KING PRAJADHIPOK'S INSTITUTE JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

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Governance and Leadership in the COVID-19 Pandemic:
South Korean Case Focusing on the Effective and Agile Policy Framework
Gi-Heon Kwon

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Community-Based Economic Empowerment:
An Alternative for Community Development After the COVID-19 Pandemic
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Administrative-Led Governance and Coping With the COVID-19 Pandemic:
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Pandemic Backsliding?
A Comparative Study of Democracy Under the Virus Threat
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Book Review: Review of the ERIA-Published Report on
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Published annually, *King Prajadhipok's Institute Journal of Democracy and Governance* seeks to advance knowledge of democracy and governance, particularly in regard to the Thai context, by providing a platform for publication of original English-language scholarly articles addressing topics relevant to democracy, politics, and governance in Thailand from Thai and international perspectives and multiple disciplines. In this, the journal is meant to lead in promoting a liberal, inclusive vision of democracy and governance in Thailand.

Contents

Message from the Editor

We are in the midst of the worst crisis in recent history. The emergence of COVID-19 has affected societies, economies, and people's health on a global scale. Questions have arisen as to leaders' ability to govern during the coronavirus pandemic. Many outstanding leaders have risen to the tasks they face and appear to be succeeding in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, but some have failed to cope. In order to live with COVID-19 we need strong leadership, innovation, agile government, and bold action, to respond with an effective policy framework for the chaotic situation. The COVID-19 pandemic allows us to see the challenging leadership tasks and appreciate how quality governance can affect ability to cope with the crisis. I think we are now far more likely to recognize true outstanding leaders because it is easy to identify them when they are severely tested.

In recognition of the importance of governance at this time, this issue of the *King Prajadhipok's Institute Journal of Democracy and Governance* is devoted to the theme **Governance and Leadership in the COVID-19 Pandemic** with a collection of worthy articles relating to how governments and political leaders have shown resilience and solidarity responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

The first article, **"Governance and Leadership in the COVID-19 Pandemic: South Korean Case Focusing on the Effective and Agile Policy Framework,"** by *Professor Gi-Heon Kwon,* examines an outstanding case from Korea. The journal then moves to community participation for strong economic capacity in Taiwan, with **"Community-Based Economic Empowerment: An Alternative for Community Development after the COVID-19 Pandemic,"** by *Kristian Widya Wicaksono* and *Professor José Chiu-C. Chen.* This paper explores the concept of community-based empowerment and provides an in-depth analysis of community-based empowerment as an alternative model of political community development.

A practical success case from Hong Kong is examined in **"Administrative-Led Governance and Coping With the COVID-19 Pandemic: Application and Limitations in Hong Kong,"** by *Professor Raymond K. H. Chan.* The work is an interesting explanation of how the administration proposed and implemented measures to cope with the pandemic. It suggests that governance could be improved through a stronger connection with the public, wider consultation and deliberation beyond incorporating experts, and by paying increased attention to the public's emotions.

Nevertheless, regarding the role of leaders and governance, the form of democracy is questioned on pessimistic belief that the pandemic is bringing about the decline of democracy may be an overestimated statement regarding the impact of COVID-19 on democracy in general. The article **"Pandemic Backsliding? A Comparative Study of Democracy Under the Virus Threat,"** by *Dr. Stithorn Thananitichot* and *Miss Kwankaow Kongdecha,* considers two main arguments regarding democracy and the spread of COVID-19.

The next article on leadership and governance during the pandemic from India by *Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay* and *Mr. Kaustuv Chakrabarti* **"Governance and Leadership in India During the Pandemic"** suggests that better realization of "Cooperative Federalism" and revisions to the health care sector are needed. Lastly, *Mr. Apichai Sunchindah* reviews a report titled **"Subregional Development Strategy in ASEAN after COVID-19: Inclusiveness and Sustainability in the Mekong Subregion (Mekong 2030)".** Produced by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and EAST Asia (ERIA), the report proposes tackling development gaps in the Mekong Subregion with policy recommendations across four priority policy areas: connectivity, industrialization, human welfare, and sustainability.

I would like to express my appreciation to all the distinguished contributors. It is worth reflecting on what we have learned from this pandemic. Therefore, I sincerely hope that readers will find these articles valuable for sharing experiences and enhancing knowledge so that we may fight against this outbreak together.I believe this pandemic will definitely test our values, but will lead us to discover ways to stay resilient in our lives in the best way.

(Prof. Woothisarn Tanchai)
Editor in Chief and Secretary General
King Prajadhipok's Institute

Governance and Leadership in the COVID-19 Pandemic:

South Korean Case Focusing on the Effective and Agile Policy Framework

Gi-Heon Kwon*

Abstract

The unfolding of the 21st century has brought the world into a new and different turn. We are living in a chaotic and turbulent society as we witness the vortex of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, we are also facing the issue of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In these times of turbulence, innovation is crucial to achieve the transformation of governance under society 4.0. To achieve innovation and transformation, an effective policy framework is indispensable. This article discusses how smart governance based on an effective policy framework can save thousands of valuable human lives, as we have seen vividly in the vortex of the COVID-19 crisis. The Korean cases show that agile governance with effective policy framework was the key to the answers. By utilizing big data and evidence-based scientific analyses, which can lead to effective policy-making and implementation, we can open a bright and more creative future to make a strong and great nation.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, effective policy framework, agile governance, digital capacities

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Introduction

The unfolding of the 21st century has brought the world to a new and different place. As the 21st century unfolds, we are living in a chaotic and turbulent society as we are witnessing the vortex of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, we are also facing the issue of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In these times of turbulence, innovation is crucial to achieve the transformation of governance under society 4.0. To achieve innovation and transformation, an effective policy framework is indispensable.

Speed of thought becomes very important as information and knowledge are the most critical factors of national competitiveness. To achieve national competitiveness, thereby building a great and strong nation, an effective policy framework is crucial to achieve government innovation and national transformation.

The swirl of the pandemic crisis and information revolution require an unsullied evaluation of the existing governance model and its operating system. In particular, up until now, the bureaucratic model has led the modern development, and its operating system is largely dependent on the steep, rigid, and hierarchical system based on command and control.

But this is no longer true in this knowledge society. Ordinary people can access information and knowledge easily; they sometimes know important information before the government. The red-zone disappears; there are no secrets. Power shifts. As a result, modern society becomes transparent at an increasing speed. Cooperative or network governance based on e-Governance, in which government consults with its partners, corporate businesses, and NGOs in the civil society with a spirit of trust and collaboration, becomes a more and more effective form of governance in this modern knowledge society, even in developing countries.

The full integration of knowledge and skills stacked in thousands of years can be attributed to digitization or advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). The concept of time and space was totally obliterated due to innovations in broadcasting and communication.

How will these kinds of enormous change and innovation, swirling from the high-technological environmental changes and the COVID-19 pandemic, impact the academic discipline of policy science, specifically effective policy framework? What should be the new theoretical principle and philosophy of policy science to break away the so-called criticism of "impoverished professionalism" facing the science of public administration?

As mentioned already, we are currently witnessing and experiencing the frightening COVID-19 pandemic. While addressing the above-raised broader questions, this article will also attempt to delve into the theme of effective governance and leadership, which is indispensable to solve the "wicked" problems emerging from the COVID-19 crisis.

As the coronavirus spreads rapidly around the world, killing thousands and leaving governments scrambling to deal with the fallout, South Korea has drawn praise for its efficiency in dealing with COVID-19.

This article will attempt to address this issue: why and how? In doing so, this article will highlight the theme of effective and agile policy framework and digital capacities.

First, this article will address the Lasswell paradigm of policy science with an aim of establishing a basic theoretical foundation. Then, the article will discuss how effective policy framework relates to new governance as one pillar and national innovation as another pillar. The next section will address the issue of human dignity and how to make a strong and great nation. Specifically, it will discuss the policy dimension and criteria of efficiency, democracy, and reflexivity. Subsequently, it will discuss more practical issues of new capacity building and policy manual to ensure an effective policy framework. Then, this article will discuss real Korean cases: one with a structural framework of the Korean governance process, the other with a specific case of the Korean COVID-19 crisis. Finally, this will lead to the conclusion of the article.

The Lasswell Paradigm of Policy Science

Modern policy science, called policy science of democracy by Harold Lasswell, was initiated by H. Lasswell (1951) in his article, "The Policy Orientation." He argued that policy science should study the systemic order of fundamental problems, for example, civilization clash, social conflict and change, and world revolution and war. By suggesting problem orientation, contextual orientation, and interdisciplinary orientation, he highlighted that the policy science of democracy should pursue human dignity. For this vision, each government should complete its policy orientation by researching the policy process (of) as well as policy content (in).

Figure 1
The Lasswell Paradigm: Policy Science
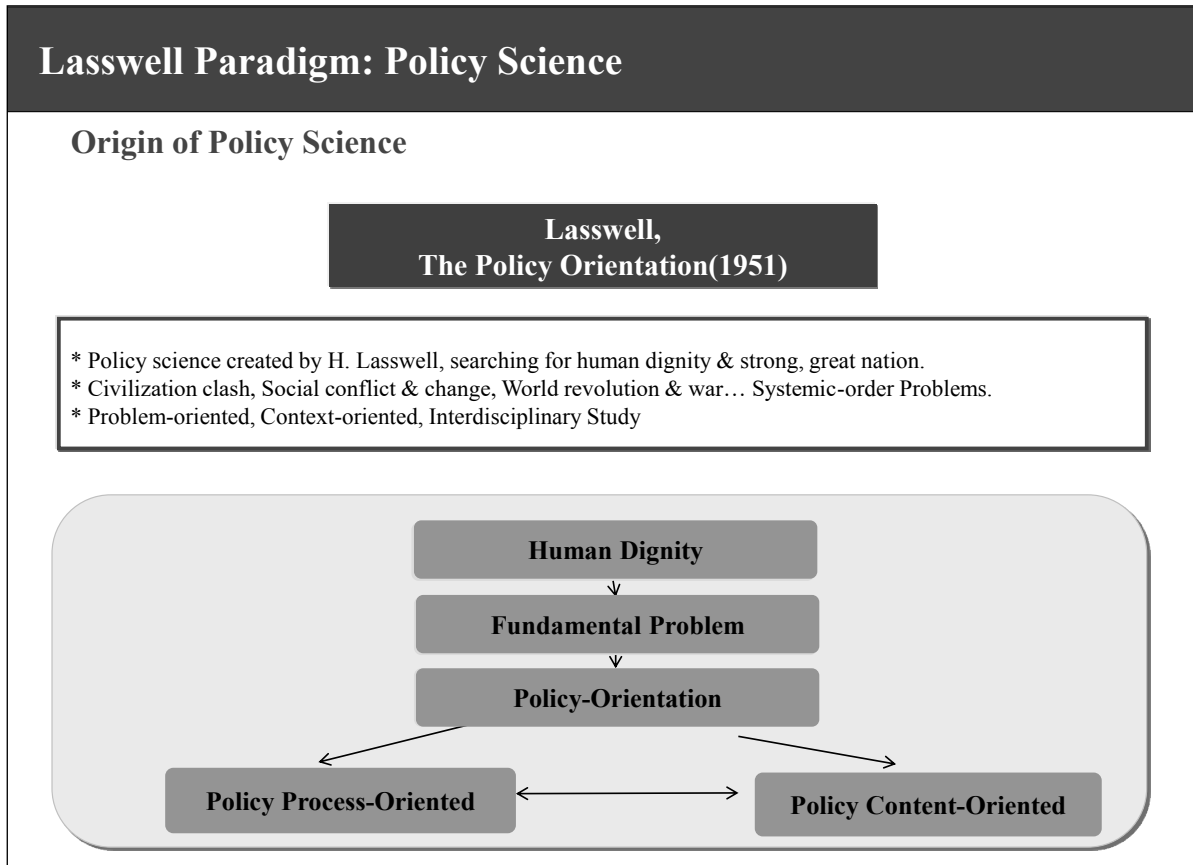
Effective Policy Framework and New Governance

As the 21st century unfolds, we are living in a chaotic and turbulent society characterized by time, speed, and uncertainty. Speed of thought becomes very important as information and knowledge are the most critical factors of national competitiveness. To achieve national competitiveness, thereby building a great and strong nation, an effective policy framework is indispensable to achieve government innovation and national transformation. In the midst of information revolution, an unsullied evaluation of the existing governance model and its operating system is necessary.

The figure below shows the vision and direction of new governance. It also shows globalization, innovation, and leadership challenges that global leaders should face in the turbulence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Digital is characterized by time, speed, and uncertainty. Therefore, in this turbulent modern age, speed of thought and a new direction of innovation is critical, and that is what an effective policy framework should be targeting.

Figure 2

Vision and Direction of New Governance
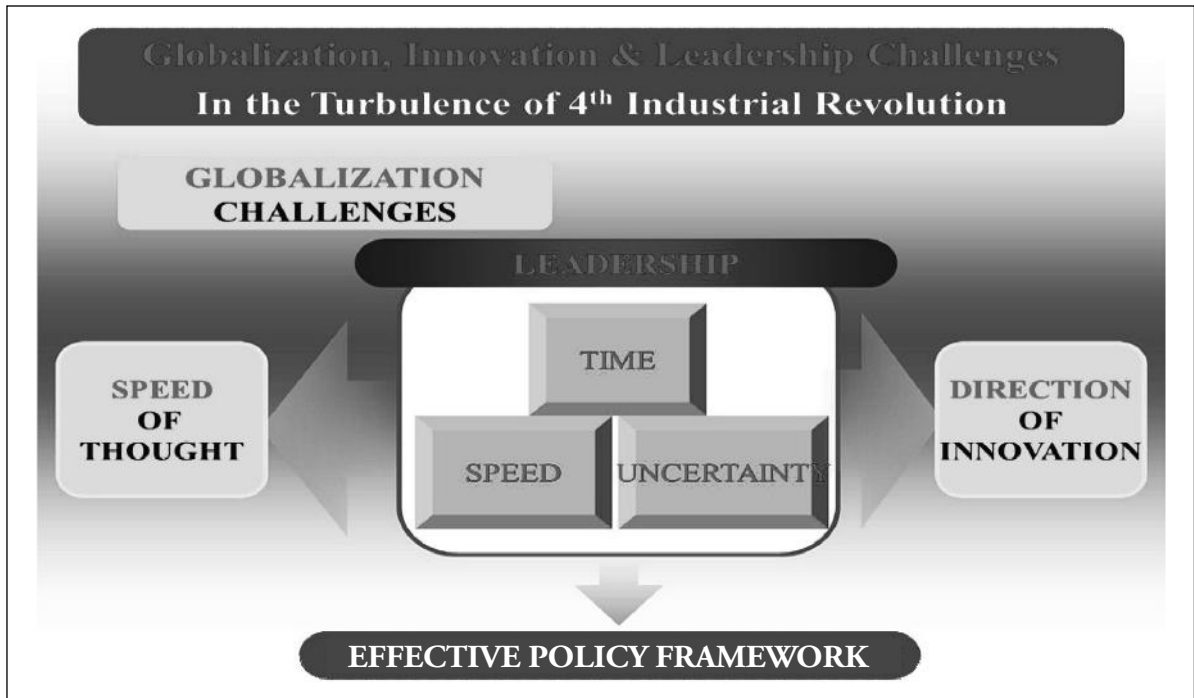
Effective Policy Framework and National Innovation

For most developing nations, the dream of national innovation is to achieve a great and strong nation. This dream and vision start with an effective policy framework. A great nation should be built upon an effective policy framework and strong foundation of the governance system in which government, business, and civil society function most effectively in society.

An effective policy framework starts with the theoretical foundation of understanding two critical features of public policy: the rational aspect and the political aspect. To enhance the rational aspect of public policy, knowledge management and performance management are critical; while incorporating the political aspect, conflict management is inevitable. For the former, we need innovation and foresight approach, while for the latter we need a new governance approach as new governance emphasizes horizontal networks based on the spirit of trust and collaboration.

Figure 3
Effective Policy Framework

Effective Policy Framework (1)

- National innovation will be realized through an effective policy framework

- An effective policy framework will create a Smart e-Government system in which government, business, and civil society will function most effectively in your society

National Innovation

Political Aspect

Conflict Management

Effective Policy Framework

Rational Aspect

Knowledge Management

Performance Management

Effective Policy Framework and Human Dignity

H. Lasswell (1951) argued that the ultimate aim of policy science should be human dignity. For developing nations, this vision can be expressed as nation-building toward strength and greatness: maybe to become strong first and then to become a great nation. Human dignity is an excessively philosophical term and seems to be far away, so we need more practical goals, such as to become a strong and great nation. What, then, is strong and what is great? "The great" means beyond "the strong." To be strong is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being a great nation. A great

nation needs more. For example, a great nation should provide a peaceful community and a foundation in which freedom and justice flow like a great river so that all citizens love each other with full trust and respect, and could pursue their well-being and self-realization with their own free will and wisdom. Also, internationally the great nation should be willing to share its resources and technologies with its neighbors or other less-developed countries to make this world a better place such that people could live in a genuinely peaceful, co-existent, and co-prosperous environment.

To become a strong and great nation, governments, especially in developing areas,

need new capacity building to enhance the government officials' capacity for effective policy framework.

For this purpose, some key items on the capacity building agenda should be

1) identify "fundamental problems" faced in your society;

2) perform evidence-based policy analysis and policy making;

3) also, learn the foundation of policy science with Smart e-Government, e-Transformation, and attitude change for the behavioral perspectives.

Figure 4
Effective Policy Framework and New Capacity Building

Effective Policy Framework & New Capacity-Building

What Kinds of New Capacity-Building are Required for Human Dignity?

Human Dignity

Goal

New Capacity-Building:
1) Identify "fundamental problem" faced in your society
2)Perform evidence-based policy framework
* Effective Policy Framework, Attitude change, Smart e-Government, e-Transformation

Lasswell's Policy Science

| **Problem-solving oriented** | **Contextual-oriented** | **Interdisciplinary oriented** |

Strong and Great Nation: Dimensions

Let us elaborate on the concept of a strong and great nation in a more detailed fashion. What are the dimensions required to become a strong and great nation?

There are five types of capital that a nation needs to build up in this creative knowledge society: economic and physical capital, human capital, social capital, positive psychology capital, and spiritual capital. These show stages of national development. To become a strong nation, a country needs a strong foundation of economy, defense, and human capital. Also, it needs a strong infrastructure such as physical roads, highways, transportation, and smart ICT infrastructures. In other

words, a strong nation has a strong foundation of physical, economic, and human capital. These are types of visible capital.

To become a great nation, however, a country needs more. We do not automatically consider a nation, even if strong, as a great nation. A great nation is not only strong but needs invisible capital including social, positive psychological, and spiritual capital. Especially in the age of creative knowledge, these types of invisible capital have become more valuable. Trust-building, cooperative attitudes, positive citizens with creativity, love, and sharing of wisdom or wealth with other countries. Hidden capital like this will become more noble and valuable, especially in the uncertain and turbulent age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Figure 5
Strong and Great Nation: Five Kinds of Capital
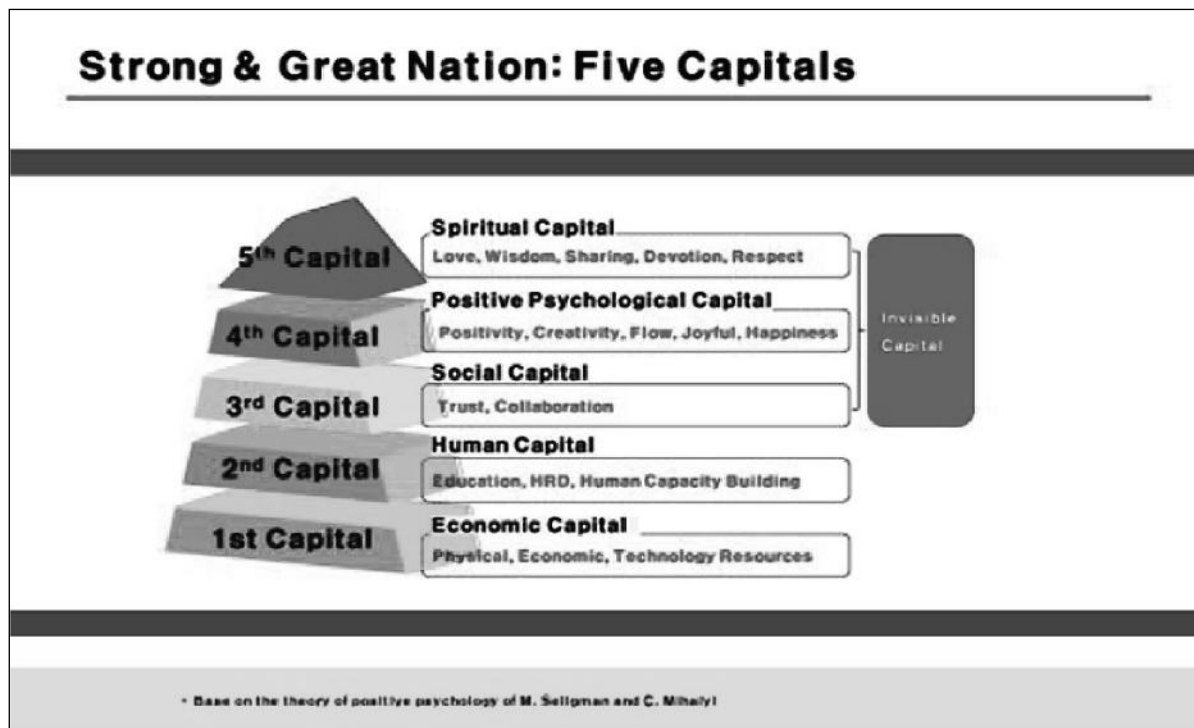
Strong and Great Nation: Policy Criteria

What would be the policy criteria that a strong and great nation should follow? In the same vein, what are the most critical criteria of good governance? The policy criteria for good governance are composed of efficiency, democracy, and reflexivity.

Figure 6

Effective Policy Framework Promotes Efficiency, Democracy, and Reflexivity
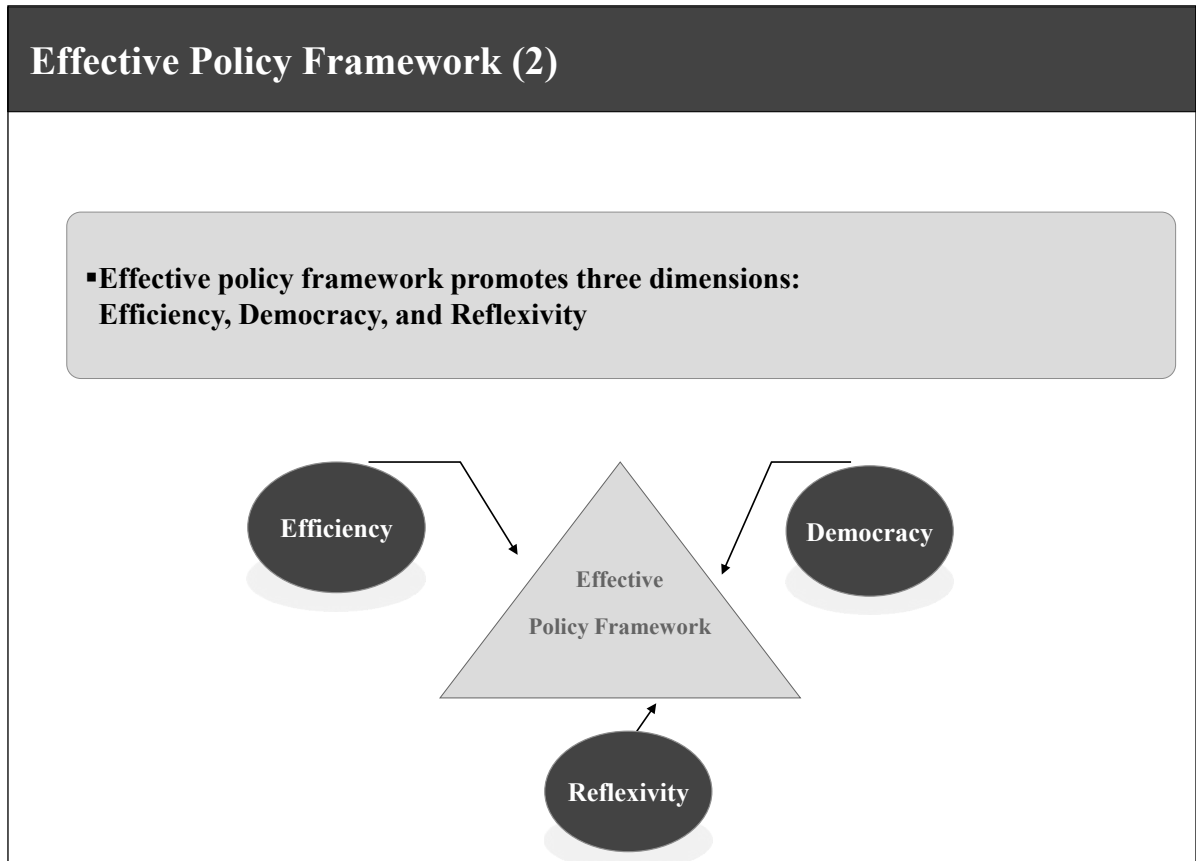
Efficiency. A strong and great nation should be strong and efficient. It should have an effective policy framework. From the standpoint of smart e-government, efficiency dimension has four elements: 1) one and any stop portal government; 2) paperless and building-less government with cost reduction; 3) clean and transparent government with zero corruption; and 4) digital government with knowledge management.

Democracy. A strong and great nation embraces democratic values. From the political and process standpoint, democracy is valuable and indispensable. It indicates not only political participation through elections or voting but also participation in policy-making employing features of digital government. Hence, democracy dimension has two critical elements: 1) e-policy with digital participation in the policy process; and 2) e-politics with digital voting, digital congress, and digital legislation.

Reflexivity. A strong and great nation is reflexive. Reflexivity is a philosophical term. Reflexivity is defined here as a circular relation or interaction among policy actors such that affecting their belief system toward the direction of open, considerate, and more harmonious way considering the other actors' situations. If efficiency concerns an economic material domain, democracy concerns a political institutional or procedural domain; this reflexivity is a much

higher or broader philosophical and social dimension. Therefore, it refers to a supreme vision that a nation-state could realize. For instance, it means a society in which human dignity will be strictly observed; therefore, the individual citizen could freely actualize self-esteem and self-realization. In a nutshell, a reflexive society is a trustful and mature society in which citizens can freely discuss social issues or the public agenda using the public space and smart e-government. It is the highest dimension of an effective policy framework.

Figure 7

New Criteria for Effective Policy Framework to Build a Strong and Great Nation

Effective Policy Framework (3)

▪ **New Criteria for Effective Policy Framework to Build a Strong and Great Nation**

Efficiency(Productivity)

▪ **One, Non, Any Stop Government**
▪ **Paperless, Building less** (cost reduction)
▪ **Clean & Transparent**
▪ **Digital Neural Gov.** (knowledge management)

Democracy

▪ **E-Participation** (e-Policy)
▪ **E-Politics** (e-voting, e-Legislation)

Reflexivity

▪ **Public discussion** (public space)
▪ **Trust-building & Mature Society**
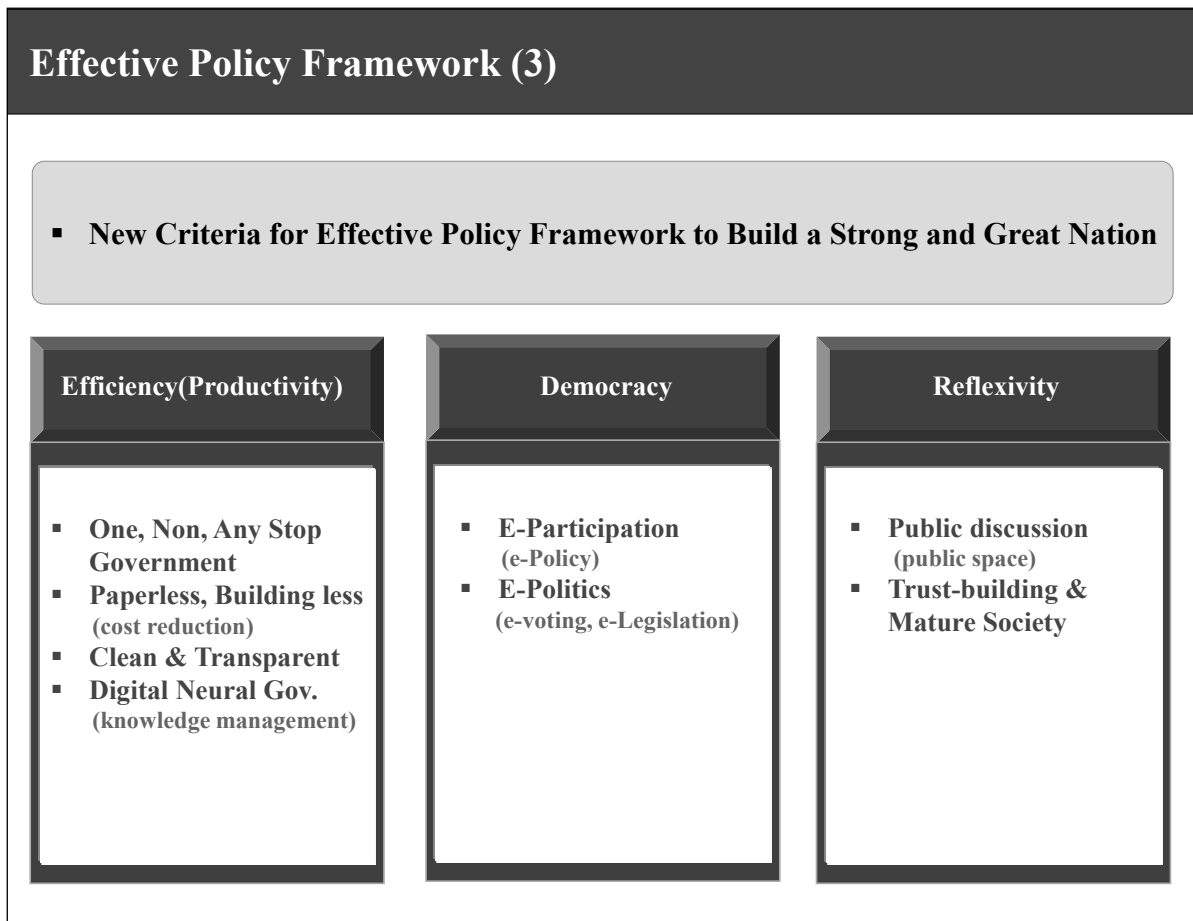
Let us discuss this important issue from another angle. The figure below displays the policy design model that a strong and great nation should follow. To put it another way, it shows the great vision that national innovation should attain. It indicates dimension, institution, method, and model. From the dimension perspective, it shows efficiency, democracy, and reflexivity. From the institution perspective, it is an economic method, political system, and philosophical vision, respectively. The vision can be expressed as BAR society, meaning spiritually beautiful, materially affluent, and

humanely rewarding society. And this vision can be fulfilled by the efficient, democratic, and reflexive governance model in which effective policy framework should pursue achievement of a trustful and creative society. Also, this vision can be realized when the three critical actors, government-market-civil society, will be harmoniously collaborating with a spirit of trust and network. Then, the vision of a strong and great nation will be accomplished in which citizens can fully express their creativity and collective intelligence with positive, loving, and grateful attitudes.

Figure 8
Effective Policy Framework Model
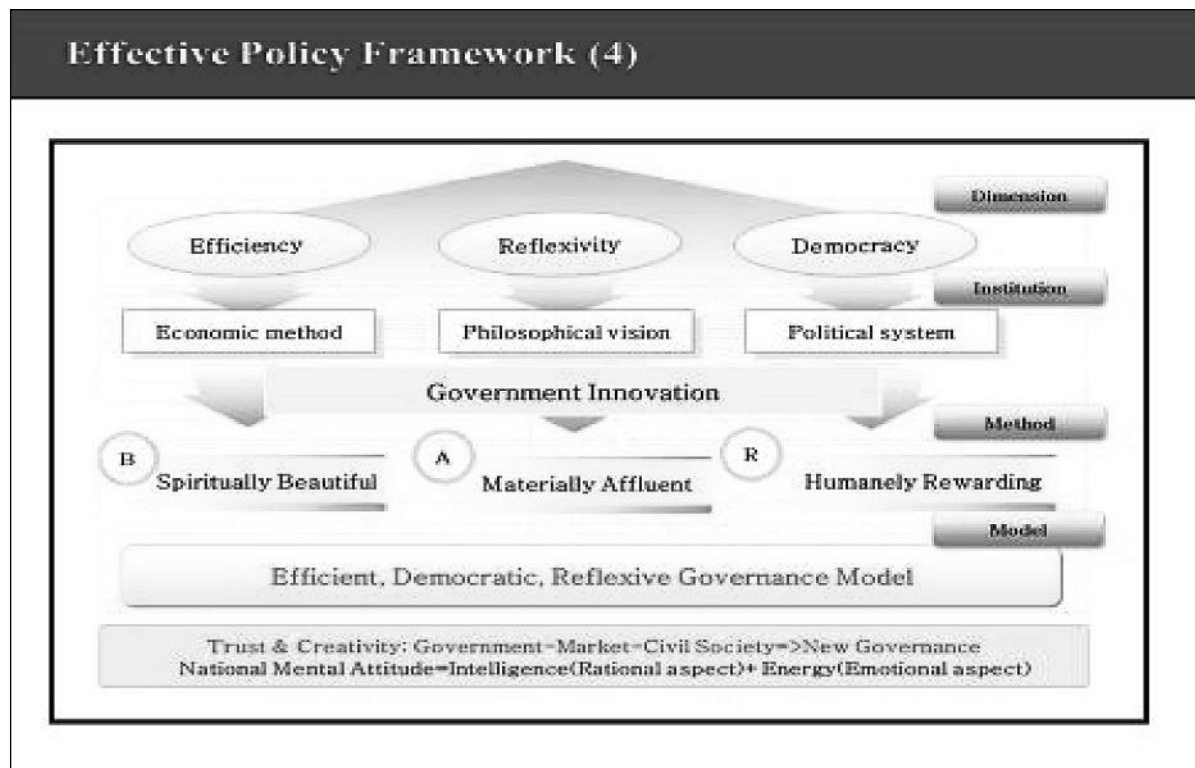
Effective Policy Framework: New Capacity Building

To achieve the vision of a strong and great nation, mentioned above, we need new capacity building for an effective policy framework. The following figure shows this new paradigm. It consists of the supreme value of human dignity, intermediate goal, research, and action orientation. The realization of human dignity is the vision of a strong and great nation. To achieve this vision, the government should upgrade policy capacity, management capacity, and infrastructure capacity. Also, by upgrading the research capacity of policy analysis, including quantitative and qualitative methodologies, each government should formulate an action plan and road map to achieve its goal and vision. The right side of Figure 9 shows a desirable new

governance principle and its structures. In other words, an effective policy framework could be accomplished when the government, business, and civil society collaborate with the spirit of trust and network.

Figure 9
New Capacity Building: Effective Policy Framework

New Capacity Building: Effective Policy Framework
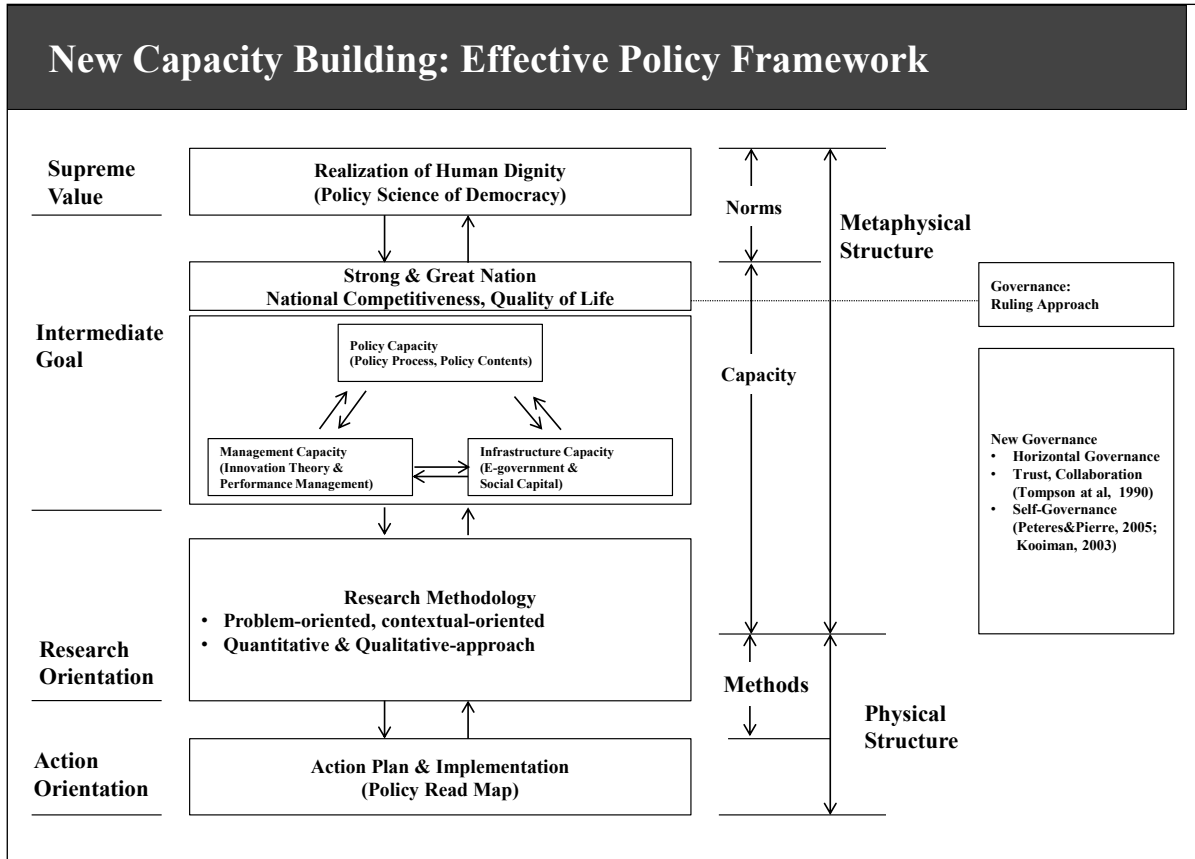
Effective Policy Framework: Micro and Macro Meaning

Effective policy framework, in this article, is defined following two perspectives: micro and macro. The micro perspective of effective policy framework denotes theory and methods for effective decision-making.

On the other hand, the macro perspective is used as the theory and methods of the overall policy processes. In particular, a typical policy process includes agenda setting, policy making, implementation, and evaluation. Employing the macro perspective of effective policy framework requires the adoption of proper theory and method.

Figure 10

Effective Policy Framework Dimensions

Effective Policy Framework

Effective Policy Framework has two dimensions: narrow & broad senses.
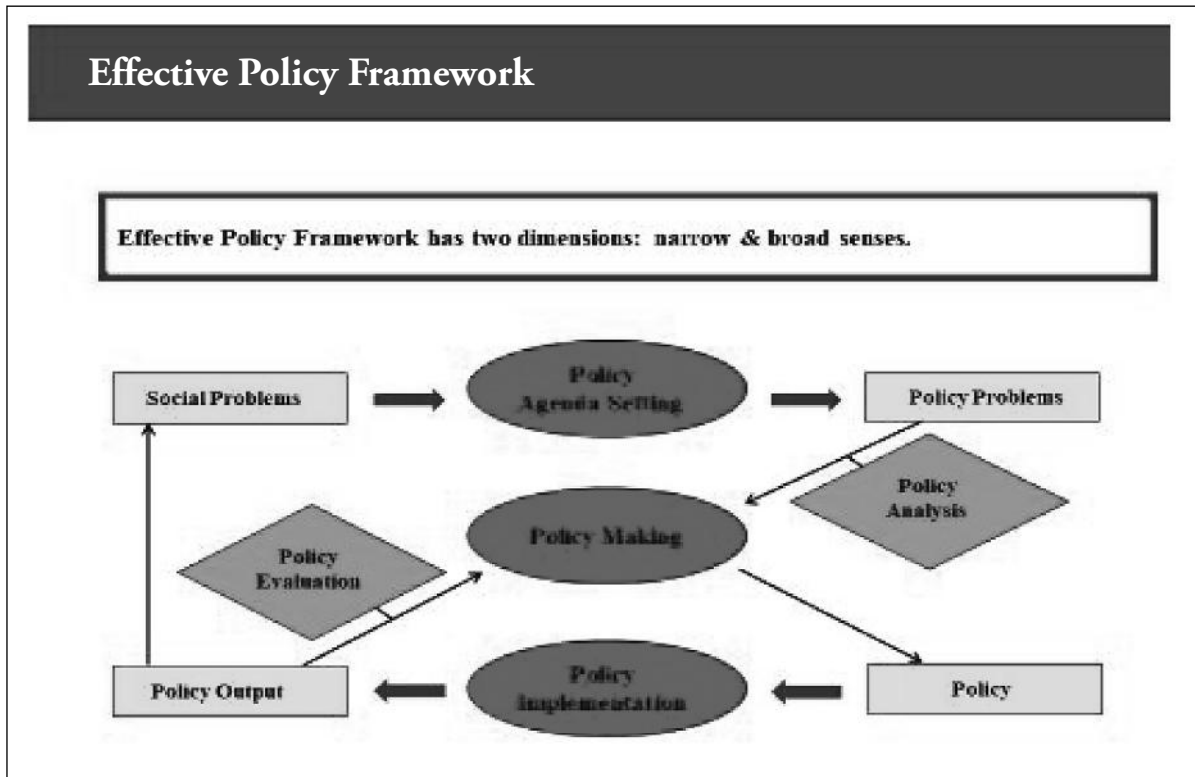
Effective Policy Framework: Check Points for Policy Quality Control

For an effective policy framework, government must have a toolkit for policy quality management. To ensure policy success, an effective policy framework should have a checkpoint for each stage of the policy process. The checkpoints are as follow.

Table 1

Effective Policy Framework: Checkpoints for Quality Control

Rational Model	Check List	Cf
Policy Planning	• Have you identified the true nature (issue) of the problem?	
	• Would the problem require government intervention; is it inevitable?	
	• Have you checked and thoroughly investigated previous similar policy cases?	
	• Have you identified and listened carefully to the relevant target population or groups?	
Policy Making	• Did you choose your best option?	
	• Have you checked the resources necessary for the policy: is it enough?	
	• Have you checked the relevant agencies and taken prior consultation with them?	
	• Have you checked and followed the legal procedures?	
	• Have you set up the PR plan?	
Policy Announcement	• Did you take consultation and coordination with your related parties?	
Policy Implementation	• Did you maintain the policy priority in a consistent manner?	
	• Have you strategically positioned the authorities and resources required for policy implementation?	
	• Have you monitored the responses of policy target groups from time to time and responded appropriately?	
	• Did you perform monitoring at the mid-point of the policy implementation such that policy was implemented in accordance to the original purpose?	
Policy Evaluation	• Did you realize your original policy goal?	
	• Did you set up the rewards and incentives (positive as well as negative) based upon policy evaluation?	
	• Did you make a document as a nice lively policy case and draw policy implications and policy learning?	

Effective Policy Framework: Korean Governance Case

The following figure shows the Korean case of policy life cycle governance. It is characterized by its successful identification of client needs, performance indicators, and policy validity. Also, it is the best case for careful and meticulous policy quality control, and process innovation. For effective agenda-setting and conceptualization of policy, the Korean government successfully uses many toolkits that include brainstorming, policy survey, SWOT, client needs, goal setting, process map, CSF, and resource plan. For effective policy-making, the Korean government successfully performs concretization by utilizing feasibility study, scenario planning, PR planning, and opinion gathering as real-time management. For an effective policy confirmation, the Korean president presides over regular cabinet meetings at the Blue House (President's Office) and closely consults with Parliament about strategic direction and policy-making to enhance successful policy performance. For effective policy implementation and evaluation, the Korean government performs monitoring in the middle of implementation or by evaluating post-mortem performance.

Figure 11

Korea: Effective Policy Governance Model
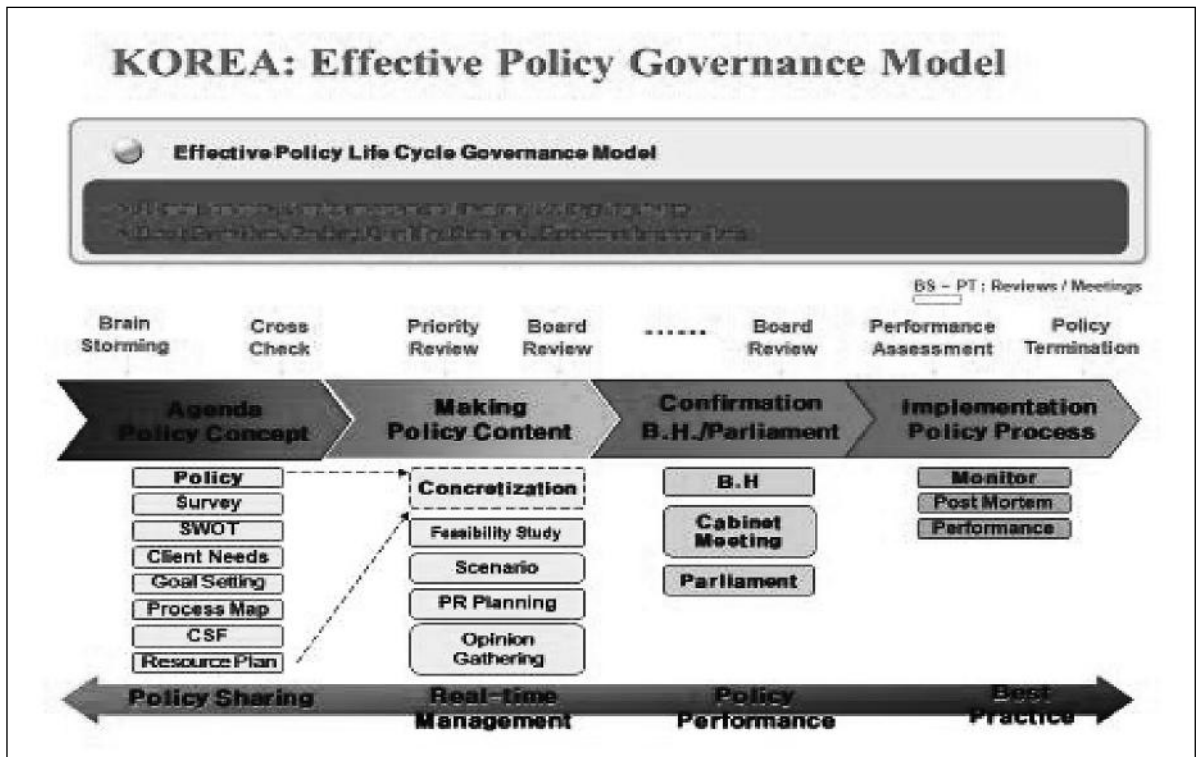
The COVID-19 Crisis: Korean Case of Applied Effective Policy Framework

As the coronavirus spreads rapidly around the world, killing thousands and leaving governments scrambling to deal with the fallout, one country has repeatedly drawn praise for its efficiency in dealing with it: South Korea.

Medical System or Effective Leadership: Learning From Past Experiences?

South Korea has been praised for its response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which combines widespread testing with innovative strategies such as public "drive-through" that separates medical professionals and patients and can provide results within several hours. Additionally, there have been efforts in triangulating available public and private data to track patients' whereabouts and schedules. The United States, recognizing South Korea's success, has even requested equipment, likely including test kits, from South Korea. The Moon Jae-in administration built upon South Korea's previous experiences responding to outbreaks of both Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015.

South Korea is one of the few countries that succeeded in flattening the coronavirus curve. The policies of testing, tracing, and treating without lockdowns have been widely lauded. Some attribute this to South Korea's experience of having dealt with previous epidemics such as SARS and MERS. Commentators in the US tend to stress South Korea's effective leadership, contrasting it with that of Donald Trump. Others point to cultural factors, such as the willingness of the public to sacrifice privacy for the greater public good.

Effective Governance and Agile Policy System

What is often overlooked, though, is that at the fundamental foundations of South Korea's success against COVID-19 are effective and efficient governance and policy systems to deliver public services. Without this firm foundation and strong infrastructure, which was initiated under the leadership of President Park Chung Hee, the policy of test, trace, and treat could not have been sustained or expanded to the degree that it has. Furthermore, effective leadership cannot achieve much if it lacks a well-functioning public service system that can deliver.

In retrospect, South Korea, as a newly industrialized and independent developing country after World War II, brought not only state-led economic development but also new kinds of government-led medical implementations. During the 1950s, many South Koreans were still unfamiliar with Western medicine and did not initially welcome official health programs.

This began to change under the strong leadership of Park Chung Hee who brought the economic miracle of Han River. The strong and committed South Korean leader launched public health campaigns that fundamentally changed both the medical profession and the public's attitude toward it. New professional standards were demanded of doctors and their support staff, while the public was encouraged to participate in the medical and health insurance system and other state-organized health implementations.

Effective Smart ICT Infrastructure and Transparent System

Today, the Moon Jae-in government's response to the virus has not been without flaws and criticism. The South Korean media has blamed him for not moving quickly enough to ban Chinese tourists when the virus began spreading rapidly. Others have criticized the high degree of state surveillance. The government would have had far more difficulty carrying out contact tracing if it could not have closely followed the movement of its citizens through their smartphones and well-functioning credit card systems. This last point has quite critical implications because it implies that an effective smart ICT infrastructure and transparent big data tracing system have been an excellent smart foundation of South Korea's success story.

Comprehensive and Systematic Policy Capacity

In a nutshell, South Korea's response to the recently emerged COVID-19 crisis was a success of the Korean governance system and specifically the country's comprehensive and systematic policy capacity: 1) consistent tracing of the patients' whereabouts and schedules; 2) transparent data open to the public; 3) citizens' cooperative attitude to the government policy guidelines; 4) a comprehensive and systematic test kit program; and, most importantly, 5) an effective governance system and an improved policy capacity learned from the past policy experiences of SARSs and MERS.

What This Korean Story Implies for Other Developing Nations?

What, then, does this Korean story tell other developing countries? Of course, each country has a different historical trajectory, so there is no one best solution or panacea. The best solution for one country, oftentimes, does not fit another nation. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: a strong state with responsible and responsive leadership is always the answer. We are living in the age of turbulence, surrounded by very volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous circumstances. We are not very sure about what kinds of wicked viruses or other unknown hazards will attack our life. In this regard, we need, more than ever before, agile governance, fully armed with an effective policy framework and digital capabilities.

Comprehensive Design: Effective Policy Framework

To elucidate the holistic paradigm of effective policy framework, we need to understand the following comprehensive design. Public policy has two aspects: rational and political. To upgrade its rational scientific features, the government should enhance its capacity-building, from policy-making, policy analysis, foresight and forecasting, and innovation theory. To harmonize its political features, the government should enhance its capacity-building, from conflict management, attitude change, and new governance theory. This means that the government needs to integrate harmoniously its efficiency and democratic dimensions. Furthermore, the government should understand the uppermost dimension of reflexivity by studying smart e-government theory. In total, effective policy making is the underpinning of good governance achieving efficiency, democracy, and reflexivity.

Figure 12

Effective Policy Framework Comprehensive Design
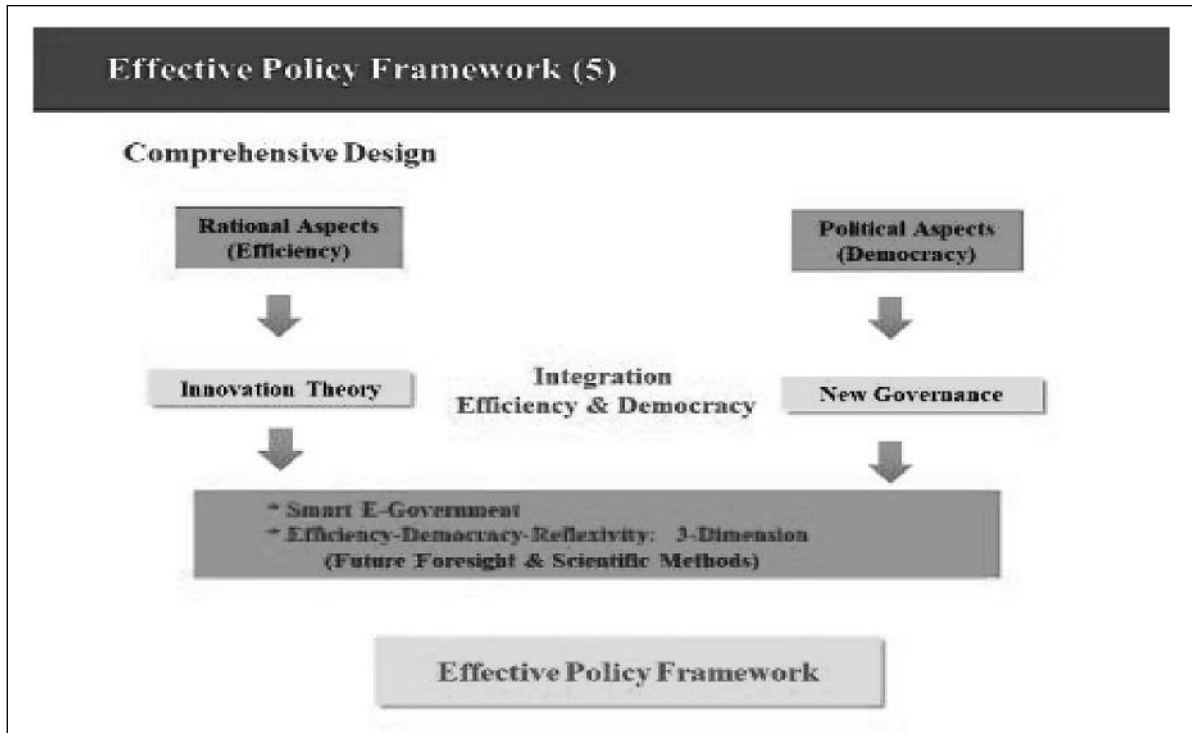
Conclusion: Effective Policy Framework and Digital Capabilities

Let us summarize the key lessons of this article.

The unfolding of the 21st century has brought the world into a new and different condition. As globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution deepen in this contemporary age, uncertainty and complexity of wicked problems are ever heightened. It is the age of time, speed, and uncertainty, or the turbulent age of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In this age of turbulence, innovation is crucial to achieving the transformation of governance under society 4.0. To achieve innovation and transformation, an effective policy framework is indispensable. As we saw vividly in the vortex of the COVID-19 crisis, smart governance based on an effective policy framework can save thousands of valuable human lives. As shown in the Korean success case, agile governance with an effective policy framework was the key to the answers. By utilizing big data and evidence-based scientific analyses, which can lead to effective policy-making and implementation, we can open a bright and more creative future to make a strong and great nation.

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Community-Based Economic Empowerment:

An Alternative for Community Development After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper tries to promote community-based economic empowerment as an alternative model of the solution to economic liberalization. The conception of Economic Empowerment presented focuses on efforts to build economic capacity in a participatory manner within the community with all its limitations so that collectively communities are enlightened and then struggle to step out of the bondage of economic inequality, which has so far conditioned them to be trapped in the valley of poverty. This study is conducted to explore and enrich the concept of community-based empowerment. Furthermore, this paper will provide an in-depth analysis of community-based empowerment as an alternative model of political community development. A comprehensive review of the literature will be included in this paper to give an adequate description of community-based economic empowerment logic. The data shown in this analysis are secondary data obtained from various publications that are of great significance to the topics discussed. Moreover, the data are analyzed and quantitatively tested to provide an in-depth understanding of

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community-based economic empowerment. Primary benefits of community-based economic empowerment are that the benefits obtained from productive activities can be shared by the actors involved in the production process and that attention is paid to preserving nature during the pursuit of profit. The economic architecture is built within a network of sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships for all actors involved in the production process following their contributions. Therefore, there is no structural segregation where some parties are superior and others inferior.

Keywords: Community empowerment, community economics, community development, COVID-19

Introduction

Lately, imported products have tended to be the prime favorite for public consumption in developing countries. Two leading causes explain why this can occur. First, the price of imported products in the local market is relatively low, the packaging is also comparatively attractive, the quality of goods is better, and imports have a classy social status image. Second, there may be no choice for consumers in developing countries besides consuming imported products because of the scarcity of local products due to weak capital, limited distribution networks, high production costs, conventional technology, and market distrust of local goods (Hertz, 2003).

Encroachment of imported products is one of the effects of neoliberalism. As stated by George (1999), neoliberalism is a tool of economic policy that at the global level directs its efforts to the manifestation of three things, namely:

1. free trade in goods and services;

2. free flow for capital; and

3. freedom for the market player to create and withdraw investment.

Economic globalization, as a manifestation of neoliberalism, occurs as a form of encouragement to expand capital. In more academic terms, it is called the expansion of capitalism. The international world is a large area for conducting trade transactions. Capitalism sees this opportunity to spread its ideological wings. It became known as neoliberalism, which became a firm root to encourage people, capital, goods, and services to move freely without being hindered by anything, including national borders. Nike, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Microsoft, IBM, Apple, Adidas, and others are evidence of the strong urge to accumulate these benefits. These companies were later referred to as transnational corporations. The giant actors in the economy and business are competing with each other for buyers in various parts of the country, and they even build their corporate regimes to form a more resilient corporate power.

Therefore, neoliberalism is very relevant to the phenomenon of "transnationalization" of the economy, where countries' boundaries are not so significant to stem the capitalization of various product streams ranging from the need for upstream to

downstream industries. We can see the indicators on the trade label printed on the packaging of various products circulating in the local market. The dominance of companies' names that produce various industrial processes needs is the names of large-scale companies that obtain licenses from foreign companies that mostly come from advanced industrial countries such as Monsanto and other giant companies.

Generally, the economic system of developing countries is an open system. Thus, it provides opportunities for imported products and local products to compete in the market. Those who cannot compete must be willing to be marginalized and run over by the wheels of market competition. Many of those affected by this situation are micro, small, and medium scale businesses upon which people with limited income depend. Externalities like this have never been a part of market institutions and business actors' responsibility globally, where their corporations have succeeded in destroying various economic bases of small income groups spread across developing countries.

It then gave rise to the nuances of injustice that were quite contrasting. The data presented in the United Nations Human Development Report illustrated economic inequality conditions at the international community level. The report stated that one-fifth of the world's most affluent population consumed 86% of all goods and services, while one-fifth of the poorest only got one percent more. Then, one-fifth of the richest also enjoy 82 percent of export trade and 68 percent of foreign direct investment (FDI), while one-fifth of the most inferior only enjoys one percent

more (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). This condition triggers an unstable economy and stimulates communal violence due to social jealousy packaged in conflicts between ethnicities, religions, and other identity factors.

At least four direct impacts arise from liberalism, which is often referred to as liberalism syndrome. The first impact is the erosion of human existence (dehumanization), which leads to subhuman conditions. Human resources have been replaced by machines and technological means, continually evolving due to industrialization and the interest in profit accumulation. Empirically, we can observe that today's postmodern humans are very dependent on electricity, fuel oil, the internet, smartphones, and computers. Without all the supporting infrastructure, human activities will be hampered, causing a decrease in productivity. We need to keep in mind that all these facilities should be under conscious human control, not the other way around. Moreover, the formation of individualistic patterns of life is also caused by human dependence on machines to alienate human interactions.

The second is the strengthening of consumerism culture. The construction of liberalism has presented a concrete human being co-opted by various forms of materialism so that human satisfaction can only be fulfilled if-and only if-its total consumption of materialism can be fulfilled continuously. Consumerism is an effort to elevate and legitimize social strata in postmodernist society. The meaning of life and social status determination are found when one is willing to spend one's money to buy branded goods, hold the latest

cellphone, eat at famous fast-food restaurants, or enjoy the sunset in a star hotel's courtyard. This condition is a ritual routine that is cultivated in the behavior patterns of today's society.

The third is the automation of political behavior in a democracy. Globalization not only narrows the space and time to move goods, services, capital, and information. It also narrows the probability of winning the political competition in elections through the preference infiltration method using money politics instruments. This automation of behavior exists not only in political competition but also in the struggle for ideological influence. Certain groups hope that the short process of obtaining quick results will satisfy them with materialism. To signal a marginalized group's existence, they present terror to obtain full public recognition quickly and effectively. It is what is then blamed on the Muslim world, even though so far the neglect of the existence of other civilizations - not only to Islam - by Western civilization, which is currently becoming the prima donna of dominating the global order, is an independent variable towards the formation of new characteristics, namely the automation of political behavior, in this case terrorism.

The fourth is the spiritual emptiness that Fukuyama (1995) fully admits as the vacuum at the heart of liberalism and becomes a fundamental ideological flaw. The attention of postmodern humans is currently being taken away more towards fulfilling the needs of materialism. There is no more meaning in life to create a purpose in life after death. We are living only to satisfy the needs of materialism and then die into the soil. In this aspect, we can also see how life in today's world is based on selfish interactions. Kindness becomes a pretense to cover up the interests that lie behind it. This pretension appears as a consequence of wanting to meet the needs of materialism instantly.

Indifference to the syndrome of liberalism will make this social pathology even more acute and erode the essential values that underlie social life. Fukuyama (1999) names this situation as "The Great Disruption." On the condition of global chaos, Fukuyama recommends that efforts to recover from the condition should be directed at the improvement of economic capacity based on the community. Even though it is not implicitly described in Fukuyama's book, he tries to remind us of the importance of development initiated from the community level by relying on a network strategy. This method is expected to avoid the economic system's degradation and deterioration amid strong companies. This idea is also supported by Friedmann (1992), who argued that there must be serious efforts to restore power to the hands of society in various dimensions of life. Moreover, Friedmann also outlined the economic, socio-political, and gender aspects.

Therefore, this paper tries to raise the concept of community-based economic empowerment as an alternative model of solutions to economic liberalization, which is currently reaching the international world today. The conception of economic empowerment offered focuses on efforts to build economic capacity in a participatory manner within the community with all the limitations possessed by community

members so that they are collectively enlightened and then struggle to step out of the bondage of economic inequality that has conditioned and trapped them in the valley of poverty.

Conceptual Framework

Philosophical Framework: Reinterpreting Empowerment

Often a fundamental error occurs in interpreting the meaning of empowerment. For instance, there is an assumption that empowerment is an effort to build a community's power through efforts to encourage, motivate, and raise awareness of the potential that is owned and develop this potential to achieve more optimal results (Business of Better World and International Center for Research on Women, 2016). This conception seems to be correct. However, the concept raises an arrogant impression because a particular party is positioned as being stronger and already empowered. On the other hand, there are vulnerable communities and they need to be empowered by the already empowered community. Empowerment in the concept above is more visible to mobilize a community, not empower the community. The concept of ambiguous empowerment is a gap for the community to be deceived instead of being empowered.

In this paper, empowerment is viewed as developing three dimensions of community strength—political, social, and psychological—based on the community's understanding, not on the initiative or coercion of a party outside the community. Therefore, the author believes that

empowerment is related to social capital. To be precise, empowerment is an effort to increase social capital (Colemean, 1998). Social capital is people's ability to work together to achieve common goals in various groups and organizations (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). Social capital is just as important as physical capital (land, buildings, machinery) and human capital (skills and knowledge possessed by humans) because all these three types of capital become complementary prerequisite dimensions for a community to lead to a welfare pledge. Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is also productive capital (Hellerstein & Neumark, 2020). Social capital plays a significant role in providing access to more information, increasing social cohesion, enhancing public engagement, minimizing opportunistic behavior, raising political participation, government responsiveness and performance, decreasing costs, providing risk and insecurity protection, and addressing collective action issues (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009).

The method that becomes the entry point in empowerment is brainstorming among community members to determine the fundamental philosophical values that become a common understanding framework and form the social capital. Therefore, the community must be allowed to develop and determine its mindset independently freely. Thus, all actors who are components of community stakeholders can freely establish a philosophical foundation about the fundamental values of life they believe. One of the things that then needs to be done collectively is the change of each individual (inner change) to arouse

enlightenment that they are part of this universe so that what is done is no longer controlling to take control but adapting constructively to the environment.

It is best for individuals involved in brainstorming activities to do so as a conscious effort, namely the will that starts from the inner self and without coercion or compulsion. The agreement obtained through brainstorming activities is a pleasant and prosperous commitment rather than a bond that ties and becomes a terror that imprisons human free will as part of a community.

Mapping the Contemporary Economic Models

Over the past few generations, neoclassical economists have dominated economic thinking so the public is more familiar with free-market economists such as Milton Friedmann, Gary Becker, and George Stigler (Butler-Bowdon, 2017). The agitation of the Marxists and Keynesians became a strong motivator for the emergence of neoclassical economic perspectives. The specialty of neoclassical economics is its success in finding essential facts about the nature of money and markets. This success is possible because of the fundamental model of neoclassical economics that maps human behavior as that of rational beings who have interests. For example, how humans take a position of themselves in an escalation of social life. As creatures with interests, humans try to take advantageous roles in decision-making so that the chosen policies do not harm them. It can be seen in the pattern of representation in policy-making institutions. For instance, in Indonesia, after the

Reformation, various political entities tried to take the opportunity to participate in the policy formulation process. They hoped that their representation would not put them in a disadvantaged economic situation. The neoclassical economic model is also an excellent reference to understand the development of the current financial and market situation.

Empirically, many countries and other international actors show that the interactions they build are in the framework of money and markets. For instance, international trade interactions show the international division of labor phenomenon described by Wallerstein in the dependency theory. It shows the form of interaction in the flow of money in international markets as something that the state and international actors cannot avoid.

On the other hand, although not dominant enough, neomercantilism economic thinking also developed. At least the names like Chalmers Johnson, James Fallow, Clyde Prestowitz, John Zysman, Karel van Wolferen, Alice Amsden, and Laura Tyson have become scholars who characterize the development of neomercantilism thinking (Fukuyama, 1995). The thinking of neomercantilism economics focuses on government policies in export-oriented industries and government efforts to direct economic development to be better than the market. This theory's strength lies in explaining public goods and the role of equity creation and income redistribution among the public. Public barriers are goods or services that have two fundamental characteristics, namely non-rivalry and non-excludability. Non-rivalry is

is the absence of competition when consuming an item (Makowski & Ostroy, 2001).

In contrast, non-excludability refers to the broadest openness of access for any actor to utilize a service even though they do not issue any compensation for obtaining the service (Makowski & Ostroy, 2001). An example is national defense. It means that the implementation of national defense is intended for all citizens, even though some of them do not pay taxes.

Based on this conception, what emerges is called a market failure, where markets are reluctant to provide public goods in sufficient quantities due to free-rider problems and externalities. For example, in the implementation of national defense, those who do not pay or whose taxes are in arrears continue to obtain the service. This group is then referred to as a free rider. Therefore, the market will be reluctant to do this because it deals with inefficiencies that damage the transaction's optimum profit. The actor that then provides the public goods, of course, is the country.

Another thing that shows the state's power is creating justice through redistribution of income due to market competition, which causes most people to live in economic powerlessness. Through the mechanism of state taxes and levies, the state then provides services to the public so that those who live in poverty can continue to access health services, education, and assistance stimulus such as subsidies and soft loans. For instance, to save financial institutions from collapse, the US government has provided assistance in bailouts to various banks. Unfortunately, however, this approach has caused a prolonged economic crisis. In Fukuyama's

article entitled The Fall of America Inc. in *Newsweek* magazine at the beginning of October 2008, it was stated that the weakening of the role of the state during the implementation of Ronald Reagan's economic policy package commonly called Reaganomics, was precisely the root of the crisis faced by the United States (Fukuyama, 2008). The critical note on Fukuyama's writing is that the state's unbalanced role causes behavioral deviations in markets such as making loans or credit beyond the limits of income capabilities, low public savings, and war subsidies that sacrifice pension funds, destroy the balance of the market's role. Therefore, the state should exercise proportional control so that economic congestion does not occur.

However, neoclassical economics is a more sustainable intellectual effort compared to neomercantilism. It is because, empirically, the market is an efficient resource provider and gives freedom to encourage personal interests to increase growth. The market is a broader space for business people to express themselves. It is what causes creativity and innovation to continue to develop dynamically. For example, the development of information technology continues to experience rapid development so that the public as consumers gets favorable choices for these products' availability.

Behind the perfection of the classic economic thought, there are weaknesses, and even weaknesses are also the neomercantilism economy. These economic thoughts turned out to have forgotten what Adam Smith suggested: as Muller (1992) quoted, economic life is deeply embedded in social life. Therefore, the economy cannot be

understood separately from the customs, morals, and habits of the community in which the economic process takes place.

A contemporary neoclassical theory that relies on the relatively simple human nature of human beings who rationally maximize their use to prosper materially is not indisputable. Because sometimes humans pursue other things than usability. We cannot generalize that every confrontation, conflict, and war is only fought for economic resources because these various contradictions also involve other purposes, such as religion, recognition, justice, prestige, and honor.

This rebuttal does not make neoclassical theorists silent. They try to expand the definition of usability to explain why goals such as religion, recognition, justice, prestige, and honor contribute to conflict. One explanation is the physical pleasure someone receives from doing the right thing or the pleasure someone gets after giving something to someone else. Therefore, someone can find out something useful if other people find it useful. F. Y. Edgeworth, as quoted by Sen (1977), describes this as revealed preference.

However, if we look at the concept put forward by Edgeworth, it will appear contradictory to human nature as previously postulated, where humans are declared as rational beings who maximize their use before the group because humans have self-interest. Ambiguity further weakens the neoclassical defense efforts for the postulate about the nature of human beings. Therefore, a clearer perspective for reviewing the economy is to see it as a diametric composition between material and spiritual dimensions of satisfaction.

Methods

The author will first clarify the method used in the writing of this article before further description. A survey of the literature is a technique for writing this article. This method prioritizes researchers' efforts to conduct literature reviews on previous writings that refer to the subjects discussed and summarize the literature to obtain new insights (Snyder, 2019). In the literature survey, numerous approaches occur in more detail: a systematic approach, a semi-systematic approach, and an integrative approach. A systematic analysis of the literature will be included in this article. Synder demonstrated that the systematic approach attempts to synthesize and contrast outcomes (Snyder, 2019). This approach can offer an appropriate explanation of the rationale of community-based economic empowerment. The data shown in this study is secondary data gathered from numerous publications that are highly important to the topics discussed.

Furthermore, the data are analyzed and qualitatively validated to provide an in-depth understanding of community-based economic empowerment. The author will also bring forward some additional ideas that could enrich the value of the sustainable existence of community-based economic empowerment as an alternative model of development.

Discussion

Social Empowerment and Community-Based Economic Empowerment

Friedmann (1992) identified three important forces in empowerment: social,

political, and psychological. He further explained that social strength is related to access to the production base, such as information, knowledge and ability, participation in social organizations, and financial resources. When a community's economic access capacity increases with its production base, its ability to develop and achieve its goals also increases. An increase in social power can also be understood as an increase in community access to the production base for prosperity.

Referring to Friedmann's opinion, community-based economic empowerment is framed in the conceptual framework of strengthening social aspects that focus on building access to the production base and strengthening its distribution channels. Therefore, community-based economic empowerment is the conscious participation of humans as community members who relate to the environment both physically and socially. The community has access to a production base that can be continuously improved to support their capacity to survive and contribute positively to social balance and the ecosystem.

However, it should be noted that community-based economic empowerment is not merely focused on increasing social power but also paying attention to simultaneous reinforcement of political and psychological aspects. The three power concepts put forward by Friedmann still collaborate proportionally in creating a comprehensive development force for the community that is supported.

Community-Based Economic Empowerment as an Evolutionary Process

Factual reality shows that economic liberalization has co-opted the pattern of human life at this time so that it is difficult to eliminate its dominance in a revolutionary manner. Therefore, community-based economic empowerment is not an instant offer that can quickly lead people to enjoy welfare at an optimal degree immediately. Instead, it is a conscious effort that systematically and gradually reaches an economical application that is equitably sustainable with a rational calculation of risk. Simultaneously, the focus is on striving to implement an equitable economy built on a relatively solid foundation to generate trust among the community to achieve prosperity.

However, indeed everything new raises doubts. Therefore, a testing laboratory is needed to realize a practical concept of economic empowerment based on community. It is essential to understand that community-based economic empowerment is not a concept that can instantly change the world economy's facts. Instead, it is an alternative political development that gradually seeks to create equitable economic conditions. Therefore, an unyielding insistence on implementing the model to degrade the power of economic liberalization evolutionarily can exterminate all potential resources in developing countries.

The pretension of an equitable economic concept that leads to alienation among fellow community members needs to be transformed into a trust to anticipate the delay. Fundamentally, alienation between community members is triggered by the same source, namely excessive materialism orientation. The indication is the use of an economic development paradigm that is inclined to fulfill physical and material needs as the neoclassical people believe. Therefore,

the mindset and culture formed in the society are oriented to satisfaction in materialism. As a result, the manifestations of economic behavior that are impelled tend to show human nature that tends to conflict with each other, as stated by Thomas Hobbes (1997). These conflicting traits eliminate what Fukuyama (1995) calls trust. According to Fukuyama, people who have a high level of trust will be more efficient than people with low trust levels. He gave an example of America as a group of people with high rivalry levels, where the state must spend a relatively large budget to hold more than one percent of its population. Besides, Americans also have to pay more for lawyers so that their citizens can sue each other. Fukuyama's illustration shows that a society with a low level of trust is wasting costs, which would undoubtedly be more productive if converted into investment. Therefore, the first step that needs to be carried out is to reduce alienation among fellow community members due to excessive materialism to create a firm belief order.

To further strengthen the bond of trust among fellow community members, community-based economic empowerment uses a participatory approach to increase the community's capacity consciously and independently to generate capital to create income that can be enjoyed by all community members equitably. Creating a balance of orientation between materialism and spiritualism is thus the core fundamental of economic empowerment. Economic empowerment creates material changes such as increased income and synergy between increasing income and improving life mechanisms.

Empower Local Economic Institutions

Institutional strengthening in community-based economic empowerment focuses on local economic institutions that have been popular with community members themselves. For example, for the public in Indonesia, famous local economic institutions are cooperatives.

Macro globalization flows have marginalized the role of local economic institutions such as cooperatives. Globalization makes the world increasingly catastrophic, meaning that citizens in one part of the world will quickly know citizens' economic activities in other parts of the world. It is supported by Toffler (1980), who states that the international community is entering a new era called the "Third Wave." The third wave is a label for freedom and ease of access and exchange of information and services. It is indeed not entirely detrimental, but the management system that is still manual makes the cooperative seem conventional and lags far behind the information systems that have developed in various large-scale economic institutions that have already adapted to the Third Wave era.

Therefore, in an increasingly globalized economy, local economic institutions need to enrich roles and functions. One of them is revitalizing their role, limited to the narrow scope of economic activities. The local economic institutions in community-based economic empowerment are encouraged to mutate into economic institutions that play a role in implementing economic development strategies based on utilizing local communities' potential. In other words, local economic institutions

contribute to developing the economy by optimizing local content to realize increased economic growth and equal distribution across society. Because the community-based economic empowerment concept does not contrast economic growth with equitable economic outcomes, equity will create a solid foundation for ongoing economic growth. In the long-term context, equitable distribution of economic resources in the community can maintain the sustainability of economic growth.

The local economic institution is expected to establish linkages between villages and cities and linkages between the types of livelihoods of people in the mountains and the coast, in order to realize equitable economic prosperity and create sustainable economic development. Visionary, the local economic institution, should create an accurate calculation of benefit values measured based on effective and efficient tools for all activities.

It should also be noted that the enrichment of local economic institutions' functions and roles is not directed at creating large-scale organizations that are oriented to business expansion only but rather at creating micro-scale institutions that serve the interests of community members around their environment. Local economic institutions are encouraged to develop and mold in various regions so that the scope of services is getting smaller to facilitate control of capital flows. This is intended to increase mutual trust among fellow community members because trust is built more significantly if the range of control is relatively small in scope. Simultaneously, the linkages between various economic activity sectors are linked through a network

of collaboration between local economic institutions in different locations. However, this form of collaboration is still directed at complex and operational matters to avoid misunderstandings that can reduce trust levels.

Grameen Bank's success can be an excellent example of disbursing investment credit for small micro-credit actors. The process is well managed so that there tends to be a good rate of return. It means that our trust in small businesses can be developed constructively through experiences that enable these efforts to grow well. It includes the strengthening of market networks that provide a tremendous competitive advantage. Natural products also have relatively equal value with manufactured goods, so that bargaining positions are built to ensure the equality of roles and positions between economic goods.

Conclusion

When viewed from a socio-political perspective, the concept of community-based economic empowerment aims to erode monopolistic mastery of economic resources. The erosion is expected to form a new relationship, namely "sharing benefits" transparently and participatively among community members. The distribution of benefits can be carried out through a network of sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships for all actors involved in the production process following their contributions. Therefore, there is no structural segregation where some parties are superior and others inferior. It is different from the form of new companies where capital owners are fully authorized to

determine the wages entitled to be received by employees and do not involve employees in the decision-making process.

Therefore, constructing a business mechanism in community-based economic empowerment will evolve into a conscious human effort. The benefits obtained can be shared by actors involved in the production process fairly, and take into account the preservation of nature, not merely pursuit of profit. It means that the economic architecture is not built in the framework of absolute freedom but on justice and shared prosperity. Amartya Sen calls "social opportunities" to create opportunities for the wider community to obtain a prosperous life as a rational choice according to the lifestyle he demonstrated. On the other hand, the gradual development of Community-Based Economic Empowerment will help set aside the concept of trade liberalization (free trade) so that it naturally mutates into fair trade to create a more humane, rational, and environmentally friendly economic balance.

Thus, the concept of community-based economic empowerment is expected to be an alternative model of development that promotes local wisdom, equality of roles in the economy, preservation of nature, and a balance between aspects of materialism and spiritualism.

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Administrative-Led Governance and Coping With the COVID-19 Pandemic:
Application and Limitations in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Hong Kong is governed by an administrative-led system, headed up by the Governor under British colonial rule and the Chief Executive since 1997 in accordance with the Basic Law. In all this time, the administration has enjoyed greater power than the legislature. Discussion on the legitimacy and merits of this mode of governance has primarily focused on satisfactory performance, especially in managing the economy. Though facing stronger demands for greater public participation in recent years, this system has been retained, and has even been consolidated. Since early 2020, the administration has faced the unprecedented and prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, a major test of its capacity. By outlining the key features of administrative-led governance in Hong Kong, this paper discusses how the administration proposed and implemented measures to cope with the pandemic. Though certain merits of this system have been identified, it also has limitations. Apart from loopholes in the coping measures, communication gaps and weakened connections were identified between the administration and the public, argued to be the result of over-centralization of decision making, and hence, marginalization of the public. The administration failed to communicate its values and rationale to the public, and could not connect with the public's emotional mood. Taking account of the unique nature of

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pandemics, it is suggested that governance could be improved through a stronger connection with the public, wider consultation and deliberation beyond incorporating experts, and paying increased attention to the public's emotion.

Keywords: Governance, administrative-led, pandemic, COVID-19, Hong Kong

Introduction

In the colonial period and following China's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, the city's style of governance has often been described as an administrative-led mode. Administrative-led governance does not mean that the executive arm of the government either simply monopolizes power or imposes an authoritarian style of management. Instead, it suggests that the administration enjoys relatively stronger power and autonomy from the checks and balances of other arms of the government (especially the legislature). The administration still needs to manage and negotiate with other parts of the government and the public in decision-making and policy implementation. In a sense, the level of autonomy and power enjoyed by the administration, though guaranteed by constitutional arrangements, also depends on its performance and the strategies by which it manages various stakeholders' interests. Thus, apart from assessing this mode of governance in terms of its capacity to deliver policy objectives and meet public expectations, the administration still needs to demonstrate an appropriate level of accountability, through proper communication, to the stakeholders. If the stakeholders consider it satisfactory, it will enjoy a higher level of legitimacy, trust, and popular support.

Since the 1980s, Hong Kong has experienced negotiation of its future, transitional arrangements, and a change of sovereignty in 1997. The promise of "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and gradual democratization, as enshrined in the Basic Law, offers clues to continuous government reform. In a sense, both colonial and the Special Administrative Region (SAR) governments introduced various measures to enhance the democratic elements of the government, primarily through expanding the number of representatives elected to District Councils and the Legislative Council until the latest election reform endorsed by the central PRC government in March 2021 (Lam, 2021).

However, progress has never been smooth; and even with these reforms, the administrative-led structure has not been substantially modified. Demands to speed up democratic reform have intensified since the early 2010s, and the administration has been criticized for incompetence in performing its roles and delivering its promises. Tensions have not diminished since the "Occupy Central Movement" in 2014. In response, the central PRC government has repeatedly reinforced the power and status of the administration in the constitutional arrangements enshrined in the Basic Law that seem not entirely in line with the increasing demands for a more accountable and responsive administration. In mid-2019 the Extradition Law

Amendment led to major conflict. When these protests gradually subsided, the administration further tightened its authority by exerting control over the elected councilors in the District Councils (through controlling the councils' agendas, functions, and budgets) and the Legislative Council (through disqualifying members for their political standpoints, which led to the resignation of almost the entire pan-democratic camp in the Legislative Council in November 2019). In March 2021, the central PRC government approved measures to require that qualifications of candidates in major elections be assessed by a government-appointed committee (Lam, 2021). It could be said that these measures enabled the administration to further consolidate its power and authority.

Since January 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has proven a significant test of the administration. Coping with the pandemic became the top priority of every element of society, and the administration was expected to perform its duties and prove its competence. Successfully coping with the pandemic would be a golden opportunity for the administration to demonstrate the merits of administrative-led governance, and to regain its legitimacy, popular support, and trust.

This paper outlines the core features of this administrative-led governance mode in Hong Kong. Specifically, it describes how policy making and implementation operated during the COVID-19 pandemic since January 2020. By observing the processes and the outcomes, the strengths and weaknesses of this mode of governance will be assessed in handling pandemics, which by its nature is highly uncertain and ambiguous.

Administrative-Led Governance

Governance includes the processes of governing, including interaction between the administration and other stakeholders within and beyond the government in decision-making and implementation. In these processes, laws, rules, and actions will be structured, with the governed – individuals, groups, and organizations – being regulated. In principle, those who govern will be held accountable for the processes and outcomes (Bevir, 2012).

A variety of governance modes may be identified. For example, in collaborative and participatory governance modes, engagement of the public prevails with fair power-sharing between the public, their representatives, and various sections of the government. Often, a more balanced and collaborative relationship between the government and other actors is observed, and government officials will be expected to be more responsive (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Gaventa, 2006).

In contrast, administrative-led governance more heavily emphasizes the role of the administrative arm of government in decision-making and implementation compared to other arms of the government, such as the legislature or even the judiciary. Hence, the power of other stakeholders is limited, and their engagement subject to the administration's discretion.

Both the Hong Kong colonial government and the SAR government have often been described as adopting administrative-led governance; some describing this as an "executive-led" model of governance (Chan, 1996; Chan, 2011;

Cheng, 2011; Fong, 2014; Lam, 1995; Lau, 2018). This model is characterized by a small governing group (usually most senior officials forming the executive arm of the government) and the absence of a strong internal counter-force (e.g., the legislature), guiding the policy process and providing public services (Huque, 2010). It is similar to an "exclusionary corporatist state" (Stepan, 1978), which incorporates like-minded elites but provides minimal interaction and integration between state and society. This system is characterized by "deference to authority, formality in administrative practice, and a high degree of centralization" (Lee & Huque, 1996, p.14). Lau (1982) describes this as a "minimally-integrated socio-political system" with a low level of social mobilization and participation. When the administration exerts its power, this can be similar to semi-authoritarian governance (Fong, 2013).

As a colonial government and initially with limited interaction with society, the administration faced a legitimacy deficit (Scott, 1986). It used to claim its legitimacy and support through the maintenance of public order and economic prosperity (Huque, 2010). Further public administration reform since the 1980s, incorporating a stronger sense of accountability and transparency, has contributed to its popularity. Democratic reform in the District Boards and Legislative Council in the same period, however limited, also served to incorporate increased public participation without compromising the administrative-led system (Scott, 2010) and demonstrated strong state capacity and its competence in managing the increasing political mobilization from various stakeholders (Cheng, 2011; Cheung, 2008).

The establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government in 1997 marked a new era for the city and was based on the principle of "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong", inviting stronger expectation of a more responsive government under the Basic Law. However, the Basic Law also emphasized maintenance of administrative-led governance (Fong, 2014). Similar to the Governor of the colonial government, the Chief Executive (CE) of the SAR government retained extensive scope for constitutional leverage, such as power over political appointments, the exclusive power to initiate legislation and make policies, power to veto legislation and to dissolve the legislature. To empower the CE, the Principal Officials Accountability System (POAS), implemented in 2002, ensured that all posts of Secretaries (the heads of policy branches in charge of making policy and monitoring its implementation) were to be appointed by the CE and no longer filled by civil servants. Since all Secretaries are directly accountable to the CE, all major decisions are in the hands of this group of political appointees (Scott, 2005).

This reinforced administrative-led system met with a series of economic crises, and subsequently social and political conflicts: the anti-national security law movement in 2003, the anti-national education campaign in 2012, the "Occupy Central Movement" in 2014, the anti-extradition law amendment in 2019, and the decades-long campaign for democratic reforms (Lam, 2015; Lee et al., 2019). Demands for increased participation in the policy-making process, which would inevitably constrain the power of the administration, steadily increased (Cheng,

2011). The administration's performance in managing the economy and frustrating demands for more substantial democratic reform gradually compounded its legitimacy deficit (Cheung, 2008). Antagonism between the administration and legislature intensified with wider adoption of filibustering and confrontation in Legislative Council meetings.

In the face of these challenges, the administration, buoyed by the central PRC government (BBC, 2020), responded by reiterating the constitutional arrangement according to the Basic Law and the core position of the CE in the SAR and the government; and there is no "separation of powers" in Hong Kong (Cheung & Lau, 2020).

Recently, the administration has shown increased determination to protect its power by managing elections (e.g., disqualifying candidates and postponing the 2020 Legislative Council election), reinstating greater control over the civil service and public sector (e.g., through the appointment of members and requiring all POAS staff and civil servants to take an oath declaring they will uphold the Basic Law, their allegiance to the HKSAR, and responsibility to the HKSAR government). More recently, in November 2020 the disqualification of several Legislative Council members led to the resignation of almost all pan-democratic camp members in it, coupled with tighter control of the agendas and budgets of district councils that were controlled by the pan-democratic camp. The National Security Law also offers protection against illegal subversive actions that might paralyze the operation of the government. The latest election reform introduces significant changes to the nomination of candidates and elections of representatives to the Legislative Council (Lam, 2021).

It cannot be denied that gaining popular support, trust, and legitimacy remain the targets of the administration, through improved performance in delivering its policy objectives. While eliminating possible undesirable interference from opposition camps inside and outside the government, the administration is increasingly in a better position to exercise its management of all issues it faces. One of the major, albeit unexpected, tests of the administration has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, this also provided a golden opportunity for the administration to prove its capacity and the merits of administrative-led governance.

Unique Nature of Pandemic Risks and Their Management

The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique risks and challenges for the administration. The situation is characterized by the unknown and uncertainty (Anderson et al., 2020). Since the virus is entirely new and available scientific knowledge to guide decision-making and selection of coping measures is lacking, the public will experience a high level of uncertainty. Unavoidably, there will be disagreement over interpretation of the risks (e.g., the extent, nature, and causes) and the policies adopted. Debates on the risks posed by the pandemic can be highly political and moral (Brown, 2020). Public agreement and compliance with the administration's decisions cannot be taken for granted but require a high level of trust in the administration's analytical,

operational, and political capacity (Capano et al., 2020).

Managing the threats caused by a new virus is never an easy task. The entire management process is very complex and non-linear. In response, Renn (2015) argues that merely resorting to epistemic discourse, meaning resorting to science and additional scientific investigation through formation of expert panels, conducting hearings, and research to support a scientific-informed decision, is inadequate. To cope with uncertainty and ambiguity, we should consider the reflective and participatory discourse, which proposes increased public participation that aims to resolve conflicts in values and corresponding policy choices (e.g., lockdown, the economic impact, personal freedom, vaccination choices). Communication with the public is crucial in sharing accurate knowledge, soliciting trust, and hence compliance (Slovic, 1993).

A high level of trust can reduce anxiety, and promote compliance and collaboration that are useful in managing uncertainty and ambiguity. When trust is stronger, the trustee is likely to be more willing to take risks despite doubts about the proposed measures (Das & Teng, 2004), as existing studies on COVID-19 management have demonstrated (Fetzer et al., 2020; Oksanen et al., 2020).

Trust may be promoted through two routes. First, through the perceived competence of the relevant authority in delivering its promises. This accords with the conventional expectation of the administrative-led government in Hong Kong that legitimacy may be achieved through competent performance. Second,

when the public believes that the administration shares their values (i.e., salient value similarity), when they will consider the government as credible, reliable, and having integrity (Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2005).

Apart from trust-building through competence and shared values, emotion has also been identified as a central feature of managing risks associated with public health that should not be neglected (Lupton, 2013). If the administration can make an emotional connection with the public, it will have a positive impact on perceived value similarity, and eventually higher acceptance of its policies or even higher tolerance of its weaknesses.

Due to the unique nature of pandemic risks, the administration has to be careful in building up confidence by presenting evidence of accuracy, their abilities, and expertise in coping, as well as promoting trust through emphasizing value similarity as a process to consolidate solidarity (Earle, 2010). Renn's (2015) recommendation to include and integrate stakeholders in the reflective and participatory risk discourse is also relevant in discussions to legitimize the administration's decisions and facilitate their implementation. Risk communication, including attention to emotional elements, can also help. Nevertheless, one might have the impression that these requirements could contradict the increasing emphasis of administration-led governance on bureaucratic/technocratic rationality and centralization of power. The way in which the Hong Kong administration responded to COVID-19 provides evidence to discuss the merits and limitations of this mode of governance.

COVID-19 Pandemic Threats in Hong Kong

Defined by the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, four waves can be identified in Hong Kong: 1) First Wave – confirmation of the first case in late January to early March 2020; 2) Second Wave – a surge of case numbers from mid-March to early April; 3) Third Wave – an explosive increase in cases from mid-July to mid-August; and 4) Fourth Wave – another eruption from November into early 2021 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in Hong Kong, 2020-2021
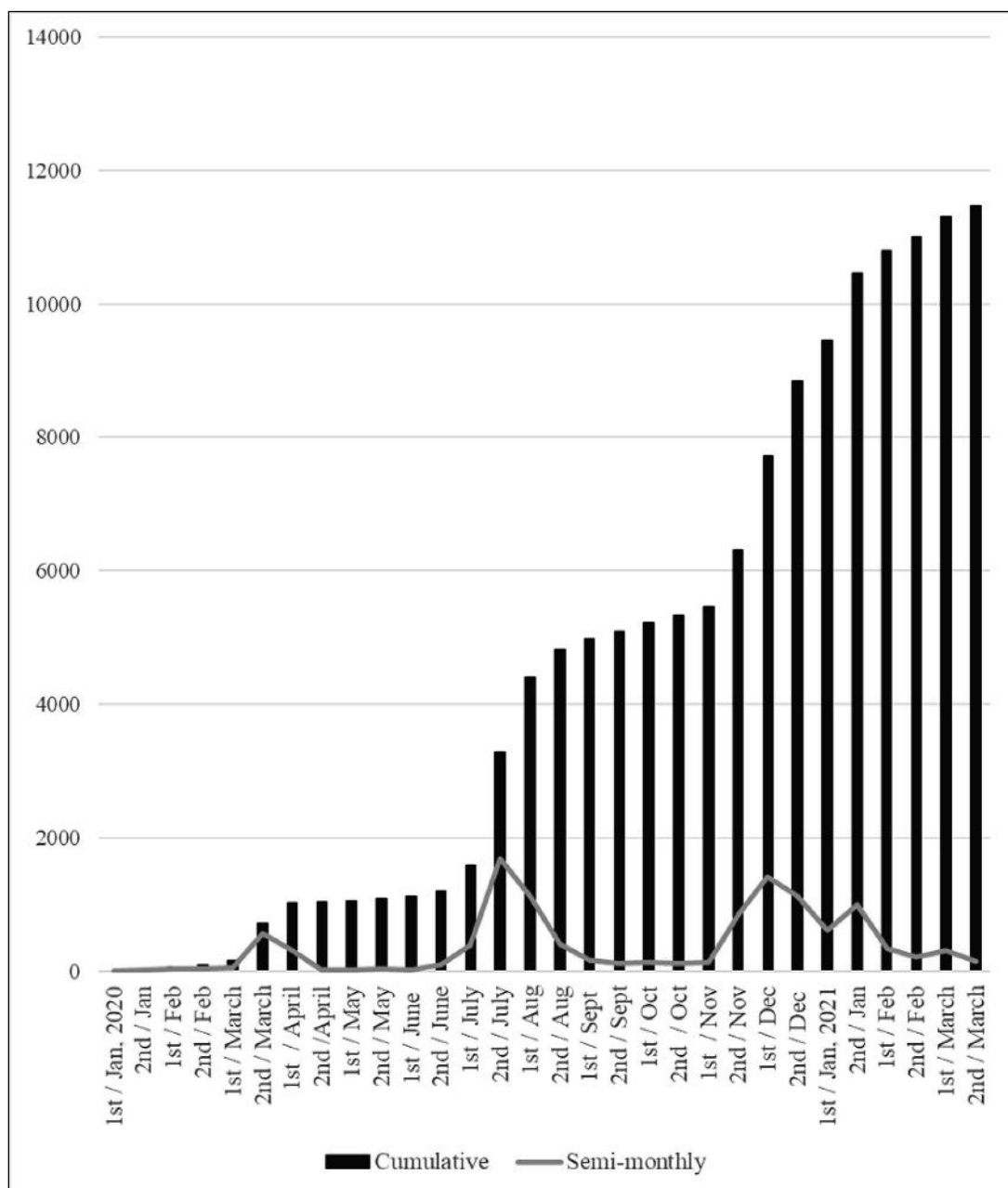
Source: data compiled from daily Hong Kong SAR government press releases

First Wave

The number of confirmed cases was the lowest in all four waves (i.e., 149 until mid-March). However, while the virus was unknown, and with memories of the previous traumatic SARS experience in 2003, the public reaction was intense. Since the virus in Wuhan was first reported in local media around the end of December 2019, and the reported case numbers were rather stable, the public remained skeptical of the situation in the mainland. The first confirmed case in Hong Kong – a visitor from Wuhan - was identified on January 23. With a sense of being at risks of contracting the virus heightened (Table 1), a significant percentage of the public was already taking precautionary measures: 74.5 percent in late-January increasing to 97.5 percent in mid-February wore masks when going out (Cowling et al., 2020) in advance of the government's advice to do so.

Table 1

COVID-19 Risk Perception and Appraisal of the Administration

Survey Month/ Year	Probability of contracting COVID-19 in the coming month (0 = certainly not; 10 = certainly will)*	Satisfaction with the administration's performance in tackling COVID-19*		Trust in administration		Support rate for the Chief Executive (0-100)
		Satisfaction level (mean) (1=very dissatisfied, 5= very satisfied)	Dissatisfied & very dissatisfied (%)	Distrust in government (%)	Trust in government (%)	
6/2019				60.2	27.9	32.8
12/2019				63.2	24.6	19.6
1/2020	3.1	1.8	75.0	69.2	19.1	20.8
2/2020	3.0	1.9	76.0	75.9	14.2	18.2
3/2020	3.1	2.2	67.3	61.7	24.5	22.3
4/2020	3.0	2.4	55.5	60.3	28.5	27.7
5/2020	1.7	2.7	52.5	62.9	27.3	28.3
6/2020	1.9	2.6	54.5	59.0	26.8	29.0
7/2020	3.4	2.6	58.4	60.9	25.5	28.9
8/2020	2.9	2.2	60.7	59.3	30.2	26.8
9/2020	2.2	2.3	58.0	54.8	26.6	27.5
10/2020	2.41	2.5	58.8	61.3	26.3	28.6

Survey Month/ Year	Probability of contracting COVID-19 in the coming month (0 = certainly not; 10 = certainly will)*	Satisfaction with the administration's performance in tackling COVID-19*		Trust in administration		Support rate for the Chief Executive (0-100)
		Satisfaction level (mean) (1=very dissatisfied, 5= very satisfied)	Dissatisfied & very dissatisfied (%)	Distrust in government (%)	Trust in government (%)	
11/2020	2.02	2.4	60.9	49.4	29.8	33.5
12/2020	2.90	2.2	66.2	55.9	28.6	30.6
1/2021	1.13	2.2	54.7	50.7	28.1	32.0
2/2021				49.9	36.1	33.9
3/2021				53.1	32.1	32.8

* If there was more than one survey in the same month, the highest score is shown.

Sources: Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c

Second Wave

The situation suddenly deteriorated when a large number of Hong Kong residents returned from overseas where there were outbreaks. The number of confirmed cases surged from mid-March, although these were quickly under control by early-April. The sense of being at risk was sustained and the public were skeptical of the additional measures adopted (or not adopted) by the administration as shown in the sustained higher percentage of dissatisfaction with and distrust in the administration, evidenced in Table 1.

Third Wave

Rather unexpectedly, the number of confirmed cases and the death toll rapidly increased in July and August. The Third Wave was caused by a virus imported by Kazakhstan seamen who were exempted from quarantine requirements (Siu et al., 2020), and then spread in the community. Deaths in these two months represented almost half of all COVID-19 deaths during the entire period affected by the pandemic to date. This coincided with a simultaneous increase in risk perception and uncertainty, and a slight increase in dissatisfaction with the administration as evidenced in Table 1.

Fourth Wave

Scientific findings suggest that, again, the virus was imported through returnees from India and Nepal, then spread to the community by visitors to these persons who were still in their quarantine in a hotel (Siu et al., 2020). The threat was later augmented by returnees from the UK and South Africa with new variants of the virus. The number of confirmed cases increased rapidly. The number of deaths almost doubled in

this wave (105 deaths until October 31, 2020, increased to 205 deaths as of March 31, 2021), and this is also the longest of all waves. Though number of confirmed case declined from March. It is still uncertain when this wave will end, and the public are showing clear signs of emotional fatigue and frustration.

Pandemic Management Measures Implemented by the Administration

Policy Deliberation

In line with the administrative-led model of governance, major policies were deliberated by senior officials, led by the CE and members of the Executive Council (comprising all Secretaries and appointed members from major parties, and elite groups), and implemented by relevant departments headed by civil servants. Several key features of the policy deliberation process may be summarized as follows.

1. A central steering committee, chaired by the CE and attended by the relevant Secretaries was established even before the first confirmed case was identified in Hong Kong, as the highest body setting the policy and measures.

2. Special ad hoc task forces were established to deliberate the policy details and implementation, for example, on universal community testing in September and preparation of the vaccination program. These task forces normally comprise representatives from relevant departments.

3. An ad hoc expert advisory group comprising four renowned medical professionals and scientists from the two local medical schools was invited to serve as the key advisor to the administration since the First Wave. Two regular scientific committees were established to provide expert comment on the vaccine. To further minimize public skepticism on the choice of vaccine, a new ad hoc Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines was established in December 2020.

On the whole, the administration attempted to enhance the decision-making and coordination mechanism to ensure a more efficient and effective response. As before, experts were invited to aid decision-making and to enhance its credibility, although wider public involvement was rare.

Pandemic Coping Measures

The coping measures may be briefly divided into six categories (Table 2). Over the period, measures were stepped up or relaxed and combined with others to enhance their effectiveness. To ensure a swift response, it was not uncommon to observe a swift change in implementation, without consultation or at very short notice.

Table 2

Selected Pandemic Coping Measures by Waves

Measures	First Wave	Second Wave	Third Wave	Fourth Wave
Health precautionary measures	Strong "advice" to take precautionary health measures	Strong "advice" maintained	Mandatory mask wearing in public spaces; adding temperature check and provision of hand sanitizers in relevant premises Provision of free reusable masks by the government	Measures continued
Social distancing measures	School closure Voluntary work from home arrangements	School closure, and closure of specified social and recreational facilities Voluntary work from home arrangements Prohibition of group gathering in public spaces	School closure, and closure of specified social and recreational facilities enforced again Voluntary work from home arrangements Prohibition of group gathering in public spaces	School closure, and closure of specified social and recreational facilities enforced again Voluntary work from home arrangements Prohibition of group gathering in public spaces
Border closure	Border closed to mainland China visitors	Border closure extended to visitors from high-risk countries and non-Hong Kong residents *Border control relaxed for approved groups to and from mainland China after this Wave*	Border control tightened for visitors from high-risk countries (e.g., South Asia) Compulsory negative COVID-19 test certificate for all visitors	Border control maintained and further tightened by forbidding visitors from more high-risk countries (e.g., UK and South Africa)
Quarantine	For visitors in government arranged premises for 14 days, and home quarantine for Hong Kong residents	Acquisition of more recreational premises and vacated public housing blocks for quarantine purposes	Purpose-built quarantine camps completed in phases	Quarantine period for visitors extended to 21 days Tougher control on those residing in hotels for quarantine purpose
Testing & tracing	Test applied to visitors and people with close contact with confirmed cases	Testing policy continued with gradual increase of the testing capacity	Compulsory test for selected groups (e.g., taxi drivers) *Universal Community Testing Programme* launched in September	Compulsory test for identified buildings and premises in designated and restricted sites *LeaveHomeSafe* Apps launched for contact tracing and made compulsory for entering specific premises
Others		First round Employment Support Scheme	Second round Employment Support Scheme	COVID vaccination programme commenced from late February

First Wave

In this wave, the government was criticized for its slow response and inadequate preparation. Once the first imported case was confirmed, the public immediately faced an inadequate supply of masks and disinfectant, the prices of which quadrupled or increased even more. The administration failed to provide adequate medical supplies to health workers, let alone the public. The issue of border closure with mainland China was particularly controversial and led to thousands of public health workers taking strike action in early February to demand complete closure of the border. The government rejected this, arguing it would discriminate against specific groups and was not in line with contemporaneous WHO advice. However, within a few days, border check-points closed one-by-one when the number of cases increased.

Second Wave

Tighter border control and mandatory quarantine measures received a positive response. However, loopholes were still found in quarantine arrangements; the number of quarantine places was inadequate and monitoring of those in quarantine was ineffective. Due to the sudden surge of confirmed cases, there was a shortage of isolation wards and beds and personal protective equipment for health workers. The decision to impose stricter limitations on public gatherings received an ambivalent response, as some speculated the administration was using it to control anti-government protests.

Third Wave

The situation gradually improved and the public also increasingly accepted the reality of the "new normal." In May the administration also launched its reusable mask distribution project to all Hong Kong residents. At the beginning of the Third Wave, the government ordered the closure of dine-in provision at catering outlets, and eventually in July, made it compulsory for everyone to wear a mask in public places.

Fourth Wave

After three months of relative stability, the Fourth Wave began in November 2020. Facing the increasing threats of new variants of the virus from overseas, the compulsory quarantine period was extended to 21 days, air traffic between Hong Kong and London was suspended indefinitely, and visitors from the UK were not allowed to enter the city; all visitors (except those from the mainland, Macao, and Taiwan) were required to undergo strictly-controlled quarantine in a designated hotel. A designated office staffed by police officers was established to support the Department of Health in tracing close contacts of infected individuals. The government also launched a new app – LeaveHomeSafe – to facilitate tracing. Testing was expanded and made mandatory for residents of, and visitors to, specified buildings in identified areas. Preparatory work for vaccination also started in late December and formally commenced in late February.

Risk Communication

Since the outbreak, the administration has employed three main methods to disseminate information to the public.

1. Regular (almost daily) press conferences have been held to provide the latest information to the public, attended by senior

government officers, medical professionals and other experts, and occasionally the Chief Executive, to meet and address queries from the press. In January 2021, the administration proposed replacing this with an online format that would not allow follow-up questions, arguing this could reduce the risk of contraction. After severe criticism, the administration rescinded this proposal.

2. A dedicated website (The Government of the HKSAR, 2021) and a dashboard (Centre for Health Protection, 2021) have been established to provide updated statistical data and details to the public.

3. The Information Services Department has prepared and provided a summary of the press conferences, announcements, and speeches by senior government officials, providing information, outlining the administration's position, and clarifying misunderstandings.

Appraisal of Administration-led Governance: Processes and Outcomes

If effectiveness is assessed by the number of cumulative cases and total deaths (i.e., 1,523 and 27 per 1 million population, respectively, on March 31, 2021), both indicators are more favorable than in many advanced countries. Hong Kong seemed to successfully cope with the pandemic. However, the administration seemed unable to benefit from this outcome, as revealed in

the higher level of dissatisfaction, lower support, and degree of trust in the administration and CE (Table 1). The situation is more embarrassing by comparison with Singapore, Taiwan, or even another SAR of China – Macao, even though tougher measures have been introduced in Hong Kong. Several key problems relating to the Hong Kong government's coping measures have been raised.

Border control has continuously been the core concern in all waves. The administration has been criticized for not imposing tougher control on visitors from mainland China, such as in the First and Second Waves. On the contrary, it relaxed border controls and permitted categories of visitors to be exempted from testing after the Second Wave. Loopholes in border control allowed the entry of visitors who had contracted the virus and later spread it to the community in the Third and Fourth Waves, although the administration initially denied this (Siu et al., 2020).

The administration was also ill-prepared for quarantine arrangements, with problems identified at arrival, between arrival and quarantine premises (e.g., visitors had to arrange their own transportation to the quarantine site), and enforcement of the regulations (e.g., a malfunctioning e-tag monitoring system). Inconsistencies were also found in the social restriction policy; while public gatherings were restricted and a number of premises were closed, no attempt was made to control the number of passengers on public transport.

The administration not only failed to secure an adequate stock of medical supplies initially, this failure continued in the First

and Second Waves, while upholding "the lowest bid gets it" practice. While the distribution of free reusable masks to the public should be commended, the administration was heavily criticized as the entire process lacked transparency and stakeholders were not consulted. The quality of the masks was uncertain, and later it was confirmed that they were unsuitable for use in medical facilities after more than HK$200 million had been spent.

Dialogue between the administration and the public, particularly those holding an opposite position, seemed lacking or even non-existent. While on the one hand, centralization contributes to higher efficiency, the lack of proper communication has led to a series of conflicts. For example, there were violent confrontations between residents and the police in the First Wave when the administration decided to acquire unoccupied public housing and campsites as quarantine facilities, even without notifying nearby communities. The lack of public consultation inevitably stirred up strong resistance, eventually necessitating the deployment of the police to disperse and arrest protestors (COVID-19 and controversial issues in Hong Kong, 2020).

As shown in Table 1, appraisal of the administration was consistently low (although it was so in 2019 also). In the absence of regaining trust through competent performance, public participation and better communication of risk might be helpful. The former has been limited and marginalized. Occasionally, appointed experts also expressed that they were not consulted regularly on the measures (such as social restriction in catering facilities and vaccination). In that situation,

ambiguity and uncertainty could not be resolved. Although there were additional efforts in risk communication, "conspiracy" theories were rife; for example, speculation about the reasons for not completely closing the border with mainland China, and the imposition of restrictions on gatherings in public spaces (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, 2020c), and adoption of specific vaccinne from mainland China wihtout following the establshed guideline. Criticism of the effectiveness of the measures taken, transparency in the policy process, and accountability of the administration contributed to the low level of trust.

The pandemic has lasted more than one year and with no end in sight, society and the economy have suffered tremendously and negative emotions have prevailed. Managing this emotion could be a major challenge to the administration. Some examples have been provided to demonstrate that the administration, especially senior officials, were not competent in this task (COVID-19 and controversial issues in Hong Kong, 2020).

1. In early February 2020, when the public was in a state of panic and rushed to purchase masks, the CE openly declared that only government officials who felt unwell, were in frontline services or in crowded places were allowed to wear a mask. After severe criticism, she apologized for this statement.

2. In the Third Wave, restaurants were asked to serve takeaways only to reduce human contact. However, that posed problems for people who still had to work to find a proper place for lunch or dinner. As a

result, they had to take meals in the streets, outside construction sites, or crowded into small open spaces in the city. Again, after severe criticism, senior officials backed down, explaining that they were unaware that many people still had to work despite the "working from home" arrangement being entirely voluntary.

3. In the Fourth Wave, the CE stated that the public had no right to choose a specific vaccine provided free by the administration, even if a recipient doubted a vaccine's effectiveness. Facing criticism again, the administration reversed the decision.

Failure to attend to public sentiment and emotion could further discredit the administration's explanation and damage the relationship between the administration and the stakeholders. Facing criticism, the administration sometimes chose to adopt a tough approach; for example, penalizing health workers who went on strike in the First Wave. The public's compliance with precautionary measures in the First and Second Waves was more a spontaneous community self-protection effort than due to trust and support for the administration, since they patently did not trust it (Chan, 2021; Hartley & Jarvis, 2020).

Limitations of Administrative-Led Governance in Coping With the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been characterized by a high level of uncertainty and ambiguity. Facing a rapidly changing situation, tough and swift decisions seemed necessary. In that sense, administrative-led governance, emphasizing efficiency by a centralized system, could be a preferable option, as in the case of China and Macao. Nevertheless, experience in Hong Kong showed that this mode of governance was not problem-free. One of the key issues is the marginalization of public participation at a time when the administration enjoyed low trust and popular support.

It would be rather unfair to say the administration has excluded all forms of public participation. The Legislative Council has deliberated the Anti-Pandemic Fund and its implementation; experts have been invited to give advice. It is also true that public participation, or giving due attention to public concerns and queries, has been rather limited (e.g., setting up quarantine facilities in communities that led to violent confrontations).

As suggested, ambiguity and uncertainty led to a debate about values and choices informing decision-making. Policymakers must decide the trade-offs among competing values (e.g., safety and economic development, individual freedom, and collective interest) which will be intensified during a pandemic due to uncertainty (Yang, 2020). Apart from imposing regulations, the administration must communicate with and receive the trust and support from the governed. Compliance with government measures, in the case of Hong Kong, could not be interpreted as support of the administration. Rather, as argued, it is an act of self-help when some of them have low trust in the administration.

The reflective and participatory approaches as advocated by Renn (2015) should not be neglected. These approaches can incorporate expertise in the political process of policy decision-making. However, in the case of Hong Kong, expertise has been included but not to the extent that science was given a core role in selecting policies, for example, the maximum number who could gather in public spaces and catering facilities, but no such application to shops or public transportation. Public participation was also marginalized.

When risk communication also displayed certain problems, it was not surprising to observe that the decisions made were questioned, and trust and public support remained at the same levels, despite the administration's efforts to promote various initiatives. For example, it was rumored that DNA collected via universal community testing would be shared with the central government. The public also suspected that the LeaveHomeSafe app was an attempt by the administration to intrude on individuals' privacy. Over-centralization of power and excluding meaningful public participation alienated the administration from the public and sustained distrust. In the case of Hong Kong, weakened communication and intensified confrontation between the administration and key stakeholders (e.g., health workers, political parties, community and leaders) deterred solid cooperation, not to mention trust-building (Legido-Quigley et al., 2020).

Conclusion

As observed, the administration has exercised greater power in decision-making and its implementation coping with the pandemic. The decision-making process has been "verticalized," and coercive measures adopted that inevitably constrained public participation (He et al., 2020; Kavanagh & Singh, 2020; Sacino et al., 2020). Acceptance, or tolerance, of this could be easier and the public willing to accept trade-offs if the government's performance is perceived to be satisfactory. However, when the government's performance is in doubt, there will be stronger demand for participation to monitor the administration, which is the situation facing Hong Kong (Wan et al., 2020).

Administration-led governance could be more efficient and effective, especially when these merits may be compromised by unreasonable interference from opposition parties (e.g., filibustering in the legislature). While administration-led governance might be effective in handling many issues, it is argued that it has inherent weakness in handling the unique nature of pandemic risk. Public participation and proper communication of risk can help to minimize the problems caused by decisions taken primarily "behind closed doors," often perceived as lacking an in-depth personal touch of external circumstances. By avoiding the problems in implementation and the subsequent costs to both the public and administration, these initiatives can actually improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Connections with the public do not simply focus on policy details but also address the emotional aspects.

While it is uncertain when the pandemic will be under control, connection with the public, gaining their support and compliance, will become increasingly

challenging. The administration, while retaining its authority, needs to be extra careful, since resistance and skepticism might escalate. Policy enforcement through force is possible but will further damage the support for and trust in the administration. On the contrary, a better understanding of the specific needs of the people, and hence, vulnerabilities of their decisions through engagement can improve the legitimacy of the administration and acceptability of its policies (Goldmann, 2020). According to OECD (2020), in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, good governance must address expectations regarding open government that ensure transparency, communication, and public trust when the public is increasingly critical of the administration's exercise of power, coercion, and control in coping with the pandemic (Kavanagh & Singh, 2020).

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Pandemic Backsliding? A Comparative Study of Democracy Under the Virus Threat

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Pandemic Backsliding?
A Comparative Study of Democracy Under the Virus Threat

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened socio-economic security on a global scale. Democracy has been put to the test by the spread of COVID-19, with two main arguments having arisen: 1) COVID-19 is contributing to a trend of democratic backsliding; 2) states with illiberal practices are better at handling the outbreak than are states with liberal practices. This paper answers these two arguments. In the first section, using data from various sources, this paper examines three trends to counter the democratic backslide argument: the maintenance of democracy, fallen democracy, and autocracy. The paper shows that COVID-19 has contributed very little to the decline of democracy and, in actuality, democratic backslide that occurred in 2020 happened due to factors that existed even before the outbreak— COVID-19 was merely a reflector or trigger point for states struggling with democracy. In the second section, this paper argues that states with autocratic practices may be able to contain the spread of the pandemic, but in comparison with democratic states, they are unable to manage the pandemic crisis, resulting in a larger death rate and economic decline. As such, the pessimistic belief that the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing about the fall of democracy may be overstated.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic outbreak, democratic backsliding, comparative study

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2020, Year of the Pandemic

While the world welcomed a new decade that promised the challenges of extreme environmental crises and the possibility of World War III, few anticipated the outbreak of a pandemic: COVID-19. It began in December 2019 with a report of a cluster of pneumonia cases in China. By mid-January 2020 the disease was confirmed outside of China and there was evidence of the disease being transmitted from human to human, leading to the alarming signal of a worldwide disease outbreak. By the end of January, the WHO declared a public health emergency. The death toll surpassed that of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARs) in February. Many states began to impose a ban on global air travel as well as restrictions on movement. The level of the outbreak and its severity led to the WHO declaring a global pandemic in March. From then onward, more deaths were recorded outside of mainland China as outbreaks increased in Europe, American, Asia, and the Middle East. Many states and cities declared states of emergency with counter measures including quarantine, lockdowns, and curfews. One third of the world's population lived under restrictions (Kantis et al., 2021) in the name of protecting public health, yet the number of cases continuously increased, exceeding one million patients and causing a domino effect on economies and societies.

By mid-April, many countries began to ease up on their lockdown restrictions despite the number of cases skyrocketing to 3.5 million patients (most of the cases were in the United States and Europe). Many were hoping for a transition to a new normal state. During the period of May to June 2020, countries began to reopen after the great pause that put the world's economic activities on hold. Only in August did the world begin to see a ray of hope as Russia approved a trial vaccine called "Sputnik V." Despite the concerns of many scientists about the vaccine's safety, the population worldwide is eagerly looking forward to the development of a vaccine and it does not matter where it comes from. However, reinfection cases were reported for the first time in August. Many states faced phase two of the outbreak. By September, the cases of COVID-19 surpassed 7 million patients and 1 million deaths globally.

While many states are still suffering from the outbreak physically, socially, and economically, many countries have begun to reopen and are working toward a new normal. Different states have different measurements and underlying social norms, which lead to differences in the direction of the outbreak. States have become the main agency for countering the crisis. Clearly, the imposition of restrictive regulations suggests, to some extent, that the state is leaning toward authoritarianism. Even the most democratic countries will, one way or another, impose authoritarian measures in the hope of containing the disease outbreak for their national security. As such, this has led to questions about the sustainability of democracy. The emergence of COVID-19 has not only threatened human immunity but the "immune system" of liberal-democratic institutions as well.

Pandemic: Sliding Back to Authoritarianism?

In times of crisis, states are expected to act as the main guarantor of both national and human security. Under the pandemic,

states have been able to gain authority over the society with legitimate justification and support from the public. During the early days of the outbreak, Giorgio Agamben criticized authorities for using social anxiety to create "the state of exception" (Praxis, 2020). He called it a climate of panic, provoking a true state of exception and limitation of freedom being imposed by authorities. Referring to his famous work *State of Exception*, during times of crisis power is centered in the state, allowing the government full authority over the society. Some actions, even those of violation against basic rights, can be exempt in the name of national security and countering the crisis. Citizens under the state of exception are vulnerable to total manipulation by the state and lack of protection under the law. However, without justification the state of exception may not work. Therefore, the process of securitization comes into play. According to the Copenhagen School, the theory of securitization is the process of creating a socially constructed threat through a speech act. When the public accepts the threat as a security issue, the state gains the justification to hold absolute power over the law and over the society.

With the current situation of the COVID-19 outbreak, many countries are under the state of exception. Governments have imposed restrictions and limitations on their citizens in addition to the use of emergency power. As such, the threat of this outbreak is not limited only to the population's health but extends to the state's democracy. With the countermeasures ranging from minimal limitations on the movement of individuals to the extreme authoritarian mechanism of the state, people

jump to the assumption that this pandemic is equivalent to the acceleration of anti-democratic trends, or a global democratic recession.

Based on the fact that states are implementing emergency responses that undermine the liberal-democratic standard, this pessimistic statement believes that COVID-19 will shut down democracy. In times of crisis, states, no matter how democratic they are, will impose countermeasures that can be considered authoritarian. This can range from the small scale, such as restriction of movement, to extreme cases of discrimination against the citizens. UN experts have acknowledged the necessity of the use of emergency powers in response to COVID-19. However, it must be noted that those responses must be "proportionate, necessary, and non-discriminatory" (OHCHR, 2020). As such, not all emergency responses by the state can be considered as being of an authoritarian nature, violating democratic norms.

The V-Dem Institute has classified the types of responses that violate liberal-democratic standards as *liberal practices* and *authoritarian practices* according to the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Kolvani et al., 2020). While authoritarian practices refer to those responses that sabotage the liberal-democratic standard, liberal practices are those that violate certain basic rights, such as freedom of movement.

It must be acknowledged that there is a possibility that the state will become more autocratic given an emergency crisis as a door of opportunity. However, unlike what many people fear, this will not happen in

just a blink of an eye. The state may use the pandemic outbreak as an excuse for prolonging its emergency power and gradually undermining democracy in the long run. This is not a sudden change. Furthermore, one does not transform into an authoritarian just because there is an opportunity to do so. Again, according to a study of the V-Dem Institute, the majority of states that show worrying recent developments were already autocratic even before the pandemic outbreak—those with low democracy are prone to become more authoritarian during COVID-19.

States with unconsolidated democratic systems are being put to the test. Their histories of democratic transition and struggle are met with the challenge of the states' illiberal practices in the COVID-19 emergency, leading to the concerning development of an anti-democratic trend globally. The backsliding of democracy has been a global trend for some time, and there are many factors, including the pandemic outbreak emergency crisis, that push the world toward the likelihood of anti-democratic activity. Yet, COVID-19 is not a reason for the total downfall of democracy. It would be too shallow to believe that every state that goes through the pandemic outbreak will face democratic backsliding without considering each state's unique political character, norms, and democratic values. In actuality, COVID-19 is a reflector, revealing the true face of a regime. It proves the nature of a state—whether it is as democratic as it claims to be. Differences in the nature of states have led to differences in the counter responses to the pandemic. As such, it is worth exploring how state actions reflect the true nature of a regime. Three trends in the current situation are

discussed below.

1. *The maintenance of democracy.* States with a democratic nature continued to fight against the pandemic outbreak without violating liberal-democratic standards.

2. *Fallen democracy.* This refers to states that claim to be democratic in nature yet have managed to violate liberal-democratic standards during the pandemic outbreak and gradually reveal their autocratic nature. Within this category, there are two tiers. Tier 1 is for states beginning to fall into an autocratic path, with the likelihood that they may fall further in the future. Tier 2 is for states that are already falling toward an authoritarian path.

3. *The autocrat.* States that had an autocratic nature before the pandemic outbreak and used autocratic means to respond to the outbreak.

For this paper, we used data from four sources to categorize the trends of 142 countries. We were able to gather only enough data to make an analysis of 142 out of 193 states.

1. Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit

This index classifies states into four types according to their score (out of 10) based on 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. The first classification is "full democracy" (8.01-10); nations in this classification enjoy civil liberties, fundamental rights, and political freedom. The second classification is "flawed democracy" (6.01-8), where nations may enjoy democracy, yet there are still significant flaws present in some

respects, such as the functioning of governance or low political participation. The third classification is "hybrid regimes" (4.01-6); these nations are struggling toward democracy with low performance and flaws in various political aspects. The last classification is "authoritarian regimes" (0-4.0) where nations are often ruled under absolute monarchies or dictatorships.

2. Freedom in the World According to Freedom House

Freedom House has published ratings and scores for 195 countries, tracking democracy and the freedom of states. They base their evaluation on analysis of the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of government, freedom of expression and of belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. Each state is assigned a status depending on its score (out of 100). The score can be divided into two sections: political rights (40) and civil liberties (60). There are three statuses: free, partly free, and not free.

3. Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standards Index (PanDem) by the V-Dem Institute

This is an index that examines state-imposed emergency measures that may violate the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The V-Dem Institute recognizes in total seven acts of state responses that are equivalent to authoritarian practices: discriminatory measures targeting certain groups of citizens; derogation of non-derogable rights (the right to be free from torture, cruelty, or any inhuman treatment that cannot be suspend under any circumstance); abusive enforcement or the use of excessive violence and lethal force; no time limitation on emergency measures; limitation on the legislature; official disinformation campaigns regarding issues surrounding COVID-19; restrictions of the media and information.

4. Pandemic Backsliding Index (PanBack) by the V-Dem Institute

Similarly, the V-Dem Institute examines the factors that may lead a country to vulnerability to anti-democratic progress. The questions concerning this topic include: What legal instrument has the state used to adopt a national-level emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Does it have a time limit? When will it end? Did the legislature approve of the implementation? Do the emergency measures limit the legislative process? Is there any discrimination, or any violation of non-derogable rights, media freedom, or accessibility to information? Is there any physical violence caused by the police or military to execute emergency measures of the state?

States are ranked according to four levels of status based on their score, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1

PanBack and PanDem Ranking Systems

PanBack		PanDem	
X < 0.1	Low Risk	0	No Violations
0.1 – 0.19	Medium-Low Risk	0.1 - 0.19	Minor Violations
0.2 – 0.29	Medium-High Risk	0.2 – 0.34	Some Violations
X >= 0.3	High Risk	X >= 0.35	Major Violations

As such, we will be using the data from these sources to classify the trends of countries according to the following conditions.

1. The state will be considered as **The Maintenance of Democracy** if its total score is equal to 1 or more than 1.

2. The state will be considered as **The Fallen Democracy** (Tier 1) if its total score is equal to -2, -1, or 0.

3. The state will be considered as **The Fallen Democracy** (Tier 2) if its total score is less than -2.

The calculation of the total scoring in order to ascertain trends will use the following classifications, shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Democracy Status Classification Tiers

	Democracy Index status in 2020, compared to 2019	Global Freedom status in 2020 compared to 2019		PanDem 2020		PanBack 2020
Improved status	+1	+1	No Violations	+1	Low Risk	+1
Maintained status	0	0	Minor Violations	0	Med-low	0
Drop 1 tier	-1	-1	Some Violations	-1	Med-high	-1
Drop more than 1 tier	-2	-2	Major violations	-2	High Risk	-2

A state will earn a score of +1, if

1. its democracy index status in 2020 improved from 2019;

2. its global freedom status in 2020 improved from 2019;

3. its PanDem status in 2020 showed "no violations;"

4. its PanBack status in 2020 was "low risk."

A state will earn a score of 0, if

1. its democracy index in 2020 maintained its status from 2019;

2. its global freedom in 2020 maintained its status from 2019;

3. its PanDem status in 2020 showed "minor violations;"

4. its PanBack status in 2020 was "medium-low risk."

A state will earn a score of -1, if

1. its democracy index status in 2020 dropped 1 tier from 2019;

2. its global freedom status in 2020 dropped 1 tier from 2019;

3. its PanDem status in 2020 showed "some violations;"

4. its PanBack status in 2020 was "medium-high risk."

A state will earn a score of -2, if

1. its democracy index status in 2020 dropped more than 1 tier from 2019;

2. its global freedom status in 2020 dropped more than 1 tier from 2019;

3. its PanDem status in 2020 showed "major violations;"

4. its PanBack status in 2020 was "high risk."

The Three Trends of the Pandemic and Democracy

1. The Maintenance of Democracy (MD)

In a time of democratic backsliding, some states have proven to still strictly embrace democratic principles even in the time of crisis. However, it would be too shallow to examine the acts of the state or the decisions of the government as the sole reason for the maintenance of democracy. One needs to study in detail the state's political foundation as well as the structure that tends to take part in maintaining democratic values. One of the significant details is the character of each state's system of checks and balances that act as a mechanism for preserving democracy and preventing the state from deteriorating into authoritarian practice. Checks and balances can be interpreted as the solid foundation of democracy, embedded in the society to the point that it naturally prevents the democratic system from the possibility of backsliding. States with a mature democracy will continue to preserve their democracy no matter what the circumstances are, and they will also use democratic solutions to cope with emergency crises with caution.

Table 3
Nations Classified as "The Maintenance of Democracy"

#	State	Democracy Index (2019) Status	Score (10)	Democracy Index (2020) Status	Score (10)	Trend Scoring	Global Freedom (2019) Status	Score (100)	Global Freedom (2020) Status	Score (100)	Trend Scoring	PanDem -2020 Status	Score	Trend Scoring	PanBack -2020 Risk	Score	Trend Scoring	Total Trend Scoring	3 Trends
1	Australia	Full Democracy	9.09	Full Democracy	8.96	0	Free	98	Free	97	0	No Violations	0.05	(+)1	Low Risk	0.003	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
2	Austria	Full Democracy	8.29	Full Democracy	8.16	0	Free	93	Free	93	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
3	Canada	Full Democracy	9.22	Full Democracy	9.24	0	Free	99	Free	98	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
4	Chile	Full Democracy	8.08	Full Democracy	8.28	0	Free	94	Free	90	0	Minor Violations	0.1	0	Low Risk	0.07	(+)1	1	The Maintenance of Democracy
5	Costa Rica	Full Democracy	8.13	Full Democracy	8.16	0	Free	91	Free	91	0	Minor Violations	0.1	0	Low Risk	0.06	(+)1	1	The Maintenance of Democracy
6	Denmark	Full Democracy	9.22	Full Democracy	9.15	0	Free	97	Free	97	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
7	Finland	Full Democracy	9.25	Full Democracy	9.2	0	Free	100	Free	100	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
8	Germany	Full Democracy	8.68	Full Democracy	8.67	0	Free	94	Free	94	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
9	Ireland	Full Democracy	9.24	Full Democracy	9.05	0	Free	97	Free	97	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
10	Netherlands	Full Democracy	9.01	Full Democracy	8.96	0	Free	99	Free	99	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
11	New Zealand	Full Democracy	9.26	Full Democracy	9.25	0	Free	97	Free	97	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
12	Norway	Full Democracy	9.87	Full Democracy	9.81	(-)1	Free	100	Free	100	0	Minor Violations	0.1	0	Low Risk	0.05	(+)1	1	The Maintenance of Democracy
13	Portugal	Full Democracy	8.03	Flawed Democracy	7.9	0	Free	96	Free	96	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	0	1	The Maintenance of Democracy
14	Spain	Full Democracy	8.29	Full Democracy	8.12	0	Free	94	Free	92	0	Minor Violations	0.1	0	Low Risk	0.06	(+)1	1	The Maintenance of Democracy
15	Sweden	Full Democracy	9.39	Full Democracy	9.26	0	Free	100	Free	100	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
16	Switzerland	Full Democracy	9.03	Full Democracy	8.83	0	Free	96	Free	96	0	No Violations	0	(+)1	Low Risk	0	(+)1	2	The Maintenance of Democracy
17	United Kingdom	Full Democracy	8.52	Full Democracy	8.54	0	Free	93	Free	94	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Low Risk	0.09	(+)1	1	The Maintenance of Democracy

Table 3 presents examples of countries exhibiting the characteristic of *The Maintenance of Democracy.* Included are 17 nations with the status of full democracy, 19 out of 45 nations exhibiting flawed democracy, 12 out of 34 nations with hybrid regimes, and 0 nations with authoritarian status on the Democracy Index. There are a total of 48 out of 142 nations in the maintenance of democracy category, or about 33.80 percent of 142 nations. This analysis was based on the status of the people's freedom, democracy, violation measures, and the risk of backsliding according to the criteria: *a state will be considered as The Maintenance of Democracy if its total score is equal to 1 or more than 1.*

An Example of the Maintenance of Democracy: Canada.

Canada is regarded as a high performing democracy with a score of 9.22 out of 10 in 2019, earning the status of a full democracy (The EIU, 2020) and a score of 98 out of 100 in the global freedom scoring 2019 (Freedom House, 2020), gaining the status of *free*. Despite concerns about indigenous people facing discrimination, the government is making progress toward tackling the problems and is strengthening its democratic values and standards. Further, in 2020, Canada's status on both the democracy index and according to global freedom remained the same as in 2019: a score of 9.24 out of 10 (The EIU, 2021) and 98 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2021).

On the matter of the state's response to the emergency crisis, Canada has performed according to the liberal-democratic standard. It is considered as a "low risk" state with the score of 0 in PanBack or the possibility of

the pandemic crisis leading to democratic backsliding. Its emergency responses are classified as no violations with the score of 0 in PanDem as well. As such, Canada is considered a country that is in The Maintenance of Democracy category.

Early in the pandemic outbreak, the first case, a man returning from Wuhan, was reported on January 25, 2020. The Canadian government immediately acted in a cautious manner. Most of the individuals with confirmed cases were put in self-isolation in their homes instead of in hospital. It was not until March, when WHO declared a pandemic, that activities such as sports leagues, schools, and the parliament were put on break for a short period of time. Borders were also closed to non-Canadians and to non-essential travel. However, on the national level, Canada has not invoked the Emergencies Act. Instead, the Canadian government has used existing legal frameworks to counter the spread of COVID-19, for instance the Quarantine Act and the Public Health Agency of Canada Act (Lachapelle & Maerz, 2020a). The declaration of a state of emergency was mostly done at the provincial level, which cannot be considered as a national level emergency response. Hence, there have not been any reports of incidents of violations or discrimination in Canada since the beginning of the pandemic outbreak.

2. The Fallen Democracy (FD)

The Fallen Democracy category refers to states with questionable democratic regimes. These are usually states with unconsolidated democracy with the status of either a flawed democracy or a hybrid regime. The Fallen Democracy nations are

easily vulnerable to the challenge posed by an emergency crisis such as the spread of COVID-19. As the government asserts its emergency power in the name of securing both national and human security, there is the possibility that their pretense of being a democratic country might fall, and the state instead will fully welcome absolute power, violating liberal and democratic standards.

In this grouping, the falling of a state to authoritarian rule can be divided into two tiers. The first tier represents states with concerning development. States in this tier presented the likelihood of falling from democracy. On the other hand, the second tier refers to those states with an authoritarian nature, yet most still claim to be democratic or at least to be struggling to be democratic.

2.1 The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)

Table 4 presents examples of countries classified as being in the grouping *The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)*. Tier 1 refers to states with the likelihood of falling into an authoritarian path, as shown in the data. However, they are not as extreme as *The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)*, where nations exhibit autocratic tendencies despite the pretense of being democratic. The trend is also analyzed according to the criteria: *a state will be considered as being in The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1) group if its total score is equal to -2, -1, or 0.*

In this category, there are 37 out of 142 nations (26.05 percent): two nations with the status of full democracy, 19 out of 45 nations with flawed democracy, 16 out of 34 nations with hybrid regime, and 0 nations with authoritarian status. Interestingly, the majority of nations in The Fallen Democracy

category (Tier 1) are from the flawed democracy category.

An Example of The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1): Hungary.

In 1989, Hungary became a democratic parliamentary republic after the communist regime was formally abolished. Ranked 55th out of 167 states in 2019, Hungary was considered a flawed democracy with a score of 6.63 out of 10 (The EIU, 2020) with the status of being partly free, and 70 out of 100 in the Global Freedom Score (Freedom House, 2020). In 2020, Hungary's status remained unchanged. It was a flawed democracy with 6.56 out of 10 points (The EIU, 2021) and had the status of being partly free, with a score of 70 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2021).

The first case of a COVID-19 patient in Hungary was reported in early March 2020 before the disease spread nation-wide. The government declared a special state of emergency called a "state of danger" and introduced governmental decrees to counter the spread of COVID-19, including a state of epidemiological preparedness (Lachapelle & Maerz, 2020c). Their state of emergency has been extended by the parliament with no end limit, allowing the government to exercise emergency power indefinitely. Information about the disease has been tightly controlled and questions at government press conferences have been preselected and censored. Punishment and jail time have also been introduced for members of the public who might spread false information that hinders the work of authorities. This has led to concern on the part of the European Union regarding democratic erosion in Hungary.

Table 4
Nations Classified as "The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)"

	State	Democracy Index (2019)		Democracy Index (2020)			Global Freedom (2019)		Global Freedom (2020)			PanDem -2020			PanBack -2020			Total Trend Scoring	3 Trends
		Status	Score (10)	Status	Score (10)	Trend Scoring	Status	Score (100)	Status	Score (100)	Trend Scoring	Status	Score	Trend Scoring	Risk	Score	Trend Scoring		
1	Argentina	Flawed Democracy	7.02	Flawed Democracy	6.95	0	Free	84	Free	85	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.13	0	0	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
2	Czech Republic	Flawed Democracy	7.69	Flawed Democracy	7.67	0	Free	91	Free	91	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.12	0	0	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
3	Ecuador	Flawed Democracy	6.33	Flawed Democracy	6.13	0	Partly Free	63	Partly Free	65	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.14	0	0	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
4	Hong Kong	Flawed Democracy	6.02	Hybrid Regime	5.57	(-)1	Partly Free	59	Partly Free	55	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.11	0	-1	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
5	Hungary	Flawed Democracy	6.63	Flawed Democracy	6.56	0	Partly Free	70	Partly Free	70	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.24	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
6	India	Flawed Democracy	6.9	Flawed Democracy	6.61	0	Free	75	Free	71	0	Some Violations	0.3	(-)1	Medium-high	0.27	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
7	Indonesia	Flawed Democracy	6.48	Flawed Democracy	6.3	0	Partly Free	62	Partly Free	61	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.14	0	0	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
8	Mongolia	Flawed Democracy	6.5	Flawed Democracy	6.48	0	Free	85	Free	84	0	Some Violations	0.2	(-)1	Medium-low	0.19	0	-1	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
9	Panama	Flawed Democracy	7.05	Flawed Democracy	7.18	0	Free	84	Free	84	0	Minor Violations	0.15	0	Medium-low	0.14	0	0	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
10	Papua New Guines	Flawed Democracy	6.03	Flawed Democracy	6.1	0	Partly Free	64	Partly Free	62	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.23	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
11	Paraguay	Flawed Democracy	6.24	Flawed Democracy	6.18	0	Partly Free	65	Partly Free	65	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.24	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
12	Poland	Flawed Democracy	6.62	Flawed Democracy	6.85	0	Free	84	Free	84	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.25	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
13	Serbia	Flawed Democracy	6.41	Flawed Democracy	6.22	0	Partly Free	67	Partly Free	66	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-low	0.18	0	-1	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
14	Singapore	Flawed Democracy	6.02	Flawed Democracy	6.03	0	Partly Free	51	Partly Free	50	0	Some Violations	0.3	(-)1	Medium-high	0.27	(-)1	-2	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
15	Slovenia	Flawed Democracy	7.5	Flawed Democracy	7.54	0	Free	94	Free	94	0	Some Violations	0.2	(-)1	Medium-low	0.16	0	-1	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)
16	South Africa	Flawed Democracy	7.24	Flawed Democracy	7.05	0	Free	79	Free	79	0	Some Violations	0.2	(-)1	Medium-low	0.19	0	-1	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)

2.2 The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)

Table 5
Nations Classified as "The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)"

	State	Democracy Index (2019)		Democracy Index (2020)		Trend	Global Freedom (2019)		Global Freedom (2020)		Trend	PanDem -2020			Trend	PanBack -2020			Trend	Total	3 Trends
		Status	Score (10)	Status	Score (10)	Scoring	Status	Score (100)	Status	Score (100)	Scoring	Status	Score	Scoring		Risk	Score	Scoring	Trend Scoring	
1	Benin	Hybrid Regime	5.09	Hybrid Regime	4.58	0	Free	79	Partly Free	66	(-)1	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.24	(-)1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
2	Haiti	Hybrid Regime	4.57	Hybrid Regime	4.22	0	Partly Free	41	Partly Free	38	0	Major Violations	0.35	(-)2	Medium-high	0.25	(-)1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
3	Mali	Hybrid Regime	4.92	Authoritarian	3.93	(-)1	Partly Free	44	Partly Free	41	0	Some Violations	0.25	(-)1	Medium-high	0.21	(-)1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
4	Nepal	Hybrid Regime	5.28	Hybrid Regime	5.22	0	Partly Free	54	Partly Free	56	0	Major Violations	0.35	(-)2	High Risk	0.34	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
5	Turkey	Hybrid Regime	4.09	Hybrid Regime	4.48	0	Not Free	31	Not Free	32	0	Major Violations	0.5	(-)2	Medium-low	0.18	(-)1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
6	Uganda	Hybrid Regime	5.02	Hybrid Regime	4.94	0	Not Free	36	Not Free	34	0	Major Violations	0.55	(-)2	High Risk	0.37	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
7	Brazil	Flawed Democracy	6.86	Flawed Democracy	6.92	0	Free	75	Free	75	0	Major Violations	0.3	(-)2	Medium-high	0.29	(-)1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
8	El Salvador	Flawed Democracy	6.15	Hybrid Regime	5.9	(-)1	Partly Free	67	Partly Free	66	0	Major Violations	0.45	(-)2	High Risk	0.44	(-)2		-5	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
9	Greece	Flawed Democracy	7.43	Flawed Democracy	7.39	0	Free	87	Free	88	0	Major Violations	0.35	(-)2	Medium-high	0.25	-1		-3	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
10	Malaysia	Flawed Democracy	7.16	Flawed Democracy	7.19	0	Partly Free	52	Partly Free	52	0	Major Violations	0.4	(-)2	High Risk	0.35	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
11	Mexico	Flawed Democracy	6.09	Flawed Democracy	6.07	0	Partly Free	63	Partly Free	62	0	Major Violations	0.35	(-)2	High Risk	0.34	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
12	Philippine	Flawed Democracy	6.64	Flawed Democracy	6.56	0	Partly Free	61	Partly Free	59	0	Major Violations	0.4	(-)2	High Risk	0.32	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)
13	Sri Lanka	Flawed Democracy	6.27	Flawed Democracy	6.14	0	Partly Free	56	Partly Free	55	0	Major Violations	0.5	(-)2	High Risk	0.49	(-)2		-4	The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)

Table 5 presents examples of countries classified as *The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)*. The identifying characteristic of this grouping is that a state will be considered as *The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)* if its total score is less than -2.

There are 13 out of 142 nations (9.15 percent) in this category: 0 nations with the status of a full democracy, seven out of 45 nations with a flawed democracy, six out of 34 nations with a hybrid regime, and 0 nations of authoritarian status. The majority of nations in The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2) are from the flawed democracy category, similar to the number in tier 1.

Unexpectedly, the number of tier 2 nations was below 10 percent. It can be claimed that despite the likelihood of falling (according to the data of tier 1), only a low percentage of states actually do fall. This suggests that the momentum of unconsolidated democratic nations heading fully down the path of authoritarianism does not present a threat to global democracy.

An Example of The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2): Malaysia.

Malaysia was classified as a hybrid regime from 1975 until 2018, when they were under the same political coalition. More recently, in 2019 it was a flawed democratic country with a score of 7.16 out of 10 (The EIU, 2020). Its global freedom status was partly free with a score of 52 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2020). In comparison, in 2020 its status on the democracy index was that of a flawed democracy, with a score of 7.19 out of 10 (The EIU, 2021). Its global freedom status was partly free, with a score of 52 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2021).

Malaysia has faced with two phases of pandemic outbreak. The first case, a foreigner entering the country, was reported in January 2020. However, there was subsequently a case of a super spreader event known as Tablighi Jamaat at Masjid in Kuala Lumpur, when the number of confirmed cases rose dramatically. The second phase took place during mid-September when officials identified new clusters in various areas throughout the country. The government did not declare a state of emergency, but instead issued measures under the Prevention and Control of Disease Act, 1988 (Lachapelle & Maerz, 2020d). These included a regulation called the Movement Control Order (MCO or PKP), which was initiated during the first phase of the outbreak on the March 20, 2020 The regulation was set to end on December 31 after being extended from August. Under this act, parliament did not need to give its approval for the regulation under the Prevention and Control Disease Act, 1988. This is a newly establish preventive measure commonly known as a lockdown or partial lockdown, regulating the movement of citizens and closing borders. The government was able to rule by decree regarding several issues. There was a report from international observers that there were arrests and detentions of immigrants in the name of countering the spread of COVID-19. As for media limitations, many journalists faced the charge of causing "fear and alarm to the public" (Section 505 of the Penal Code), while reporting on the government measures against the pandemic outbreak, threating the freedom of the media, the safety of journalists, and limiting access to information (Lachapelle & Maerz, 2020d). Many Malaysians were also arrested and

jailed for breaking regulations during curfews and lockdown measures.

3. The Autocrat (AU)

This group consists of states that exhibited an authoritarian nature even before the COVID-19 crisis. Such states will likely continue to be autocratic during and after the pandemic. This is clearly illustrated in their COVID-19 counter measures and in their emergency response to stop the spread of COVID-19. Unlike states in the Maintenance of Democracy group, the authoritarian state establishes its own system and structure within the society to ensure absolute rule. With or without the emergency crisis, Autocrat states will still enforce measures and actions that are considered to be undemocratic and illiberal.

Table 6

Nations Classified as "The Autocrat"

	State	Democracy Index (2019)		Democracy Index (2020)		Global Freedom (2019)		Global Freedom (2020)		PanDem -2020		PanBack -2020		3 Trends
		Status	Score (10)	Status	Score (10)	Status	Score (100)	Status	Score (100)	Status	Score	Risk	Score	
1	Afghanistan	Authoritarian	2.85	Authoritarian	2.85	Not Free	27	Not Free	27	Minor Violations	0.15	Medium-low	0.1	The Autocrat
2	Angola	Authoritarian	3.72	Authoritarian	3.66	Not Free	31	Not Free	32	Some Violations	0.25	Medium-low	0.17	The Autocrat
3	Azerbaijan	Authoritarian	2.75	Authoritarian	2.68	Not Free	11	Not Free	10	Minor Violations	0.15	Low Risk	0.03	The Autocrat
4	Belarus	Authoritarian	2.48	Authoritarian	2.59	Not Free	19	Not Free	19	Major Violations	0.35	Medium-low	0.14	The Autocrat
5	Burma/Myanmar	Authoritarian	3.55	Authoritarian	3.04	Not Free	30	Not Free	30	Some Violations	0.25	Medium-low	0.18	The Autocrat
6	Burundi	Authoritarian	2.15	Authoritarian	2.14	Not Free	14	Not Free	13	Minor Violations	0.15	Low Risk	0.03	The Autocrat
7	Cambodia	Authoritarian	3.53	Authoritarian	3.1	Not Free	26	Not Free	25	Minor Violations	0.15	Low Risk	0.04	The Autocrat
8	Cameroon	Authoritarian	2.85	Authoritarian	2.77	Not Free	19	Not Free	18	Major Violations		Medium-low	0.17	The Autocrat
9	Central African Republic	Authoritarian	1.32	Authoritarian	1.32	Not Free	9	Not Free	10	Some Violations	0.25	Medium-low	0.16	The Autocrat
10	Chad	Authoritarian	1.61	Authoritarian	1.55	Not Free	17	Not Free	17	Some Violations	0.3	Medium-low	0.11	The Autocrat
11	China	Authoritarian	2.26	Authoritarian	2.27	Not Free	11	Not Free	10	Major Violations	0.35	Low Risk	0.06	The Autocrat
12	Cuba	Authoritarian	2.84	Authoritarian	2.84	Not Free	14	Not Free	14	Some Violations	0.3	Low Risk	0.09	The Autocrat
13	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Authoritarian	1.13	Authoritarian	1.13	Not Free	15	Not Free	18	Some Violations	0.3	Medium-low	0.14	The Autocrat
14	Egypt	Authoritarian	3.06	Authoritarian	2.93	Not Free	22	Not Free	21	Some Violations	0.3	Medium-low	0.13	The Autocrat
15	Eritrea	Authoritarian	2.37	Authoritarian	2.15	Not Free	2	Not Free	2	Some Violations	0.3	Low Risk	0.01	The Autocrat
16	Ethiopia	Authoritarian	3.44	Authoritarian	3.38	Not Free	19	Not Free	24	No Violations	0	Low Risk	0	The Autocrat
17	Gabon	Authoritarian	3.61	Authoritarian	3.54	Not Free	23	Not Free	22	Some Violations	0.25	Medium-low	0.16	The Autocrat
18	Guinea	Authoritarian	3.14	Authoritarian	3.08	Partly Free	43	Partly Free	40	Minor Violations	0.1	Low Risk	0.05	The Autocrat
19	Iran	Authoritarian	2.38	Authoritarian	2.2	Not Free	18	Not Free	17	Minor Violations	0.15	Low Risk	0.07	The Autocrat
20	Iraq	Authoritarian	3.74	Authoritarian	3.62	Not Free	32	Not Free	31	Minor Violations	0.15	Medium-low	0.1	The Autocrat

Table 6 presents countries within the classification The *Autocrat*. The trend is analyzed differently from the other three trends due to its obvious distinctions. All 44 nations with the status of authoritarian are classified as The Autocrat. These amount to 30.98 percent of the 142 nations.

After observing the data, some might expect that the authoritarian state might become more democratic as a result of the low to medium-low risk identified by PanBack. However, the data represented states' authoritarian nature even from before the pandemic. In other words, the authoritarian states do not demonstrate any risk of democratic backsliding due to the emergency crisis such as COVID-19 because their regimes have already been authoritarian from the beginning.

An Example of The Autocrat: China.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a one-party state led by the Chinese Communist Party (CPP). Despite considering their regime as a socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2005), the nature of their regime has been authoritarian since before 1975 (The EIU, 2020) with the status of *not free* (Freedom House, 2020), illiberal, and undemocratic.

Toward the end of 2019, China was the first to experience the outbreak of COVID-19 in one of its cities, Wuhan. Only around mid-January did the government officially take action. They first declared the highest-level public health emergency with a public health emergency response level 1[1]

(The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2020). The government then proceeded to restrict citizens' movements as well as any routes from/to Wuhan and Hubei Province. Only a couple of days later did the government announce a lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei Province. It was not until April before the CCP began to loosen its strict measures from public health emergency response level 1 to level 2. China was able to contain the outbreak domestically as well as to mitigate the risk of COVID-19-related social and economic downturn in a matter of four months.

With or without the emergency response law, media freedom has always been limited in China. The government was able to put limitations on the reports of COVID-19 in its domestic media and channels of communication, and the military was employed to enforce the confinement and lockdown measurements. Technology was used as the main mechanism for keeping citizens in check, including AI face recognition and tracking drones. In some aspects, many believe that the outbreak actually benefitted China in terms of justifying and glorifying its use of undemocratic measures.

The three trends were created to categorize nations and their political trajectory during the pandemic. Open data such as the Democracy Index, the Global Freedom Index, and pandemic-related scoring on democracy were used to analyze the trend of each nation according to the given conditions of the categorization. The findings from the data revealed the

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[1] China has a four-tier system of responses for public health emergencies; level 1 or tier 1 is the most serious.

number of states within each category. Forty-eight nations (33.80 percent) were seen to maintain democracy, 37 nations (26.05 percent) were categorized as Fallen Democracy Tier 1, and 13 nations (9.15 percent) were at Fallen Democracy Tier 2 with both tiers amounting to 50 nations (35.2 percent), and 44 nations (30.98 percent) were seen to be autocratic. As a result, the total numbers of states in each of the three trends were relatively similar.

Table 7

Summary of the Number of Nations in the Various Categories

Trend	Total number of nations in different categories				Total number of nations	% of 142 nations
	Full Democracy (19)	Flawed Democracy (45)	Hybrid Regime (34)	Authoritarian (44)		
The Maintenance of Democracy	17	19	12	-	48	33.80
The Fallen Democracy Tier 1	2	19	16	-	37	26.05
The Fallen Democracy Tier 2	-	7	6	-	13	9.15
The Autocrat	-	-	-	44	44	30.98
Total					142	100

The three trends in states' political systems show that the likelihood of a state heading toward autocracy depends on the pre-existing political conditions of that nation. States with strong and mature democracy tend to continue to uphold their democratic standards. Similarly, states with an autocratic nature before the outbreak will continue to be authoritarian. Flawed democracy and hybrid regime countries are vulnerable to the risk of falling out of democracy. Due to their struggles in the past, their democracy is without a strong foundation, causing the states to waver and eventually leading them to their fall. As such, the number of states in the trend of the Fallen Democracy is higher than both the Autocrat and the Maintenance of Democracy states. They show signs of falling. However, the possibility of the state fully turning against democracy is relatively low. It can be concluded that the backsliding of democracy does occur with the pandemic outbreak as one of the factors in its acceleration as seen in the autocratic practices and response of state. However, the occurrence of backsliding is not as frightening as many believe it to be. What happens in the Autocrat states thus is a continuous circumstance of democratic backsliding before the time of pandemic outbreak.

Democracy, Disease, and the Economy

It is not enough to merely focus on the issues of democracy and the likelihood of backsliding. The pandemic has not only

caused instability in political regimes but has also influenced the functioning of the government in handling the pandemic crisis and its economic performance. Throughout 2020, arguments favoring authoritarian practices arose as it was claimed that states with autocratic natures and centralized decision-making are better in handling emergency crises than democratic states. This may have proven to efficiently counter the spread of the pandemic but at the expense of losing democratic values and economic growth.

This section aims to answer the debate regarding whether enforcing autocratic measures is a better practice in mitigating the risks of the pandemic crisis. The risks may include liberal and democratic values, economic performance of one state, and national public health security. State's decisions on emergency responses and measurements does not only lead to the question of democratic standard, but it also lead to the question of their economic performance and their ability to counter the spread of the disease. As such, it is crucial to compare states in the Maintenance of Democracy category and those with of Fallen Democracy status and how their COVID-19 measures affected their performance over the year. Three sets of data were used to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on economic and health security.

1. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This paper considers the real GDP growth of 142 states in 2019 and those states' real GDP growth for the year 2020 to capture the difference in each state's economic growth between the pandemic year and the preceding non-pandemic year. The aim is to uncover the result of the state's capability in handling its economic status while also countering the spread of COVID-19.

2. The World Health Organization's situation reports on COVID-19 weekly epidemiological updates.

Like the study on the state's economic performance, this paper will be using two data sets from the December 19, 2020 issue of WHO's weekly situation reports: the total number of cumulative COVID-19 cases and the total number of cumulative deaths. However, there are three states (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Ivory Coast) with no data presented in the report. As a replacement, data from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering (JHU CSSE) will be used instead.

3. United Nations data on total population.

According to the UN databases, estimates of the total population of the 142 states were presented in the population, surface area, and density report as updated on November 5, 2020. This paper uses the estimate of the total population to calculate the percentage of cases of infection and deaths. Combining the UN data on total population and the data on WHO's total infections and deaths, the results will uncover the ability of states to counter the spread of the pandemic, and indicate whether their measures, liberal or authoritarian, are working to stop the increase of infections and deaths.

Table 8
Data on Democracy, Disease, and The Economy

	State	Trend	Economic			Infections (27 December 2020)	Total Population (December 2020)	Deaths (27 December 2020)	% of infections in total population	% of deaths case in total infections
			GDP Growth 2019	GDP Growth 2020	Differences					
1	Australia	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.8	-4.2	6	28,296	25,500,000	908	0.110964706	3.208934125
2	Austria	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.6	-6.7	8.3	348,359	9,010,000	5,752	3.8663596	1.651170201
3	Canada	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.7	-7.1	8.8	539,298	37,740,000	14,781	1.428982512	2.740785243
4	Chile	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.1	-6	7.1	598,394	19,120,000	16,404	3.129675732	2.741337647
5	Costa Rica	The Maintenance of Democracy	2.1	-5.5	7.6	162,990	5,090,000	2,086	3.2021611	1.279833119
6	Denmark	The Maintenance of Democracy	2.3	-4.5	6.8	151,167	5,790,000	1,153	2.610829016	0.762732607
7	Finland	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.1	-4	5.1	34,084	5,540,000	524	0.615234657	1.537378242
8	Germany	The Maintenance of Democracy	0.6	-6	6.6	1,640,858	83,780,000	29,778	1.958531869	1.814782266
9	Ireland	The Maintenance of Democracy	5.9	-3	8.9	85,394	4,940,000	2,200	1.728623482	2.576293416
10	Netherlands	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.7	-5.4	7.1	754,171	17,130,000	10,974	4.402632808	1.455107661
11	New Zealand	The Maintenance of Democracy	2.2	-6.1	8.3	1,788	4,820,000	25	0.037095436	1.398210291
12	Norway	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.2	-2.8	4	44,932	5,420,000	421	0.82900369	0.936971423
13	Portugal	The Maintenance of Democracy	2.2	-1	3.2	392,996	10,200,000	6,556	3.852901961	1.668210363
14	Spain	The Maintenance of Democracy	2	-12.8	14.8	1,854,951	46,750,000	49,824	3.967809626	2.68600087
15	Sweden	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.3	-4.7	6	396,048	10,100,000	8,279	3.921267327	2.090403183
16	Switzerland	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.2	-5.3	6.5	426,199	8,650,000	6,508	4.927156069	1.52698622
17	United Kingdom	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.5	-9.8	11.3	2,256,009	67,890,000	70,405	3.323035793	3.120776557
18	Belgium	The Maintenance of Democracy	1.4	-8.3	9.7	638,874	11,590,000	19,192	5.512286454	3.004035224
19	Botswana	The Maintenance of Democracy	3	-9.6	12.6	13,622	2,350,000	38	0.579659574	0.278960505

The results of the data analysis can be categorized into three sections: the average differences in GDP growth, the average percentage of infectious cases, and the average percentage of death cases. These three figures will be used to analyze the performance of states in two different trends regarding their response and management during the pandemic.

Table 9

Comparison of States in Three Trends Regarding Democracy, Disease, and the Economy

3 Trends	Average % of Infections Cases (Dec 2020)	Average % of Deaths (Dec 2020)	The average difference of GDP growth between 2019 and 2020
The Maintenance of Democracy	2.16	2.03	-7.91
The Fallen Democracy (Tier 1)	1.79	2.13	-8.35
The Fallen Democracy (Tier 2)	0.78	2.38	-8.05

In comparison of infection percentages, the average number of infections present in the MD states is higher than that of the FD states. The MD states face higher numbers of infections in their countries. From the findings of the data, there is the possibility that FD states' autocratic practices may be successful in countering the spread of the disease; however, the ability to stop the spread of the pandemic is not the only concern in this time of crisis.

Every state is vulnerable to the risk of economic regression. The risk of the pandemic spreading inevitably leads to the decline in a state's economic status. It is one of the concerning factors that requires immediate attention and responses from states. One hundred and forty-two states have faced downturns in their economic growth. Only nine countries were able to maintain their economic growth and to not fall into negative growth: five countries in the Fallen Democracy category (Benin, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nepal, and Tanzania)

and four countries in the Maintenance of Democracy category (Ghana, Taiwan, Bangladesh, and Malawi). As presented in Table 9, the average GDP growth of the states with the status of the Maintenance of Democracy fell by 7.79 from 2019 to 2020. At the same time, states with the status of the FD faced a decline of 8.35 in Tier 1 and a of 8.05 in Tier 2. Despite the spread of COVID-19, the MD states were more effective in mitigating the risk of economic regression. The FD states might be able to stop the spread of the disease and keep the infections at a lower number, but at the same time, they are facing economic regression.

Nevertheless, the FD states' ability to handle their economies in the time of the pandemic crisis is still behind that of the MD states, as is as their ability to ensure their citizens' well-being and safety from the pandemic-related death. The average death rate in the FD states is much higher than in the MD states. Citizens in the FD states,

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despite the lower number of infections, are more vulnerable to the risk of dying from the pandemic. With the average percentage of deaths in the MD states at 2.03 percent, the FD states face higher death rates: 2.13 percent in FD Tier 1 and 2.38 percent in FD Tier 2. According to the statistics, states with the likelihood of falling out of democracy face a high challenge of threats against their citizens' lives. The more autocratic they are, in comparison to the democratic states, the more likely deaths will occur.

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Governance and Leadership in India During the Pandemic

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Kaustuv Chakrabarti**

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have adversely impacted the economy and the livelihood of millions of people along with the democratic governance in India. The article explains how the Indian economy, which was already on a weak footing even before the pandemic, has been affected. Decelerating GDP growth, significant decrease in industrial output, fall in tax revenues, and a massive reduction in power demand were recorded well before the lockdown, and the pandemic has worsened economic conditions. Many scholars observed that jobs were not growing as fast as the country's GDP. The demonetization slowed the economy and caused unemployment. Despite all major economic indicators showing a downward spiral, the government remained in denial.

The article also examines public health governance in India. Public healthcare infrastructure in India has long suffered from neglect and a chronic lack of funding. The weak and unprepared health system in the country proved to be grossly inadequate to handle the pandemic. The pandemic crisis has exposed weaknesses

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in the public healthcare system and prompted questions about decades of neglect and abdication of responsibility by successive central and state governments.

COVID-19 has exposed the glaring inequalities that exist in society, which are exacerbated by unsafe and undignified migration. Informal migrant workers in India were the hardest hit group during the pandemic. The migrant crisis has made clear that no government authority has a comprehensive understanding of the scale and type of migrant workers. Government accountability and urgent migrant welfare interventions have become the need of the hour.

The article examines democratic governance in the country during the pandemic. Democratic governance in India has been under stress for many years, with democratic practices and ethos alarmingly waning. The pandemic provided a perfect excuse to the ruling dispensation to further clamp down on dissent and civic engagement. During the pandemic, citizens experienced unidirectional communication from the government without much opportunity for participation in dialogue and deliberation, which are fundamental in a functional democracy. Absence of a legal framework for organising online consultations with citizens and "affected persons" in making public laws and policies belies the government's rhetoric of "putting citizens at the centre of policy making." The article examines the protest movements against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the Farmers' Acts, and several other instances of suppression of democratic dissent and critics. The article also proposes a number of policy recommendations for improving governance and strengthening democracy in India.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, democracy, governance, public health, informal workers, civil society

Introduction

The primary responsibility for governing a country rests with the state. The state using its various apparatus enacts laws, policies, and procedures to enable institutions to provide political, social, and economic goods and services to its people (Wachira, 2020). An effective state does this by mitigating and managing risks particularly for those people who are vulnerable with less capabilities. The leadership at the helm of government has to steer the policies, programs, and institutions within the democratic frameworks of a county, particularly at times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the foundations of governance in India as much as in other parts of the world. The lessons emerging from the pandemic clearly reveal that a capable, accountable, inclusive, and participatory government is essential for effectively addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic with long-lasting ramifications. It is unimaginable that such principles and capacities would emerge

overnight in the wake of the crisis. These would require experience, strategies, and operational abilities along with decisive and participatory leadership for a state to rise to the occasion.

The first case of COVID-19 infection was reported by China to the World Health Organization in December 2019. India identified its first COVID-19 infection case in Kerala on January 27, 2020. Since then, as on March 13, 2021, India has recorded 11,333,728 cases of infections and 158,483 deaths. A total of 10,973,260 persons have recovered, which means nearly 99 percent of all the people who got infected have recovered (Worldometers, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has immensely impacted the lives and livelihood of millions of people in India. The pandemic induced lockdown has added to unprecedented misery and suffering to poor, vulnerable, and informal workers. The economy, which was already on a weak footing even before the pandemic, has suffered the most. The weak and unprepared health system in the country proved to be grossly inadequate to handle a pandemic of this magnitude. Democratic governance has been under stress for many years with democratic practices and ethos alarmingly waning, and the pandemic provided a perfect excuse to the ruling dispensation to further clamp down dissents and civic engagement.

The general election in 2014 brought the National Democratic Alliance[1] (NDA) coalition in power at the center led by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and its charismatic leader Mr. Narendra Modi. The election witnessed an intensive conversation around the alleged "corruption" "mismanagement," and "policy paralysis" in the country's governance by the United Progressive Alliance[4] (UPA) coalition under the leadership of Indian National Congress (INA). The agenda of inclusive development as illustrated through the political slogan *"sabka sath, sabka vikas"* provided the electoral mandate to NDA to govern the country with a more-than-two-thirds majority in the parliament. Over the next five years, it became apparent that the Hindutva project, ostensibly premised on religious polarization and overt populism, would be the basis for the country's governance. The first year after re-election in 2019, the BJP alone with a two-thirds majority in the parliament wanted to carry out all its top Hindutva projects, and most of them have been accomplished. The constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir, the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and the amendment of citizenship laws all contributed to reinforce the Hindutva as the basis for political ideology (Vij, 2020).

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[1] The National Democratic Alliance is a coalition of political parties led by the Bhartiya Janata Party, which rules the central government in India.

[2] United Progressive Alliance is a coalition of political parties led by Indian National Congress (INC) which is now the principal opposition.

Pre-Pandemic Economic and Political Context

The COVID-19 pandemic hit India, as in other parts of the world, at a time when the Indian economy was going through one of its worst phases, with growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) falling to a 11-year low of 4.2 percent in 2019-2020. The economy grew by 3.1 percent in the January-March quarter of 2019-2020, against 5.7 percent at the same time the previous year, the slowest growth in at least eight years (Sahoo, 2020). Decelerating GDP growth, significant decrease in industrial output, fall in tax revenues, and a massive reduction in power demand were all recorded well before the impact of the lockdown was recorded (Radhakrishnan et. al, 2020). Figure 1 shows that while the pandemic has slowed down the economies of every other country in the world, the scale of economic contraction in India was bigger than in any of the G20 countries.

Figure 1

Economic Contraction in G20 Countries –Quarter GDP, Total, Percentage Change, Previous Period, Q2 2020
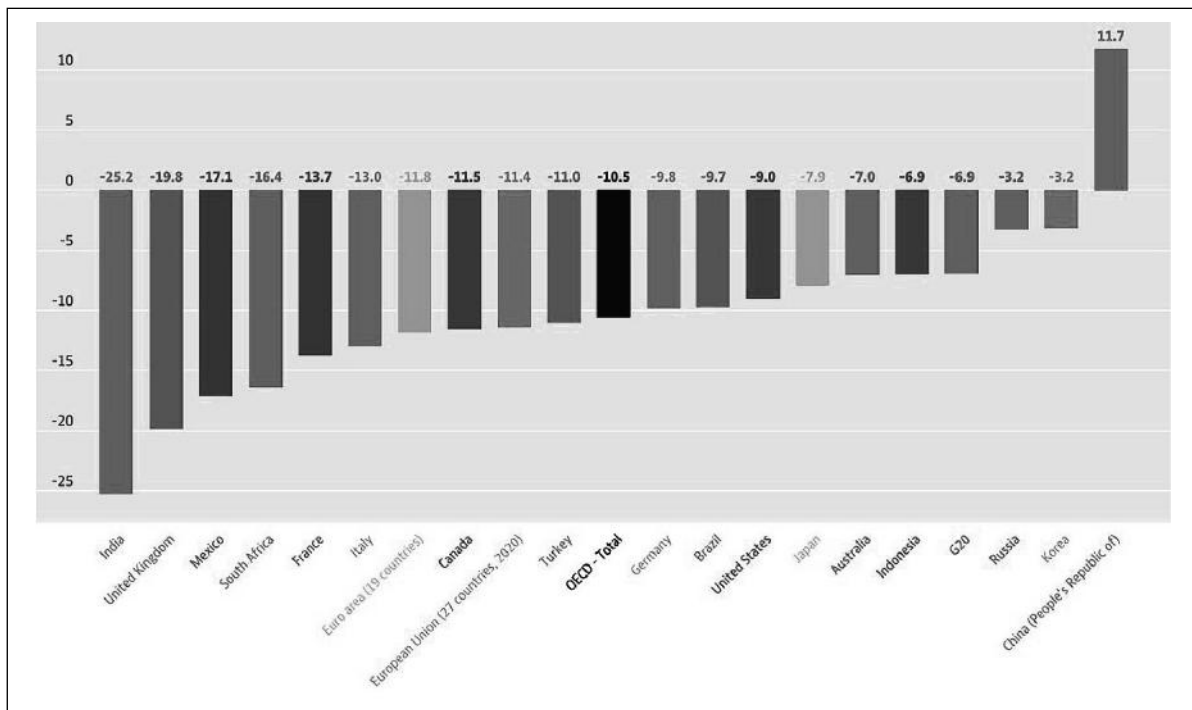
Source: OECD, September 2020 (https://www.oecd.org/sdd/na/g20-gdp-growth-second-quarter-2020-oecd.htm) accessed on January 15, 2021

Jobless growth in India had already become a concern among many economists who had repeatedly questioned how jobs were not growing as fast as the country's GDP. They warned that the rate of jobless growth could severely impact India's economy, which depends heavily on the middle-class population, engaged primarily

in salaried jobs and entrepreneurship (Das, 2020). The demonetization[3] imposed by the previous NDA government in November 2016 had the effect of slowing the economy and resulting in unemployment across the country, which the government has continuously denied.

This concern over unemployment was reinforced by the findings of a National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) study. The survey was the first on employment by a government agency since demonetization. The government delayed the publication of this report but it got leaked to the media. The government eventually published NSSO's annual report (July 2017-June 2018) of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which pegs the all India unemployment rate at 6.1 percent in the given year. This unemployment figure was a 45-year high. The report also revealed that unemployment was higher in urban areas as compared to rural. For rural areas, the unemployment rate was 5.3 percent, while in the urban areas it was 7.8 percent. Among rural men, the unemployment rate was 5.8 percent while among rural women it was 3.8 percent. Among urban men, unemployment was 7.8 percent and 5.7 percent among urban women (Patel, 2019). Facing vociferous critics from the opposition political parties and among prominent economists, the government issued a statement that said comparing the recent jobs data with past data was faulty as the study had used a new design methodology for the survey.

Despite all major economic indicators showing the downward spiral, the government remained in denial. The country's finance minister, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, blamed India's unprecedented economic slump on "an act of god." The government insisted these are extraordinary "once in one-and-a-half century" times. The chief economic adviser of India attributed the deceleration to "exogenous factors," referring to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns it necessitated. In a nutshell, the government line has been that the virus had slowed down all countries and there was nothing particularly unique or alarming about India's recession (Scroll, 2020).

While the Indian economy continued in the doldrums, political governance followed a hardcore Hindutva propaganda. The Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 on December 11, 2019. It amended the Citizenship Act, 1955 by providing a route to Indian citizenship for migrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities, who had fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan before December 2014. The amendment was severely criticized by several opposition political parties and civil society for two reasons: first the Muslims from those countries were not given such eligibility, and second, for first the time in constitutional history religion had been overtly used as a criterion for citizenship. The passage of this act sparked violent protests across the country, particularly in

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[3] On November 8, 2016, the Government of India announced the demonetisation of all Rs. 500 and Rs.1,000 banknotes. It announced the issuance of new Rs.500 and Rs. 2,000 banknotes in exchange for the demonetised banknotes.

the north-eastern states. Protesters feared that granting citizenship to migrants would change the demography in the region and might destroy the local indigenous culture and political balance.

As soon as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was passed by both houses of the Indian Parliament, the government also moved to implement National Register of Citizens (NRC). At its core, the NRC is an official record of those who are legal Indian citizens. It includes demographic information about all those individuals who qualify as citizens of India as per the Citizenship Act, 1955. The register was first prepared after the 1951 Census of India and since then it had not been updated until recently. The move was seen as another effort by the current government to target religious minorities, particularly Muslims.

The NRC updating was ordered by the Supreme Court of India in 2014 in the north-eastern state of Assam, in accordance with Citizenship Act, 1955 and Citizenship Rules, 2003. The process officially started in 2015 and the updated final NRC was released in August 2019, with over 1.9 million applicants failing to make it onto the NRC list. The applicants who could not prove their citizenship faced Foreigner's Tribunals and those who are declared as illegal immigrants would put under detention centers created by the BJP-ruled state government.

The move from the Indian government to implement nationwide NRC triggered widespread fear that this exercise will be targeted to harass Muslims and other religious minorities. The announcement by the home minister in the Parliament caused widespread protests and movements against both CAA and NRC. While in most places the protests were peaceful, in some places they became violent with incidences of high handedness by police. In February 2020, Delhi witnessed one of its worst communal riots in which 53 people, two-thirds of them Muslims, died.

The Indian government revoked the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in August 2019, which was a long-standing promise of the BJP. This Article provided special status to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. With the revocation of this Article, the Indian government bifurcated the state in two Union Territories – Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Anticipating opposition, the Indian government completely shut down internet, cable TV, and mobile connectivity throughout the state; most opposition leaders along with thousands of political activists were taken into custody by either placing them under house arrest or in prison. All the educational institutions were also shut down and students from other states were asked to leave the state.

In short, the COVID-19 pandemic struck India at a time when economic and political governance in India was already going through its toughest challenges. With a downturn in economic growth along with governance characterized by majoritarian populism and decaying institutional checks and balances, the country's governance was already at multiple crossroads.

Government Response to Public Health Governance

India has had a long history of outbreaks. During the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918, India accounted for the largest number of estimated global cases and deaths. During the past decade, outbreaks of avian influenza, Japanese encephalitis, dengue, cholera, swine flu, and most recently Nipah[4] in 2018, have hit several parts of the country.

India's response to COVID-19 was consistent with its 2019 scores on the Global Health Security Index (GHS, 2019). The GHS Index assesses and compares the capacity of countries in outbreak preparedness. In 2019, India's overall GHS Index score was 46.5, placing it 57 out of 195 countries receiving a score. India's score was above the global average of 40.2 but lower than other south-east Asian countries like Thailand and Indonesia, which received scores of 73.2 and 56.6 respectively. The scores under all six categories[5] were in the moderate range for preparedness, indicating room for improvement on all fronts (Bharali et al., 2020).

The first three infection cases occurred on January 30 and February 3 in Kerala as a group of students returned from Wuhan China. The state government's response was effective and received accolades from the UN. The state's investment in public health care and experience tackling the Nipah outbreak in 2018 may have contributed to

its capacity and preparedness to swiftly handle the current outbreak. In less than five months, the COVID-19 outbreak in India has spread to all states and union territories, infecting more than 500,000 people. Not all states were prepared as well.

According to the National Health Profile – 2019 (CBHI, 2019) there were in total 713,986 government hospital beds available in India. This amounted to 0.55 beds per 1,000 population, which was abysmally low, and an epidemic like coronavirus could very quickly complicate the problem even further. The elderly population (aged 60 and above) was especially vulnerable, given that more complications were reported for patients in this age group. The availability of beds for the elderly population in India was 5.18 beds per 1,000 population. According to Singh et al. (2020), many states lied below the national level figure (0.55 beds per 1,000 population), including Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Odisha, Assam, and Manipur. These 12 states together account for close to 70 percent of the total population in India. Bihar has an acute shortage of government hospital beds with just 0.11 beds available per 1,000 population. Some states do better on this metric, such as West Bengal (2.25 government beds per 1,000) and Sikkim (2.34 government beds per 1,000). The capital city of Delhi has 1.05 beds per 1,000 population and the southern states of

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[4] Nipah virus (NiV) infection is an emerging zoonosis that causes severe disease in both animals and humans. Its natural host is the fruit bat. NiV can lead to acute respiratory distress, encephalitis, and/or seizures, and can progress to coma within 24 to 48 hours.

[5] Six categories under which the countries are scored are: prevention; detection and reporting; rapid response; health system; compliance with international norms; and risk environment.

Kerala (1.05 beds per 1,000) and Tamil Nadu (1.1 beds per 1,000) also have better availability of beds. The scenario is pretty similar when the analysis is done for just the elderly population: North-eastern states do far better than others; southern states also have higher numbers of beds available for the elderly population – for example, Kerala (7.4), Tamil Nadu (7.8), and Karnataka (8.6) – while northern and central states have relatively low availability of government beds for the elderly population.

An estimated 5-10 percent of total patients would require critical care in form of ventilator support. In a worst-case scenario, the COV-IND-19 Study Group (2020) estimated that India might end up with 2.2 million cases by May 15, 2020, which implied that it would have needed 110,000 to 220,000 ventilators. There were no official figures on the number of ventilators available in the public sector, however, the same analysis (ibid.) provided an estimated figure using the number of hospital beds available – 713,986 total government beds, out of which 5-8 percent were ICU beds (35,699 to 57,119 ICU beds). Assuming that 50 percent of these ICU beds had ventilators, the analysis estimated 17,850 to 25,556 ventilators in the country. Even in the best-case scenario where all ICU beds were equipped with ventilators, India would have a maximum of 57,000 ventilators to cater to a growing number of COVID-19 patients.

Human resources is the most important building block of public health. Availability of an adequate number of human resources with a suitable skill mix and their appropriate deployment at various levels of health care are essential for providing effective health care services for the population. WHO recommends a ratio of one doctor for every 1,000 patients, India has one government doctor for every 10,000, according to the 2019 National Health Profile.

Hence at the onset of the pandemic, the country's health-care system was ill equipped to cope with an avalanche of patients with a contagious respiratory infection in the manner that China and other developed economies such as Italy have been doing. India's continued inability to deal with the epidemic of tuberculosis speaks to that struggle (Krishnan, 2020).

Public healthcare infrastructure in India has long suffered from neglect and a chronic lack of funding. Between 2009 and 2019, India invested less than 2 percent of its GDP in public health. This percentage has continued to drop, with barely 1.1 percent of the GDP going towards public health last year (PRS, 2020). This lack of investment has come home to roost, with India unable to cope effectively with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The handling of this crisis has exposed the weaknesses in the public healthcare system in the country and raised questions about the decades of neglect and abdication of responsibility by successive governments, both at the center and in the states. It has underscored the consequences of the neglect of public health by successive governments, both at the center and in the states, in violation of both their constitutional obligations as established by the Supreme Court as well as the best practices relating to the provision of public healthcare worldwide. The increase of India's population from

around 39 crores[6] at the time of its independence to around 135 crores today has not seen proportionate robustness in policy response in reasonably quantitative terms, particularly in developing public health infrastructure in rural areas.

This is despite an early recognition of the fact that a universal public healthcare system was essential to the growth and development of the nation. India ranks 184 out of 191 countries in terms of percentage of GDP spent on healthcare, according to WHO. At US$85 (approximately INR 6,044), the average healthcare spend per person in India is amongst the lowest when compared to other countries. Even countries like Sri Lanka, China, and Thailand invest three to four times more per capita on healthcare.

Despite the fact that almost 70 percent of India's population lives on less than US$2 a day, the country continues to have one of the highest out of pocket expenditures on health. It is estimated that 62.4 percent of the total current health expenditure is paid for by the patients themselves while the government only contributes 16.7 percent (Basu and Srivastava, 2020). While the National Health Policy of 2017 envisages an increase in health spending to 2.5 percent of the GDP by 2025, there has been no movement in this direction.

In the wake of the pandemic, the Government of India sanctioned Rs.15,000 crore for "India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package," as a response to fund dedicated treatment facilities, ramp up the number of testing facilities, procure personal protective

equipment (PPE), isolation beds, ICU beds, ventilators, and other essential equipment for treating COVID-19.

India realized the need for providing PPEs to the frontline workers and quickly leveraged its domestic manufacturing sector to increase production from zero PPEs to 450,000 PPEs per day. With initial imports of testing kits from China facing quality issues, India decided to depend on test kits from domestic manufacturers. With only 19,398 ventilators available, the government encouraged domestic manufacturing of medical equipment and ordered 60,000 ventilators from domestic vendors.

India designated specific public health facilities for COVID-19 case management. These facilities fell under three broad categories. Category I included dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, category II included dedicated COVID-19 health centers, and category III included dedicated COVID-19 care centers. According to the union health minister (Economic Times, 2020), as of December 2020, there were 15,359 facilities across the country. In total there were 1,500,000 isolation beds, 270,000 oxygen-supported beds, 80,727 ICU beds, and 40,575 ventilators.

The government installed 29 surveillance units at international airports across the country. Universal thermal screening for all international arrivals has been in effect since March 3, 2020. Two COVID-19 surveillance systems have been put in place to monitor trends in COVID-19 infections at a district level. The first is a facility-based survey across all districts, initially using throat/nasal swabs and testing for the virus, which

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[6] 1 crore is equal to 10 million.

would be replace by serum testing for antibodies. The second is a population based sero-survey (testing serum for antibodies) in selected districts to detect exposed populations in high-risk areas and containment zones. ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) health workers played a key role in community surveillance by (i) conducting house to house surveillance on symptoms, (ii) contact tracing, and (iii) providing information to households on preventive public health measures. Other non-health workers like functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions,[7] Red Cross volunteers, and Anganwadi[8] staff have been provided training to support community surveillance. For contact tracing the government of India launched the "Aarogya Setu" app to enable people to assess themselves for COVID-19 risk based on their interaction with others.

COVID-19 testing is free for everyone at government public facilities, and since April 4, 2020, both testing and treatment have been made free for eligible beneficiaries under India's Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), the publicly funded health insurance program benefitting the poorest households in India. While the cost of testing in private labs was initially capped at INR 4,500 (US$60), the cap has been removed and states are allowed to fix their own prices.

However, this is a very limited response. Selective investments in COVID-19 control did not meet many other essential demands of the health system. The emergency response to COVID-19 has resulted in diversion of resources from other essential

health services, including maternal and child-health services, which is bound to have repercussions in the long run. Adequate investments in strengthening the public health system are needed to deliver universal health coverage (UHC) and ensure system preparedness to withstand any kind of public health emergency.

According Raghavan et al., (2020), private hospitals, which make up two-thirds of hospital beds in India and possess almost 80 percent of available ventilators, were handling less than 10 percent of the critical load of COVID-19 patients till April 2020. By the end of March 2020, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan had already involved private facilities to treat COVID-19 patients free of cost. This is on account of the fact that private health facilities are better equipped to provide specialized care and have an advantage over public health facilities in terms of better infrastructure and staff.

Pandemic and Informal Migrant Workers

India has over 400 million migrants, a large proportion of whom are internal migrants (Census 2011). This includes inter-state migrants as well as intra-state migrants. Some of these migrants move seasonally from one state to another, in lean agricultural periods to sustain their livelihoods through wage employment in urban areas. The circular migrants are more permanently settled in urban destinations and return to their rural homes during festivals, marriages,

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[7] Panchayati Raj Institutions are local governance institutions in rural areas.

[8] Anganwadi are early childhood care centres.

and other ceremonies. These two categories of migrants constitute a large portion of the rural migrants, who are highly mobile between the source and destination.

COVID-19 has exposed the glaring inequalities that exist in society and unsafe and undignified migration often exacerbates such inequalities. Informal migrant workers in India were the hardest hit group during the pandemic. To arrest the spread of pandemic the Indian government imposed one of the most stringent lockdowns. The lockdown resulted in complete shutdown of economic activities throughout the country for almost 10 weeks between the end of March and early June 2020. In India, most of the migrant workers were not paid their wages during the lockdown; they had no access to food or cash to pay for rental accommodation, or social welfare schemes because of lack of portability of welfare services. Many did not have bank accounts or identification documents, which were valid only in their states of origin. Language barriers in any case add to the discrimination migrant workers face; this stigma worsened when urban locals began calling them "Corona Carriers," thereby reducing their chances of becoming employable in the near future.

According to the International Labour Organization, the pandemic could push 400 million informal workers in India into deeper poverty. The migrant crisis has made clear that no government authority, at the center or in states, has any comprehensive understanding of the scale and type of migrant workers. In response to the multifaceted crises of the migrant workers, the government announced a number of relief, welfare, and recovery measures. However, as the most recent GDP figures show sharp contraction of the economy, there are doubts if these program measures will be implemented at all. State governments have fewer resources to implement many of these public programs, which raises further uncertainty about migrant workers' return to urban locations. With such grave challenges faced by migrants concerning their livelihoods, government accountability and urgent migrant welfare interventions have become the need of the hour.

In India, inter-state migrants account for approximately 60 million people (Economic Survey, 2017). The migrant labor force in India mostly operates through informal recruitment channels, where workers are forced to work in high risk, unsafe, and exploitative working conditions. Their livelihoods are dependent on meagre daily, weekly, or monthly wages. Women migrants remain most vulnerable, given that they are exposed to much higher risks of violence, exploitation, and deprivation. There is a huge array of social protection schemes that are financed and delivered by different levels of government (Srivastava, 2020). These include food-based schemes for distribution of subsidized food items (Public Distribution System); nutritional supplemental schemes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS); and various social security schemes for the poor and informal sector workers (ibid). Some examples of such schemes are: Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) providing clean cooking fuel – LPG through fifty million LPG connections to BPL[9] families; the Ayushman Bharat Yojana - National

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[9] Below poverty line.

Health Protection Scheme wherein beneficiaries get an e-card that can be used to avail services at an empanelled hospital, public or private, anywhere in the country; and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, a credit linked subsidy scheme for housing for the marginalized. However, institutional failures and lack of a clear understanding and policies in place between the central and state governments has ensured that migrant workers have remained ignored and steeped in poverty through the decades despite having constitutionally guaranteed rights as equal citizens of their country.

The roles of the different levels of government in the different kinds of social protection arrangements are delineated in the Constitution of India.? Under the constitution, subjects under social protection are either (a) in the exclusive purview of center/states or (b) in the concurrent purview of center and states or (c) undertaken by center, states and local governments (Schedule 7, 11, and 12 of the Constitution of India). The legal framework governing migration in India is a complex web of various sets of laws, passed by the central and state governments. There exist two main categories of social protection statutes. One set is the statutes enacted exclusively for women to prevent gender-based discrimination at the workplace, such as the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. The second category of statutes is those enacted for workers at large, such as the Factories Act, 1948, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and the Building and Other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service)

Act, 1996. The one statute that comes closest to protecting rights of migrants is The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, enacted to regulate the conditions of service of interstate workers in the informal labor force. It regulates minimum wage rates and provides journey allowances, health benefits, and other welfare measures for migrants. However, certain provisions in this law are problematic, such as mandating registration of establishments employing inter-state migrant workers but not the workers themselves. The statute obligates contractors employing migrants to ensure basic labor rights for the latter, but until December 2016, it saw only four prosecutions on account of non-adherences. Legislation such as the Sexual Harassment Act and the Maternity Benefits Act are intended to protect women in the workforce, but are hardly implemented in letter and spirit, leaving the majority of women migrant workers at the peril of discriminatory and often dangerous employers. With an attempt to revamp the labor and industrial ecosystem, the government of India introduced four labor codes (Hindustan Times, 2020). Among those, the draft Labour Code on Social Security & Welfare, 2018 provided for the integration of schemes and benefits across the country and recognized the rights of workers to access these benefits (Doval, 2020). The latest Social Security Bill, 2019, however is silent on whether special protections apply to migrant workers. Under the bill, important areas such as employment injury benefits and provident fund for workers in the unorganized sector are left to the discretion of states (ibid.).

Despite the country having policies and legislation in place, COVID-19 uncovered the institutional, legal and socio-cultural cracks in the unorganized labor economy. Migrants faced different sets of problems in source and destination states. In destination states, most of the welfare schemes for migrants remained ineffective during COVID-19 due to registration gaps, lack of transferability of benefits, and absence of infrastructural and informational support provided to the migrants. Migrant workers who live away from their homes do not have access to their bank accounts opened in their home states, which meant that they could not access any cash benefits transferred to their bank accounts. They do not have their ration cards with them, and therefore could not access food benefits from ration shops in their localities. Daily wage earners lost their employment overnight and had to look to nearby neighbourhood retail shops who lent them money and food through the lockdown. Migrant workers in destination states have also faced a challenge of housing and sanitation for decades. These migrants live in "jhuggis" or densely populated informal settlements controlled by powerful landlords. The landlords started harassing migrants for rents during the lockdown, by cutting their electricity and threatening them to pay or leave. Maintaining hygiene and physical distancing was a distant reality in these informal settlements where houses are tightly packed right next to each other, having common toilets and water for domestic use. The messaging for protecting people from COVID-19, namely "Social Distancing" only facilitated stigmatisation of migrants. Language, religion, and cultural values played a huge role in enhancing this stigmatization of the workers, especially in urban centers.

For returning migrants, a different set of barriers confronted them. They had their families to feed, but no access to food, jobs, health facilities, or education. They also faced stigma in the eys of the administration and neighbors in their home states. The government decided to expand the funding for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), a scheme guaranteeing a hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to adult members of any rural household who are willing to do unskilled manual work. Over 8.3 million new households have been issued job cards under the scheme during the first five months of the current financial year. State governments also collaborated with organizations such as Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to hire returning migrants for construction of roads and other infrastructure projects. However, these projects do not provide a permanent solution for skilled and semi-skilled migrants, who are not being employed for jobs that match their skill sets. Although a data mapping exercise has now been ramped up in some states in India, accreditation of prior skills and skill upgradation projects have not been given their due importance. Skill recognition and upgradation schemes are critical at this juncture for making returning migrants employable. Large scale registration of migrants is equally crucial, in order to bridge the gap between the workers and the welfare benefits laid down for their use.

People Versus the State During COVID-19

The pandemic has devastated the country's economy and livelihood for millions of people. It has also adversely affected democratic governance in the country (Ghosh, 2020). During the pandemic, citizens experienced unidirectional communication from the government without much opportunity for participation in dialogue and deliberation, a fundamental requirement in a functional democracy. The absence of a legal framework for organizing online consultations with citizens and "affected persons" when making public laws and policies belies the government's rhetoric of "putting citizens at the center of policy making." The practice of citizen consultation in making public laws and policies has been sporadic, whimsical, and inadequate. In a number of cases where suggestions, comments, and feedback have been sought from citizens on draft bills or draft rules, there was clearly no obligation on the part of the government to "close the feedback loop" by disclosing which feedback from the citizens was considered, whether it was included, and why.

Non-transparent ways of making laws and policies are particularly concerning during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 24, 2020 when the first country-wide lockdown was announced, the Indian government has introduced, passed into law and/or amended nearly 50 bills, rules, and acts.[10] In the absence of an established protocol and legal framework for online consultation, a majority of these were passed without adequate discourse and consultation, neither in the two houses of the parliament nor with the citizens in general and with the communities affected by these laws.

The political landscape of India was shaped by instances of popular protests while the country was grappling to flatten the COVID-19 curve. While the electorate continues to invest their faith in the Hindu majoritarian ruling party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity remains unshaken, with the opposition on the back foot. Yet these protests and assertion of rights represent a critical juncture in Indian politics. Democracy is defined as much by elections as it is by social processes that moderate and hold state power accountable. This is the power of protests and their centrality in India's current political moment. As we look back at 2020, it is worth reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of our politics, expressed through the following critical events.

Crackdown on Protests Against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act

The year 2020 began with protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). This popular uprising was a beacon of secularism. CAA protesters raised a brief glimmer of hope for a new type of politics. This brand of politics, which promoted secularism, was an antidote to the majoritarian Hindutva brand of politics of the ruling dispensation. These protests laid bare the anxiety among India's Muslims, increasingly alienated by Hindutva politics that leverages the state machinery to

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[10] PRS Legislative website (www.prsindia.org).

strengthen its ideological project by polarizing the populace on communal grounds.

According to Ghosh (2020), just before the lockdown in March, there were many peaceful protests across the country, against the attempt to pass a new citizenship law that would effectively give lower status to Muslims. Some protests had been met with violence on the part of police and armed supporters of the ruling party. The central government used the opportunity presented by the lockdown not just to prohibit any kind of public protest but to arrest several of those who had participated in peaceful protests, while protecting supporters of the ruling party. Women peacefully protesting the new citizenship law at the protest site in Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi were forced to move from the site on March 24, 2020, as lockdown had been imposed (Firstpost, 2020). On refusing, the protestors were subjected to legal action as the assembly was unlawful. The deputy commissioner of police for Southeast Delhi told ANI that protesters who refused to disperse were detained (The Free Press Journal, 2020). Additionally, Times of India (2020) reported that the Delhi Police had also told the Shaheen Bagh agitators that more than four people would not be allowed to sit in for the protest till March 31 and that those protestors should sit three meters apart from each other. Protesters have also been asked not to use microphones since Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code was imposed.

Amidst the COVID-19 lockdown, the government resorted to the use of draconian laws, divisive media reporting, and jail terms for students, lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, and academics. The Delhi police,

controlled by the central government, searched homes and offices, confiscated phones and documents, and questioned, detained, and arrested large numbers of persons. It was instructive that these arrests were being made when the Supreme Court has directed governments to decongest jails to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (Mander & Verma, 2020). The charges levelled against the arrested persons relate to their alleged role in organizing protests against the discriminatory amendments to India's citizenship law, the proposed National Register of Citizens, and the National Population Register. They were further accused of instigating and participating in the violent communal carnage that engulfed working-class settlements in Northeast Delhi in February, the gravest Hindu-Muslim riots in the capital since Partition of 1947. They have been charged under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. This rise in detention and arrests – after a brief respite following the imposition of the lockdown – has reportedly come after the Home Ministry's instructions to the Crime Branch at the end of March (Manral, 2020).

Almost every month in the last year, several activists and academics have been either arrested or booked under counter-terrorism, sedition, and other laws for merely expressing their discontent against the current dispensation. In states where the BJP was in power, the local police worked overtime profiling and targeting critical voices. In other states, central agencies like the National Investigations Agency (NIA), the Enforcement Directorate (ED), and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) were deployed (Shantha, 2020). From March 22

to mid-April, around 25 to 30 arrests were made in the violence-affected, Muslim-majority areas of Northeast Delhi (Bhandari, 2020). Legal services were not included in the "essential services" permitted under the lockdown. This, in effect, meant the suspension of the accused persons' fundamental rights.

The purpose of such continued repression during a period of national calamity appears to be to teach a lesson to those who had challenged the government's intentions and actions and to intimidate others. Unfortunately, this also means that the government's own ability to create a widespread social consensus and atmosphere of trust in which to combat the pandemic is correspondingly reduced.

Amendment of Labor Laws During the Monsoon Session

The passage of three crucial labor law bills during the Monsoon Session of parliament in September – in the absence of the Opposition that was away protesting against the farm bills – has been called into question by workers' rights groups. Both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha passed the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, and the Code on Social Security, 2020, while the Opposition was not in the House (Sharma, 2020).

Analysts have pointed out that the bills were significantly different from earlier ones introduced in 2019, and should thus have been referred again to a Standing Committee. Workers' rights groups have claimed that

these bills are anti-worker as they paved the way for a "hire and fire" policy and restrict the right to strike and protest.

Also, they said the new norms would adversely affect workers by allowing easy retrenchment and exempting certain categories of companies from adherence to the laws that safeguard workers' rights. Aajeevika Bureau[11] questioned why workers were being denied their right to protest. The Bureau highlighted that the Industrial Relations Code prohibits the right to strike and demands that unions give a 60-day notice to strike although a notice leads to automatic conciliation and striking during conciliation is illegal. The Bureau said the bill thus "destroys the freedom of association guaranteed to Indian citizens under the Constitution" (The Wire, 2020).

Rights groups and the Opposition have alleged that under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has resorted to fast tracking the passage of such bills without any democratic debate in the parliament. Opposition leaders have raised the issue of little time being given to members of parliament to consider the provisions of the bills or to debate them. They sought to have these bills referred to a standing committee. It has been pointed out that the bills were introduced on Saturday, September 19, and the Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha allocated three hours for them to be discussed before they were passed the following week despite these bills having 411 clauses and 13 schedules running into 350 pages.

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[11] A non-profit working with migrant communities.

Prohibiting Media, and the Opposition to Visit the Family of a Rape Victim in Hathras

On September 14, a 19-year-old Dalit woman was gang-raped and tortured by "upper" caste men in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras while she was out with her mother to collect fodder. She died a fortnight later in New Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital.

Family members of the victim claimed that her body was cremated by Uttar Pradesh police in their absence in the dark of night. Dalit community leaders and women's rights activists protested against the police action, calling it a "new low." When Opposition leaders tried to visit the family of the victim their convoy was stopped and detained as Section 144 was imposed in the area. Imposition of Section 144 created a curfew-like situation in the area preventing people from staging any kind of protest against the ghastly incident.

According to the additional superintendent of the state police, no politician or the media would be allowed entry into the village of the victim in Hathras until the Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the Uttar Pradesh government completed its probe (The Wire, 2020). Apart from a complete ban on media in Hathras, reports of media persons being intimidated and roughed up have come from other parts of the state. In Hathras and Lucknow, journalists were physically prevented from taking pictures or shooting videos of protests being staged by activists, politicians, and students (Pradhan, 2020). The apathy of the ruling party was evident as a minister of state in the state of Uttar Pradesh described the issue as "a small issue,"

asserting that the girl was not raped and blaming the opposition for politicking.

In October, 2020 civil society members, students, women, and political leaders, including the Delhi chief minister, gathered at Jantar Mantar in Delhi demanding the resignation of the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, alleging his administration was "shielding" the accused. This protest was initially to be held at India Gate but had to be shifted to Jantar Mantar owing to the prohibitory orders in place in the Rajpath area issued by the authorities. Delhi police, which is under the Home Ministry of the Government of India, said a gathering of up to 100 people would be allowed at Jantar Mantar with prior permission. Police officials repeatedly made public announcements urging protesters to keep their masks on and maintain social distance. Later, protesters were booked for violating Section 144 under the Code of Criminal Procedure and other COVID-19 restrictions, a senior police official said. They were also accused of rioting and booked under the Epidemic Diseases Act.

The state used police brutality to block access, arresting the victim's family and filing draconian UAPA charges against a journalist who had no previous criminal record or incriminating evidence on him. The state left no stone unturned to weaponize every wing of the government, to intimidate and terrorize journalists and political and social activists demanding answers.

The state hired a public relations firm to develop and disseminate a counter narrative that no incident of rape had taken place and pass off the victim's demise due to strangulation. Similar attempts were made

to spin the cremation story, with the false claim that relatives had presided over the cremation. Meanwhile the police and state administration delayed registration of the FIR, the forensic examination, while pressurng the family to change its statement and forcibly cremating the body, thereby committing serious illegalities.

In addition, it is crucial to acknowledge the caste aspect of this crime. This violence was perpetrated by upper caste men from the "Thakur" community in the "Thakur" majority village of Boolagarhi, against the young woman from the historically oppressed "Valmiki" community. It is important to understand how the Thakur network stretching from the chief minister to the lowliest constable allows upper caste mobilization even as Dalit anger is suppressed (Philipose, 2020).

The Hurried Passage of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill

The passing of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) bill, in September 2020, in both Houses of Parliament, without any real deliberations, poses deeply troubling and ominous messages for civil society and democracy in India. The said bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on September 20, 2020. Until that afternoon, no one even had a clue that this bill was in the offing. The very next day it was passed by the Lok Sabha and, on September 23, by the Rajya Sabha. The bill received the president's assent on September 28 and by September 29, or in just over a week's time, it was law (ICJ, 2020).

The primary reason this amendment by the government was the need for greater accountability of civil society. However, the government did not give any evidence to demonstrate lack of accountability by NGOs in utilizing the FCRA money. According to Behar (2020), the perceived narrative is that foreign funded NGOs and civil society groups "misuse" funds meant for development by investing them for religious conversions, although no data was shared to substantiate this perception. It needs to be highlighted that this perception is far from truth as most foreign funding neither has church origin, nor do an overwhelming majority of the receiving entities have anything to do with religion as their work is completely dedicated to people's issues like education, health, and livelihood. More nuanced discussion, in a select committee for instance, would have thrown light on potential hazards to development and democracy. The amendment reflects a deeply flawed understanding of democracy in which it has been reduced to electoral democracy or quest for state power, and any other form of democratic action is seen with suspicion and as illegitimate.

The amendments provoking the greatest concerns are:

a. *Ban on regranting FCRA funds:* the Act prohibits the transfer of foreign contributions to any other person. The term "person" under the Act includes an individual, an association, or a registered company.

b. *Cap on "overhead" spending:* the Act permits only 20 percent of a foreign contribution to be used for administrative expenses versus the earlier threshold of 50 percent.

c. *Mandatory sharing of Aadhaar:* the Act also requires that any person seeking prior permission, registration, or renewal of registration must provide the Aadhaar number of all its office bearers, directors, or key functionaries as an identification document.

d. *Routing all FCRA funds through the State Bank of India, New Delhi:* the Act says foreign contributions must be received only by designated "FCRA account" in a branch of the State Bank of India, New Delhi, as notified by the central government.

According to Srinath (2020), the timing of the FCRA bill was most bewildering as it was tabled in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic, in which civil society has played a stellar role in reaching out and supporting millions of poor Indians by providing food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other basic necessities. This praise has come from the highest quarters, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as NITI Aayog.

These FCRA amendments, rushed through Parliament, erode any chances of rapprochement at a time when collaboration has never been more necessary, whether in ensuring last mile delivery of services and entitlements, or in ensuring voices at the margins are heard in policy discourse.

Most critically, these amendments come at a time when India's global rankings on democratic freedoms are in sharp decline. They will undoubtedly have a deeply chilling effect on dissent and the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, all guaranteed by India's Constitution and international treaties.

The restrictions in the Act continued a larger pattern of threats and harassment faced by civil society in India. The Indian Government has sought to restrict human rights defenders from traveling outside India and used overbroad laws like sedition (Section 124A, Indian Penal Code) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 to arbitrarily arrest human rights defenders. At present, over 20 human rights defenders are in pre-trial detention.

District Development Council (DDC) Elections in Kashmir

Eight-phase District Development Council (DDC) polls were scheduled to begin on November 28 in Jammu and Kashmir. This was to be the first instance where electoral democracy was being practiced in the erstwhile state since its special status was revoked in August 2019.

In October 2020, the Union government amended the J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989. It introduced a provision to hold direct elections to the district development councils. These councils replaced the district development boards, which functioned mostly as official bodies of the government.

Other than the members of parliament and members of legislative assembly representing the district, there was no representation for the board. The DDCs, on the other hand, were constituted on the basis of a direct election with each district having 14 elected members. At least 12,000 vacant panchayat seats and over 230 urban local body seats would be polled along with 280 DDC seats, *India Today* reported (Dutta, 2020).

However, the campaigning for the first phase of the election was riddled with accusations of bipartisanship, terror threats as well as politicking over various topics including the abrogation of Article 370. Candidates from People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), which is comprised of the opposition parties, registered their inability to campaign freely with the lieutenant governor of the Union Territory. The opposition alleged that PAGD candidates have been "locked up" in hotels and guesthouses in several places and are not allowed to campaign. Under the pretext of security and safety of life of the candidates, the opposition were not allowed to attend party meetings, and were only afforded a window of three hours, between noon and three in the afternoon, to campaign. In the complaint to the lieutenant governor, the opposition leader pointed out that there were instances where rival candidates were sent in the same vehicle and asked to campaign together, highlighting the concerns of legitimacy and credibility of the elections (Firstpost, 2020).

Farmer Protests

The standoff between India's government and its farmers began in September 2020 following the passage of new regulations designed to open up the country's enormous agricultural sector to private investment (a move that would enable farmers to sell directly to companies instead of to the government marketplace, which guaranteed a minimum price for certain crops). Although the authorities have framed the reforms as necessary to modernize India's farming industry, which employs more than half of the country's 1.35 billion people and is rife with mismanagement and waste, many farmers fear that the changes will ultimately drive down crop prices, devastating their livelihoods (Mohan, 2019). The farm bills will disempower farmers, forcing them to sell at prices that will eventually be dictated by large corporates who will buy produce (Parsai, 2020). They will have to switch to crops that are in demand by the big buyers. And, they will have little or no legal recourse in case of a dispute – a local bureaucrat will decide the merits of the case (Sainath, 2020). The present system of selling through the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) is flawed, but the so-called reforms are worse.

These fears have prompted tens of thousands of farmers, predominantly from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, known as India's "food bowl," to set up makeshift barricades of tractors and trailers across roads, railway lines, and highways leading to Delhi. More than 450 farmers' unions and organizations expressed their support in a nationwide strike, and the protests have attracted the backing of the opposition. However, BJP-led governments in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh had tried to prevent the farmers from crossing state boundaries. When the farmers burst through the barricades, they were met with police batons, tear gas, and water cannons (Lalwani, 2020).

By bringing in three highly-contentious farm laws without draft bills for discussion, then mooting the final bill discreetly during the peak of the pandemic, and then eventually bulldozing the passage of the laws in the Parliament, the center has left no room for itself to bring farmers onto its side (Mahaprashasta, 2020).

In addition, the ruling party and its spokespersons, online and on television, have spared no effort to rubbish the farmers. The ruling party's supporters and pliant media platforms have sought to defame the farmers' movement initially by labelling them as "Khalistanis," and now portraying it as "Naxal-influenced." Then, realizing that this wasn't working, trolls and even some ministers attacked "the *tukde tukde* gang" for orchestrating the protests.

Farmers' unions have been unconcerned about what they see as "BJP's propaganda." They have already conveyed to the center that they will not settle for anything less than a complete repeal of the laws, and have even threatened to intensify their agitations in the days to come. All of these only signify that the ruling party has struggled to polarize political narrative around the farmers' protests in its favor. The farmer is a noble figure in the Indian mind – toiling in the sun to produce food that feeds the community and the nation. And in return, the farmer gets a pittance while the middlemen make big profits. Often, agriculture remains the best performing sector in the economy, and it is the one that gets step-motherly treatment from governments, whichever one they may be.

Conclusion

The pandemic posed extraordinary challenges to governing a diverse country like India. The Indian Constitution provides a remarkable framework for federalism. However, the centralization of power by the central government during the pandemic was rapid. The lockdown was imposed by invoking the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which allowed the central government to over-ride all other laws in force and issue directions to any authority in India, and requires that all such directions must be followed. The center failed to use any additional powers to increase coordination between the central and state governments. It rather imposed often changing and sometimes contradictory decisions upon state governments without consulting them – including the announcement of national lockdown in haste. It provided hardly any opportunity for the state governments to prepare. Subsequently, many specific requests and concerns from the state governments were ignored, which led to avoidable delays and shortages in early days of the lockdown. Lack of consultation and coordination with states resulted in utter confusion among the inter-state migrant workers. Similarly, air travel was suddenly allowed by the central government a week before the official end of the national lockdown on May 31, again without consulting states. This created chaos, with many flight cancellations as some states refused permission for flights to land and others insisted on quarantine requirements that the center had lifted on its own. "Cooperative Federalism,: which has been emphasized by the prime minister time and again, needs to be followed and executed in letter and spirit.

The public health care system and national health policy requires a thorough revamp in light of the pandemic experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for a universally available and holistic healthcare system starker than ever before. This is possible through a synergic approach by the central and state governments of

India, seen in the past with efforts to eradicate polio, or replicating successful healthcare systems in states such as Kerala or Goa or Chhattisgarh.

The single-minded focus on COVID-19 had other adverse implications on overall health services, as other diseases and their treatment were ignored or given less attention. According to Ghosh (2020), many tuberculosis patients did not receive the required treatment; immunisation of children suffered because of the lockdown; cancer patients and those requiring dialysis suffered neglect; important operations have been indefinitely postponed for large numbers of people; and there were 40 percent fewer institutional deliveries of babies during the lockdown than in the same period of the previous year.

With many government facilities being converted into dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, a large number of non-COVID-19 patients needed facilities and providers to take care of their healthcare needs. In such a situation, private hospitals had a crucial role to play in managing the treatment of non-COVID-19 patients. Constraints for healthcare, both at the center and states, along with a weak public health infrastructure necessitates a greater engagement of the private sector to equally join the fight against the pandemic.

The contributions and needs of the informal migrant workers who are the backbone of the Indian economy must be acknowledged with proper legislation and enabling policies. The Dr. Arjun K Sengupta Report (2007) clearly acknowledged that migrant workers are often left without work and social security. There is high congruence between this segment of the workforce and 77 percent of the population who are poor and vulnerable. The situation calls for immediate steps to ensure minimum conditions of work for informal workers and to protect their lives and livelihoods. Governments must implement existing provisions of Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 in letter and spirit. A renewed approach must be developed to create inter-state migration policies, which would encourage greater cooperation and coordination between state governments for promoting welfare of migrants. Strengthening information channels, securing housing and sanitation, financial inclusion through bank linkages, and incentivizing self-employment in peri-urban and urban areas will create a stimulus for working conditions of migrant workers. Digitalizing registration, reinventing recognition and upgradation of skills of migrants, promotion of health of workers, legal counseling services dedicated to migrant workers and heightened coordination in migration corridors between states is imperative for ensuring protection of migrants. Much of this implementation aspect can be achieved through setting up Migrant Support Resource Centres (MSRCs) both in the source districts and destination cities with high numbers of migrants. These can be created and managed by civil society organizations and social entrepreneurs in the high emigration cities, and can prove very useful in providing end-point access to information, services, training, and support to the most vulnerable migrant workers.

Globally, the year 2020 will be known for how the novel coronavirus ravaged lives

and economies. In India, however, the year could well be remembered for how civil liberties were trampled and anti-terror laws like UAPA, that were crafted for "exceptional circumstances," have been routinized. Along with counter-terrorism laws, defamation laws were more generously used against those criticizing both the state and judiciary. There is a tendency among the government to see every small-time activist as a threat to its popularity. With a monopoly over the means of propaganda, and clever use of political narrative, the government has managed to keep its popularity. The COVID pandemic, a ravaged economy, millions of jobs lost, tensions with China – there's too much going on for this government to be complacent about the power of even the most irrelevant critic. The government clearly feels insecure about its position. It knows its popularity is not sustainable when the Indian economy is going through its worst contraction ever. Hence it leaves no stone unturned to silence even the potential challengers to its domination. It must rule with an iron fist because all is clearly not well. This attitude of the government definitely requires a radical shift to uplift the democratic spirit of India.

India has received several accolades from the developing world for its contribution and assistance in fighting the global pandemic. Indian government has gone out of the way to provide COVID vaccines to several countries in the right spirit. However, the internal governance and democracy is under severe threat. While other countries in South Asia grapple with their own internal democracy, India has to demonstrate that an inclusive democracy is essential to a sustainable and prosperous society in the region.

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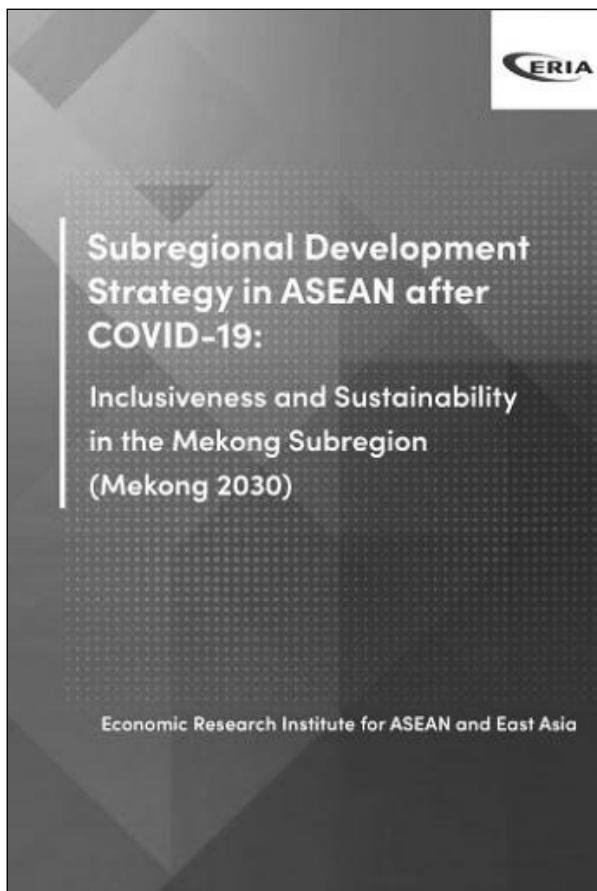
Review of the ERIA-Published Report on

"Subregional Development Strategy in ASEAN after COVID-19: Inclusiveness and Sustainability in the Mekong Subregion (Mekong 2030)"

*Apichai Sunchindah**

1. ASEAN Leaders' Recent Directives on Sub-Regional Development

In the Chairman's Statement from the 37th ASEAN Summit held on 12 November 2020, ASEAN leaders commended the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) for publishing the report, *Subregional Development Strategy in ASEAN after COVID-19: Inclusiveness and Sustainability in the Mekong Subregion (Mekong 2030),* which provided insights regarding ASEAN's subregional development and the organization's role in community-building.

The ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC), in its report to the aforementioned ASEAN Summit, declared holding a Special Session on Sub-Regional Development during the 53rd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on September 9, 2020 where it noted the ASEAN Senior Officials' discussion on the outcome of the ASEAN Forum on Sub-Regional Development:

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Converging Mekong Sub-Regional Cooperation with ASEAN Goals, held earlier on July 14, 2020. The ACC welcomed and encouraged efforts made by sub-regional cooperation frameworks such as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) and other Mekong cooperation frameworks in promoting equitable and sustainable development across the ASEAN Community by aligning sub-regional growth with the comprehensive development of ASEAN. The ACC further discussed the way forward for the enhanced role of ASEAN in promoting sub-regional development and agreed to explore cooperation in the following areas.

    (i) Harmonizing sub-regional development strategies and ASEAN development strategies such as the ASEAN Community Vision Blueprints 2025, Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV, and Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025); and promoting sub-regional development in ASEAN's relevant cooperation agenda.

    (ii) Enhancing ASEAN's strategic outlook towards sub-regional cooperation frameworks; encouraging closer coordination between ASEAN and sub-regional cooperation frameworks including through the ASEAN Secretariat, relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, and relevant bodies of sub-regional cooperation frameworks.

    (iii) Promoting dialogues and cooperation in ASEAN and with ASEAN's external partners on strengthening sub-regional development, including through existing mechanisms; ensuring that sub-regional cooperation is complementary to ASEAN's efforts towards regional integration and narrowing the development gap within ASEAN and ASEAN community building; encouraging coordination and exchange of information among sub-regional cooperation frameworks with a view to promoting effective synergy among them.

At the 37th ASEAN Summit, leaders acknowledged the complementary role and contribution of sub-regional cooperation in realizing ASEAN's community-building goals toward an inclusive, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community that leaves no one behind, as well as to serve as catalysts for economic growth, deepening regional economic integration, and connectivity. They recognized the relevance of sub-regional development to ASEAN's regional integration and community building process, narrowing the development gap and enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness as a region, and ensuring ASEAN's sustainable and inclusive development in accordance with ASEAN centrality and unity. The leaders further indicated the importance of ensuring that sub-regional development strategies are aligned with the overall development strategies of ASEAN, through promoting synergies between existing sub-regional cooperation initiatives and ASEAN Community-building efforts. To that end, they endorsed the recommendations

submitted by the ACC and tasked the ACC to oversee and report to subsequent ASEAN Summits the process of strengthening ASEAN's role in sub-regional cooperation. They also encouraged the enhanced synergies between ASEAN cooperation and sub-regional frameworks, including the previously mentioned ACMECS, Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Viet Nam (CLMV) cooperation, the Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area and other Mekong cooperation frameworks, which are among several existing sub-regional development mechanisms in addition to the Mekong Sub-Region (MSR), so as to achieve the goal of narrowing the development gap among and within ASEAN member states.

2. The Extent to Which the ERIA Report Responded to ASEAN Directives, Strategies, and Priorities

The subject report published by ERIA had achieved in attempting to provide an initial broad brush situation analysis of the state of play of sub-regional development and cooperation frameworks currently undertaken within the MSR. It highlighted certain opportunities and also identified various challenges faced by the mainland Southeast Asian countries in numerous sectoral areas such as infrastructure development, data connectivity, trade facilitation, industrial and especially SME development, health services, and human capital development, as well as energy markets, environment sustainability, and water resource management. It is commendable that the ERIA team managed to cover the wide-ranging subject areas

included in the report to some degree of depth. Although by no means a comprehensive and exhaustive exercise, it does represent a first attempt in response to the latest ASEAN directives pertaining to linking sub-regional development cooperation frameworks with ASEAN's own strategies and priorities.

3. Some Deficiencies and Shortcomings of the ERIA Report and Recommendations

The analyses conducted by the respective clusters of ERIA researchers are pretty much a siloed approach with rather little examination of cross-sectoral and/or inter-linked issues or considerations, which are becoming quite important in the context of Mekong sub-regional development discourse. For instance, problems related to water, food, energy, and environment/climate could perhaps be better analyzed through a Water-Food-Energy-Environment/Climate nexus lens to bring out in sharper focus the interactive factors, both positive and negative, between them. That way, a more accurate depiction of the real-world picture of the situation is likely to emerge. Another example would be to examine the outcomes of improving connectivity, industrialization, and trade in the Mekong sub-region in terms of winners and losers, or who ultimately benefits and loses as a result and whether or not the net effect is a more inclusive, balanced, and sustainable community or society. Ideally, it would be nice if sometime in the not-too-distant future, policy makers can show, at the push of a button on a Google type of map of the Mekong geographical area,

"traffic" lights concerning how different development schemes and their alignments or locations would create positive (as represented by green color) and negative (red color) effects or require further study (yellow color). But in order for such to happen would require availability of substantial baseline data derived from well-conducted research to input into the computerized algorithm comprising physical features like topography, locations where communities and especially vulnerable people reside, natural assets like water, landforms, forests, parks, and sanctuaries, etc. Ultimately, once fully developed, the system should be able to provide an estimated assessment of the pros and cons of any development projects in terms of impact over space, time, and various population groups. It would then be up to the decision-makers to make informed choices on the various options after weighing their respective potential benefits and losses based on reliable supporting evidence and available information.

The ERIA report basically looks at the formal or above ground economies in the MSR where statistics are more readily evident or available. But, as is commonly known, there exists a grey or underground economy that is experienced in many aspects of people's lives in both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, involving things like smuggling and sale of counterfeit products, money laundering, trade in drugs, wildlife and human trafficking, corruption, and other types of transnational organized crime. Figures for such illicit activities are often hard to come by but the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has put a ballpark conservative estimate of approximately USD 100 billion a year for Southeast Asia, and the MSR is a well-known hotbed of such criminal activities.[1] One wonders if the so-called "Gross Criminal Product" or GCP outpaces the official Gross Domestic Product or GDP measure of the formal economy, especially in the current economic downturn due to COVID-19. It is well accepted that criminal elements utilize the existing connectivity and trading channels, both physical and online, to carry out their operations just like legally conducted business parties do. So, one would need to have a balanced measure of how much more good versus harm is created when the Mekong sub-region gets further connected and linked up, for instance in terms of likelihood of disease transmission or outbreaks, various kinds of pollution and environmental damage, and dark or criminal economy proliferation.

Most of the time, the ERIA report just stated the obvious or what is already documented in the existing literature without breaking much new ground on looking at things from different perspectives or proposing new ways of doing things, especially under the now (post) COVID-19 new normal conditions. The report also appears weak in linking up or mapping out synergies and/or complementarities with the plethora of current sub-regional development cooperation frameworks with the various ASEAN directives, policies, and strategies that are relevant to the MSR, like the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) work plans which have been around for two decades already, and the Master Plan on

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[1] https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific//Publications/2019/SEA_TOCTA_2019_web.pdf and https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view/1147

ASEAN Connectivity 2025. Nor does the report make any reference at all to the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) or the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy (ASUS). For that matter, it does not make any substantial reference or links to the ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which is the 10-year ASEAN blueprint from 2016 to 2025 or the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ARCF) to respond to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the research done is rather incomplete and not comprehensive enough to fulfill the earlier stated goals of mapping out and facilitating synergies and complementarities between the MSR cooperation frameworks and that of ASEAN as a whole.

The report exercise also did not touch much on the fact that MSR is becoming a hotly contested geo-political area involving practically all major powers in the increasingly prominent and broader Indo-Pacific region. How can ASEAN navigate carefully the growing US-China rivalry considering its respective alliances with both the contesting parties? Among other things, the relationships involve physical infrastructure like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) promoted by China for the building of railways and highways connecting southern China with the rest of mainland Southeast Asia, and the Quality Infrastructure initiatives for the same geographical area advocated especially by Japan and also to some extent the US. One engineering problem that has arisen out of this competition is that the computerized signaling systems of trains running on the Chinese and Japanese-built tracks are incompatible, creating technical inter-operability headaches for countries considering constructing both competing railways systems.

The report mentioned several times that the development gaps between MSR and more developed countries of ASEAN remain substantial or huge, but did not provide any quantitative information on the size of the gap or the character and duration of any specific concerted and sustained action that would be needed to narrow or bridge that gap. It would have also been more helpful if the ERIA research team could pinpoint how the recently finalized Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as the flagship regional free trade agreement in the Asia-Pacific region, APEC, and the various formulations of the Indo-Pacific strategies of different countries or group of countries could have a bearing on or more specifically help promote and enhance MSR and ASEAN development priorities.

What are sorely needed in the MSR now are multi-stakeholder platforms of discussions on a wide-range of development-oriented issues. These platforms and discussions should be inclusive in composition and holistic and well-integrated in nature in order to be able to address multi-faceted and inter-twined problems in an effective and timely manner to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned parties. Perhaps a very tall and challenging order, but this is what is needed if the MSR is to come out on top hopefully in a win-win fashion and avoid falling into the trap of being caught between a rock and hard place in the near future or even in the long term, whereby both MSR and ASEAN are likely to cede its sovereignty, unity, and centrality to

external parties, which would be to the detriment of the future prospects of the Southeast Asia region. It would also be useful to provide suggestions on how to gear up the MSR and ASEAN region to be well prepared to deal satisfactorily with "black swan" or unexpected occurrences such as the sudden appearance of COVID-19 pandemic a year ago or other potential threats of similar proportions, like the effects due to climate change and global warming that the world and Southeast Asia including MSR will probably face in the foreseeable future including risks arising from unexpected political events like the recent military coup in Myanmar which became a destabilizing factor for ASEAN.

Building back better and leaving no one behind in the post-COVID-19 new normal environment would inevitably entail more nature-oriented policies and actions or nature-based solutions to some of the current problems and challenges faced. Novel and outside of the box thinking would be needed because conventional or business as usual one-size-fits-all or siloed approaches just simply won't work as they were the cause of the problems in the first place. A case in point in this regard is finding the political will to search for a durable solution to the sustainable, equitable, and inclusive management of the water and related natural resources in the Mekong River basin, which is a key signature feature of the MSR.[2] Various attempts have been made over the past half century or more to address this challenging issue but so far it has become even more insurmountable with conflict situations already emerging and likely to worsen if not properly handled among the riparian parties themselves and exacerbated by further complications from the competing external parties and/or major power rivalry and competition in the same geographical space/ landscape. China is the uppermost riparian country and its already "fait accompli" construction of a series of hydropower dams in its stretch of the international river system has caused much consternation and worries among the lower riparian states in terms of the availability of sufficient water of decent quality among its downstream members at specific critical times of the year. Recent wild fluctuations of water levels in significant stretches of the river due to dam restrictions of water releases and/or drought-induced conditions, the substantial reduction in sediment flow, and the unusual changing of the color of the river water all point to quite unusual changes or deviations from normal in the riverine system. The Lao government's stated policy of being the "battery of Southeast Asia" through plans to build of a cascade of hydropower dams along much of the mid-section of the river and also in some of its tributaries also does not bode well for the future health of the Mekong river even compared with the current abnormal situation and could lead to more disastrous outcomes.[3] This begs the question of what alternative pathways or energy mixes have been considered by the riparian countries in terms of producing

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[2] https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1719067/mekong-dilemmas-need-political-will-to-resolve

[3] https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1512982/dam-calamity-a-wake-up-call-for-mekong-hazards

power for various uses. Have any serious thought been given to other forms of renewable energy like solar, wind, biomass, or geothermal? Lately Viet Nam has taken a quantum leap by investing in solar farms to produce energy, which can be considered exemplary for the rest of MSR and even ASEAN to emulate.

As indicated previously, more nexus type of planning approach and implementation schemes looking at water-energy-food-climate/environment in a consolidated and integrated manner would be required since these things are all inextricably linked or inter-twined. For this to happen, honest brokers who can gain the trust and confidence of all the concerned parties and making available some neutral platforms or settings for having frank and open discussions and exchanges of views and opinions is a crucial first step towards a constructive dialogue on balancing competing needs in a confidence-building atmosphere.[4] It has been noted that ASEAN officials are taking greater interest in the MSR due to the recent changes in the hydrological conditions, and more attention is being focused on the dynamically evolving geo-political development landscape described earlier. In a survey of about one thousand Southeast Asian respondents released in February this year by the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute based in Singapore, a good majority of them (some 72 percent) favored the statement that "ASEAN should include Mekong River issues in its agenda," and of those who disagreed with the statement, a good proportion of them (66 percent) expressed the view that "Mekong issues should be best addressed through existing sub-regional mechanisms."[5] This dovetails well with ASEAN's recent proclamation that there should be closer alignment, synergy, and complementarity between ASEAN and MSR cooperation frameworks. Interestingly, back in October 2013 at the 23rd ASEAN Summit held in Brunei Darussalam, the ASEAN's leaders stated that "we recognized the importance of preserving, managing, and sustaining use of water resources and call on ASEAN Member States to continue effectively implementing the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Water Resources Management, including assessing impacts that economic development has on the environment and people's livelihoods in major river basins including the Lower Mekong Basin." Since Brunei Darussalam is chairing ASEAN in 2021, perhaps this would provide a good and timely opportunity for ASEAN to reiterate such a call.

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[4] http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/asean-en/brd/m_2568/view.do?seq=761243

[5] https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf