Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Age of the Pandemic

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion

- Blaise Misztal, Fellow, Hudson Institute
- Heather Nauert, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute
- Torrey Taussig, Research Director, Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, Harvard Kennedy School
- Daniel Twining, President, International Republican Institute

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Heather Nauert:

Good afternoon. I'm Heather Nauert, a senior fellow here at the Hudson Institute. We're here to talk about a very timely subject, and that is how governments are dealing with the coronavirus response. We have authoritarian regimes versus democracies, and their approach to coronavirus has been very different. One of the areas we're really going to focus on today is what does this mean for the march of freedom around the world. Will freedom continue to expand or is this something that we'll see pulled back on significantly?

We've got a great team of experts here to talk about it and I'd like to introduce you to some of those. We have Blaise Misztal, who's a fellow at the Hudson Institute. He focuses on the Middle East, Europe, and strategic competition. This conversation, by the way, was his brainchild. So Blaise, thanks so much for assembling the panel here today.

Blaise Misztal:

Thank you, Heather.

Heather Nauert:

We also have Dan Twining. Dan is president of the International Republican Institute, really a terrific group that helps to promote freedom and democracy around the world with new governments and also governments that are having a little bit of difficulty with that. Dan has teams or did have teams in place all around the globe to help out with this effort, so Dan, you're perfect for this panel today.

Then finally, Dr. Torrey Taussig. She's a research director at the Project on Europe and Transatlantic Relationship at Harvard's Kennedy School Belfer Center. She's also a non-resident fellow at the Brookings Institution. Good afternoon to all of you. Anxious to talk about this topic. I guess this question we should start out with is will coronavirus enable autocratic regimes to grab more power from its people and populations, or do we think there will be an increase in freedom from some of these countries and some of these movements around the globe? Torrey, why don't we start with you?

Torrey Taussig:

Great. Thank you very much, Heather. This is an interesting time to look at democratic trends around the world, particularly as we're seeing both the democratic and authoritarian governments take truly extraordinary measures to try to control this pandemic. To date, I think we've had over 80 countries enact emergency laws and emergency measures in their countries which have subdued a number of ongoing protests, democratic movements, democratic energy that we saw before the pandemic.

Just to give a wrap up statement now or an overview statement now, I'm hopeful that the trends that we saw in democratic progress before this pandemic will reemerge, but we're certainly at a time of uncertainty in democracies and authoritarian systems around the world. A lot will be determined by democratic and authoritarian responses both domestically and internationally to this crisis moving forward.
Heather Nauert:
Well, I'm glad to hear that you're optimistic. Freedom House did a report last year, as they do very often, that said that democracies were actually, were not on the rise but it was in fact the opposite. Dan, what are your thoughts on that?

Daniel Twining:
Heather, thank you for having me, Blaise, everybody. It's great to be here. We should not treat this health crisis as something that doesn't involve politics. This global health crisis emanated from an authoritarian regime's repression of media and medical and official reporting of this pandemic. If China had had an open and free society, an open and free press, normal reporting lines, arguably we would not all be in lockdown, right. So politics is not something separate from the crisis. Politics is part of the crisis.

We have seen democracies handle this stress test very well, including in places like South Korea and Taiwan and Germany and other countries. We have seen some authoritarian regimes handle it very badly. Many authoritarian societies were terribly placed even coming into the pandemic. Think about Venezuela and the human misery and desperation before coronavirus and then what this terrible pandemic is doing to further fracture that society. Politics is very much part of this.

We see authoritarians trying to take advantage of the crisis to persecute political opponents, to spread disinformation that weakens the West. I mean there are lots of political agendas at work here. We also see just really heartening stories of citizen-led civic responses. We see lots of democracies where strong institutions are part of the solution, not part of the problem.

I think the story is yet to be written, including in countries like Russia, where Putin began saying, "Ah, this is a function of Western decadence. Look at all of these Western democracies," before it hit home in his own country. And he essentially went dark in the media because the thing is now a terrible burden on him and is reminding many Russians that maybe they wish they had a government that had not stolen and looted so much of the country's wealth for the past 20 years and maybe invested in some public health institutions.

Heather Nauert:
Well, you hit on a lot there and those are some of the topics that we'll cover as well, including the massive disinformation campaign that we're seeing not just from China but Russia and then also Iran. That's something that democracies all around the world are now going to have to struggle with and are still struggling with getting out the message on that. Blaise, let's go to you and get your take on how you see this unfolding.

Blaise Misztal:
Thanks, Heather, and thanks to Dan and Torrey for joining as well for what I'm sure is going to be a fascinating discussion. To pick up on what Dan was saying about the political nature of this crisis, I'd go a step further and say that it's actually demonstrating something that I think we knew but maybe wasn't evident or wasn't forefront in our minds beforehand, which is that the world isn't just divided between democratic countries and authoritarian governments, but it's actually pitched in a competition between these two political systems where, particularly,
authoritarian countries are trying to expand their reach and convince more countries to join their side. I think that's what we've been seeing in the aftermath of the spread of the coronavirus, particularly through these propaganda and disinformation campaigns that you just mentioned, Heather.

I think in the short term there might be some advantages for authoritarian forces. What makes democracies work, whether it is elections, is going to be a lot harder in an age of pandemic. We've already seen numerous countries postpone elections, including Ethiopia and Sri Lanka and Ecuador. Some countries are going ahead with them, like Poland in just a couple of days, but it's contentious as to whether they should be having elections when people can't gather.

At the same time, the forces of democracy like popular protests that we saw all across the world last year from Hong Kong through Iran and Iraq, Lebanon, into Africa and South America, those are really hard to have when people are sheltering in place. So in the short term I think there might be some advantage to authoritarian forces, but I think in the longer term you're going to see, as Dan was saying, that democracies are going to weather the storm better. And even if they don't, they provide people with the means of voicing their dissatisfaction and changing their governments that don't do a good job of dealing with this crisis, where autocracies are going to see a build-up of public dissatisfaction that I think is going to lead to political upheaval in the long term.

Heather Nauert:

Well, a lot to go over here. But Blaise, one of the things that you hit upon, and I'd love to get everyone's take on this, is sort of an alliance-forming of these countries that are autocratic that would like to see other governments adopt that kind of government representation. Do you mean you see this coming together between Iran, Russia, and China, or do you see other blocs from around the world, and anyone take a shot at answering this, but where do you see that happening and what countries are you talking about?

Blaise Misztal:

Sure. I'm not sure that I'd call it a bloc in the form of some sort of well-structure alliance, but it is pretty amazing the way that you see the sharing of techniques and tools and tropes across, and particularly as you mentioned, Russia, Iran, and China. You've seen Iran pick up on disinformation that China has spread about the possibility that the coronavirus was actually created and originated in the US military. You've seen China adopt Russian disinformation tools and use social media in the US to try to spread misinformation. There is definitely shared tactics going on.

Heather Nauert:

I want to bring Torrey into this because I see her nodding quite a bit right there. Torrey, it's fascinating that China, which normally would speak in far more diplomatic, flowery tones, has really become very pointed in its criticism of America and audacious in its claims that America developed this virus and unleashed it on the world. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth, but they're being very pointed in trying to call out America and take us to task on this. What are your thoughts on that?
Torrey Taussig:

It's been worrying to see the tactics that Chinese disinformation actors have picked up on in the last few weeks throughout the coronavirus pandemic. As Blaise mentioned, they seem to be borrowing a number of tactics from the Kremlin's playbook. By that I mean using big social media outlets to spread conspiracy theories. Also, we're seeing Chinese diplomats, even the spokesperson from the Chinese Foreign Ministry himself said that this was a virus that was originated in the US or spread by US troops, which is not only inaccurate but disturbing to see where China is taking its disinformation campaign.

I also think it's important to take a step back and look at what Russian and Chinese tactics and objectives were vis-a-vis the West before the pandemic started. I think it was very clear, even if not acting in coordination with one another, that both Russia and China benefit from disunity and a lack of cohesion in the West, in the United States and Europe. And it's been particularly interesting to see China's kind of charm offensive or mass diplomacy when it comes to Europe because China is very much pushing its objectives through these new, reinforced disinformation tools and information campaigns. For example, making China out to be a global partner of first resort, China being there for Europe when the United States is not. And sadly, I think the disunity that we're seeing between the US and Europe is only allowing for China to enhance these actions and take them further in Europe.

I think the big story with disinformation here has not actually been from the Russian actors but more how China has picked up on some of the Kremlin's playbook and is pushing it in a much more aggressive manner.

Heather Nauert:

Well, Russia's been so successful at turning Americans on one another. And as they've fiddled in other countries as well, I think you're exactly right, that China has watched that very carefully and is now deploying that. To what extent they will be successful, I think that's still to be determined, but it was almost comical to watch as China... And Dan, I'd like to get your take on this, as China was sending out equipment to some of those European countries and, I recall, sending some PPE to Finland, for example. And then Finland received it and said, "Well, wait a minute. This stuff doesn't even work." You saw China do that all around Europe. So at what point, Dan, do countries say, "Hey China, this is just bogus"?

Daniel Twining:

I mean one thing to really hone in on here, Heather, is the connection between Chinese domestic political imperatives and their foreign policy playbook as regards to COVID. In addition to the examples you've described, we've also seen in every country where China has delivered assistance, the Chinese Embassy has requested or demanded in return that the leadership of those countries stand up and publicly thank China and the Chinese Communist Party and the great leader, Xi Jinping. So part of what's going on here, it's not just to think about China as a country.

Torrey is completely correct. They want to weaken the West. They want to put China closer to the center of world politics, erode our alliances and our leadership, but there is also this feedback loop between the foreign propaganda and the domestic political imperative of convincing the Chinese public that the Chinese Communist Party makes no mistakes, is morally
superior, is a visionary party leading China into the 21st century into a position of global prominence.

One thing you are seeing with this foreign propaganda and this disinformation is it is feeding back directly to Chinese audiences. Chinese audiences then see the leader of country X or country Y praising Xi Jinping, praising the Chinese Communist Party. And that checks the domestic political box for them in ways that you sort of can't imagine America or European democracy requiring.

Heather Nauert:
So that China can then continue to keep its people under their control and under their power.

Daniel Twining:
Correct, absolutely. These things are not separate. They are one and the same.

Heather Nauert:
So Blaise, do you see that any nations around the world now that of course we know that coronavirus came from China, we know that China kicked out reporters; they stifled dissent; they've put people who disagreed with the government publicly in jail or even worse; they've sent faulty equipment all around the globe while demanding that other governments will praise them for it. Are nations buying this Chinese goodness or do you think they're wise to what China's really up to?

Blaise Misztal:
That's an excellent question and I think many countries are very wise to it, or at least getting wise. It's been incredible to see just in the commentariat here in Washington, the initial alarm that I think was rightly felt about this Chinese charm offensive, as Torrey put it, around COVID-19. But that has given way to the realization that a lot of this falls really flat. China does not exercise soft power very well. As you mentioned, the medical assistance that they tried to provide, they both charged countries for and then actually provided faulty equipment in the end. We've seen in Africa where they tried to do the same, provide African countries with medical assistance, that was quickly soured by a reporting about how the Chinese were treating African migrants inside of China very poorly.

So the charm offensive has really failed, but where I do think there should be concern is China's use of more muscular policies. And we've seen those most recently when it came to the EU report that was published last week that was supposed to include and originally included discussions of these Chinese disinformation campaigns that Torrey was just alluding to. But China used political pressure and economic pressure due to the trading relationship it has with European countries to get that reporting buried. I think this is the real concern. China doesn't necessarily exercise soft power very well, but it has what the National Endowment on Democracy called "sharp power."

It's able to use some of its political tools to bury dissent. And there's also a technological component to that which I think we should worry about, which is that it tries to get other countries to adopt its technological platforms in the form of 5G and telecommunications
equipment, which enables surveillance both by governments of their own people, and of China to the rest of the world. I think there's still a lot to come in the way of Chinese attempts to use this crisis to influence world politics and grow their stature, but at least so far this preliminary mass diplomacy I think has been discounted quite broadly.

Heather Nauert:
Well, a couple points there. From my time at the State Department, and you all will recall this, the United States was talking to European countries and cautioning them about working with Huawei as nations would expand into 5G. The United States got a whole lot of pushback from many of those countries, including our strongest ally, the UK, about implementing that kind of technology. Now the Brits are taking a close look at working with Huawei because as the United States explained very clearly, the Chinese government will take this information and take what intelligence that they can get from this technology and use it for their own benefit and to the harm of Western nations.

So I think countries are at least starting to take a second look at that, but then a second point that you brought up that I want to spend a little more time on, is how China is using a strong arm at different institutions and how they're not good at the soft power but they're better at the point of power. A place where we see that is at the United Nations and on the Security Council where China will really strong arm other countries not just at the Security Council but all throughout the United Nations. A prime example of that that I think we're just waking up to now is how China handled things within the WHO. Would love to get everybody's thoughts on that. Dan, you want to weigh in?

Daniel Twining:
The United States last year gave 10 times more support to World Health Organization than did China, yet the leadership of the World Health Organization very early in this crisis, in January, February, almost seemed to be relaying Chinese Communist Party talking points in first dismissing the transmissibility of the disease, then in dismissing or minimizing its international spread implications. The Chinese have pursued a rather sophisticated strategy over the past decade-plus of insinuating their candidates and candidates from other countries who agree to sort of follow their line into leadership of all sorts of UN technical organizations and other multilateral bodies.

America has always had a rather tortured relationship with some of the these institutions. Of course, we helped stand them up and create them and are often their primary donor, but in fact the way multilateralism gives voice, say, to autocracies gives an equal voice to all countries, that can redound to your disadvantage as you've seen in lots of UN General Assembly votes. The Chinese have basically figured out that leadership of multilateral clubs is part of their strategy, including for excluding Taiwan. Taiwan was banned from the World Health Organization. India's admission to the Security Council, Japan's admission has been blocked by China. We can just go down the list.

The Chinese have pursued a policy of excluding rival powers in Asia and beyond and projecting their candidates. And the goal I think over time is to build out a world that is more friendly not simply to Chinese interests and stability and security, but frankly, that is more susceptible to, say, a values-free zone in foreign policy where the Chinese Communist Party is not judged with
respect to its autocratic record at home. It's judged very much in morally neutral terms. They're trying to create a world that is safer for Chinese authoritarianism.

Heather Nauert:

Dan, I really like how you put that, a values-free zone where nations around the world wouldn't judge, wouldn't criticize China for its human rights abuses or for having kicked out scores of journalists and imprisoned hundreds of thousands or possibly up to millions of Chinese Uighur Muslims and not being called out. That's something we really have to watch. Torrey?

Torrey Taussig:

To tie in a point you were making earlier about China's economic influence in Europe and also Dan's point about creating value-free zones, I mean Europe has been a really interesting place to watch US-China competition play out over the last even few years. And I think going forward what happens in Europe, what happens in the Europe-Chinese relationship will affect a lot of what global order, global balance of power looks like in the years ahead. If we go back to 2019, it seemed that Europe was taking a little bit of a harder line towards Chinese investments, Chinese political influence. And when the pandemic started, we saw China pursue more of this charm offensive, bring in lots of aid and support to Europe, some of which proved to be faulty, in addition to these information campaigns.

What has been interesting to see is this mixed response from Europeans. On the one hand, we saw Brits, Germans and even Italians come out just last month saying that there were concerns about potential Chinese takeovers and buyouts of European companies if there were to be an economic fallout and therefore European governments needed to strengthen, for example, their investment screening mechanisms to try to guard against Chinese economic influence. Then on the flip side of that, as Blaise mentioned, we saw this watered-down European response to Chinese disinformation.

I think both of these kind of responses in the last month show that Europe is a little conflicted when it comes to its relationship with China. Europe does not wish to see a decoupled and competitive US-China world in the way that some Americans might be interested in doing. And this pandemic will have an influence on that balance of power and will have an influence on China's role in Europe. I think we're very much at a deciding point in which direction Europe goes, and right now we're seeing mixed responses at both the European level and the national level. Lamentably, I think that the divisions we're seeing between the US and Europe on the pandemic response is only increasing those vulnerabilities for China to take advantage of, particularly in Europe.

Heather Nauert:

Let's talk a little bit about democratic movements and what we've watched over the past year in Hong Kong in particular, where people have taken to the streets to protest the movement of those in Hong Kong to extradite citizens to China and what has happened as a result. Just over the weekend I know we were all watching this as there was the first fairly large-scale protest in Hong Kong, and police came in and they shut that down. There were about 300 or so people who showed up at a shopping mall. Of course, this comes after about 15 were arrested, I think it was about a week ago or so.
So we're starting to see those in Hong Kong speak out against the Chinese government. What do we see happening to that movement down the road?

**Daniel Twining:**

I'd be interested in what you all think. I will say that before the pandemic struck, people power was on the march all over the world. That you had not seen another year since 1989 where more people were in the streets, on the move, protesting against corrupt governance, protesting against oppressive governance. This was not in lots of comfortable, cozy countries. This was in really tough places like Algeria, like Sudan, like Venezuela, like Hong Kong. There used to be an argument a lot of us in the China community used to hear, which is that the Chinese leadership had essentially bought off the Chinese public with a bargain that we put money in your pockets; you become prosperous middle class, and then you don't worry too much about your political rights.

Hong Kong is the richest part of China. Per capita incomes in Hong Kong are higher than they are in the United States, in Europe. Yet Hongkongers have led the campaign for greater political rights and freedoms and dignity because of course, having money in your pocket, having prosperity is not enough. You also want the dignity that comes from accountable and responsive politics, politicians that are accountable and responsive to you.

The pandemic has dealt a temporary blow to street protest movements just because it's not safe to be in large crowds. But in fact, I think you're going to see over the coming period that a lot of this anger will grow against abuses by autocratic governments, against governments that are not reforming fast enough, responsive enough to their people because a lot of governments have either dropped the ball in the health crisis or they have used the pandemic to pursue ulterior motives, like the Chinese Communist Party cracking down on Hong Kong's rights and freedoms.

**Heather Nauert:**

Well, I'm glad to hear you think this is just going to be a temporary blow to those types of movements. I think we're all in agreement that democracies end up winning in the end because it's what's best for people and a continuation of a fair and fruitful society. So I'm glad to hear you think it's just going to be a temporary blow.

You mentioned something that made me think of the Philippines and I don't know if this is a good or a bad thing. But President Duterte tried to promote the takeover, basically, of companies. Obviously, that's not a good thing, for private sector industry. But yet some of his allies pushed back on that thinking that he was simply going too far. There could be a price to pay for some of these regimes when they do try to overreach as we saw it happen in the Philippines. Blaise, any thoughts on those just not necessarily in the Philippines but overreach in general?

**Blaise Misztal:**

Yes. I think Dan raises an excellent point and I think a lot of people who have been living perhaps contently or quietly under autocracies are beginning to realize that authoritarianism is bad for your health. I'm thinking here not just of the fact that this outbreak started in China and was squashed by the Chinese Communist Party for so long, but even what happened in Iran
where the Iranian authorities sort of denied that there was a pandemic happening. They didn't tell people to take precautions, but there was already so much distrust between the society and the Iranian government that even once the Iranian government began to take things more seriously, the people of Iran wouldn't listen to them and instead turned to quack ideas on how to deal with this. There was a number of deaths in Iran, for example, from people drinking methyl alcohol because a preacher told them that that was one way to cure or prevent themselves from getting the coronavirus.

This distrust that happens between societies and governments in authoritarian regimes is really being brought to the forefront and is being stressed even further in situations like you raised, Heather, in which governments think that this is a good time to flex their muscles and seize even more power. I think you're going to see a lot of people grow dissatisfied with the ineptitude that their governments demonstrate and realize that their lives are being put in danger by whether it is the greed and corruption or purely disinterest of autocratic regimes in their wellbeing.

That's going to, I think, lead to the desire to have more of these popular protests, as Dan was saying. But so long as there is sheltering in place or there are concerns about renewed outbreaks, that's going to be physically difficult to do, which is why organizations like IRI are really important to help people find new ways to engage in political activism and make sure their voices are heard and engage in popular mobilization. I think you're going to see a lot of those same forces that brought people to the streets manifest themselves, but we're going to have to find new ways to try to engage them politically.

**Heather Nauert:**

Dan, as the president of IRI, and I mentioned at the top that you deploy folks all around the world to countries that are either fledgling democracies or countries that are going through an election process and who reach out to you and say, "Hey, how do we set up these institutions?" Obviously, your folks aren't able to travel right now, so how do you see that impacting some of those fragile countries where you had been helping to advise some of those new governments?

**Daniel Twining:**

Thanks, Heather. We have offices in almost 50 countries that work out of them into many more countries. Our field staff are still in position. They too in many countries are limited, though it's different in different countries. Some of the restrictions are lighter depending on the intensity of the pandemic. But the answer is there is a lot to do in the democracy business right now, helping parliaments conduct effective oversight virtually, helping civil society groups organize when governments are not listening to citizen concerns. Civil society can be that counterbalance that feeds in and creates pressure points for governments to put their people first.

How do you help them organize virtually and drive their peaceful agendas? How do you help governments connect with citizens in a period when you can't have the normal town halls? In some cases, you can't run a proper election because the conditions do not warrant. So how do you help make sure that that transmission belt between government and citizens remains intact? How do you help governments understand what their people really need and want? We take it for granted in America, but in lots of countries public opinion polling is not necessarily an advanced science. And so how do you help make sure that politicians understand that citizens
need this kind of relief in the current pandemic circumstance? There's a lot to do. There's a lot to do in this space.

I mean finally, I would just like to say, Heather, because this feeds to kind of when we all reopen and when things begin to normalize again. State power has grown everywhere. The state-society balance is not healthy, including in many democracies, as a result of the emergency powers that governments have assumed, including democratic governance. That cannot be a permanent condition. We're going to have to everywhere, including in the West, make sure that governments go back to having a healthy balance with society rather than to be too top down and commandeering and restricting citizen rights and freedoms.

Heather Nauert:

Yeah. Torrey, can we talk a little bit, and Dan, I'm really glad to hear that your teams are still able to do a large part of their jobs and look forward to when your folks here in Washington and elsewhere can get back out in the field too. But glad to hear you guys are still helping freedom on the march. Torrey, can we talk a little bit about some of those countries that really got it right? Taiwan, for example, the Republic of Korea, those countries identifying concerns and problems very early on trying to alert the West.

In the case of Taiwan, they weren't able to get the attention that was necessary and needed at the WHO, lacking representation there. Where do you see things going with Taiwan and how did some of these countries manage to get it right?

Torrey Taussig:

Well, there's-

Heather Nauert:

I'm sorry, don't mean that Taiwan is a country. Obviously, it's one country, two systems under China, but you know what I mean. How did some areas manage to get it right?

Torrey Taussig:

Well, I think looking back at the last two months and the various responses we've seen put in place, as you mentioned, some countries have done better than others. Obviously, those who have done better were those who were able to roll out rapid testing early on, who took measures to close down parts of their economy, close down parts of their society early on, take the risk seriously when it became known that this was a creeping pandemic around the world.

Another country that's done very well, given that it's in the heart of Europe, is Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel has been praised for her very pragmatic, almost scientific response to the pandemic. She's provided cool and calm leadership to her people and has also been very, I think, realistic about what the next few months will hold. But overall, I would say that those societies that have done best have been those that have relied on health and science experts and who have taken the crisis seriously from day one.
Heather Nauert:

Dan or Blaise, where do you see things going with Taiwan? Do you see that Taiwan will be able to obtain representation within the WHO or will China continue to strong-arm other countries to block that?

Daniel Twining:

Blaise, go ahead.

Blaise Misztal:

Well, I think it really depends on the United States at this point and its decision that it has to make, I think, going forward on whether it wants to fix the mistakes that it has rightly seen in the World Health Organization, which has led President Trump to pull US funding from the organization, or whether it’s going to go its own way and try to create some other alternative form of global health systems. But I think if the US does reengage with the WHO, it does need to address some of the structural issues that we have seen. Foremost among them is the WHO's leadership's willingness to completely bury reporting out of Taiwan when it came to the beginnings of this outbreak.

Heather Nauert:

One of you brought up a little bit ago the issue of surveillance. I think it was Dan. You mentioned that and even democracies are trying to figure out a new way of how to deal with surveillance. I was on a call earlier today where something was being discussed about using surveillance among companies or employees, taking their temperature, monitoring their movements and all of that. So how do democracies sort of grapple with these decisions about when there’s a pandemic, it could seem like it's a good idea to monitor people's health and temperature and their whereabouts, but on the other hand that can be a really slippery slope. Torrey, how do we have that debate here and in other democracies?

Torrey Taussig:

There's a big question about the balance between security and civil liberties taking place across democracies in the world. As I mentioned, over 80 countries have imposed emergency rule, emergency systems, measures, since the beginning of the pandemic. There is this question of surveillance and tracking and monitoring, and we've seen democracies that have very little appetite for those types of models embrace them in order to get the pandemic and get the crisis under control. I think a big question going forward is how you slowly reduce these types of measures, how you reduce emergency measures in place, how you pull back these surveillance tactics that we're seeing used in democratic states.

What I worry is that in countries where there are very few constraints left on the executive, I'll just put forward Hungary as an example in Central Europe, one of the big reasons that emergency measures put in place by the Orban government are so worrying is because a lot of democratic constraints on the government have been weakened and reduced in years prior to this crisis. So when we look at how and when these types of emergency measures might be removed, there's not a lot of optimism over when and how the government will actually relax these types of measures.
As another example, we saw the government in Turkey impose emergency law after the attempted coup in 2016 and that has yet to be lifted. Again, the question is when and how these types of measures are lifted in the future. But for now it seems that even democratic states have been willing to impose surveillance and emergency measures in order to get the pandemic under control even if it means losing some of those civil liberties in the time being.

Heather Nauert:
Well, developing some of those powers and hanging onto those powers is a really tempting thing to want to continue, and so it's tough for some governments to try to give those up. It's up to us really to keep those governments accountable and keep our government leaders accountable. But I like how you put it, that as we talk about surveillance, there has to be an off ramp too. Perhaps, as we talk to colleagues and talk to the American public and other countries through our own work, that's something that needs to be highlighted. We understand the need for some form of surveillance right now, but let's look at a way that ends up winding down so that we don't erode our own freedoms, whether it's here or in Germany or other countries.

Torrey Taussig:
Completely agree. To take a broader stance on where we see some authoritarian governments that have these surveillance methods already in place, for example, in China, China has been rolling out a digital surveillance model within its country for a number of years now. They're trying to impose this type or bring this type of model and system to developing countries around the world, even to countries in Europe. As we see this pandemic play out, as we see governments willing to use some of these surveillance tactics, it will be interesting to see whether some of these Chinese data surveillance models take hold in places that they are already being promoted and sold by the Chinese government.

Heather Nauert:
I think we've summed it up pretty well, the problem and also some potential solutions. I just want to get last thoughts from everybody about authoritarian regimes versus democratic movements, both trying to be on the march, and where we see things going. I've heard a sense of optimism from all of you that it could take some time. There could be some setbacks right now, but you think that overall going forward things are looking fairly positive for democratic movements. I'd like to just get everyone's last thoughts. Torrey, let's start with you there.

Torrey Taussig:
One of the reasons I mentioned that I was kind of optimistic on the side of democratic movements regaining momentum in the wake of this pandemic is in part because of the inherent weaknesses that we see within authoritarian regimes. I'll just take two very durable ones at the moment, Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China. It was mentioned earlier that both presidents were strangely absent in various parts of this crisis. Xi Jinping sent his premier, Li Keqiang, to Wuhan in the early days of the crisis perhaps in part because he didn't want to be seen as responsible for a crisis that he wasn't sure that he could control. Similarly, in Russia President Putin was uncharacteristically quiet in some of the early COVID responses when it appeared that it could spiral out of control.
Dictators, authoritarian leaders like a crisis when it's something that they can spin and control to their own favor. I think as we set in to the economic fallout from this pandemic, authoritarian leaders are going to be met with a very different type of challenge, a very different type of legitimacy challenge to their control and their rule. And it's one that authoritarian leaders have not stacked up very well against in the past. So I think as we move forward and as we see the economic fallout take place in this pandemic, some of that inherent weaknesses within authoritarian regimes will start to be seen again.

Heather Nauert:
Dan, any last thoughts?

Daniel Twining:
Thanks, Heather. This has been great. What a good discussion. Look, democracies have executed rather unevenly in this crisis thus far, but I would just like to make maybe a point that we haven't fully fleshed out, which is that when we think about open societies, part of the solution to this kind of emergency is that free and effective media space, and open reporting so government shortfalls can be identified and governments can be held accountable. It's elections and the other tools to make sure that politicians are putting people first, are responsive to their citizens. It's rule of law and courts and effective oversight.

It's governments so that one man at the center is not making all the decisions, which is sometimes how the Chinese Communist Party portrays Xi Jinping. That in fact if you look at the US example, we've had just heroic mayors and governors who have been part of the solution here. So when we think about how countries have performed, we should think not just about the initial phase but also about how they bounce back, how resilient they are, how focused they are on putting their people first rather than putting their political party or their individual politicians first.

Finally, just the point, Heather, that as we navigate this post-pandemic world, innovation is going to be so central to finding a vaccine, to finding workarounds so that people can get back to work. I just have a hundred percent confidence in the ability of the US and other free and open societies to innovate their way out of a crisis in ways that rigid authoritarians that are very focused on propping up one man or one party are just never going to be able to execute as effectively. In the long term, this has been bumpy here in America, but I'm hoping that it reminds people of the total package of our open systems and why they do matter so much.

Heather Nauert:
And your point about this is something that the media needs to be able to cover and what we saw happen in China with so many of the Western press thrown out. And then we've known for a long time that any media in China that even attempts to criticize the government gets thrown into jail, and we've seen some now such as human rights lawyers with the 709 movement, that they were imprisoned and then some of them let out. But it's now called quarantine, which is really code for another form of prison for some of those, but really China needs to let media in and let them in and report in an unfettered way.

Blaise, let's get your last thoughts before we wrap things up.
Blaise Misztal:

Thanks, Heather. And thanks to Torrey and Dan. I think they really beautifully summed up the state of the world in a way that pairs well together, Torrey highlighting the weakness of authoritarian systems and Dan the resilience of open and democratic societies. I think the only thing that I would add to that is that we really shouldn't take either of those for granted, which is to say this crisis has revealed the ugly face of authoritarianism to the world. But we shouldn't take it for granted that it will crumble on its own even if those weaknesses that Torrey mentioned continued to be exacerbated. And we shouldn't take for granted that democracies will thrive even though they have all of the virtues and assets that Dan listed.

Blaise Misztal:

It's really going to take work on our part as democratic countries to keep our democracies healthy and functioning and investments in the democracies and freedoms in other parts of the world to continue to undermine the dangerous autocracies that threaten both their own citizens and our own health and the civility of international order.

Heather Nauert:

Well, I think that's a good place to leave it. This has been a fascinating conversation. And Blaise, I'm just so thrilled that you put this together and got this team in place from all of our respective places around the country. So Blaise Misztal, my colleague here from Hudson Institute, he's a fellow there. Thank you so much. Dan Twining from the International Republican Institute. Dan, thank you so much and look forward to seeing you again real soon. And Dr. Torrey Taussig. Torrey, thank you. It's so nice to meet you and I look forward to speaking with you again as we try to figure out and solve the world's problems.