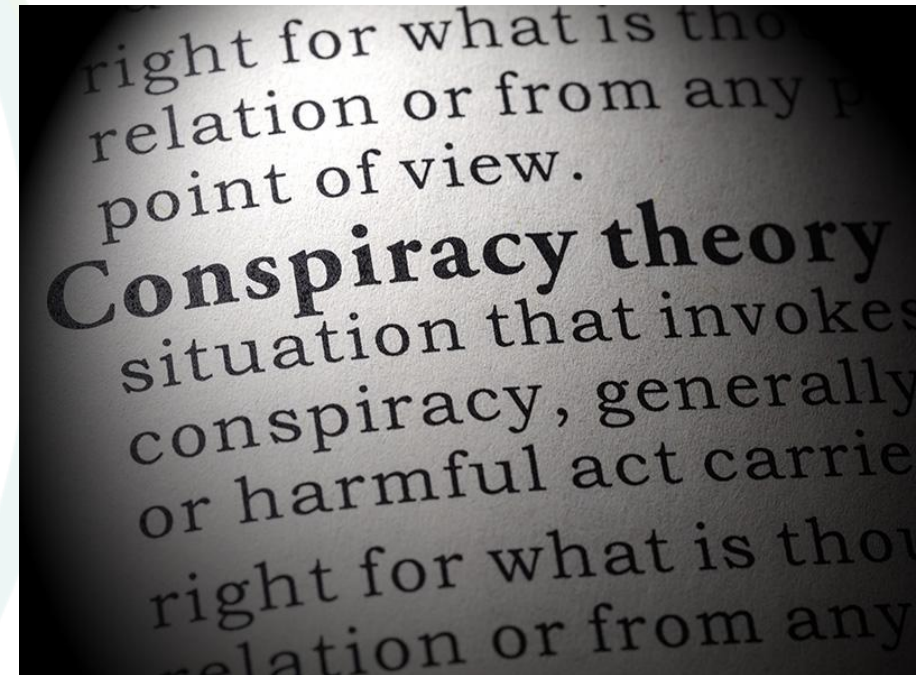


Polarization of beliefs and conspiracy theories are damaging future response capacity

- Virologists are being harassed and are victims of hate speech and of acts of violence
- Transparency and diplomacy at an international level are key to preparedness and response and are suffering in a very tense geopolitical situation.

Pessimistic slide

Loss of institutional trust and of confidence in science is widespread, and is certainly a MAJOR driver within the space of management of health crises.



Optimistic slide

We need to train **new generations of professionals** who acquire **interdisciplinary knowledge** to address **complex situations** related to pandemic preparedness and response who must be empowered to lead **innovative policy making activities.**



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