



Winter School

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Pandemics

Covid-19 as a Tipping Point for Trust in Government



The Pandemic's Effect on Democracy and Human Rights

- **Freedom House reported in 2023 that Global Freedom has been in decline for the 17th year in a row.**
- **Freedom House also reported that 80 countries had a regression in freedom in the first year of the pandemic.**
- **The Economist Intelligence Unit in 2021 reported that democracy had undergone backsliding in every region of the world.**
- **The most remarkable change was the rollback of civil liberties in full democracies during the pandemic.**

Covid-19 and the Erosion of Trust in Government

- The pandemic was not the sole cause of loss of trust in government in a state but rather a magnifying glass on existing issues:
- *“By intensifying long-lasting paradoxes of modernization, the pandemic facilitates collective reflection: those challenges, which have burdened late modernity for a long time both on the level of freedom (e.g. the fragmentation of the collective lifeworld due to individualization), justice (e.g. the increasing global and local inequality) and sustainability (e.g. the exploitation of humans and natural resources for the sake of perpetual growth), suddenly became a multi-dimensional imminent crisis requiring collective countermeasures.” (Sik, 2023)*

What factors did the Pandemic Catalyse?

- **Globalisation**
 - **Financial Crisis**
 - **Technological advances**
 - **Social Media**
 - **Cost of living**
 - **Multiple Wars**
- **How do you think these factors have contributed to the erosion of trust in the government?**



Can a New Social Contract Fix our Trust in Democracy?

- **Social contract theory says:**
 - **Political legitimacy = the ability of the government to protect those who have consented to its social contract.**
 - **i.e. No security = no social contract.**
- **Social contract theory is abstract, but it does have power in its acknowledgement of humans as individual rational actors.**

What underpins the feeling of insecurity in a Polity?



- **Material Inequality?**
- **Cultural Insecurity?**
- **Border Insecurity?**
- **Others?**
- **How can social contract theory address these concerns and prevent a peripheral event like a pandemic from upending democracy and human rights?**



Thank you!

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