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Authoritarianism in the time of COVID

Abstract

COVID19 leaves the world in shock and the struggle with the invisible enemy continues around the world. The crisis is seen as an opportunity to prove the resilience of authoritarianism and failure of democratic leadership that could take authoritarian soft power diplomacy to new heights.

Competitors to the liberal order are treating the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to exploit for their advantage. It proved the falsity of European "fairy tale" to stand united and extend aid to other countries in dire need of assistance. Authoritarian China would not be averse to the perpetuation of non-democratic government, the prospectus being that it would seek to provide these regimes with moral, but also financial, assistance. The COVID-19 pandemic is erupting at a period when totalitarian governments were still threatening liberalism. Now, liberal-order competitors are using the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to leverage it for their benefit.

Keywords

Authoritarianism - Democracy - COVID19 - Extreme measures - Surveillance

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The coronavirus outbreak has brought extreme pressure on public systems globally and presents a significant threat to the global economy, with financial prices crashing, and businesses idling employees. Yet analysts raise caution that, by hardening authoritarian regimes and eroding stability in certain regions, it may also reshape governance, particularly in vulnerable nations where would-be tyrants have sought to consolidate their power.

Authoritarian regimes like the Chinese Communist Party not only consolidating their domestic hold on power but also promote their political systems as a model for others to emulate. The coronavirus pandemic is a serious problem, and uncertainty remains over how policymakers will react. Public health analysts also commended the attempts made by certain authoritarian systems like Singapore and China response to the crisis. The World Health Organization called it "maybe the most creative, efficient, and effective containment of disease in history," (Aylward 2020) which the Chinese authorities was

swift to turn into encomiums for its chairman, President Xi Jinping, “And under the leadership of President Xi, decisive steps can only be taken in China to get this unpredictable disease under control.(see Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020)

China and some of its acolytes look to Beijing's performance in combating the coronavirus pandemic as a clear justification for authoritarian rule. After a slow start, the logic goes, China had the resources to put in place a massive control campaign that effectively brought the epidemic to heel within its boundaries.

The crisis raises the question: Is COVID19 altering the political landscape globally?

Whereas the advantages autocracy may offer in guiding response to the pandemic, it is profoundly dangerous when the strongman chooses to deny the threat or provide an alternative narrative. There are also various signs that governments are harnessing the crisis for their gain. Yet the crisis is still an opportunity to show democracy's resilience, which may fuel fresh demands for freedom. This also halted months-long anti-government demonstrations in Iraq, Tunisia, and Lebanon that were a severe thorn in the elite's side. At the same moment, widespread pro-democracy protests were still developing across the world last year including in Hong Kong, Iran and Sudan. All these factors would be influenced by the new pandemic: lockdowns prevent large mass demonstrations, disasters provide incentives for autocrats to take control, disparities in health conditions in democratic and autocratic countries will change global perceptions and mechanisms of public health monitoring the progress of the epidemic without civil liberties. What the current crisis means for the prospects of global democracy, and what the US and its allies will do to defend worldwide freedom. The first-of-a-kind state litigation emerges in the wake of bipartisan efforts to sanction China and President Donald Trump's effort to concentrate on the role of Beijing, in the face of disapproval about how he treated the crisis. Despite Trump's strong disapproval of China, his government has

been hesitant in attempts to impose sanctions against Beijing, keeping in mind that the Asian superpower is a big supplier of masks and other medical supplies that the United States urgently needs.

So far, the 2020 events have demonstrated not only the world today's volatility and instability but also the need for global leaders to react with unparalleled agility and assurance. The pandemic resulted in an increasing global instability as the forces of great power influence the international community. A glance around the globe shows several other governments who have overreached the epidemic response. Throughout the Philippines, usually, an authoritarian strongman, President Rodrigo Duterte, grabbed far greater powers to combat the infection, including the possibility of incarceration for circulating false reports regarding the coronavirus a move that might potentially be used to silence political dissent. Yes, the most significant aspect of this crisis seems to be the scientific advancement of a government. Many of the developed, such as China, may also be autocracies. Governance consistency is what is really important in this respect. Well-governed societies have knowledge and advice that helps people to consider where threats are and how to prevent them. We may never know the severity of an epidemic owing to inadequate surveillance in less well-governed nations, and we may never get a direct answer.

Many who allude to the benefits of democracy are inclined to cite the popular dictum of economist Amartya Sen, "No famine has ever existed in a working democracy in the history of the world." That's because, Mr Sen claimed, democratic regimes will face the electorate. They possess a strong incentive to fend off disasters. On the other hand, Trump lethal inaction in dealing with the pandemic is hurting his approval rating during the midterms elections. It is seen as an attempt to divert public attention from Trump's initial response to the epidemic.

More generally, the usage of surveillance systems in the pandemic monitoring and management could become more widespread in our communities after the crisis if proper precautions are not put in place at the front lines. These developments may also contribute to democracy weakening. Where the Trump administration fits into this controversy depends on which side of the political divide he stands on in addition to the American political system.

America's disengagement from global structures is also accompanied by expanded involvement by states like China and Russia, whose interests and goals are fundamentally at odds with liberal democratic ideals. The risk democracies face by disengagement is joining a destructive circle of isolation, totalitarian control and more Western alienation from the organisation as its behaviour become more of an anathema to democracies interests. Over the last decade we have seen this happen with the UN Human Rights Committee. Some civil society campaigners have noted that the WHO may follow a similar trajectory drawn in by China's soft power diplomacy.

Diversity of the American democracy, the local government's public systems, robust mass media, and various religious institutions precludes totalitarian dictatorship-like China rule. But the propensity of the autocratically inclined to manipulate a catastrophe can never be ignored. Even as governments exploited emergencies like the German Reichstag's 1933 burning to consolidate control throughout history, there are real fears that the coronavirus pandemic might be used to enforce drastic controls.

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