JONATHAN WOLFF, DAVID ELITZER, ANNA PETHERICK, MAYA TUDOR & KATIE TYNER

COVID-19 and Authoritarianism: Two Strategies of Engaging Fear

Abstract: This paper considers ways in which rulers can respond to, generate, or exploit fear of COVID-19 infection for various ends, and in particular distinguishes between 'fear-invoking' and 'fear-minimising' strategies. It examines historical precedent for executive overreach in crises and then moves on to look in more detail at some specific areas where fear is being mobilised or generated: in ways that lead to the suspension of civil liberties; that foster discrimination against minorities; and that boost the personality cult of leaders and limit criticism or competition. Finally, in the Appendix, we present empirical work, based on the results of an original survey in Brazil, that provides support for the conjectures in the previous sections. While it is too early to tell what the longer-term outcomes of the changes we note will be, our purpose here is simply to identify some warning signs that threaten the key institutions and values of democracy.

Keywords: *COVID-19; Authoritarianism; Democracy; Fear-invoking; Fear-minimising; Civil liberties; 11th September; India; Brazil*

Introduction

Like so many poignant quotations, the exact origin of the phrase 'Never let a good crisis go to waste' is disputed. In recent years it has constantly been a refrain of leaders awaiting an opportune moment to introduce a measure that would be much more difficult to introduce in normal times. Crises are windows of opportunity to reconsider business-as-usual, ushering in a wide range of policy changes, from new social protections to changed decision-making processes. For example, World War II was a crisis that ultimately allowed many European countries to introduce key elements of the welfare state that previously had been met with stubborn resistance (Webster, 2002). Today, some countries are considering Universal Basic Income or other significant welfare reforms as a response to the economic changes brought in train by COVID-19 (Ng, 2020). In the shorter term, as a wide range of measures addressing the health and economic effects of the crisis have been passed by executive order, to general approval, the crisis has cut through the paralysis of some democracies previously

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tied down in partisan politics.

Our focus in this paper is to explore two strategies through which the COVID-19 pandemic has afforded leaders opportunities to weaken democracy and thereby strengthen authoritarianism: fear-invoking and fear-minimizing. Democracy is both an idea denoting ‘rule of the people, for the people, by the people’ and a set of institutions that embody the idea of self-rule. Here we rely on a political science conception of democracy as a multi-faceted institution comprised of (I) *elections* based on universal adult franchise of citizens; (II) *competition* by opposition with alternative programmes; and (III) *civil liberties* of citizens allowing them to speak, assemble and dissent (Dahl, 1956).

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we discuss the ways in which rulers can respond to, generate, or exploit fear for various ends. In the second section, we examine historical precedent for executive overreach in crises. We then look in more detail at some specific areas where fear is being mobilised or generated: first, in ways that lead to the suspension of civil liberties; second, that foster discrimination against minorities; and third, that boost the personality cult of leaders and limit criticism or competition. We then discuss fear-minimizing strategies. Finally, in the Appendix, we will present empirical work, based on an original survey in Brazil, that provides support for the conjectures in the previous section. At the time of writing (November 2020) it is too early to tell with any certainty what the longer-term outcomes of the changes we note will be (Olar, 2020). Our purpose here is simply to identify some warning signs that threaten the key institutions and values of democracy.

Leading in a time of fear

Fear is a complex matter for leaders of governments. Ideally, we might think, a government should keep its people free from harm, and free from fear of harm. But a government cannot completely insulate its citizens from all risks. Ordinary life contains ordinary risks, understanding risk in an entirely intuitive sense as a non-zero probability of an adverse event. Work, transport, socialising, and much else involves risk, even when everyone follows the law to the best of their ability. Beyond this, each of us is exposed to risks outside the boundaries of law, such as crime and negligence. And, most relevant to the current discussion, nature offers up risks in forms such as hurricanes, volcanos, and pandemics.

Yet some countries will be better prepared to deal with such natural risks than others. This is why some theorists insist that there is no such thing as a truly natural disaster. The degree to which natural events turn into disasters depends on how well we are prepared for them (Clarke and Dercon, 2016). In making preparations for such events, governments must delicately balance risk and fear.

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Consider what was once a slogan from the British Home Office: 'Reducing Crime, Reducing Fear of Crime'. It is natural to think that if crime goes down, fear of crime will go down too. But what will happen if fear of crime goes down simply out of complacency? It is quite possible that crime will rise as people relax, take fewer precautions and expose themselves to greater risk. Conversely, one way of reducing crime could be to increase fear of crime (Wolff, 2019), just as, in a pandemic, a terrified population will do more to try to protect itself.

But a leader who increases fear in order to reduce risk must be cautious. After all, fear is a negative experience in itself. If, to return to the previous example, crime is low but fear of crime is intense and widespread, then the fear of crime could be more broadly harmful than the relatively low levels of crime. Jeremy Bentham speculated that fear of crime, which affects everyone, when taken as a whole could outweigh the harms of crime, as relatively few people become victims of serious crime (Bentham, 1843).

When leaders and governments prepare for potential natural disasters, they must strategize the nature of their messaging to the public. In principle there is a wide range of possibilities, from minimizing public access to information to inciting panic that could threaten civil order. The public interest is best served by finding a balance between providing a reasonable amount of information and warning citizens to take suitable precautions, whilst ensuring that fear itself, and the behavioural changes such fear could lead to, do not become the predominant harm (Huddy et al., 2005).

There is an important dimension of uncertainty, sequence, and timing to governing decisions. Measures that may seem heavy-handed and draconian when experienced, may, in retrospect, seem fully justified, especially when comparisons are made with other countries that assumed a different approach. There is already evidence emerging that governments taking a clear and decisive position are better for the perceived mental health of their citizens (Fetzer et al, 2020). Yet thus far, these considerations simply concern good judgement and governance.

Our primary concern below is that crises also afford opportunities for power to be abused in that a leader can pursue ends that do not coincide with the public interest. Any government may opportunistically use normal fear to pursue policies that they believe to be in the public interest but would be harder to introduce in ordinary times. A more concerning strategy attempts to provoke an exaggerated level of fear for similar purposes. And a vital barrier is breached when fear, whether normal or exaggerated, is employed *without* consideration for the *public interest*: whether to consolidate the leader's power by undermining normal

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political processes; create opportunities for corruption; demonise a persecuted minority; or indeed for any other illegitimate purposes (cf Young, 2019).

Looking to history: civil liberties and minority rights in crises

Whenever fear is widespread, minorities have historically been vulnerable to being politically targeted through a narrowing of political liberties. Catalans and Jews were consistently politically scapegoated during the 14th century Black Death outbreaks in Europe (Cohn, 2007; Lupovitch, 2010) and Chinese and Japanese communities were held responsible for plague outbreaks in California in 1900 (McClain, 1994).

At the time of writing, we are amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and no country that instigated response policies has yet restored a pre-pandemic state of affairs. Have crises of such magnitude been witnessed in modern history? Although the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States was a decidedly different crisis from COVID-19, it is one of the few modern crises that is comparable in terms of scale of impact on liberal democratic governance worldwide. These attacks precipitated a political crisis that was used to disproportionately infringe upon the civil liberties of minority groups. Pieces of legislation such as the Patriot Act provide a historical case study of a how a crisis can cause even a liberal democracy to adopt governance practices more commonly associated with autocracies. Both crises uprooted business as usual, and created widespread fear which pressured elected officials to act. At the same time, many leaders simultaneously *encouraged* such public fear to create reason to act in ways that advanced their governing agendas. A consideration of the Patriot Act and its relationship to American civil liberties for minorities provides a useful point of comparison for the dangers of fear-invoking leadership as the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold.

About six weeks after the September 11th attacks, President George W. Bush signed into law the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, more commonly known as the USA Patriot Act or just the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act was a sweeping piece of national security legislation (much of which is still in effect today) that authorised expanded use of warrantless searches, collection of personal communications, and detention and deportation at the border, among other measures. The bill arrived on the president's desk with overwhelming bipartisan support, passing in the Senate 98-1 and in the House 357-66 (U.S. Senate, 2001; U.S. House of Representatives, 2001).

As the Bush administration lobbied both Congress and the American public for the Patriot Act's periodic renewal, it promoted an image of widespread civic support for the curtailing of civil liberties to bolster national security (Simone,

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2009: 6–7). But the administration's messaging also deliberately stoked fear of another September 11th to secure and renew such legislation. On LifeAndLiberty.gov, a Justice Department website devoted to promoting the Patriot Act, it reads:

> The government's success in preventing another catastrophic attack on the American homeland since September 11, 2001, would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, without the USA Patriot Act. The authorities Congress provided have substantially enhanced our ability to prevent, investigate, and prosecute acts of terror (The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty, n.d.).

The not-so-subtle implication of such messaging is that citizens should fear what would happen to the US without the Patriot Act.

While many Americans were accepting of the Patriot Act because it ostensibly prevented another terrorist attack, Muslims and those perceived to be of Middle Eastern descent bore the brunt of the legislation. In one study of American Muslims, one-fifth had personally experienced some form of government surveillance (O'Connor and Jahan, 2014). Moreover, the September 11th attacks ushered in a new era of American Islamophobia. The longstanding demonisation of Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent in the US paved the way for many Americans to accept the discriminatory measures ushered in by the Patriot Act and other national security measures (Elver, 2012). The combination of Islamophobia with the longstanding problem of racial profiling in American law enforcement led to Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent — or at least those perceived as such by the government and the American public — seeing their civil liberties disproportionately curtailed (Onwudiwe, 2005; Pitt, 2011). As many Americans linked Islam to terrorism in the days following September 11th, laws such as the Patriot Act tested Americans' commitment to key parts of constitutional law (Pitt, 2011: 54).

Whether or not this was the explicit intention of the President or Congress, a fear of Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent provided the public-good justification for crafting otherwise unpopular government interventions. The COVID-19 crisis presents us with a similar dilemma. With social upheaval and fear permeating liberal democracies in a way not seen since the wake of the September 11th crisis, governmental responses to COVID-19 have the potential to rewrite norms of democratic governance much the same way the Patriot Act did in the US. There are, of course, important differences between the events of September 11th and the contemporaneous spread of a global pandemic. What these events share is that they are unanticipated moments of deep political crisis which form windows of opportunity for changing settled political patterns. During

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such crises, governments can fan or attenuate fear, responding in ways that can either bring society together or push it further apart by undermining democratic norms.

A fear-invoking response and the danger to minority rights

In the previous section we highlighted how a political crisis created an environment in which restrictive measures could be introduced and retained, and how, over time, such measures have been highly problematic for a disadvantaged minority. At various times since the onset of COVID-19, governments around the world have suspended civil liberties in the name of public health. And citizens across the globe initially accepted strong interventions from their governments without mass uprisings, in part because of their natural fear of contracting and spreading the disease and the scientific consensus that social distancing measures will slow its spread.

However, just as behavioural scientists have predicted, the longer the lockdowns continued, the more pressure mounted on leaders to lift emergency measures, even in regions where the virus caseload had not seen its first peak. As time has gone on, protests against lockdown measures and the enforcement of mask-wearing have sprung up. Leaders face a choice to either continue imposing lockdowns and curbs on civil liberties or lift lockdowns and risk worsening a public health disaster. As predicted by some, where the lockdown has been released, whether too early or more responsibly, a 'hammer and a dance' pattern has had to be employed, combining civil liberty suspensions under shelter-at-home orders, followed by periods of loosened restrictions in which life approaches normality (Pueyo, 2020).

While the suspension of civil liberties in a crisis affects all citizens to some extent, minorities—who rely on civil liberties for equal rights—are most affected. For leaders already eager to erode norms of democratic governance, the pandemic presents a window of opportunity that is especially dangerous for minorities because, for socio-economic reasons, minorities also often carry the greatest burden of disease (Mamelund, 2002). In the COVID-19 crisis, minorities are particularly susceptible to the bearing the burden of a fear-invoking strategy.

First, since minorities are likely to experience higher rates of infection for health and economic reasons, they are likely to experience harsher restrictions on liberties in countries adopting regionally-variant policies. Pandemics thrive in spaces where individuals live in crowded living quarters and possess poor access to sanitation. Minorities are also more likely to have underlying health conditions (e.g. poorer nutrition and higher rates of risk conditions such as hypertension and diabetes) which make them particularly susceptible to health

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problems. Finally, minorities are also more likely to be employed in sectors of the economy (delivery drivers, cleaning services) that offer few possibilities for working remotely. Indigenous minorities often lack acquired immunity. Taken together, these factors explain why across a wide range of countries, research has already begun to show a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 on racial, ethnic and religious minorities (Rust, 2020; Siddique, 2020) with attendant restrictions upon civil liberties.

Notably, the COVID-19 virus was initially different because it was first known as the 'rich man's disease'. Infection vectors outside of China occurred first among cosmopolitan elite returning from ski holidays in the European Alps or business trips to China. But once COVID-19 became widely prevalent, poor minorities were disproportionately likely to become infected, for reasons already mentioned.

Second, irrespective of whether minorities directly have a greater disease burden, they are liable to being treated as the source of the infection by politicians seeking to distract from bread-and-butter considerations or their own political failures. Playing up us-versus-them dynamics is arguably the oldest political strategy for power consolidation, perhaps because it harnesses a human tendency for in-group preferences (Heinrich 2017). In some countries with COVID-19 epidemics, political leaders have explicitly linked minorities to the virus and employed inflammatory language in public statements or social media posts to raise the fear of minorities as responsible for mass disease transmission.

India is perhaps the clearest example of this trend. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, India was led by the government of Narendra Modi, a government elected to power with a Hindu nationalist platform that was directly linked to a spike in discrimination and violence against Muslims (Tudor, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Once COVID-19 cases began to multiply globally in India, the Modi government both directly began to blame Muslims for spreading the disease and allowed conspiracy theories to widely circulate by condemning them slowly, if at all.

This scapegoating effort was exemplified by the government response to an annual meeting of Muslim missionaries in India's capital city, Delhi. For three days between March 6 and 8 2020, a Muslim missionary group called the Tablighi Jamaat held its annual meeting in a crowded sector of Delhi. India had neither banned mass gathering nor entered lockdown (this first occurred on March 13 2020) and similar such gatherings were still happening elsewhere. By early April however, it had become clear that the Tablighi Jamaat meeting was a major transmission vector, with over a thousand confirmed cases linked to this meeting (Bisht and Naqvi, 2020).

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Because the Indian government ordered the mandatory testing of Tablighi Jamaat attendees and offered substantial monetary rewards for helping to locate Jamaat attendees (in a country that did very little testing otherwise), 30% of India's early confirmed coronavirus cases were traced to the Jamaat meeting. However, as the Indian scientists' response to COVID-19 verified, there is no evidence that Muslims are disproportionately vectors of transmission (Ellis-Petersen and Azizur Rahman, 2020). Instead, in accordance with a government elected on a platform of Hindu nationalism, the Modi government took a political decision to disproportionately test Muslims and provide fuel for a minority-targeting fire. According to *Time* magazine, tweets with the hashtag #CoronaJihad appeared nearly 300,000 times and were potentially seen by 165 million people (Ayyub, 2020). Hashtags such as #coronaJihad, #CoronaTerrorism and #CoronaBombsTablighi began to trend on Twitter. Mainstream Indian media repeatedly asserted that Tablighi Jamaat members were coronavirus 'superspreaders'.

As all manner of fake news stories and rumours about Muslim culpability for COVID-19 circulated, prominent members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata (BJP) party verbally began to hold Muslim minorities responsible for the pandemic's spread in India. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the union minority affairs minister in Modi's cabinet, called the gathering by the Tablighi Jamaat 'Talibani crime' (Ayyub, 2020). Kapil Mishra, a Delhi BJP leader tweeted: 'Tablighi Jamaat people have begun spitting on the doctors and other health workers. It's clear, their aim is to infect as many people as possible with coronavirus and kill them' (Ellis-Petersen and Rahman, 2020).

While India is perhaps a prominent case of the fear-invoking response to targeting minorities, the Indian government is hardly alone in weaponizing the coronavirus. The early stages of the pandemic were also hyped to create opportunities for loosening the democratic restraints upon national leaders. Hungary is one of the clearest examples of this trend. The Hungarian parliament, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's party (Fidesz) holds a two-thirds majority, passed a bill on March 30, 2020 granting Orbán the power to rule by decree in order to fight the coronavirus (Guardian editorial, 2020). This bill did not contain a sunset clause, despite the opposition pushing for its inclusion, meaning there was no plan in place for when Orbán's emergency executive powers would come to an end, putting the protection of citizens' rights and liberties at risk. Although the parliament voted to end the rule of decree starting June 20, 2020, Orbán was able to hold onto his powers because Hungarian democracy had deteriorated even further during the COVID-19 crisis (Novak, 2020).

Leaders like Orbán—who trumpeted the risk that the coronavirus posed to the

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country and assumed extraordinary powers, ostensibly to protect against it—have understandably generated the most concern among journalists, international peers, and human rights groups. Other countries with fear-invoking leaders, such as Venezuela and China, tended to respond to the pandemic by hyping fears and adopting stringent measures earlier relative to the timing of the first death. They assumed greater executive power in the form of jailing and detaining voices of dissent and protest in the name of combatting misinformation, suspending court proceedings and elections, introducing military checkpoints, and extending digital surveillance.

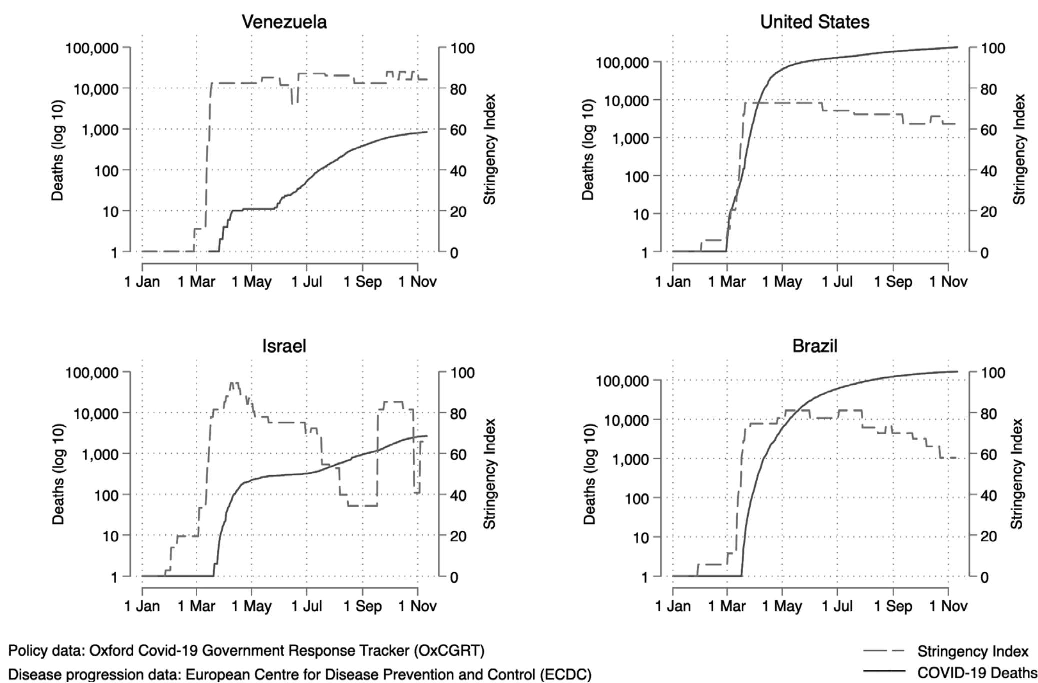

FIGURE 1: Policy and pandemic trajectories of two countries with fear-invoking leaders (Venezuela and Israel), that enacted policies in advance of rising deaths, and two countries with fear-minimizing leaders (United States and Brazil). In the United States and Brazil, leaders of subnational jurisdictions put in place many of the COVID-19 response policies. They did so as deaths were already beginning to rise in their respective countries, and in the context of a limited federal government response. Data to 11 November 2020.

A fear-rejecting response and the consolidation of executive overreach

Some governments that have already engaged in democratic backsliding through executive overreach responded in a markedly different fashion, foregoing fear as a strategy by dismissing the severity of the pandemic or encouraging activities to proceed as normal. These *fear-rejecting* leaders notably included Trump of the United States, Bolsonaro of Brazil, Johnson of United Kingdom, Magafuli of Tanzania and Nkurunziza of Burundi. Such leaders belittled or even ridiculed

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the dangers posed by the coronavirus pandemic. During the early stages of the pandemic, they often declined to take scientifically-proven measures to mitigate disease spread (see Figure 1) because doing so would undermine a core tenet of populism.

Such leaders typically governed with a strongly populist rhetoric (defined primarily by depicting a central problem of politics to be one of corrupt, establishment elites who are juxtaposed against an uncorrupted citizenry). These leaders had risen to power prior to the pandemic by rhetorically rejecting the need for a technocratic elite in domains as varied as climate change and trade, presenting their leadership as the embodiment of the popular will. Once in power, such leaders had *already* loosened executive constraints in the name of enacting the popular will and minimizing the role of the corrupt elite.

Once the pandemic broke out, in keeping with the populist strategies that brought them to power, such leaders were slow to take seriously the advice of experts they had long decried. Several of these leaders tested positive for the coronavirus themselves, including Trump, Bolsonaro, and Johnson. Fear-rejecting leaders only reluctantly embraced the role of scientific advice because to do so would undermine the core contention that such elites were indeed the country's central problem. For example, before he became President, Donald Trump wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in April 2016: 'The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong.' Once in power, in the domains of administration adjudication and the use of executive order, Trump engaged in a 'quiet power grab' (Shane, 2020), using *more* executive orders than any of his recent predecessors and doing it eagerly rather than as a last resort (Gearan, 2020). Unsurprisingly, once the pandemic broke out in 2020, Trump minimized it, stating nearly every month that the pandemic would imminently resolve itself and that the media was unduly hyping its effects. Trump repeatedly defied scientific advice on wearing face masks and made the wearing of masks a 'political and cultural flashpoint' (Collinson, 2020).

Bolsonaro, similarly, has joined supporters protesting closure policies enacted by subnational governments, often without wearing a mask, and on occasion, coughing repeatedly. He removed his mask in the process of announcing to the media that he had tested positive, taking only a couple of steps back from a group of journalists (BBC News, 2020a). Bolsonaro's discourse epitomises the strongman personalism of fear-rejecting leaders, scoffing that self-isolating in response to 'a little flu' is 'for the weak' (Phillips, 2020), and espousing his

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prowess as an athlete. On April 28 2020, he responded to media questions about the daily death rate by referencing his middle name, Messiah, and retorting 'So what?' (Ortega & Orsini, 2020). He has expressed science denialism by firing health minister Luiz Mandetta, whose replacement, Nelson Teich—also a medical doctor—resigned within a month. The post was subsequently filled by an army general with no medical training. On 10 November 2020, the news that Brazil's national regulator had stopped a vaccine trial due to a suicide among its recipients prompted the comment 'Another victory for Bolsonaro,' on his official Facebook page (BBC News, 2020b). On the same day, he gave a speech acknowledging Brazil's many deaths, while adding a homophobic swipe, 'Everyone is going to die. We need to stop being a country of poofs' (Chaib, 2020).

A possible enabling condition of variation in leadership styles may be the federal nature of the state, which allows national leaders to double down on the strategies that facilitated their rise to power. In a federal system, the head of government has the ability place both responsibility and blame on other actors (e.g. state governors) and claim that governing elites are the problem rather than the solution. Bolsonaro was able to join the crowd protesting the governors' lockdown decisions in large part because of Brazil's federal structure. Further detailed empirical analysis of the early pandemic in Brazil is included in the Appendix.

Conclusion

Well before the COVID-19 crisis, alarm was being expressed at a perceived authoritarian drift in world politics (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). The present crisis has allowed leaders to mobilise fear to advance their authoritarian agendas but the ways in which this was done varied with fear-invoking and fear-minimising strategies both evident. While all citizens are at risk of authoritarian overreach, in many cases minorities bear the brunt of democratic decline. However, a complicating factor is that those countries with fear-invoking authoritarian leaders, locking down early and taking draconian measures, have, so far, been among the more successful states in dealing with the public health emergency. Hence their popularity may well increase as a result of the steps they have taken, even at the expense of civil liberties. We should note, however, that many stable democratic regimes, with honest, straightforward messaging, have so far done as well as, or better than, these fear-invoking authoritarian regimes (for example, see the case of New Zealand).

From the point of view of the preservation of democracy, it is too early to tell how widespread the damage will be, but there are already signs of change that

will be hard to reverse. Emergency powers may lapse in some cases, while the digital surveillance introduced to tackle the crisis may not. Detailed predictions about the future course of the disease, and the appropriate policy response, is, of course, not only beyond the scope of this paper, but beyond anyone's powers. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that freedom of the press, the rule of law, and the protection of civil liberties (as requisites for democratic survival) are utterly vital in these times, and thought and support should be given not only their preservation but also their strengthening.

Appendix: Fear-minimization: The Case of Brazil

To assess fear and opinions of minorities in a country with fear-minimizing leader, we ran a survey in eight of Brazil's state capitals, the cities of Fortaleza, Goiânia, Manaus, Porto Alegre, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and São Paulo. These cities were chosen to provide breadth of political opinion among cities with COVID-19 outbreaks, and to represent all five regions of the country (the North, Northeast, Central-west, Southeast and South). In the 2018 presidential elections, cities in the Northeast (such as Salvador) largely opposed Bolsonaro, whereas many cities in the other regions, especially the Central-west, South and Southeast (such as São Paulo) supported him.

Our survey ran from 6 May 2020 to 27 May 2020. A survey company interviewed two hundred people from each city over the phone, with 254 respondents from São Paulo, yielding a total of 1,654 responses. Respondents were selected at random from a sampling frame of hundreds of thousands of landline and mobile phone numbers from those cities. The sample for each city was stratified by sex, age, household income, and education level, to ensure that the survey results were representative of the true population of those cities. Similarly, to ensure as best possible against bias – since individuals who are less fearful of COVID-19 may head out to work whatever the rules, especially in the informal sector – calls were made at different times of day and over weekends, and the survey company was instructed to call back several times those who did not pick up on the first attempt.

While there are many groupings of disadvantaged people in Brazil, two clearly defined groups with numerous members are Afrobrazilians and the poor, and often Afrobrazilians are poor. For different emotions, we present responses to the question, 'When you think about coronavirus, do you feel… ?'. The results are shown as the percentage of respondents who identify as a given racial or ethnic category ('cor' or 'colour' in Portuguese), or are from a stated household-income level, who say they feel the emotion in question. The income categories are displayed in terms of multiples of the Brazilian minimum wage.

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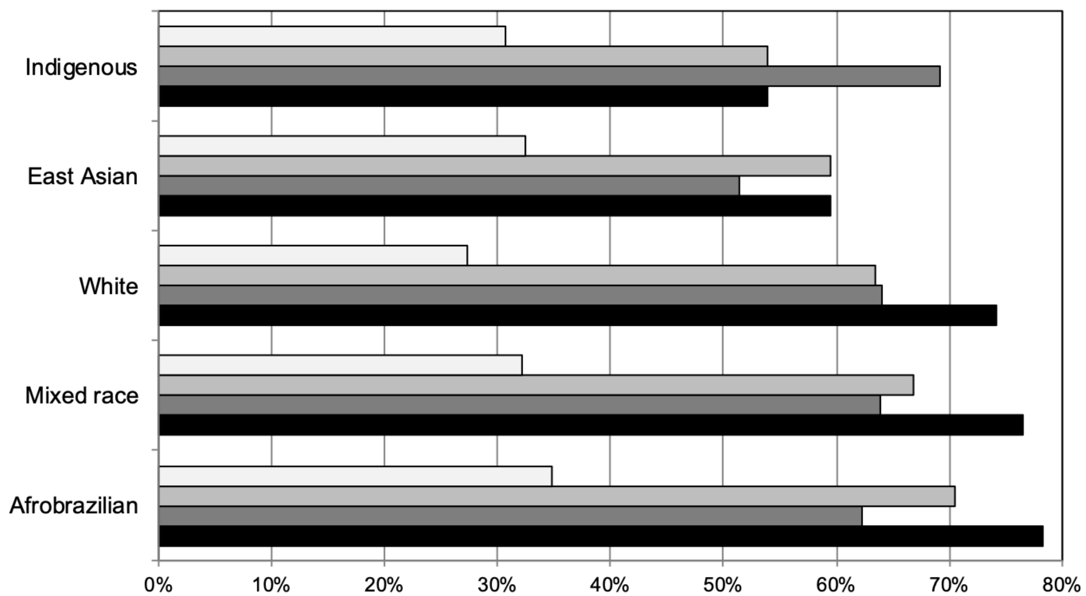
Fear was a widespread emotion in these eight urban areas of Brazil at the time of our survey. The vast majority of all respondents stated that they felt fear when they think about COVID-19. However, a larger percentage of Afrobrazilians in the survey (78.3%) than other racial or ethnic groups (74.6%, taken together) report feeling fear when they think about COVID-19. This difference is not statistically significant in a two-sample t-test, though the standard level of significance ($p \leq 0.05$) is a high bar in this case as Afrobrazilians comprise 17.0% of our sample. Similarly, a larger percentage of respondents living on less than one minimum wage (79.1%), than respondents in other income categories (74.6%), report feeling fear when they think about COVID-19. Again, the result is not statistically significant, yet the lowest income bracket is just 14.4% of the population. One would expect groups at greater risk of disease to experience more fear.

Emotions Experienced by Brazilians of Different Racial or Ethnic Groups When They Think About COVID-19



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cities, the total number of respondents in each category is different. There are especially few indigenous respondents, and as such, the percentages for this category should be interpreted with caution. The number of respondents in each category is: 281 Afrobrazilian, 587 mixed race, 736 white, 37 east Asian, 13 indigenous.

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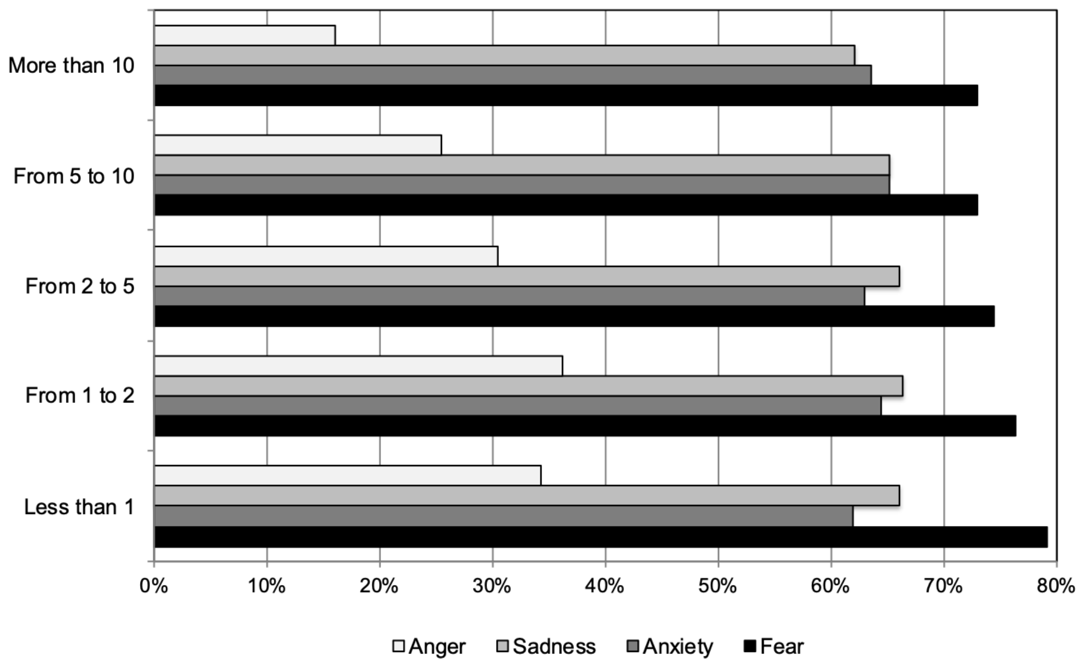
Emotions Experienced by Brazilians of Different Household Income Levels When They Think About COVID-19



The number of respondents in each category is: 239 living on less than 1 minimum wage, 354 living on 1 to 2 minimum wages, 752 living on 2 to 5 minimum wages, 192 living on 5 to 10 minimum wages, and 137 living on more than 10 minimum wages.

Respondents were also asked about whether they had participated in a protest against president Bolsonaro in the previous two weeks. A commonplace form of protest in Brazil – especially when social distancing rules do not allow one to aggregate in the street – is to bang pots and pans at home, typically in unison with your neighbours. This form of protest is known as a panelaço. As the figure below shows, among those participating in a panelaço against the president, the percentage of people who report experiencing fear when they think about coronavirus, is higher than the percentages associated with other reported emotions. Fear associated with COVID-19 in Brazil is not stoked by the president. Those who reject him are most likely to feel it.

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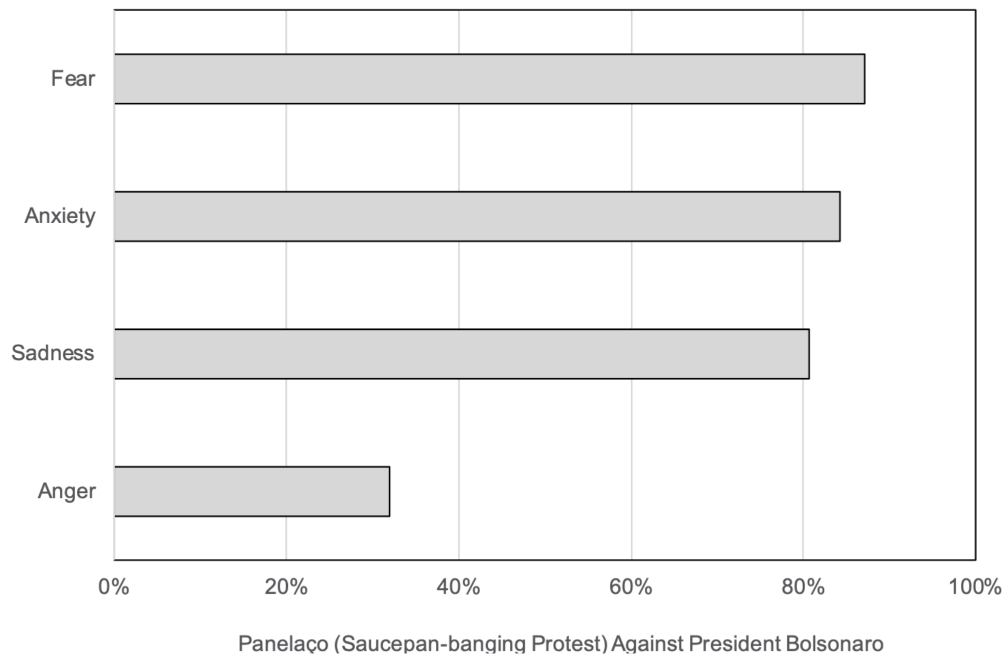
Protest Against the President and Emotions Experienced by Brazilians When They Think About COVID-19



Of the full sample, 108 respondents reported taking part in a panelaço against Bolsonaro.

We further asked respondents about what the government should do in response to COVID-19. The question read: 'For each item, please tell me what you are convinced the government should do. For your answer, it doesn't matter if the government is doing it or not. We want to know your opinions.' Respondents from the most disadvantaged groups were most likely to say that the government should postpone the municipal elections that are due to take place in October, and were most likely to agree that the government should be able to censor media sources giving out false information about COVID-19. Another question asked whether respondents agreed that in principle a government should exaggerate the risk of COVID-19 if it means citizens are more likely to comply with measures to contain the spread of the disease. Again, respondents in the most disadvantaged groups were most likely to agree.

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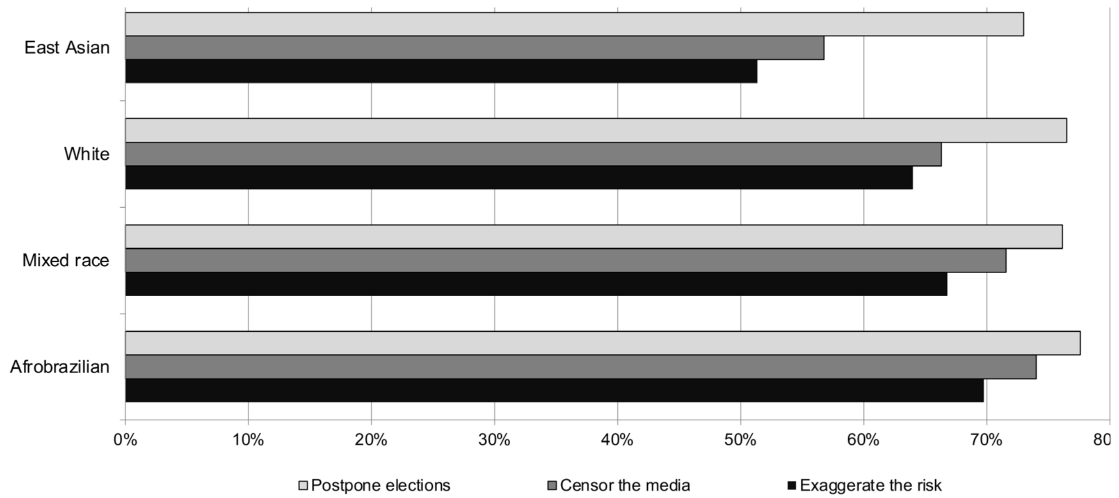
Opinions Expressed by Brazilians of Different Racial or Ethnic Groups



Note that the sample has especially few indigenous respondents, and as such, the percentages for this category should be interpreted with caution. The number of respondents in each category is: 281 Afrobrazilian, 587 mixed race, 736 white, 37 east Asian, 13 indigenous.

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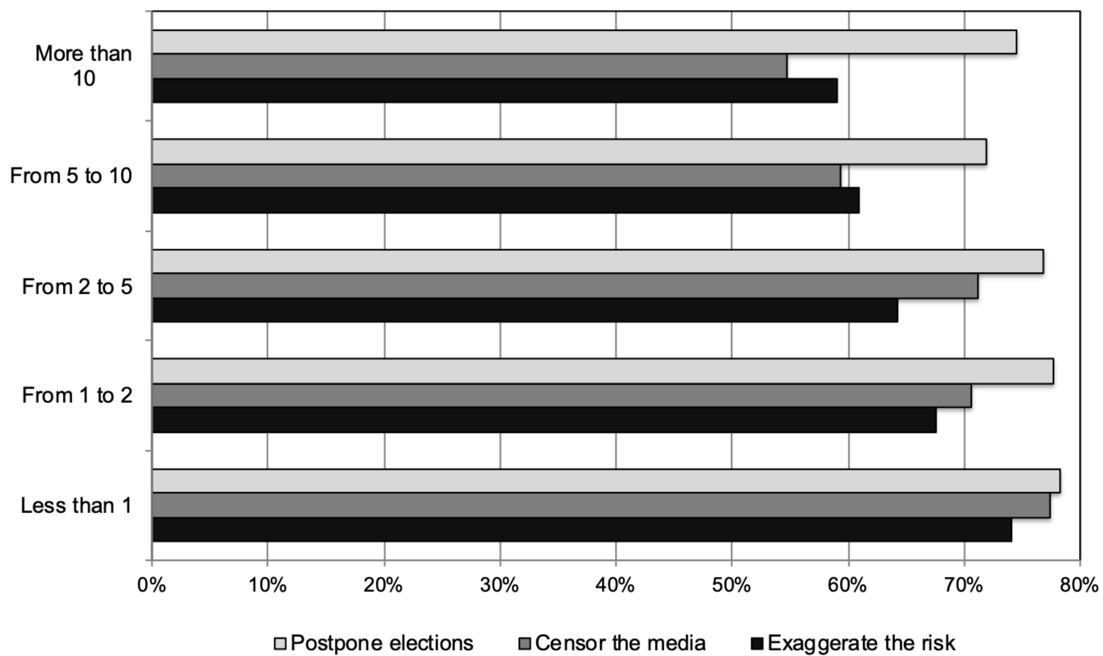
Opinions Expressed by Brazilians of Different Household Income Levels



The number of respondents in each category is: 239 living on less than 1 minimum wage, 354 living on 1 to 2 minimum wages, 752 living on 2 to 5 minimum wages, 192 living on 5 to 10 minimum wages, and 137 living on more than 10 minimum wages.

Taken together, those for whom the thought of COVID-19 brings on feelings of fear are more likely to agree the government should exaggerate the risk of COVID-19 if doing so means citizens comply with measures to control spread ($t = -8.79$; $p < 0.001$). The difference is not as clear when it comes to censoring false information ($t = -1.46$; $p = 0.145$). But, back in May, was stark — highly significant — for postponing the October municipal elections ($t = -4.09$; $p < 0.001$), a postponement which has since happened. This does not bode well for Brazilian democracy. It suggests that such a measure, even though brought in by policymakers whole-heartedly seeking to curb the spread of COVID-19, found support among citizens who were unhappy with Bolsonaro's leadership, rather than objection from them.[1]

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Jonathan Wolff
Alfred Landecker Professor of Values and Public Policy
Blavatnik School of Government
University of Oxford
Email: jonathan.wolff@bsg.ox.ac.uk

David Elitzer
Rabbinical Student
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Email: david.elitzer@huc.edu

Anna Petherick
Departmental Lecturer in Public Policy
Blavatnik School of Government
University of Oxford
Email: anna.petherick@bsg.ox.ac.uk

Maya Tudor
Associate Professor of Government and Public Policy Department of Philosophy and Classics
Blavatnik School of Government
University of Oxford
Email: maya.tudor@bsg.ox.ac.uk

Katie Tyner
Research Associate
The Cohen Group
Email: ktyner@wesleyan.edu

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