

## Use case: Iran & COVID-19

114,533 confirmed, 6,854 dead

Iran has currently over 114,000 infections and almost 7,000 deaths caused by COVID-19 (Source: [John Hopkins' Coronavirus Resource Center](#)). Although, Iranian official numbers were widely questioned (Source: [The Atlantic](#)).

The numbers are believed and potentially could be **five times higher**, or even 55 to 85 times higher taking the mathematical models of [Thomas Pueyo](#) into account. Moreover, the government stated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May that **15% of the deaths are related to patients under 40 years old**. The high mortality rate in younger patients was also later on pointed out by doctors in the [United Kingdom](#). This data indicates a possible mutation or the health system being in dire condition.

Currently, the country can be regarded as both economically and socially instable. This is due to many factors, such as sanctions imposed on the country, economic crisis, natural disasters and recent protests, etc., which impact the economic situation. Regarding the social situation, the event of the downing of PS752 by Iranian armed forces and the attempt to reframe this as an accident in January had the high impact on the perception of the government by Iranian citizens.

Although distrust towards the government increases, the government currently attempts to be perceived as being in control of the situation. The present health crisis is impacted by factors as a very strained health system due to sanctions and brain drain of health care professionals who were able to find employment outside of the country. The combination of those presents a very high risk for mass casualties.

It is possible that the numbers of infected and deaths will reach beyond the numbers currently seen in Italy, or likely already have. In recent reports by the Washington Post (13<sup>th</sup> of March), satellite images shown mass graves being utilized in the North of Qom, one of the officially hardest hit provinces, which can be seen on the picture.

This supports the hypothesis that the numbers disclosed by the government are far lower than the actual casualties, given the age of the images and what can be made out of them, this indicates the total amount of currently reported victims is vastly understated. Images from social media on the ground also reconfirm this assumption.

Satellite images showing mass graves being utilized in the North of Qom. Source: Washington Post



There is also a campaign to counter this narrative **by the Iranian media stating these graves have been prepared well in advance for any kind of disaster**. This would however not explain the fresh pile of lime on the site. Also, there is video from the morgue indicating high death numbers, **this can however not be independently verified**.

There also seems to be a very high number of infections within the Iranian regime with prominent people being infected and dying, among them the deputy health minister and a well decorated former **Revolutionary Guard commander**. The options of the Iranian government are now entirely limited, given that admitting the downing of PS752 later was met with massive protests and further distrust.

Moreover, parts of the segments of the population who support the government do not agree with some of the **restrictive measures imposed** (next picture) to contain the virus, what might even weaken their base support in the general population. Also, being perceived as being driven by the crisis, **calls to cancel the new year's celebrations** by several opposition groups could further weaken the government's image, which meanwhile has been done. This concludes that the health crisis triggered by COVID19 in Iran has led to many possible paths opening up in the economic and political dimensions that pose grave threat to the regime.

In consequence, an opposition which is already fairly motivated, loyalists that are questioning the decisions and the leadership affected by the virus as well can potentially lead to a very dangerous scenario of Iran destabilizing further and in worst case drifting into the status of a failed state rather quickly.

Even in a not so drastic case the increasing pressure on the health system will likely trigger migration movements of citizens desperate for medical attention of sheer fear of becoming infected within a state with a collapsed medical system.

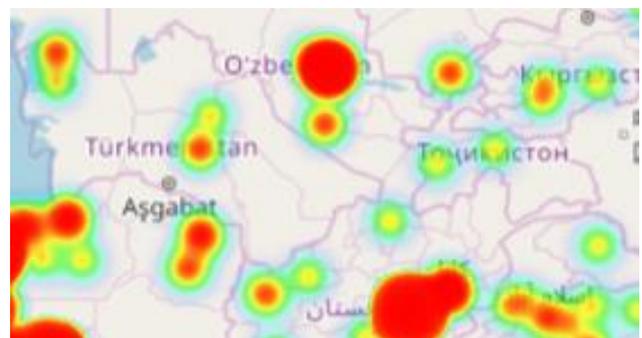
The logical migration movements would then be towards Europe via Turkey that would further complicate the refugee situation in Turkey, which in turn could lead Turkey to similar means as they had previously used at the Greek Turkish border, by opening up their part of the border and very likely aiding refugees logistically to get to the location (bus transfers made the impression of being highly organized and at least with consent of the Turkish authorities). It would be important to monitor for especially these indicators:

- 1) Weakening of political ability of Iranian regime
- 2) Increase in mortality rates and regional distribution as well as demographics of deceased
- 3) Signs of the medical system collapsing further
- 4) Increase of civil unrest or anti-regime behaviour
- 5) Change of tone in media sources (state official, journalists in country, foreign press)
- 6) Signals of migration intentions or actions as well as their geographic intent or interest

Parts of the segments of the population who support the government do not agree with some of the restrictive measures imposed. Source: Twitter



Social Media Heat Map demonstrating the geolocations with high number of social media hits on the topic coronavirus at northwest of Iran and surroundings. Source: MMSys



TOP 5 Key Opinion Leaders tweeting about COVID-19 and Iran in the week from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Key Opinion Leaders**

Name	Screen Name	Influence*
[Redacted]	[Redacted]	17.81
Reuters	@Reuters	9.49
[Redacted]	[Redacted]	4.11
Heshmat Alavi	@HeshmatAlavi	3.79
BBC News (World)	@BBCWorld	3.48

The tweet says that the Iranian newspapers inform about the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA, but ignore the pandemic in Iran.

Sweden

الصحف الإيرانية تتحدث عن انتشار فيروس كورونا في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وتتجاهل الكارثة الوبائية التي تشهدها إيران الآن دولة الديكتاتور لا ترى الداخل

<https://t.co/bCOW9mI9Dp>

(Source: TwitterMedia)

RETWEETS	FAVORITES	POTENTIAL REACH*	REPLIES	USER MENTIONS
66	388	501.3K	29	0

Apr 13, 2020 1:02:01 AM

**Geographic Details**

Tweet Coordinates N/A

Detected Locations (NEDs) Iran, United States

Tweet Details

User Details

Sweden

هیئت حسینیة بمدينة قم تقوم بمراسم لطم لیلية سرية وبمکان غیر معین، بعد إيقاف أنشطة المساجد والحصینیات والمزارات بسبب انتشار فيروس كورونا في ایران رئیس کلیة قم الطبية صرح بأنه في الأيام الأخيرة بدأت مستشفيات المدينة تلاحظ ازدياد ملحوظ في نسبة الإصابات بفيروس كورونا بقم

<https://t.co/OvWise6NMW>

(Source: TwitterMedia)

RETWEETS	FAVORITES	POTENTIAL REACH*	REPLIES	USER MENTIONS
353	1.1K	1.8M	469	0

Apr 19, 2020 3:21:43 AM

**Geographic Details**

Tweet Coordinates N/A

Detected Locations (NEDs) Iran, Qom

Tweet Details

User Details

The social media influencer also informed about the secret ceremonies happening in Qom at an undisclosed location.

There is still polemic about the Iranian's official numbers of deceased, as tweeted by BBC News (World), one of the TOP 5 influencers tweeting about the topic.

BBC News (World) @BBCWorld London, UK

Coronavirus Are the bodies of victims undermining Iran's official figures

<https://t.co/czBE8U578E>

(Source: TwitterMedia)

RETWEETS	FAVORITES	POTENTIAL REACH*	REPLIES	USER MENTIONS
100	197	28.7M	32	0

Apr 15, 2020 1:21:21 AM

**Geographic Details**

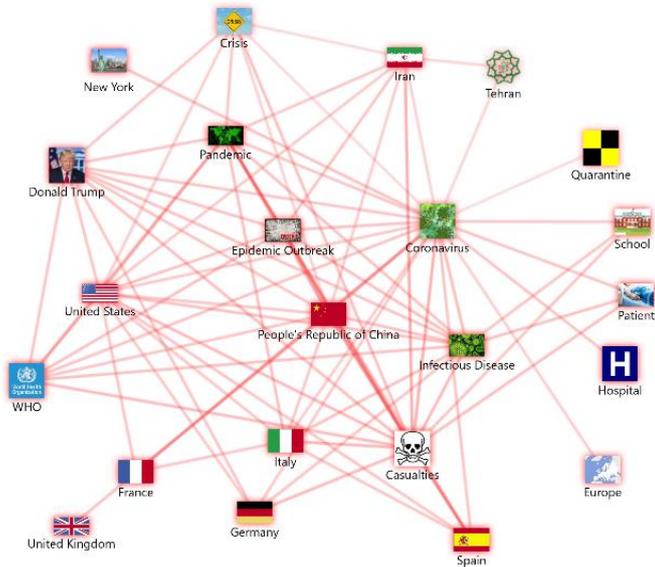
Tweet Coordinates N/A

Detected Locations (NEDs) Iran

Tweet Details

User Details

The graph below depicts entities often mentioned together by the media in the week from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.



1. The official Iranian numbers are believed and potentially could be **five times higher**, or even 55 to 85 times higher taking the mathematical models of **Thomas Pueyo** into account.
2. Although distrust towards the government increases, the government currently attempts to be perceived as being in control of the situation.
3. Washington Post (**13th of March**) published **satellite images** showing mass graves being utilized in the **North of Qom**, one of the officially hardest hit provinces.
4. A campaign to counter this **narrative by the Iranian media was created and states that these graves** have been prepared well in advance for any kind of disaster.
5. The increasing pressure on the health system will likely trigger migration movements of citizens desperate for medical attention.
6. Parts of the segments of the population who support the government do not agree with some of the restrictive measures imposed.

A different tweet by one of the Twitter influencers informing about Iran and COVID-19. The system identified detected locations in the text in all four tweets and displayed them on an interactive map.



As the world rightly focuses on addressing the **#coronavirus** pandemic a lesser discussed issue is how the regime ruling **#Iran** is taking advantage to spy on ordinary Iranians And with China's support  
<https://t.co/RM15Qd1FhF> .

RETWEETS 357 FAVORITES 351 POTENTIAL REACH\* 2.7M REPLIES 0 USER MENTIONS 0

Apr 13, 2020 5:00:12 PM

**Geographic Details**

- Tweet Coordinates N/A
- Detected Locations (NEDs) Iran

**Tweet Details**

**User Details**