

From an Epidemic of Fear to an Epidemic of Explanations



During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have moved through different phases as they battle this crisis. In the beginning, there was an epidemic of fear. People were worried and scared about this unknown virus and its incredibly high level of contagiousness. After that, when governments imposed lockdowns and restrictions, this fear quickly switched to an epidemic of explanations.

Around the globe, people began to look for someone to blame. The most obvious target was the government. The public strongly believed that it was the government that was the culprit and who let the virus spread the way it did. When you think of it, governments become the obvious go-to blame entity because they are in a position of power, have authority and have the means and the right to impose protective measures.

Researchers at the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Polish Academy of Sciences were still curious why it was so easy for people to blame the government. Was it because of different political views? Or was it a more emotional reaction? Was it induced by sociocultural factors?

To explore this question, a study was conducted in Poland - a country that is politically divided between Liberalism and Communitarianism. 850 Polish adults were included in the study published in the *Social Psychological Bulletin*.

Their findings show, as expected, that it was the government and the system that most participants believed was responsible for the high incidence rate of COVID-19. In addition, findings showed that political views and party preferences also played an important role in the participants' responses. In fact, political affiliation was a bigger influencer than stress, anxiety, depression, and participants' overall wellbeing. Another interesting finding was that the more educated the respondent, the more likely were they to blame and emphasise governmental role and responsibility.

Researchers propose several theories to explain these findings, including the Terror Management Theory, which relies on highlighting existential threats and increased need for protection and the Theory of Attribution and Social Roles, which is based on the belief that the government has a duty to provide adequate protection against an epidemic.

Overall, the researchers conclude that observing, criticising and blaming the government during such situations is a general phenomenon. Most people end up blaming external causes rather than investigate in-depth whether there is more to the story or not.

Source: [Social Psychological Bulletin](#)

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