



ONE COUNTRY

“COVID-19”

**Snapshot of Online and Social Media Analysis in Rural
Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire,
Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin**

May 17 – 24, 2020

Rural Citizens



76,000 original posts



27,000 unique authors

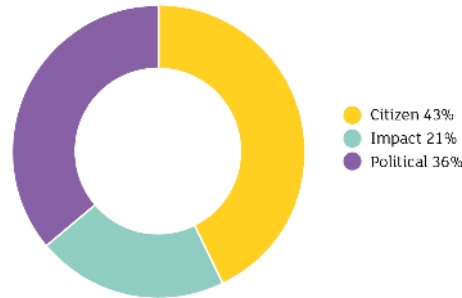
Overview

State by state comparisons are leading some to question if the crisis could have been handled more effectively in their region. To make matters worse, contradictory conclusions as to the rate of infection and death are making these questions even harder to answer.

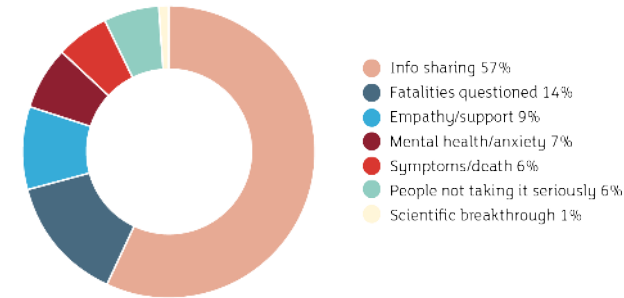
These figures are accompanied by conflicting advice from so-called experts on a vast number of topics related to COVID-19, which is creating annoyance and confusion. It seems the longer the crisis goes on, the less definitive advice becomes available.

President Trump continues to be blamed directly for the crisis. However, many on the right are fighting back, blaming Democratic governors for their eagerness to move into lockdown and the disproportionate number of people who have died in nursing homes. In addition, a sizable proportion of Trump's base come to his defense.

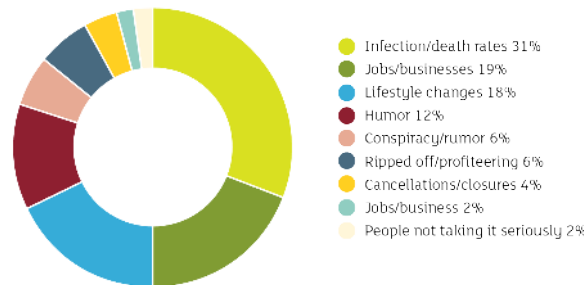
DISCUSSION SPLIT



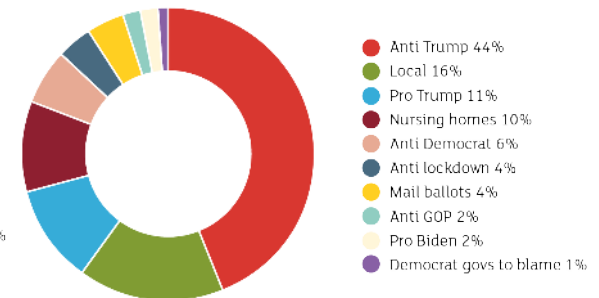
CITIZEN DISCUSSION



IMPACT DISCUSSION



POLITICAL DISCUSSION



Analysis: Key Takeaways

Citizen Discussion

- People are understandably annoyed that mainstream and social media is awash with conflicting advice from so-called experts.
- Using facemasks as an example, one set of people will inform another that Dr. Fauci said “masks are practically useless” while another group shares detailed information as to the effectiveness of a surgical mask compared to cloth. Similarly, some will share information on the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine, while others exchange evidence as to its harm. These are just two examples of the misinformation and confusion that are spreading widely online due a failure of the authorities to send out clear messaging and information.
- The conversation relating to the number of fatalities is evolving. People still question the totals, with some suggesting they have been exaggerated for political purposes while others are adamant they have been undercounted for the same reason. Yet for some, this argument is academic. They suggest that even at 100,000 deaths, the numbers are so low in comparison to the population that the shutdown should never have happened. These people don’t see themselves as heartless, but pragmatic. They are trying to put the total death count into perspective and weigh it against the overall cost of shutting down the economy.
- The accumulation of lockdown, COVID-19, job losses and – for Michigan – the floods is clearly too much for some rural residents who are reaching out.
- People who have been impacted by the virus are showing anger towards those who continue to flaunt the regulations.



Analysis: Key Takeaways

Impact Discussion

- Alongside the normal state by state comparisons, people also look towards the broader trends and question how the crisis might have been handled differently. This is on the back of studies being released which suggest tens of thousands of lives may have been saved had stay-at-home policies been introduced earlier.
- This situation is made worse by contradictory studies into infection rates and death forecasts which fuel confusion and irritation.
- Two months in and the pressure has increased on those impacted economically by the disease with many realizing that their job is dependent on the viability of other sectors.
- Others are embracing some of the positives brought on by stay-at-home policies such as more time to exercise, vowing to continue when their state reopens.
- Meanwhile, as new conspiracy theories are created, old ones such as 5G technology being to blame refuse to disappear.
- Rural citizens go online to warn one another about scammers who are looking to take advantage of the crisis and rip people off.



Analysis: Key Takeaways

Political Discussion

- As the death toll rises towards 100,000, there is no escaping the strong accusation online that Trump delayed taking action (and instead played golf) to lessen the spread of the disease – a view backed up by recent studies.
- In addition, Trump's attempt to blame his predecessor for the United States' unpreparedness has encouraged a fresh wave of criticism.
- Yet those on the right continue to fight back, attacking Democratic governors for their handling of the disease. Around 80% of the 'local' posts are of people accusing the left of mishandling the crisis by imposing and prolonging the lockdowns. In particular, Governors Tom Wolfe and Gretchen Whitmer are subjected to heavy criticism.
- These attacks are further intensified due to the number of COVID-19 related deaths in nursing homes, where blame is being firmly laid at the door of Democratic governors.
- Additionally, Trump's figures improved due to his base rallying to his defense. Riled by the constant criticism of their president, his supporters blame the media for their bias reporting over the president's use of hydroxychloroquine and remind people that Trump did not create the virus.



Sample Posts

Impact Discussion

- 🗣️ *Study estimates 24 states still have uncontrolled coronavirus spread.*
- 🗣️ *36,000 U.S. coronavirus deaths could have been avoided if social distancing began a week earlier!*
- 🗣️ *700,000: The number of people Bill Gates admits will be harmed or killed by his coronavirus vaccine 91,000: The number of deaths in the US so far blamed on Corononavirus This guy's supposed to be some sorta genius, right?*
- 🗣️ *COVID-19 government austerity measures are threatened subsistence farmers' livelihoods because they cannot adequately harvest, collect, transport, process and trade non-wood forest products from the forests or from their mix-farming systems. So, COVID-19 may be spreading poverty.*
- 🗣️ *Google blocks more than 18M coronavirus-related phishing emails every day. But, the scammers keep going because they are having success. With over 40,000 coronavirus domain names, you've got to be careful because they're only after your money.*



Sample Posts

Citizen Discussion

🗣️ *While cloth masks are not as effective as surgical masks (~99% effective), they are at least somewhat effective (77-90% effective for typical cotton fabrics DIY masks are made of), so better than nothing.*

🗣️ *A new study found that hydroxychloroquine, the antimalaria drug promoted by President Trump, may actually harm coronavirus patients. An early-stage trial of a vaccine developed in China and tested on 108 people appears to be safe and may offer protection against the virus.*

🗣️ *98,000 deaths from COVID-19...OMG! Representing .0003% of the US population...wait, say what???*

🗣️ *Never in a million years could you have told me that in just three short months the world would be in utter chaos due to a global pandemic, that my aunt would contract the virus and be fighting for her life, and that my hometown would be destroyed by a massive 500 year flood.*

🗣️ *Be sure to check on your friends and family during this time. Just because #COVID19 isn't new doesn't mean that they aren't still suffering from #mentalhealth issues.*

🗣️ *The amount of people in my state that seem to think the pandemic is over is ridiculous I keep seeing people on FB and on here who are just living normal lives. One has a 2 month old she just seems to be taking around Willy nilly.*



Sample Posts

Political Discussion

🗨️ *Nobody would have believed this in 2016 campaign, even without incomprehensible denial, delay consequent deaths engendered by Trump COVID ignorance, apathy, amorality, & overweening self-indulgent political fixation, that ignored 100K American death concerns (so far) as necessary cost!*

🗨️ *President Obama left you a 69 page book on how to handle a pandemic, one medical experts agree would have saved thousands of lives if followed ! And Republicans forced budget cuts and denied president Obama the money needed to properly replenish the stockpile after H1N1.*

🗨️ *After watching Wolf In Action. I'm voting for everyone who isn't a democrat. COVID didn't kill anyone in my family (thankfully) but Wolf's shutdowns and the unemployment system being broken sure as hell tried to kill my family. No tolerance for Wolf's incompetence.*

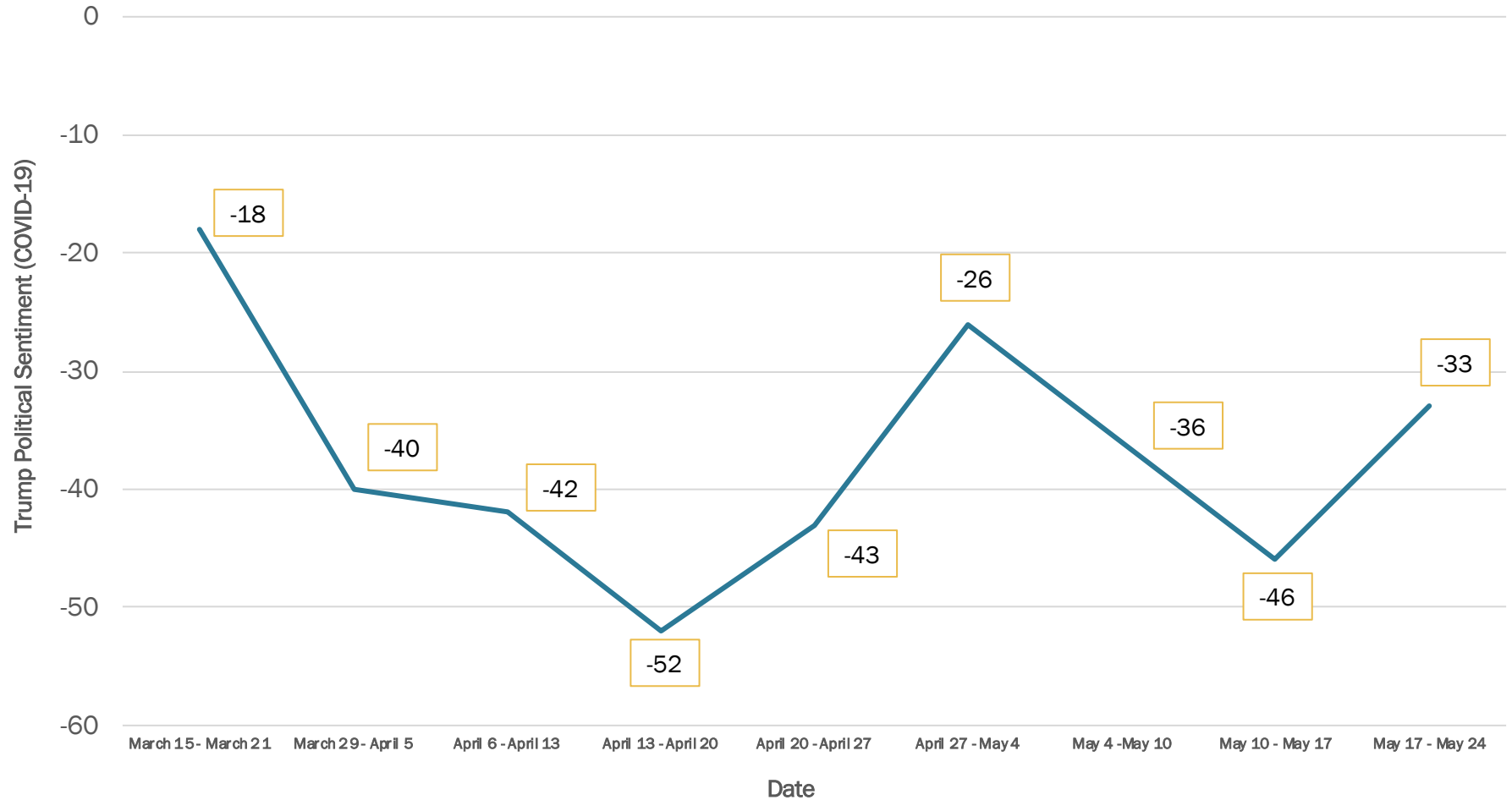
🗨️ *26 of the 29 deaths in the last 13 days have been in long term care facilities. Why don't you criticize @GovTimWalz for causing those deaths by orders those places to take COVID19 patients?*

🗨️ *President Trump Golf as much as you would like were a Free Country you have earned it Thank you for all you have done for our Great Country.*

🗨️ *Why don't you report the fact that South Korea, India, Senegal, and Ghana, as well as many other countries, are using hydroxychloroquine to treat coronavirus? Successfully, I might add.*



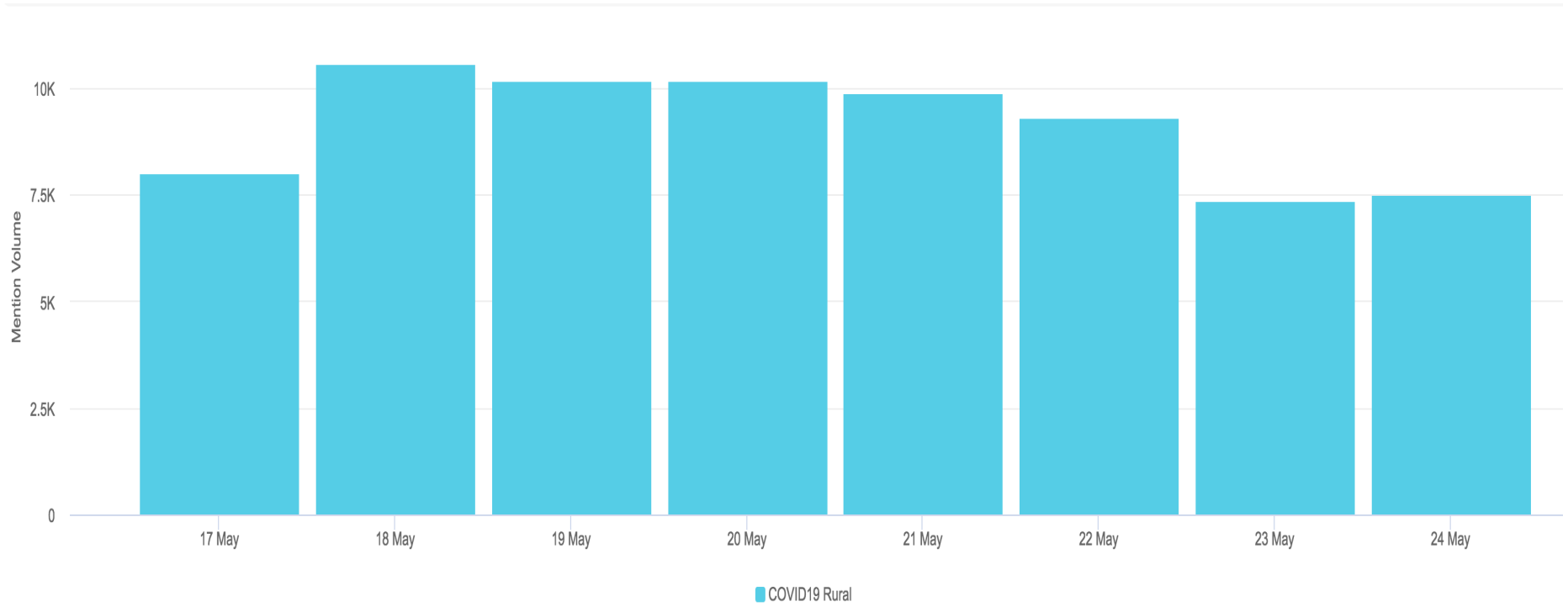
Trump Net Sentiment



Notes on the data: The line chart above tracks net sentiment on Trump in relation to COVID-19. It will show shifts in the perception of how the president is dealing with the pandemic and how this plays out within rural social media discussions over time.



CORONAVIRUS RURAL CONVERSATION – DISCUSSION VOLUME (BY DAY)



Prepared for One Country Project

by  **impact**Social



Methodology

This analysis is based on collected, publicly available, online data, geo-located to rural populations in the six states from May 17 – 24, 2020 related to COVID-19. In total, 76,000 posts from 27,000 authors were collected across the six states.

Randomized, representative samples of these conversations were analyzed after removing shares, retweets, repetition, media, and influencers from the dataset to focus solely on the views of local citizens. These conversations were then scored – positive, negative, or neutral.

