



Le Monde



Coronavirus:

A Survey of French Media Coverage



L'OBS

"Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world, yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history, yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise."

"They fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences."

Albert Camus, *The Plague*, 1947

French Context - Pre-Coronavirus

- Retirement Reforms
- Budget Cuts in Health Sector
- Upcoming Municipal Elections
- Political Polarization
- Racial Tension
- Yellow Vest Movement
- Distrust of Mainstream Media
- Debate Over European Union



Photo: AFP

Coronavirus in France – at a Glance

- Fourth most infected country in the world (behind the US, Italy and Spain)
 - As of April 14: approximately 98,000 cases, 15,000 deaths
- First case January 24 – linked to China
- Epicenter in Alsace (East Region) – linked to a religious gathering (2500+ people) in mid February
- Paris Region and the East Region by far most impacted by the virus
- Strict quarantine remains in effect until at least May 11
 - Signed documentation needed to go outside for healthcare or essential services
 - No jogging or exercise during daytime hours
- Hospitals overwhelmed in affected areas, reconfigured trains transport patients from hot zones to less-affected areas.

Coronavirus in France – at a Glance

- President Macron
 - Four presidential speeches since early March, up to 30 minutes each, very formal, somber
 - War metaphor: “état de guerre”
 - Mask and test controversy
 - Recently laid out plan for gradual opening of society and economy starting May 11, starting with schools (excluding universities) and certain businesses.
- Approval rating
 - Pre-coronavirus (December 2019): 29% (according to Ipsos)
 - On March 20, 2020 went up to 44% (according to Ipsos)
 - As crisis takes hold, these gains seem to be eroding

(1) Key Storylines

- Masks and Tests

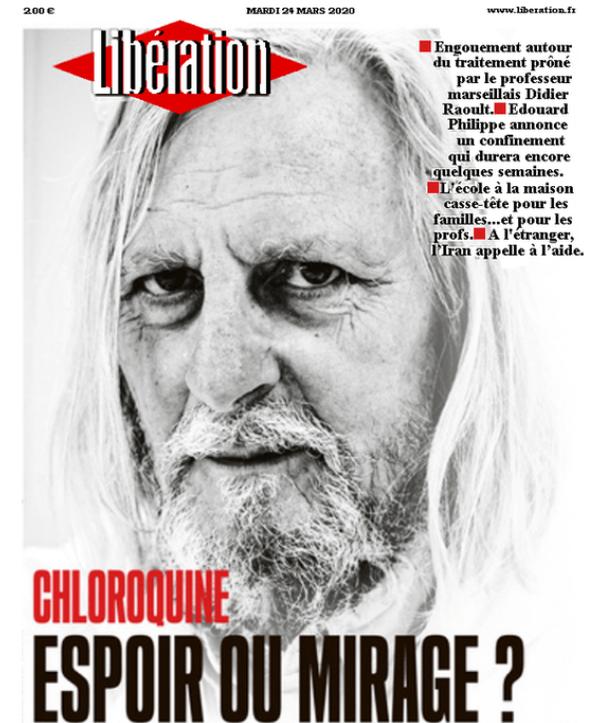
- When the crisis broke out in France, the country had limited surgical masks and no N95 mask supplies. ([Liberation](#))
- Contradictory messaging around the need to wear masks by the general public. ([BFMTV](#))

- Healthcare Reforms

- Impact of liberal healthcare reforms over the past decade and a half on public hospitals.
 - [Les Inrocks](#)
 - [Nouvel Obs](#)
 - [L'Humanite](#)

(2) Key Storylines

- Dr. Raoult
 - Doctor advocating for hydroxychloroquine, at the center of global treatment debate ([BFMTV](#))
 - From Marseille
 - Paris/provincial divide ([La Provence](#))
 - Cult figure: memes, signs in the streets
 - Lightning rod for conspiracy theories. ([Le Monde](#))
 - “Yellow Vest Doctor” ([Europe1](#))



(3) Key Storylines

- ‘Les Banlieues’ – Poor, Largely Immigrant French Suburbs
 - Fewer stories on impact on these vulnerable communities.
 - Focus on gangs, drugs and violence ([Le Point](#), [Europe1](#), [20 Minutes](#))
 - “Is the quarantine enforced in the ‘banlieues’?” ([Le Parisien](#), [Valeurs Actuelles](#))
- The War Metaphor
 - More analysis and commentary on significance of the President’s war metaphor: “We are at war.”
 - If we are in ‘war’ where is recognition of front-line workers? ([Médiapart](#))
 - “Turned blind eye to actual wars”
 - “Irresponsible and dangerous” ([Marianne](#))
 - Parallels to previous conflicts ([Médiapart](#))

Examples of International Coverage

- USA (high level of coverage)
 - High infection numbers and fatalities
 - The Trump Show
 - Poor healthcare coverage ([LCI](#))
 - Celebrities getting tested ([RFI](#))
 - Impact on populations of color ([Nouvelle Obs](#))
- Algeria (lower level of coverage)
 - Algeria was French colony until 1962 and has third-most infections and fatalities in Africa, yet the coverage is relatively little, considering proximity and strong history between two countries and large Algerian immigrant population
 - Recent protest movement, Hirak ([France Info](#))
 - A look at Oran, the town featured in Camus' *The Plague* ([Le Point](#))

Questions

- How do you view the war metaphor?
- What does coverage of (sensationalist) Dr. Raoult say about media coverage of the virus?
- What is the significance of the difference between coverage of Algeria and the US?
- How do you view volatility in Macron's approval in comparison to Trump's relatively steady poll numbers?
- What parallels/differences do you see with US coverage of the Coronavirus?