

# CONFIDENCE AS A MODULATOR IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC BEHAVIORS AND PERSPECTIVES?

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## ABSTRACT

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals have been divided about the best course of action. The media has continued to highlight aspects of the uncertainty and discontent of individuals around the globe. Although fundamental, general confidence in oneself and in others may largely contribute to such behaviors and perspectives. The present study investigated an array of variables pertaining to pandemic-specific confidence, decision-making, and subjective perspectives. This article addresses the findings concerning confidence in the pandemic within and across cultures. 622 complete questionnaires were collected through an online survey, of which 561 were divided into three cultural groups (*United States, Other Western countries, Non-Western countries*) and analyzed across confidence contexts. Cultural groups were based on geography, response frequency, and general cultural tendencies. The findings indicate greater confidence in self-relevant contexts, such as own actions and decision-making, compared to other-relevant contexts, in others' actions and decision-making. Confidence further differentiated across cultural groups, demonstrating minute but notable differences in reported confidence across contexts. These findings provide preliminary evidence that confidence is an underlying modulator in pandemic behaviors and decision-making. Such findings also suggest potential differences across cultures, which should be further expounded on in future research.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, confidence, pandemic perspectives, behaviors, decision-making*

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new degrees of uncertainty across the globe. In early 2020, the implementation of restrictions resulted in numerous protests against regulations, masks, and testing. While the media typically depicts the most captivating stories, an entirely different perspective urged individuals to abide by governmental regulations and health organizations' recommendations. The two polarizing perspectives seemingly share a common denominator: confidence.

Confidence is arguably a silent, key factor driving our actions and choices. Numerous studies have linked confidence and decision-making, even identifying the neural networks related to confidence [1]. The effects of confidence are typically documented with respect to areas of expertise, such as clinical decision-making [2] or group decision-making [3]. Research has demonstrated that subjective confidence is predictive of information seeking in decision-making [4]. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the uncertainty through confidence in governmental decision-making and misinformation [5][6] and even our ability to “win” against the virus [7]. However, the contextual nature of confidence concerning self and other and how this is represented across cultures has yet to be investigated. More specifically, the timely and unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic calls for further exploration as to how confidence might modulate behaviors and decision-making during a crisis within and across cultures. Therefore, the study aimed to investigate confidence and decision-making within the pandemic, as well as exploring cross-cultural differences. We explored the role of confidence as a possible, modulating factor in pandemic behaviors in the present article.

## METHODS

Supplementary materials, including the full questionnaire, translations, raw data, and preprocessed data are available on OSF: <https://osf.io/sjhdy/>.

### Participants

Six hundred and fifty-five respondents voluntarily filled out the complete survey. Exclusion criteria consisted of individuals under the age of 18 years, failure to complete the survey in full, and failure to coherently respond to the questions. Eleven respondents were omitted due to the minimum age criterion, and an additional 22 respondents were omitted for obscure or non-sensical answers. Six hundred and twenty-two respondents were included in the following analyses. Respondents were organized into three groups during the time of survey completion: *United States* ( $N = 224$ ), *Other Western countries* ( $N = 211$ ), and *Non-Western countries* ( $N = 187$ ). Nationality was initially the grouping variable of interest, but geographical location was substituted due to a high number of responses that confused nationality with race. Note, a mix of nationalities could be responding from countries other than their home country. For meaningful group comparisons, 187 responses from the *United States* and from the *Other Western countries* groups were selected at random and used for the final analyses. Thus, the total sample analyzed included 561 participants.

The three cultural groups were characterized by their geographic position, response frequency, and the ideological construct of tradition. The concept of “Western vs. Non-Western” is an ideological construct based on the cultural heritage and traditions of a nation’s practices. Although no finite definition exists for westernization, it is rooted in colonialism, modernization, and globalization

by philosophical conceptualization [8]. Geographic commonalities also exist amongst the “Western vs. Non-Western” distinction [9]. We utilized both ideologic traditions and geographic location to sparse the respondents into cultural groups. Respondents from the United States (US) were sorted into a separate category from other western countries, given the high response frequency. Other Western countries (OW) were defined as those with European-American ties and includes respondents located in North America, Europe, or Australia. Non-Western countries (NW) included respondents located in South America, Africa, Middle East, and Asia.

In total, participants responded from 58 countries, most of which included ten or less respondents ( $n = 49$  countries). Table 1 includes a demographic report of the final data. A full list of the countries and their associated geographic group, as well as a full breakdown of all demographic data are reported in the supplementary materials.

**Table 1.** Mean age and standard deviation are provided. Gender is reported as M (male), F (female), NB (non-binary), and O (other). Education is reported as JH (junior high/middle school), HS (high school), B (Bachelor’s degree), PG (postgraduate work). The risk group is reported as a yes or no (y, n).

Source: Own source

<i>n</i> per group = 187	US	OW	NW	Total ( $N = 561$ )
<b>Age</b>	42.20 (15.03)	29.11 (9.72)	28.81 (10.28)	33.37 (13.43)
<b>Gender:</b> M,F, NB, O	50, 137, 0, 0	40, 146, 1, 0	58, 128, 0, 1	148, 411, 1, 1
<b>Edu:</b> JH, HS, B, PG	0, 18, 64, 105	5, 42, 76, 64	1, 36, 88, 62	6, 96, 228, 231
<b>Risk group:</b> y, n	53, 134	21, 166	21, 166	95, 466

### Study Design

Various social media outlets and university channels distributed the online survey for five months during the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions (May 26, 2020 through October 26, 2020). The present study’s survey was designed in English and implemented through Qualtrics. Given the international nature of the study, the survey was translated into 18 languages with the help of translators and Qualtrics’ translation function. These translations allowed for greater distribution to non-English speakers. The survey consisted of five parts: 1) demographic questions, 2) personal-pandemic opinions, 3) confidence surrounding the pandemic, 4) a pandemic-phrased decision-making task, and 5) two standardized questionnaires. We will discuss confidence surrounding the pandemic.

Given the scope of the present article, further details concerning the decision-making, empathy, and qualitative perspectives will be written in a coinciding article. Notably, culture was initially assessed through Hofstede’s cultural

dimensions on the Value Survey Module 2013 [VSM; 10]. However, an insufficient number of samples was obtained from each country to compute a meaningful cultural index. Therefore, cultural groups were categorized as previously described.

The demographic and personal opinion questions concerned participants' experiences with COVID-19 (e.g., Have you or a family member been infected?) and their opinions concerning the pandemic (e.g., What is your stance on the current restrictions in your country?). Participants were additionally asked to rate (%) their confidence on a series of eight questions concerning self and others' actions or decisions during the pandemic (e.g., How confident are you in your own social distancing practices?).

### Statistical Analysis

The present analysis focused on various confidence contexts within and across cultures. To explore confidence contexts with regards to the pandemic, visual inspection, Kendall's tau correlation, and a paired Wilcoxon t-test were used in R Studio [11]. Quasi-binomial regressions were further conducted for the confidence contexts to assess confidence across cultures.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, we divided the results into multiple papers to better communicate our findings [see 12]. The study included an array of variables, such as demographics, personal-pandemic opinions, confidence contexts (8 items), decision-making scenarios (9 items), and an empathy (IRI-B) index. Descriptive statistics are noted in Table 2 for insight into the pandemic-specific opinions of the present sample. The results below focus on the **confidence contexts**, pertaining to the pandemic, within and across cultures.

**Table 2.** Descriptive data pertaining to participants' personal-pandemic opinions and behaviors.

Source: Own source

<b>Restriction Stance</b>	<b>n (out of 561)</b>
Return to normal daily activities	47
Return to normal daily activities, but self-regulate	190
Remain under restrictions, but loosened	189
Remain under the same restrictions	96
Implement tighter restrictions	39
<b>Infection Likelihood</b>	
very unlikely	77
somewhat unlikely	150
neither likely nor unlikely	178
somewhat likely	116
very likely	40
<b>Health Consciousness</b>	
Not at all	23
Seldom	40
Sometimes	93
Usually	217
Very much	188
<b>Media Factchecking</b>	
No, never	5
No, seldom	19
Sometimes	97
Yes, usually	242
Yes, always	198

### Assumption Tests

Given the inherently non-normal nature of public opinion data, particularly for capped range dependent variables (e.g., 0-100), a quasi-binomial regression was used. Additional correlation analyses utilized the Kendall's tau method, considering the large sample size. A posteriori observation led to classification of the confidence contexts as self-relevant and other-relevant. When classified as such, the data violated normality,  $W = 0.952$ ,  $p < .001$ , as expected. Therefore, a paired Wilcoxon test was adopted.

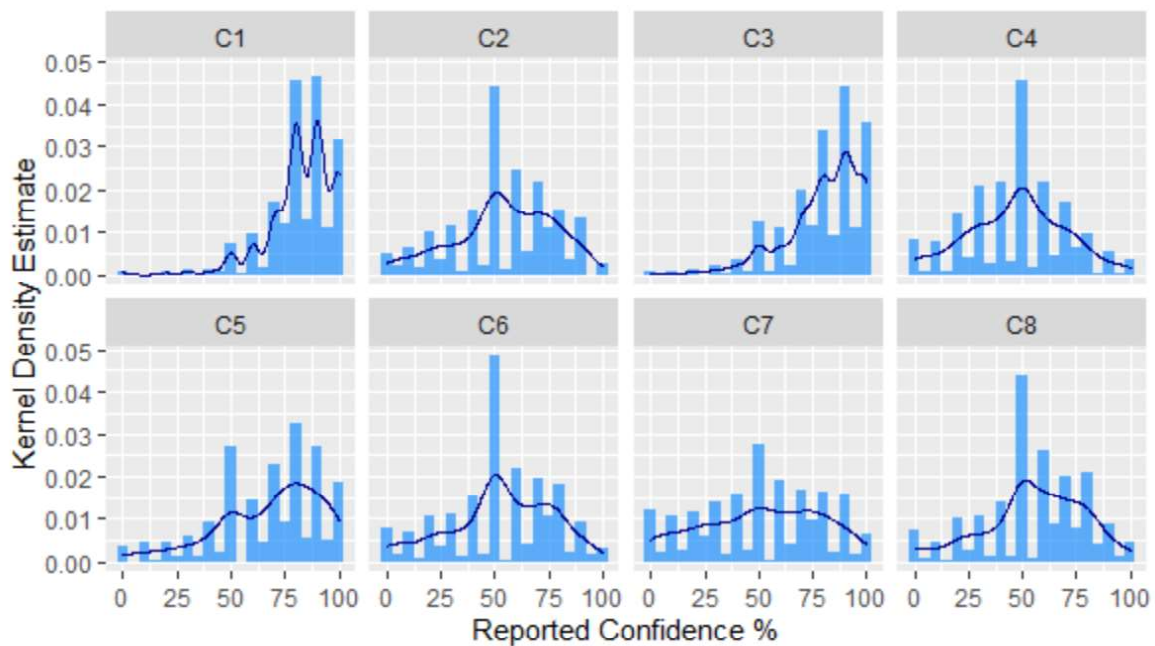
### Confidence in Context

During the survey development, confidence was included to focus on various individual aspects of behaviors and decision-making concerning the pandemic. Visual inspection during data analysis demonstrated a notable pattern across contexts when assessing the frequency of reported confidence (i.e., the number of people who reported 0-10% or 10-20% confidence; see **Figure 1**). The first, third, and fifth confidence contexts show a general left skewness, wherein the second,

fourth, sixth, and eighth contexts demonstrate a common trend toward a normal distribution. The seventh confidence context shows no specific spike in frequency distribution. Actions or judgements pertaining to the self are assessed in the first, third, fifth, and seventh concern (e.g., How confident are you in your own decision-making?). Despite the relatively flat curve in the seventh context, the wording of the context arguably qualifies the context as *self*. Further, actions and judgments of others are assessed in the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth confidence contexts (e.g., How confident are you in the social distancing practices of others?). These examples are the simplest and most evident form of this categorization (self vs. other), and the trend exists across each confidence context (see Table 3).

**Fig. 1.** The plot demonstrates the response frequency (in terms of density) of reported confidence for each confidence context. A trend is evident across the question types. Further inspection of the question phrasal revealed a trend of self-relevant (C1, 3, 5, 7) and other-relevant (C2, 4, 6, 8) questions.

Source: Own source



**Table 3.** *The categorization (self vs. other) of the confidence contexts used in the present study is shown. Contexts that are centered around one's own actions or judgements qualify as self, whereby contexts that are centered around the actions or judgments of others qualify as other. Clarification of each contexts' grouping is bolded.*

*Source: Own source*

<b>Self</b>	
C1	How confident are you in your <b>own</b> decision-making?
C3	How confident are you in your <b>own</b> social distancing practices?
C5	How confident are you that your beliefs are the best course of action for <b>your country</b> ?
C7	How confident are you in the actions taken by <b>your country</b> concerning the pandemic?
<b>Other</b>	
C2	How confident are you in the <b>media</b> you observe?
C4	How confident are you in <b>others'</b> social distancing practices?
C6	How confident are you that your beliefs are representative of <b>other's beliefs</b> ?
C8	How confident are you in the actions taken by <b>other countries</b> concerning the pandemic?

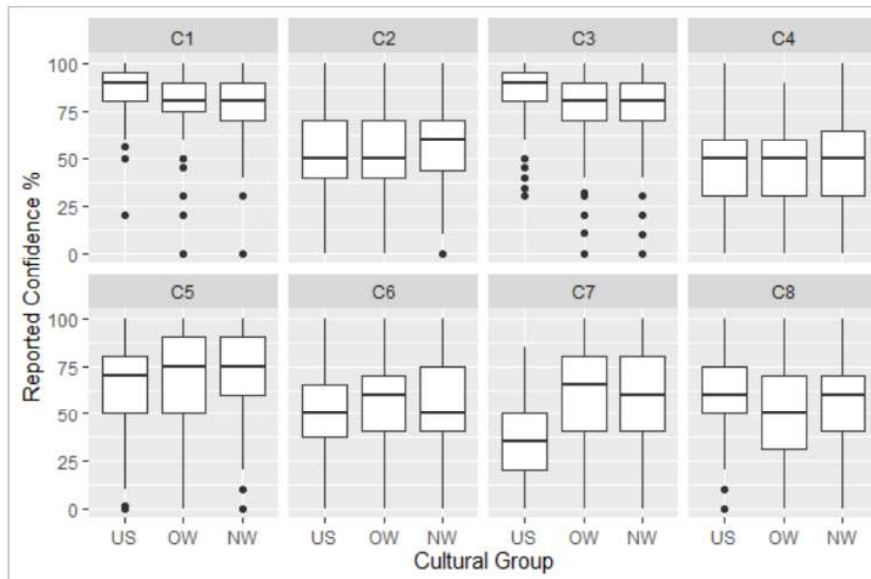
A correlation analysis further minimally supported this trend in which the self/other categorization remained, except for the seventh confidence context. Furthermore, some contexts also correlated across the classification groups, such as the second confidence context coinciding with each confidence context. To further understand the association and possible self/other classification between contexts, a paired Wilcoxon t-test revealed a statistical difference of reported confidence between the context's categorizations,  $V = 1626191$ ,  $p < .0001$ . From the contexts centered around the self, participants were significantly more likely to report higher confidence in their own actions, beliefs, or judgments (median = 80%) than questions centered around others' actions, beliefs, or judgments (median = 50%).

### Confidence across cultural groups

Culture largely modulates how one perceives the world, so we aimed to investigate cross-cultural differences of the confidence contexts. The present analysis investigated the reported confidence concerning self and others' behaviors and decision-making across the three groups, *United States (US)*, *Other Western countries (OW)*, and *Non-Western countries (NW)*. Generally, the results yielded differences in reported confidence across cultures and contexts. Figure 2 depicts the group differences across all confidence contexts.

**Fig. 2.** The plot demonstrates the mean reported confidence for each confidence context across the groups.

Source: Own source



A quasi-binomial regression was conducted on each of the eight confidence contexts to assess cultural group differences. Percentage ratings (of confidence) were treated as proportions for the analysis, in which responses that were 0 or 1 were adjusted to fall within the proportional range using the following equation:  $x' = (x(N-1) + s) / N$  [13]. This equation corrects for values on the proportional bounds, where  $x'$  is the corrected value,  $x$  is the raw value,  $N$  is the sample size, and  $s$  is a constant between 0 and 1 [13]. The present study used a constant of 0.5. The US group was treated as the baseline comparison group for the regression interpretation. Some respondents did not provide an appropriate answer type (e.g., missing words or words such as ‘completely’ that needed clarification). Because this was not the case across all confidence contexts, those with unfitting response types were treated as missing values and kept in the overall sample for analysis. Those with missing values for the given confidence context were excluded from only that regression. This method was to ensure the strength of the sample by maintaining responses from across cultures. The  $n$  used for each regression is reported.

**“How confident are you in your own decision-making?”**

This first confidence context yielded statistical differences between US respondents (M = 0.862 [86.2%], SD = 0.12) and OW respondents (M = 0.791 [79.1%], SD = 0.15), as well as between US respondents and NW respondents (M = 0.81 [81.0%], SD = 0.16). Upon group differences, a follow-up model controlled for age and political position across cultural groups (Table 4). Age and political position were selected as demographic variables of interest upon inspection from a correlation matrix of the demographic variables. The reported confidence of US and NW respondents were no longer statistically different when controlling for these demographic variables. However, age elicited a notable



influence on the regression, suggesting that it might be an underlying predictor for the context and within the NW group. Thus, the most prominent difference, even when controlling for influential demographic variables, is nested between US and OW respondents, with US respondents reporting greater confidence in their own decision-making than OW respondents. While reported confidence was also greater for US respondents compared to NW respondents, the difference was not statistically considerable once the demographic predictors were included.

**“How confident are you in the media you consume?”**

The second confidence context demonstrated no notable difference across cultural groups (US:  $M = 0.525$  [52.5%],  $SD = 0.24$ ; OW:  $M = 0.544$  [54.4%];  $SD = 0.21$ ; NW:  $M = 0.557$  [55.7%],  $SD = 0.24$ ; Table X). Interestingly, this suggests media perspectives do not differ by cultural groups in the present sample. No follow-up regression was necessary to control for demographic variables, given no difference between cultural groups.

**“How confident are you in your own social-distancing practices?”**

The third confidence context statistically differed between cultural groups. The US respondents ( $M = 0.844$  [84.4%],  $SD = 0.15$ ) reported greater confidence than OW respondents ( $M = 0.760$  [76.0%],  $SD = 0.19$ ) and NW respondents ( $M = 0.796$  [79.6%],  $SD = 0.19$ ). The follow-up regression demonstrated a driving effect of age, in which the effect of group difference statistically reduced for both the OW and NW levels in comparison to the US level. A statistical difference was still present between US and OW respondents. The effect of age suggests that confidence in our own social distancing, at least in the present study, increases with age. Older participants may take more responsibility to practice safe social distancing, and thus, their confidence in their own actions is increased. Additionally, this finding could be reflective of the toll the virus has taken on the elderly population.

**“How confident are you in others’ social distancing practices?”**

The fourth confidence context demonstrated a similar outcome as the second confidence context. Neither OW ( $M = 0.480$  [48.0%],  $SD = 0.20$ ) nor NW ( $M = 0.492$  [49.2%],  $SD = 0.25$ ) respondents statistically differed in reported confidence from US respondents ( $M = 0.451$  [45.1%],  $SD = 0.22$ ). Despite the lack of statistically notable differences between OW and US respondents, NW respondents trended toward greater reported confidence in other’s social distancing practices. A follow-up regression was conducted to investigate the extent to which age and political position influenced cultural group differences. The follow-up regression yielded differences between cultural groups and the US base level, in which age was marginally influential, and conservative respondents were more likely to report greater confidence compared to liberal respondents.

This demonstrates that the demographic data is largely influential within the cultural groups, given the notable change in statistical outputs.

**“How confident are you that your beliefs are the best course of action for your country?”**

In the fifth confidence context, OW respondents ( $M = 0.689$  [68.9%],  $SD = 0.23$ ) and NW respondents ( $M = 0.701$  [70.1%],  $SD = 0.24$ ) reported greater confidence compared to US respondents ( $M = 0.634$  [63.4%],  $SD = 0.25$ ). This suggests both OW and NW respondents were more confident that their beliefs were the best course of action for their countries, compared to US respondents who reported lesser confidence in that same belief. Further analysis indicated that group differences were greater when age mediated reported confidence, suggesting that confidence in one’s own decisions and ego-centric beliefs about those decisions is mediated across the lifespan. Furthermore, the difference between the cultural groups was surprising, given that US respondents indicated less confidence that their beliefs represented the best course of action for the United States. This contradicts the previous results (i.e., C1: How confident are you in your own decision-making) where US respondents displayed greater confidence in their own decision-making. Such conflicting findings may demonstrate uncertainty.

“How confident are you that your beliefs are representative of other’s beliefs?”

In the sixth confidence context, OW ( $M = 0.553$  [55.3%],  $SD = 0.23$ ) and NW ( $M = 0.543$  [54.3%],  $SD = 0.25$ ) respondents were, on average, significantly more confident than US respondents ( $M = 0.489$  [48.9%],  $SD = 0.23$ ), indicating that US respondents reported less confidence that their own beliefs were representative of others than the other cultural groups. Further analysis indicated that cultural differences in reported confidence remained, despite age being a mediating factor of reported confidence.

**“How confident are you in the actions taken by your country concerning the pandemic?”**

In the seventh confidence context, a considerable difference in reported confidence existed between the US and the other cultural groups. US respondents ( $M = 0.362$  [36.2%],  $SD = 0.23$ ) reported markedly lower confidence in the actions taken by their country compared to OW ( $M = 0.601$  [60.1%],  $SD = 0.27$ ) and NW ( $M = 0.573$  [57.3%],  $SD = 0.27$ ) respondents. The follow-up regression indicated an influential effect of political position, while cultural group differences remained. Specifically, conservative respondents were more likely to report greater confidence in their country’s actions than liberal respondents.

**“How confident are you in the actions taken by other countries concerning the pandemic?”**

The eighth confidence context revealed reported confidence was notably average, given the confidence reported in their own countries. Reported confidence was similar across cultural groups, with a statistical difference between US (M = 0.586 [58.6%], SD = 0.21) and OW (M = 0.523 [52.3%], SD = 0.24) respondents. No statistical difference in confidence existed between US and NW (M = 0.549 [54.9%], SD = 0.24) respondents. A follow-up regression was conducted to assess possible covariates acting on the relationship between the US and OW cultural groups. This regression yielded an effect of age and political position, in which accounting for demographic variables elicited an underlying statistical difference between the US and NW cultural groups. Importantly, the results from this regression are not reflective of the previous confidence context concerning the actions taken by one’s own country. This finding suggests that while respondents felt somewhat confident (or somewhat not confident in the case of US respondents) in the actions taken by their own country to combat the pandemic, all groups were not necessarily confident or lacking confidence concerning the actions taken by other countries. Such findings emphasize the degree of uncertainty present in the pandemic, which is seemingly evident through our own confidence judgements and beliefs.

*Table 4. The table reports the coefficient estimate, p-value, odds ratio, and confidence interval for all regression models. Bolded p-values are significant. The US group and politically liberal are base levels for categorical comparisons. Rows shaded grey indicate the initial model comparing groups. Rows shaded white indicate the follow-up model comparing groups while accounting for age and political position.*

Source: Own source

C1	<i>n</i> = 557	Coefficient Estimate	p-value	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Other countries	Western	-0.502	<b>&lt; .0001</b>	0.605	[0.492, 0.745]
Non-Western countries		-0.381	<b>&lt; .001</b>	0.682	[0.552, 0.842]
Other countries	Western	-0.315	<b>.006</b>	0.730	[0.584, 0.912]
Non-Western countries		-0.193	0.108	0.824	[0.652, 1.043]
Age		0.014	<b>&lt; .001</b>	1.014	[1.006, 1.022]
Politically neutral		0.033	.732	1.033	[0.856, 1.247]
Politically conservative		0.187	.137	1.206	[0.942, 1.542]
C2	<i>n</i> = 557				

Other countries	Western	0.077	.424	1.080	[0.894, 1.306]
Non-Western countries		0.128	.188	1.136	[0.940, 1.374]
<b>C3 n = 557</b>					
Other countries	Western	-0.532	<b>&lt; .0001</b>	0.587	[0.467, 0.737]
Non-Western countries		-0.325	<b>&lt; .01</b>	0.722	[0.571, 0.913]
Other countries	Western	-0.314	<b>.011</b>	0.730	[0.573, 0.934]
Non-Western countries		-0.101	0.446	0.904	[0.573, 0.932]
Age		0.019	<b>&lt; .001</b>	1.019	[1.010, 1.027]
Politically neutral		-0.008	.937	0.992	[0.804, 1.223]
Politically conservative		-0.086	.514	0.917	[0.708, 1.189]
<b>C4 n = 556</b>					
Other countries	Western	0.117	.214	1.124	[0.935, 1.352]
Non-Western countries		0.164	.081	1.179	[0.980, 1.417]
Other countries	Western	0.222	<b>.032</b>	1.249	[1.020, 1.529]
Non-Western countries		0.281	<b>.009</b>	1.325	[1.073, 1.636]
Age		0.006	.089	1.006	[0.999, 1.012]
Politically neutral		0.012	.891	1.012	[0.849, 1.208]
Politically conservative		0.316	<b>.004</b>	1.372	[1.108, 1.699]
<b>C5 n = 555</b>					
Other countries	Western	0.249	<b>.029</b>	1.283	[1.027, 1.602]
Non-Western countries		0.305	<b>&lt; .01</b>	1.357	[1.084, 1.698]
Other countries	Western	0.385	<b>&lt; .01</b>	1.470	[1.151, 1.878]
Non-Western countries		0.490	<b>&lt; .001</b>	1.633	[1.262, 2.113]
Age		0.009	<b>.032</b>	1.009	[1.001, 1.016]
Politically neutral		-0.165	.132	0.848	[0.684, 1.051]
Politically conservative		0.065	.632	1.067	[0.819, 1.388]

<b>C6</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 557</b>				
Other Western countries		0.258	< .01	1.294	[1.066, 1.572]
Non-Western countries		0.219	.028	1.245	[1.024, 1.512]
Other Western countries		0.370	< .001	1.448	[1.169, 1.795]
Non-Western countries		0.344	< .01	1.409	[1.126, 1.762]
Age		0.007	.031	1.007	[1.001, 1.014]
Politically neutral		-0.017	.856	0.983	[0.815, 1.185]
Politically conservative		0.117	.314	1.124	[0.895, 1.411]
<b>C7</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 557</b>				
Other Western countries		0.978	< .0001	2.653	[2.129, 3.306]
Non-Western countries		0.863	< .0001	2.369	[1.902, 2.951]
Other Western countries		1.050	< .0001	2.858	[2.239, 3.648]
Non-Western countries		0.964	< .0001	2.622	[2.035, 3.379]
Age		0.003	.515	1.003	[0.995, 1.010]
Politically neutral		-0.055	.610	0.947	[0.767, 1.168]
Politically conservative		0.296	.025	1.345	[1.039, 1.740]
<b>C8</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 557</b>				
Other Western countries		-0.252	.010	0.777	[0.641, 0.941]
Non-Western countries		-0.151	.124	0.860	[0.709, 1.042]
Other Western countries		-0.361	< .001	0.697	[0.564, 0.860]
Non-Western countries		-0.255	.024	0.775	[0.622, 0.966]
Age		-0.007	.054	0.994	[0.987, 1.000]
Politically neutral		-0.073	.437	0.930	[0.774, 1.117]
Politically conservative		-0.282	.013	0.754	[0.604, 0.941]

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Considerable differences in reported confidence in the scope of the pandemic exist with respect to self and others' thinking and behavior. The data revealed that participants reported increased confidence when asked about their own behaviors compared to others' behaviors. When participants were asked about confidence in their *own* decision-making (C1) and social distancing (C3) this finding was particularly evident. Further, when asked about their *own* beliefs with respect to their country, this finding was to a lesser effect though still present (C5). However, when asked about confidence in the actions taken by their *own* country, this was not the case (C7). This may partially be explained under the cross-cultural investigation. The visual inspection and regression model indicate a large difference in reported confidence with US respondents reporting significantly lower confidence than OW or NW respondents. Such a finding is plausible considering the political climate during the presidential election of the United States in mid to late 2020, paired with the demographic evidence indicating that over half of our US sample identified as politically liberal (57%). Self-confidence in decision-making and social distancing also differed across cultural groups. While all cultural groups reported relatively increased confidence in their own decision-making and social distancing, US respondents reported particularly increased confidence. Such increased confidence reported by the US sample demonstrates a sense of superiority often displayed by the United States [14]. This finding may be linked to the unique sense of pride and freedom associated with the American identity [15]. Future research also should further investigate whether this increased confidence is related to American's sense of nationalism.

Conversely, reported confidence for others' actions and decision-making was rather average across confidence contexts. However, some differentiation, although minute, was still present when assessed across cultures. Most interestingly, media confidence (C2) was the only context that did not differ across cultures. This result suggests a general hesitancy across the globe when considering information from the media. We were unable, however, to address the intertwined nature of media censorship and governmental persuasion over the media that is actively present in many countries.

We do not intend to draw conclusions due to the lack of existing literature on confidence in behaviors and decision-making and the unprecedented nature of the pandemic. Rather, the present study emphasizes the relevance of confidence as it underlies pandemic behaviors. Particularly, confidence appears to be an important modulator that drives individuals' thinking and actions during the pandemic. Such confidence seemingly differs across cultures. Future research should investigate the confidence in self and others across broader settings. Research could also investigate the extent of the cultural differentiation by narrowing the definition of culture by selecting specific countries that differ on cultural scales, such as

individualism. Such additional investigations will allow future researchers to begin drawing sound conclusions, given these preliminary findings.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to explore confidence as a modulating factor on pandemic behaviors and decision-making. Our findings demonstrate distinct differences in reported confidence, particularly with regards to self-relevant thinking and actions, as compared to others-relevant thinking and actions. This study also revealed the intertwined relationship that politics and governmental influence have on confidence, such as through the media and executive decision-making. Evidence also exists for cross-cultural differences in confidence concerning pandemic actions. Further, these cultural differences should be explored outside of the pandemic context to develop a comprehensive understanding of the influence of confidence in behavioral decision-making. Additionally, US respondents reported greater self-confidence, which may be linked to the identity and cultural perception some Americans hold. To allow for proper inferences, these findings should be further investigated with stringent cultural groups. Taken together, the evidence suggests that confidence is a relevant component driving our behaviors and decision-making, specifically regarding the pandemic. Such findings provide preliminary evidence to be expounded upon in future work.

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