

# IS COVID-19 PANDEMIC A TRUMPED-UP TEST FOR DEMOCRACY?

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The spread of the covid-19 virus is changing how we lead our lives, how markets and governments/incumbents react, and how political leaders are making decisions at the local, national, regional, and global level.

Most research on the political effects of natural disasters (Healy and Malhotra 2009), political instability (Asteriou & Siriopoulos, 2000), terrorism (Kollias et al., 2013), capital controls (Gkillas et al., 2016), and economic/financial shocks (Samitas et al., 2018; Margalit 2019) have focused on their impact on the economic growth and finance development, the contagion effects as the cost of the globalization (Philippas & Siriopoulos, 2013) and so on. Same questions are investigated in recent covid-19 pandemic research papers. Some authors investigated the key factors for the cross-country heterogeneity in economic activity during the last pandemic (Glocker & Piribauer, 2021), and assessed the support to the markets by relevant governmental supportive actions. Other studies started assessing the effects and risks of the covid-19 pandemic (Siriopoulos, 2020; Petherick et al., 2021; Siriopoulos, 2021), and others question its effect on the regime level (Ashworth et al., 2018; Amat et al., 2020), democracy (Karabulut et al., 2021), while others report the downward trajectory in political trust (Davies et al., 2021).

All these efforts are very important, interesting, and shed light into the effects of the covid-19 pandemic after the first 2 years. However, on the one side covid-19 poses a new challenge to governmental decision-making, and on the other side trustiness of citizens to the governments and incubations is questionable. In what way does the different national institutional setting contribute to decision-making? How are political decisions instrumentalized in public debates? Could all countries adopt the same and unique measures against covid-19 given heterogeneity in political regimes? Would it be better if we reduced globalization and improved monitoring human factors (as some authors argue, Karabulut et al., 2021)? How is democracy altered after controlling for human factors? Similar question highlights the first side of the coin that is the actions taken by governments and incumbents against covid-19 pandemic. The other side of the coin is also crucial: the trust of people to the governments is decreasing, in which case democracy becomes more fragile with undesirable consequences.

Some authors (Karabulut et al., 2021) argue that developing flexible temporary inter-country distancing that focus on human mobility is not an argument against globalization because it will make the countries more competitive and more able to in healthcare infrastructure. However, the reality is quite different. Mellish et al. (2020), among others, provide ample evidence that many governmental and incumbents preventing pandemics, however, were unable to handle local and global epidemics since excess neoliberalism has negatively impacted investment in healthcare national systems is the cause of the huge effect of covid-19.

Empirical research shows (Karabulut et al., 2021 among others) that autocratic nations with centralized decision-making approach acted faster against covid-19 pandemic and have mobilized resources more effectively. First, this is due to absence of electoral consequences, and second due to the fear of the citizens about the penalties of not obeying. In this case,

governments do not risk being punished by events that produce negative welfare shocks on the population. In these countries there is also the problem of misinformation due the total control of the media and as a result these countries are more vulnerable. It is also noted that totalitarian governments are corrupted, but I do not agree because corruption is evident in even democratic countries with long history in the regime (recent history shows cases in UK, France, Austria, even Greece and so on) as other factors might also have a key role on political corruption as well (Papakonstantinou et al., 2013).

“*Coronavirus kills its first democracy*,” the Washington Post declared last year, and if, as Yale’s Professor Christakis (2021) says, “*in my opinion we are not at the beginning of the end of the pandemic but we are nearing the end of the beginning*”, then democracy will stay long on Procrustean bed. Twenty years ago, Acemoglu and Robinson’s have developed a theory according to which in which negative shocks reduce the opportunity cost of revolt, and hence induce autocrats to make economic concessions to prevent revolution. In societies of authoritarian political regime, there is a wide gap and inequality, and are less likely to consolidate democracy, and may end up with political instability with consequences to high fiscal volatility, which lead to increased deficits and the enlargement of inequity (Acemoglu & Robins, 2001). During covid-19 pandemic, citizens are scared, and request strong leadership whereas a switch in the public towards technocratic support instead of individual freedom is initially increased.

Thus, it seems that people are willing to exchange the protection against the virus for individual freedom and ideological representation. This trade-off is dangerous though. In almost all nations vaccinations didn’t win covid-19 and a second and third wave have been occurred. This, in conjunction with ineffective communication of governments with people, led trustiness to government tending to zero and incumbents being punished. Is this a rational or irrational behavior? Is this unbalance temporary or permanent? Are people learning the hidden characteristics and performance of their leaders? The danger in this case is that other undesirable forces may increase their penetration to the mass public and, by resorting to laicism, gain step forward to democracy.

In summary, looking after economic and health consequences of the covid-19 pandemic is the first and most important issue. However, in a second level of investigation, undoubtedly trustiness of people to democratic ideals is of high priority and of major importance. JIACS welcomes papers and short communications in the respective subject matter.

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