

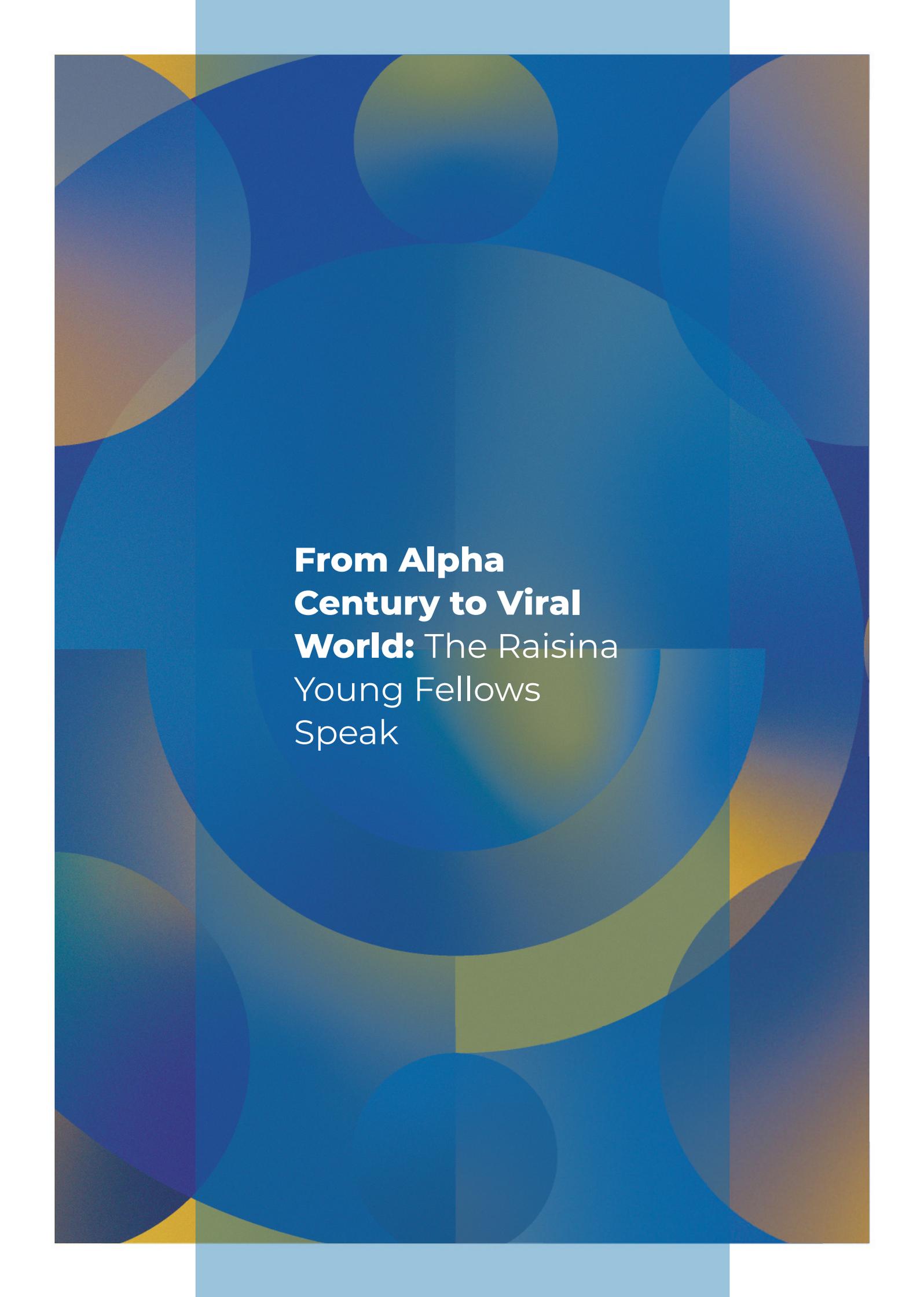


global POLICY

GP - ORF Series

**From Alpha
Century to Viral
World : The Raisina
Young Fellows
Speak**





**From Alpha
Century to Viral
World:** The Raisina
Young Fellows
Speak



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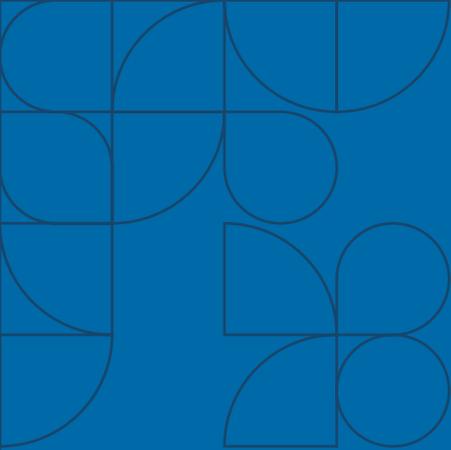
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contents

1

FOREWORD

2

CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- **A Sustainable Internet: Missing Pieces to a Healthy Future** - Cathleen Berger
- **Water Scarcity in the Middle East: Beyond an Environmental Risk** - Vali Golmohammadi
- **Security Implications of Climate Change: The Case of Permafrost Thaw** - Sophie Briquetti
- **Defence Diplomacy and Environmental Security: Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond** - Mélissa Levaillant

3

NEW WORLD ORDER

- **Why the Trading System Needs Even More Multilateralism Today** - Ankai Xu and Nicolás Albertoni
- **Multilaterals as Catalysts for Private Sector Investment in Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure** - Juan-Pablo Martinez-Molina Mercado
- **Europe in the Post-COVID-19 World** - Lucas Maurer
- **Battle of Development Narratives: EU-Africa Relations in the Multipolar World** - Loes Debuysere
- **Long Live Multilateralism** - Nasim Pourghazian

5

TECHNOLOGY

- **Exploring the Prospects for Higher Education** - Utkarsh Amitabh
- **Smart Working in the Way Ahead** - Nicolo Andreula
- **Is Hydrogen the Answer to Global Electromobility Woes?** - Krzysztof Michalski
- **Democracy: Debugging in Process** - Suneera Madhok

4

DEMOCRACY (AND POPULISM)

- **The Complicated Relationship Between Liberalism And Democracy** - Jan Hornat
- **Reversing the Wedge between Liberalism and Democracy in the Strongmen** - Era Joanna Micah Eufemio
- **The Infiltration by New Right and the Threats to Our Political Culture** - Franziska Fislage
- **The Borders That Bind Us** - Mitali Mukherjee and Patrick Sandoval

6

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

1

FOREWORD



The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and ZEIT-Stiftung are delighted to publish this compilation of essays titled, *From Alpha Century to Viral World: The Raisina Young Fellows Speak*. This is a result of the intellectual generosity of and contributions by the Raisina Young Fellows, class of 2020. They joined us from across the globe in January last year for a ten-day policy workshop in New Delhi, participated at the Raisina Dialogue, and became part of our Young Fellows community at a time when the world was still oblivious to the pandemic that was already upon it.

This collection of essays has been scripted by the contributors while battling the COVID-19 pandemic, even as we were all grappling with its implications on our personal and professional lives and reconfiguring our future passions and future pursuits. This volume is motivated by the theme of Raisina Dialogue 2020, “Alpha Century”, and, in some ways, bookends the upcoming Raisina Dialogue 2021, titled, “#ViralWorld”. These thought-provoking 17 essays compel us to engage with four important spheres of our existence that seek urgent inquiry and dialogue—climate and sustainability, the new world order, democracy and pluralism, and technology and digital societies.

With its wide scope, this publication puts forth ideas and themes that would be central to the post-pandemic era. From the future of liberalism and democracy to the insidious and increasingly overwhelming presence of technology in our daily lives, these thought pieces were written by young leaders of today, and they provoke us to appreciate that these disruptions implicate and announce the demise of the extant international order and signal the urgent need for a novel format of multi-stakeholderism and, indeed, multilateralism. These essays look beyond the rhetoric, the popular trends and hashtags, and help agitate ideas that allow us to re-invest in a world that works for all—across politics, sustainability and international relations.

As part of the Raisina Young Fellows 2020 programme, the Dean and Chair, Dr Shashi Tharoor and Dr Samir Saran, had presented and released their co-authored book, titled, *The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative*, motivated by the ten years of discussions and debates hosted at this programme. The book had highlighted the extent of the disorder and the failure of the global international system to detect, respond, and manage multiple crises since its establishment post the Second World



War. COVID-19 was to brutally corroborate many of the conclusions of the book by exposing the incapacity of the world to respond to the pandemic, the weaponisation of global trade, the selfish and perverse hunt for medical devices and solutions, and, indeed, more recently vaccine nationalism. Most importantly, it told us the story of the incapability of the international system to hold bad actors to account. The current state of affairs and its early resolution is not just an “Indian imperative”, as the book suggests, we require a new global imperative and universal ambition to find solutions to the formidable challenges and planet-wide inadequacies that confront humankind.

Can global institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) redeem themselves and honour their mandate of serving the global community? Can we partner beyond borders and find solutions and pathways that serve us all? Can we truly aspire to the ideal of one “global village”? Can we finally devise an approach for the greater good of all when it comes to our well-being and progress—from climate change to healthcare, from technology to infrastructure, from employment to social protection for every individual? We have a chance to respond to these posers now. Can one humanity emerge intact and victorious from a pandemic that has ravaged us as a collective?

But, most importantly, will the pandemic awaken us to the havoc ‘systemic risks’ pose? In October 2019, the Global Health Security Index (1) had projected the UK and US as the “most prepared countries” to tackle an epidemic or a pandemic; in 2020, we cruelly learnt reality differs from reports as both these countries lie in tatters. Similarly, our financial and credit systems prevent us from investing in climate mitigation efforts in the developing world. If we aim to preserve the integrity and viability of our planet, will we finally devise a system where climate risk supersedes the credit risk assessment of bankers in New York, Paris, and London as they invest in infrastructure for the future?

The pandemic sounded not only a wakeup call, but it also was an early warning siren for the doomsday clock as it ticks towards midnight (2). The young leaders who have contributed to this volume have written with the intention of appealing to our individual and collective conscience, and, indeed, call upon us to halt the march of this doomsday clock. As we enter this Decade of Action, we, as residents of planet earth, have this last window to turn back time and save millions from climate-induced disasters and destruction; unlike the pandemic, we will have no vaccine to redeem us then.



We, team ORF and team ZEIT-Stiftung, would like to acknowledge these important contributions made by Jan Hornát, Joanna Micah Eufemio, Franziska Fislage, Patrick Sandoval, Mitali Mukherjee, Utkarsh Amitabh, Nicolò Andreula, Krzysztof Michalski, Suneera Madhok, Ankai Xu, Nicholas Albertoni, Juan-Pablo Martinez-Molina Mercado, Lucas Maurer, Loes Debuysere, Nasim Pourghazian, Vali Golmohammadi, Sophie Briquetti, Méliissa Levailant, and Cathleen Berger. It is our hope that this publication initiates conversations on these very important questions, guided by the adage of *Per aspera, ad astra*—through hardships to the stars. We are confident that the ideas contained in this compilation prove useful to students, practitioners, amateurs, aficionados, policy makers, and budding entrepreneurs alike to walk the motto *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—the world is one family.

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Endnotes

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2

CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

2.1

A Sustainable Internet: Missing Pieces to a Healthy Future

—
Cathleen Berger

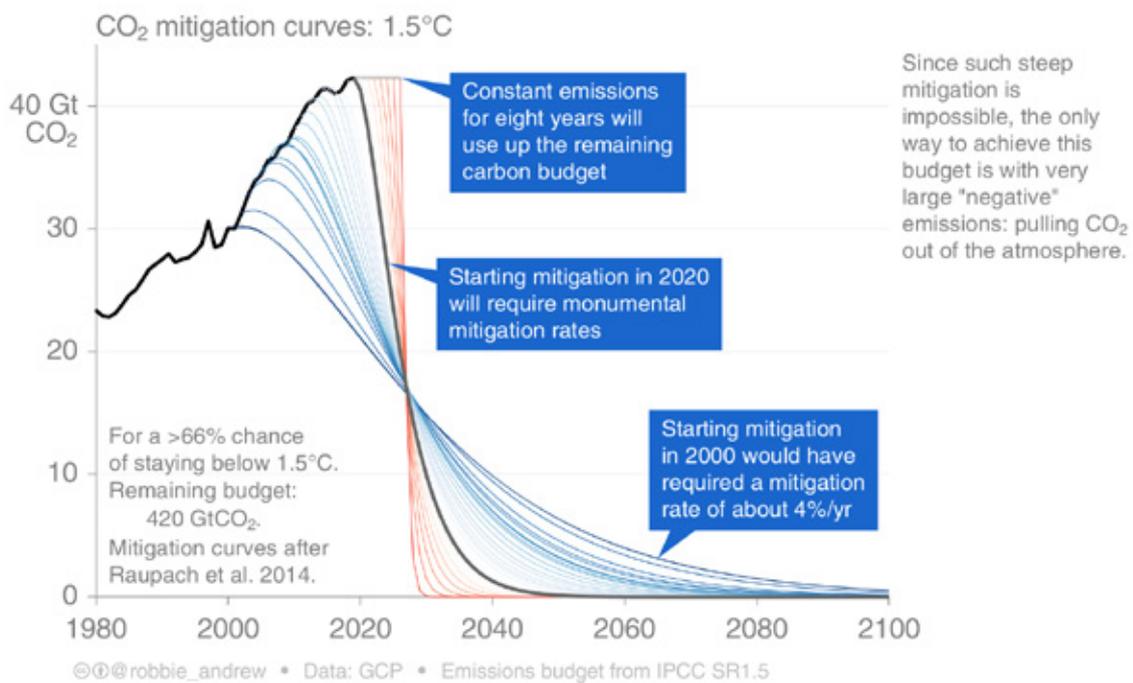


The world is in a climate crisis, and the predictions for how fast change is coming are getting gloomier. The World Meteorological Organization’s (1) most recent annual update on the five-year trajectory for climate change highlights that, until 2024, there is a ~70 percent chance that one or more months will be at least 1.5°C warmer than preindustrial levels and a ~20 percent chance that this will be true for a whole year (2). In other words, there is increasing evidence that we will be hitting the tipping point for irreversible change much sooner than anticipated and accounted for in the 2016 Paris Agreement (3).

To prevent the worst, we need a transformation, and technology has a role to play.

Most climate projections stipulate that even with the most ambitious policy and industry efforts, we will be very hard-pressed to stay within the liveable limits of 1.5°C of global heating. The Global Carbon Project graph captures the scope of this challenge by visualising how steep the curve of mitigation needs to be now (see Figure 1). Mitigation efforts starting in 2020 must drop from 40 GtCO₂ to less than half in only five years. It is a monumental transformation.

Figure 1: Mitigation curves for 1.5°C



Source: Global Carbon Project/Robbie Andrew (CCo BY 4.0)



Most projections refer to “new technologies” or “technological breakthroughs” as part of their assumptions. In some cases, the emphasis is on carbon capture and storage (CCS). In others, the options are left more vague (4), acknowledging that: a) we have yet to develop CCS at scale and b) we do not yet know the impacts of CCS tech. Some studies indicate that it may come with unwanted environmental repercussions, similar to negative repercussions of techniques such as fracking (5).

So yes, we need technology.

But we also need more research into the consequences and long-term sustainability of relevant technologies to avoid fixing fatal wounds with Band-Aids.

The Internet’s Role

It is particularly striking that the one technology that often underlies and powers the research and many of the solutions, has critically undiscussed environmental impacts—the internet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has yet again highlighted the potential and the necessity of the internet as a fundamental technology in today’s world. Sustainability is the interconnection of three elements—social connection, economic wellbeing, and a healthy environment.

From that lens, we have been reminded that the internet is often a lifeline for social connection, certainly in times of physical distancing. It is the primary means to conduct business for those of us that are not on the essential frontlines, allowing many people to work remotely, provide online services, and monetisation. Hence, the internet is a critical vehicle to safeguard economic wellbeing. However, to be sustainable, the internet also needs to assess, mitigate, and live up to its responsibilities for a healthy environment—an element of the equation that is too often neglected. What is the internet’s environmental impact and what would it take for it to be sustainable?

Measuring and comparing results from different studies on the internet’s environmental impact is tricky and builds on a range of varying technical assumptions. Here are some facts and figures to assess the internet’s carbon footprint.



Online Advertising

The average internet user of 2019 was served 1,700 banner adverts per month (6). With an estimated 4.6 billion people online (7), there were approximately 8 trillion banner ads displayed each month. In 2018, a study (8) evaluated that the carbon footprint of online advertising constituted 10 percent of the total CO₂ emissions of the internet, looking at 2016. In 2016, this meant roughly 106.59 Terra Watthour of energy, which equals approximately 60.28 million metric tons of CO₂ emissions (MtCO₂e). These numbers are likely to have grown since then. Yet, even with this conservative estimate, this would mean 301 MtCO₂e from 2016 to 2020 and almost 1 GtCO₂e until 2030 (out of the remaining global carbon budget of 307 GtCO₂e (9)) for online advertising alone.

Research (10) shows that online advertising only has a success rate of one purchase per million ad impressions. Is it a worthwhile investment?

Connected Devices

There are currently around 30 billion devices connected to the internet (11), or about three to four devices per person across the global population. Geographically, it equates to roughly 13 devices per person in North America and one to three devices per person in Asia and Africa.

In addition, another 14 billion devices through machine-to-machine connections (12), like connected cars or smart meters, must also be accounted for.

These devices also contribute to the internet's environmental impact. According to the 2017 Greenpeace Clicking Green report (13), the information and communication technology sector was estimated to consume around 12 percent of global electricity demands, with connected devices making up between 30 percent and 40 percent of that share.

Even socks can be connected to the internet (14), checking your body temperature and pausing your streaming experience when you fall asleep. Video streaming, a whole category in and of itself, is estimated to amount to nearly a million minutes of video content every second by 2021 (15). Or, as the 2017 Greenpeace Clicking Green report notes: "Video streaming is a tremendous driver of data demand, with 63% of global internet traffic in 2015, and is projected to reach 80% by 2020" (16). YouTube is also in the running for most-used service globally (17). Even if the improved energy



efficiency of data centres and processing is slowing the growth of online streaming's environmental impact (18), its overall consequences cannot be ignored.

Apart from energy use and contribution to data traffic (data being collected, processed, analysed and stored), all of these devices need to be assessed with a view to their life cycles, including manufacturing, production, distribution and disposal (19). Most devices contain rare earth elements (20), which are mined under questionable circumstances and are difficult to dispose sustainably.

Artificial Intelligence

While often used as a catch-all phrase for automation, we only need to look at a few examples of machine-learning to highlight that the current implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) has a significant environmental cost.

Research has shown that training popular natural language processing AI models (21) produced the same CO₂ as flying roughly 300 times between Munich, Germany, and Accra in Ghana. One of the models looked at is called GPT-2 (22). In June 2020, OpenAI released GPT-3 (23), a model that is exponentially bigger than its predecessor. GPT-3 builds on 175 billion parameters, compared to the 2019 GPT-2 model, based on 1.5 billion parameters.

Models like GPT-2 were estimated to require 626,155 pounds of CO₂, which equals 284 mtCO₂e or 704,762 miles driven in an average car (24). We are yet to calculate the equivalent for the newer GPT-3.

Moreover, when assessing these huge data processing capacities, we also have to consider data centres, “the factories of the digital age” (25), that consume around 2 percent of electricity worldwide (26). Data centres occupy extensive surfaces of land and put significant strain on global water resources (27), a factor that is not consistently reflected in the sustainability reports of big service providers.

As Rob Toews put it in a recent *Forbes* piece (28):

“The “bigger is better” ethos that currently dominates the AI research agenda threatens to inflict major environmental damage in the years ahead. Thoughtful, bold change is needed to set the field of artificial intelligence on a more sustainable and productive trajectory.”



Whether that means investing in tiny AI (29), local implementations or reassessing cost-benefits with an eye towards sustainability, there is tremendous room for improvement.

Additional Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The story does not end with online advertising, connected devices and AI. The internet is also grabbling with legacy code, spam, increasing website weight, data mining and proof-of-work blockchain implementations, or simply an abundance of useless and outdated data.

Without too much detail on these, consider that in 2019, approximately 158 billion spam emails were sent, which amounts to roughly 55 percent (30) of all email traffic and an average of 0.3g CO₂e per message (31). Fake social media accounts add to the size of the problem; for example, in 2019 Facebook removed 2.2 billion fake accounts in the first quarter of the year alone (32). Each active profile is estimated to account for 281 grams of CO₂e (33). And while different implementations of blockchain may have potential, the technology is mostly known as the system powering Bitcoin and other digital cryptocurrencies. This proof-of-work implementation requires huge amounts of electricity and in 2019, researchers from the Technical University of Munich and Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated Bitcoin's emissions at 22-22.9 MtCO₂e per year (34).

It is abundantly clear that we need a reset. We need to slow emissions and contribute to the sort of transformation required to stay within the liveable limits of global heating.

Different Future is Possible

If you are feeling overwhelmed, you are not alone. We are learning that sending signals to the market that actively push for better protections and sustainable alternatives is really hard if you cannot picture what such a future will look like.

We need images. We need a vision. We need creativity. And a new trend.

Imagine this: (35)

We are in 2050.



Welcome to the Museum of the Fossilized Internet. Opened in 2050, it looks back at the obscure practices of the internet of 2020.

Gasp at the horrors of surveillance capitalism. Nod knowingly at the plague of spam. Be baffled at the size of AI training data or the reckless excess of data-mining and lament the binge culture of video streaming. These practices are now outdated.

Looking at the main carbon emitters of the internet of 2020 (some captured above) can help us imagine a better world. Visualising a utopia is the first step to making smart decisions to push for change.

We must address each of these to help tackle the climate crisis. But we do not have to tackle all of them alone or by ourselves. It is a collective effort, one in which everyone can have a positive impact and make the necessary change.

Going Forward

At this point, carbon capture and storage, or similar alternatives, will be necessary to make up for lost time in reduction and mitigation efforts; however, they are not a panacea.

We still need to do our homework and change some habits.

Greenhouse gas emissions assessments (36) should be common practice. These should feed into efforts such as the global carbon tracker (37) to increase transparency and accountability for everyone.

If the idea of the global transformation of societies and markets seems daunting, break it down into little steps (38) and understand your actions as part of a collective (39). Switch energy providers, download instead of stream, repair rather than buy new devices, send fewer emails (40)—everyone must do this together. It is a commitment, not a one-off. Increasing awareness must be a constant effort, for instance, through tools like Carbonalyser.

You can also support your city to take the lead (41) where national governments may be lagging behind, or engage your co-workers to nudge your company in the right direction (42).



Ultimately, when looking at tools that most of us use every day, like the internet, we need to take a step back and consider their larger impact. It is about changing our mindsets (43), and then meeting people where they are and bringing them along.

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2.2

Water Scarcity in the Middle East: Beyond an Environmental Risk

—
Vali Golmohammadi



The Middle East region is currently facing simultaneous security, climate change and water scarcity crises. Water scarcity is a pressing environmental issue in the Middle East and is increasingly becoming an additional source of conflict in the already unstable region. The region's annual internal water resources amount to only 6 percent of its average annual precipitation, against a world average of 38 percent (1). Home to about 6 percent of the world's population, it has just 1 percent of the world's freshwater resources. Nearly two-thirds of the region's population live in areas that lack sufficient renewable water resources, and over 60 percent live in areas with high surface water stress compared to the global average of about 35 percent (2). Meanwhile, nearly 70 percent of the Middle East's economic activities are conducted in areas of high or very high water stress, more than three times the global average of 22 percent (3). Despite the recent advances in water supply technology and management, extreme scarcity, poor governance, changing hydrology and ascending demands in different sectors are driving the overexploitation of the region's scarce water resources. The high subsidies undermine incentives for efficient water management.

Although the Middle East has remarkable transboundary freshwater resources, the lack of mutual concession on water allocation in shared rivers and aquifers add a layer of complexity and potential conflict to the water scarcity situation in the region. Freshwater from the region's main transboundary rivers—the Tigris-Euphrates, the Nile and the Jordan—are used for agricultural, industrial and domestic purposes at unsustainable volumes. However, most water policy measures are aimed at increasing access through further exploitation of aquifers or desalination of seawater, rather than at saving water and ensuring efficient management (4).

The worsening water scarcity situation undermines human security and contributes to factors that increase the risks from violence, fragility and conflict, leading to insecurity and displacement throughout the Middle East. As a conflict-ridden regional system, Middle East geopolitics is characterised by failed states, political instability, forced displacement, military conflicts and chronic insecurity. Over the past decades, potential causes of insecurity have widened and diversified considerably in the region. Apart from traditional sources of tensions, socioeconomic and environmental issues increasingly contribute to causing and fueling conflict in the turbulent Middle East (5). As trends in the region demonstrate, water scarcity combined with massive



population growth and urbanisation is the most pressing environmental issue in the Middle East and is increasingly becoming an additional source of conflict in an already unstable region.

Power Asymmetry and Struggle for Hydro-Hegemony

As a strategic asset, water is no longer only linked to environmental issues and food security but also plays a critical role in regional security arrangements. States view water as a means for political leverage and as a source of power. Water in the Middle East is a source of state power, and water scarcity is highly intertwined with national security (6). Many scholars have noted that conflicts over transboundary waters cannot be interpreted without understanding the power relations and the significance of upstream-downstream positioning of the competing or conflicting states (7).

Historically, although power asymmetry is the main reason for the absence of wars in transboundary waters, it is also an important obstacle in adopting common measures and cooperative mechanisms in the basin for managing water scarcity. The severe imbalance of power among riparian states leads to an asymmetric allocation of transboundary waters and the absence of war does not imply the absence of conflict in the basin (8). In the Middle East, the hydro-political conflict has occurred when downstream states are weak and unable to adapt to water scarcity, and where the relative strength is extremely asymmetric—for example, between Israel and Palestine or Turkey and Iraq.

According to the framework of hydro-hegemony—an analytical structure to study how hegemony and power asymmetries influence transboundary water politics—relative power imbalance inevitably leads to hydro-hegemony in the basin, in which a superior power controls water flows and forces weaker states to follow its instructions (9). Power in its greatest form determines who the hegemon is. The hegemon has an asymmetric capacity to coerce a weaker state and writes the agenda for all riparian states within the river basin. Apart from the geographical position, the framework suggests that the use of force and consent tied together with the enforcement of rules on a basin is a stronger determinant than international laws on the non-navigational use of international watercourses or riparian position. Upstream states use water to garner more power, while downstream countries use power to source more water—Turkey, for instance, is an upstream hegemon; Ethiopia is an upstream state but is not a hegemon; Egypt, on the other hand, is a downstream hegemon. In this context, the international water law has been



manipulated by the powerful riparian for power expression and to urge compliance (10).

In asymmetric circumstances, when the upstream state is the basin's hegemon, cooperation is least likely to materialise. In contrast, when the downstream state is the basin's hegemon, cooperation is likely to proceed, yet the agreement is often imposed along the benefits of the stronger riparian (11). For example, the strategic location and hydro-hegemony of Turkey on the Euphrates and Tigris, and Israel on the Jordan River allow the countries to maintain an upper hand over Syria and Iraq, and Palestine, respectively. Although power relations of basin states evolve through coexisting, conflictual and cooperative interactions, efficient transboundary water management that facilitates cooperation is hard to attain. In the context of asymmetric power in the basin, where water governance is applied as water is perceived as a public good, the hydro-hegemon dictates the mechanism of cooperative adaptation to the weaker riparian in a coercive engagement. Under the running asymmetries in power over the region's main transboundary rivers—the Tigris, Euphrates and the Jordan—the weak downstream riparian states are apparently unable to change the arrangements, which leaves no room for negotiation and reconciliation while escalating the rising water conflict in the Middle East.

Beyond Borders: Emerging International Security Threat

Transboundary water arrangements are inherently political and determined by the broader social-security context of riparian states. In the Middle East, which continuously suffers from chronic disorder, water supply systems are increasingly becoming both political lever and objectives of strategic action as states perceive access to water as an issue of national security. Therefore, the maldistribution of transboundary freshwater combined with growing populations and urbanisation, the absence of the rule of international water law and dwindling water resources demonstrate that water is becoming an increasingly critical trigger of interstate politics and conflict. In semi-arid zones such as the Middle East, war over water is highly probable as the hydro-hegemony is building massive dams over shared rivers, effectively weaponising water to achieve their strategic interests.

In recent decades, Turkey has pursued the vast and ambitious Southeastern Anatolia Project that entails the construction of 22 dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, curtailing nearly 80 percent of water flow into Iraq and Syria (12). For Turkey, hydro-dams are not just sources of energy and revenue, but potent levers of geopolitical pressure to shape the security arrangements in the Levant and



Iraq, aimed at Kurdish politics. By controlling 90 percent and 44 percent, respectively, of the water flows of the Euphrates and the Tigris, Ankara refuses to be bound by international treaties and dismisses its neighbours' demands for a formal water-sharing agreement to regulate the flows in the basin (13). Given the backdrop of political tensions arising from Turkey's incursions into northern Syria and Iraq, there is also a risk that Ankara will increasingly use water as a weapon in a future conflict with its regional rivals and neighbours.

The situation is similar in the Nile and the Jordan transboundary basin; Egypt and Israel have been manipulating ongoing turmoil to push their ambitious agenda to be regional hydro-hegemony (14). Power asymmetry in the Jordan River basin and advanced technology enables Israel to seize the water resources in Palestine and neighbouring Arab countries, as water can be used as a determinant lever in Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank. Apart from being used as a domination tool, water conflict has indeed been the main trigger in wars, such as the Six Day War in 1967. A growing number of studies also show that water scarcity, drought and climate change have played a direct role in the deterioration of Syrian socioeconomic conditions and violent civil war, as well as the emergence of extremist armed groups in Iraq or Syria, such as ISIS (15).

Water scarcity in the Middle East is an issue of global importance, transforming conflict among riparian states into key regional and international security concerns. Water scarcity is a threat multiplier and its socioeconomic effects have serious implications for international security—aggravating factors can lead to massive displacement and migration flows, pressing concerns for food security, environmental degradation, political instability, social insurgency, state failure, interstate violent conflict and the re-emergence of extremism and terrorism, with all capable of triggering domino effects outside the region.

International communities and water-related institutions should initiate and advocate a constructive political dialogue among the riparian states, aiming at international cooperation to pave the way for sustainable solutions to water scarcity in the Middle East. To initiate an effective international cooperation and reconciliation, water scarcity in the region should first be recognised as the most worrisome security threat due to its profound destabilising potential and domino effects. Multilateral initiatives should be built upon the establishment of transboundary water resource management agreements, which help navigate local political barriers and may lead to the adoption of an integrated framework to manage water demand and supply in the longer term.



While cooperation and negotiation may not be welcomed by all riparian states, the constructive involvement of foreign powers and institutions can balance the negotiating field in the basin, encourage hydro-hegemons to consider water as a public good and facilitate an effective transboundary water governance in the Middle East. Along with recalibrating national water strategies and management by riparian states, water diplomacy is likely to become increasingly determinant. To do so, the international community and institutions, like the European Union, can provide financial and technical support to boost cross-border cooperation. They can moderate and facilitate negotiations among riparian nations, initiate and lead regional cooperation platforms and monitor the implementation of treaties as a third party.

If current trends persist, there is a significant risk of imminent conflicts and wars over water in this region, with vast spillover impacts. The international community must act now.

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2.3

Security Implications of Climate Change: The Case of Permafrost Thaw

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In recent years, the world has seen more extreme manifestations of climate change, from rising sea levels to heatwaves, floods and hurricanes. Permafrost thaw is one such extreme condition, termed by the United Nations (UN) as one of the five most significant emerging environmental issues in 2019 (1). As discussions on climate change are likely to intensify in the coming years, it is important to understand why permafrost thaw matters and what it means for policymaking—a powerful illustration that environmental issues can have wide-ranging and serious implications for international security.

What is Permafrost?

Permafrost is the ground below the Earth's surface that remains continuously frozen for at least two consecutive years, with parts dating back thousands of years, and at depths ranging from a few metres to over one kilometre (2). It covers 25 percent of the Northern Hemisphere and 17 percent of the Earth's exposed land surface (3). It is mainly found in the Arctic region, present beneath about 80 percent of Alaska, 50 percent of Canada and 60 percent of Russia, among others. It is also present in high mountains across the world, such as the Alps, the Himalayas and the Andes (4).

Permafrost has three main characteristics. First, it acts as a gigantic freezer for the Earth. Vast amounts of organic matter, including remnants of dead plants, animals, microbes and viruses, have accumulated and remain frozen underground (5). Permafrost is also believed to be the Earth's largest reservoir of carbon and mercury, containing about 1,600 billion tons of carbon—twice the quantity of gas currently in the atmosphere (6)—and about 1,660 billion grammes of mercury—twice the quantity of mercury present in the oceans, the atmosphere and all other land combined (7).

Second, permafrost is sensitive to several factors, particularly climate change and rising temperatures. This is especially true for Arctic permafrost. With the Arctic region warming twice or thrice as fast as the global average, permafrost is thawing rapidly, often for the first time in thousands of years. Current projections are alarming. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN body assessing the science related to climate change, 25 percent of permafrost could thaw by 2100 if global warming is limited to well below 2°C—a figure that could go up to



70 percent if greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase at the current rate (8). In other words, permafrost is thawing almost overnight (9).

Lastly, permafrost can thaw in two ways—steadily because of warmer air temperatures, or suddenly and unpredictably when it contains large pockets of ice that melt within it. The latter leads to an abrupt collapse of thawing soil, creating vast craters, lakes, wetlands, landslides, eroding mountains and coastlines (10), all of which is seen in many permafrost areas today. In the Lena delta in northeast Siberia, about 15 metres of the riverbanks crumble every year due to permafrost erosion (11).

Why Permafrost Thaw Matters for Security

Civilian and military infrastructure in regions with permafrost face a direct threat due to ongoing and potential future thawing. In the Alps, permafrost thaw will likely damage many high mountain infrastructures, including the avalanche control systems that are essential for the safety of locals and tourists (12). In the Arctic, where several countries have military bases, fire stations have collapsed, roads and houses have become unstable, and some coastal communities have been forced to relocate to safer areas (13). About 70 percent of all infrastructure in the Arctic is in areas where permafrost thaw is projected to intensify by 2050 (14). The risk is particularly high for oil and gas infrastructure in the region. Up to 45 percent of Russia's Arctic hydrocarbon extraction fields could be severely damaged by 2050, and several pipelines would be at considerable risk, such as the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline and gas pipelines from the Yamal-Nenets region (northwest Siberia). The risk would also be high for the US's Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TASP). For example, over 30 percent of ESPO and over 40 percent of TASP pipelines are located in areas where permafrost is projected to thaw by 2050 (15). In 2020, permafrost thaw weakened the foundations of a storage tank in Arctic Russia, causing a major fuel spill (16), and is affecting US Army installations in Alaska (17). Researchers predict that the worst is still to come.

Permafrost-degraded infrastructure could have wider implications, including on energy security. TASP is critical to Alaska's economy and an important pillar of US energy security; its production could be boosted by large oil deposits recently discovered in other parts of Alaska (18). Similarly, the Yamal-Nenets and ESPO pipelines are important to the energy security and hydrocarbon industry of Russia, the world's second-largest gas and oil exporter. In the last decade, ESPO has helped diversify Russia's oil exports routes against the backdrop of increased tensions with the West (19). These pipelines matter for international players too—Yamal-Nenets



provides most of the gas the European Union (EU) imports from Russia (nearly 40 percent of the EU's total gas imports in 2019 (20)), while ESPO provides a significant amount of crude oil to Asia-Pacific markets, particularly to China, Japan and South Korea.

Thawing permafrost could potentially lead to serious human security challenges. When thawing, permafrost releases its long-buried elements into the environment, which can be dangerous—its organic gas is converted into greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide and the extremely potent methane), its mercury can be toxic for humans and animals, and its thousand-year-old viruses can have unknown or forgotten effects (21) (22). In 2016 in Siberia, thawing permafrost exposed to the surface a 70-year-old reindeer carcass infected with anthrax, killing a child and affecting several other people (23). As these elements become mobile, once in the environment, permafrost thaw could threaten people in the region and beyond.

These permafrost-induced human security challenges could have broader security implications. More mercury could increase the risk of food insecurity as fish may no longer be safe to eat if carbon emissions continue at current rates (24), potentially leading to competition over resources among affected populations. As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, the release and spread of unknown viruses could have disastrous economic, social and geopolitical impacts for large parts of the world, all negatively affecting security. By releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (known as the 'permafrost carbon feedback' (25)) permafrost thaw could significantly accelerate global warming (26). This could potentially contribute to other climate-related security challenges, such as the opening of an Arctic commercial passage, soon made possible by the melting of the polar ice cap.

What Permafrost Thaw Means for Policymaking

With its wide-ranging implications for security, what does the thawing of permafrost mean for policymakers? Three main lessons stand out.

Firstly, permafrost thaw is a critical factor for climate change discussions and targets. Despite some disagreements on the numbers, researchers estimate that permafrost thaw (particularly abrupt thawing, which releases methane) could release a significant amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, adding up to 0.29°C by 2100 if global warming continues unabated (27). Some view it as a potential tipping point that could trigger an uncontrollable vicious cycle for the planet—the more permafrost releases carbon, the more it exacerbates climate change, which in turn would lead to a



further release of permafrost carbon, and so on (28). Even as scientists tried to better understand a number of key complex factors—for instance, how much methane will be released and the role of plants in offsetting the process—the IPCC did not include permafrost carbon emissions into its projections until 2018. As a result, many IPCC forecasts underestimated the extent of global warming, including those used to develop the 2015 Paris Agreement targets, which set to limit global warming to well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels, and if possible to 1.5°C (29). Going forward, the climate action plans that all the Paris Agreement countries committed to submit every five years should provide a good opportunity to account for the impact of permafrost thaw, as scientists further improve their understanding of it.

Secondly, permafrost thaw demonstrates that climate change is not only an environmental issue—it can also have real security implications, either directly or as a ‘threat multiplier’. Similar to conventional security threats like military capacity and nuclear proliferation, or newer ones such as terrorism and cyber-attacks, climate change can help policymakers understand the security situation of countries and regions (30). In this vein, an increasing number of national governments (including defence ministries) and international organisations have integrated climate change into their security assessments, structures and policies, and some militaries have started to adapt to climate change, from doctrines to equipment and operational training (see MéliSSa Levallant’s essay in this compendium). Other organisations are considering addressing the security implications of climate change, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as part of its forward-looking reflection process (‘NATO2030’) (31) (32). However, discussing climate change in the security-focused UN Security Council is still a controversial matter due to member states’ diverging opinions (33).

The third lesson derives from the previous one—immediate actions can curb climate change and reduce security challenges. In the case of permafrost, policymakers can reduce global emissions to slow permafrost thaw (mitigation), make current and future infrastructures more resilient to its thaw (adaptation), and work with other affected countries, the private sector and civil society to share best practices and increase climate capacity building (cooperation). In addition to reducing permafrost carbon release, these actions could reduce the security challenges associated with its thaw. If taken rapidly, they could halve the severe costs resulting from this process (up to USD 70 trillion if nothing is done, and about 25 trillion if actions are taken to limit warming to 1.5°C) (34). The example of mitigation is a case in point—limiting global warming at 1.5°C by 2100 (instead of 2°C) could save 2 million square kilometres of permafrost (35), protecting many people and infrastructure in the future. Permafrost



thaw is thus not an irreversible tipping point for now, as mitigation can slow it down (36). Yet the challenge is enormous. Achieving this 1.5°C goal will mean eliminating greenhouse gas emissions completely by 2050 (37) or even by 2044, according to studies accounting for the most recent discoveries on permafrost thaw (38). With 126 countries representing only 51 percent of global greenhouse emissions that had adopted, announced or considered this mid-century target (39), the December 2020 Climate Ambition Summit revealed that much work remains to be done to achieve this target by 2050 – let alone an earlier deadline.

Conclusion

Particularly sensitive to climate change, permafrost is thawing rapidly in many parts of the world. In addition to environmental consequences, permafrost thaw carries significant and multi-faceted security implications—direct and indirect, ongoing and potential, local and global. It is thus an excellent example illustrating that climate change and security are closely intertwined, and that combating climate change now can also mean reducing current and potential security challenges. Five years after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the issue of permafrost thaw is likely to gain importance on policymakers' agenda. Stronger actions will be required to implement the Paris targets, as science makes further progress on permafrost thaw, and as its security repercussions will likely be felt worldwide.

The views expressed in this essay are the author's personal views and do not necessarily represent the those of the organisation she works for.

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2.4

Defence Diplomacy and Environmental Security: Cooperation in the Indo- Pacific and Beyond

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Mélissa Levailant



The strategic implications of climate change for international security have been well documented by academics, multilateral organisations and state institutions over the last twenty years. Formal debates on the complex relationship between environmental degradation, climate change and international security were first initiated by the United Kingdom at the United Nations (UN) Security Council in 2007 (1). In 2008, the Solana Report on Climate Change and International Security, written by the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, was presented to the European Council (2). Countries like the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, the UK and the Netherlands have included climate change in their national defence strategies (3). This evolution has, however, not resulted in any significant change in international cooperation in the area. As rivalries between countries grow and multilateralism weakens, the need for international cooperation to overcome such global challenges has never been more pressing. France's experience in the Indo-Pacific showcases avenues of cooperation in environmental security and provides lessons for all.

What Governments Must Do in the Defence Sector

In the last 20 years, growing attention has been paid to widescale climate changes that could impact global geopolitical stability. Defence actors have started to incorporate climate change into their strategies, emphasizing that climate change multiplies the burdens on a country's political, economic and resource bases. It also acts as a "threat multiplier" (4), by amplifying critical situations and increasing inter-country contestation over common or shared resources. Therefore, security risks associated with the consequences of climate change will have a direct impact on the way the armed forces anticipate, prepare, operate and contribute to climate change. Defence ministries will need to focus on three main areas to plan for the coming challenges—adapting equipment and personnel, preparing for more involvement of military forces, and developing strategic foresight.

First, the defence ministries will have to modernise and adapt equipment and personnel to changing environmental conditions. In Western countries, defence ministries are already working on this issue and are considering the physical effects that operating in a warmer climate will have for missions, doctrines, critical infrastructures, operations and equipment (5). The US was a frontrunner in planning



for climate change effects on the military—the Naval War College releasing the ‘Global Climate Change: Implications for the United States Navy’ report in 1990 (6). Beyond adapting to climate change, defence ministries will also have a role to play in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, France is developing dual technology innovations related to materials and energy consumption to favour the use of eco-friendly military equipment to limit their environmental impact (7). Other countries, such as Norway, Germany and the United Kingdom (8), have also started to develop ‘green’ defence strategies for sustainable development.

Second, defence ministries must prepare for an increased pressure on military forces to respond to security crises due to climate change. Many countries are already anticipating a rise in the military’s involvement in the management of climate-related emergencies in close cooperation with civil actors. For instance, the Australian government sought assistance from the Australian Defence Force in dealing with the 2020 bushfires, provoking significant debate on the role of security forces in responding to natural disasters (9). Providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) may soon become a more crucial part of militaries’ operational missions. Navies may also increasingly be solicited for constabulary missions—fighting against illicit trafficking, fishing, pollution—and surveillance and reconnaissance operations. Third, beyond immediate reactions to urgent needs, defence ministries must prepare for and anticipate the consequences of climate change. Governments will have to develop strategic foresight, in close cooperation with civil society, think tanks, the scientific community and industry. Defence ministries should leverage research and technology to enhance knowledge capabilities and the capacities for risk assessment. This will bring new forms of cooperation in areas such as the adaptation of coastal military infrastructures, preservation and sustainable exploitation of overseas ecosystems, improvement of cyclone early warning, improvement of shoreline surveys, maritime surveillance coverage and military health.

These activities call for greater cooperation and coordination between states, and the exchange of best practices and anticipation of emergent capabilities, but it remains limited. Nevertheless, there is scope for environmental security to be placed at the heart of multilateralism, as France’s experience in implementing its environmental security policy in the Indo-Pacific shows.

French Defence Diplomacy and Environmental Security

Although the concept of environmental security is relatively new, France has long been cooperating in this space with its main strategic partners, mainly in the Indo-Pacific.



In 2002, the French defence ministry began to tackle environmental issues in the areas of military procurement and implementation of operational capabilities, based on the national strategy for sustainable development (10). Its first environmental action plan was published in 2007, but the focus was exclusively on the modernisation of military equipment (11). It was only in the 2008 edition of the French White Paper that global warming and its consequences were first included in national security strategy (12). The prospect of hosting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in 2015 (Conference of Parties – 21) created a new momentum, and in 2011, the French Institute for Strategic Research, affiliated to the defence ministry, published its first report specifically dedicated to the security implications of climate change (13). In 2016, the defence ministry launched the Observatory of Climate Change Impacts on Defence and Security (OCCIDS) in cooperation with the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs to support robust climate change research and ensure that security requirements inform future climate research priorities (14). The French Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific (15), published in 2019 by the defence ministry, identified cooperation towards environmental security as one of the country's main priorities in the region.

With several overseas territories throughout the Indo-Pacific (Mayotte, La Reunion, the French Southern and Antarctic territories, New Caledonia, Wallis & Futuna, and French Polynesia), France is compelled to closely deal with the impacts of climate change. France often mobilises its military to support local security forces and international agencies in providing emergency aid during natural disasters. In the South Pacific, the FRANZ agreement between France (FR), Australia (AN) and New Zealand (Z), signed in 1992, stipulates military cooperation related to HADR (16). In addition, the OCCIDS's work since its inception has enabled France to gradually integrate the concept of environmental security in its bilateral and multilateral dialogues; the French defence ministry has organised several conferences with strategic partners in Southeast Asia, notably with Vietnam and Indonesia (17). In 2018, the ministry coordinated a study with its partners at the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) on the 'Implications of Climate Change on Defence and Security in the South Pacific by 2030' (18). At the 2019 SPDMM in Fiji, participants adopted concrete guidelines to address the challenges identified in the report. The French defence ministry also supports scientific programmes that aim to anticipate the occurrence of extreme climatic events or the displacement of fishing resources in the Pacific, in partnership with the SPDMM (19). For example, the "Kivi Kuaka" Program, launched in 2017,



is an early warning alert system for cyclones, aimed at providing an accurate observation of migratory birds. Such critical information, complementary to satellite data, contributes to preparing people and armed forces for climate-induced natural catastrophes (20). France is also an aspiring member of the US Indo-Pacific Command's Pacific Environment Security Forum, which explores environmental security solutions in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the Indian Ocean, France and Australia conducted between 2018 and 2020 a joint project to map environmental risks in the region to propose bilateral and multilateral preventive actions (21). The study is planned to be presented at the launch of the two-year French presidency of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2021.

Prospects for Regional Cooperation

As a vocal proponent of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific (22), France must demonstrate international leadership through regional engagement and develop high-level local climate security plans. It must systematically include its vision of environmental security in all bilateral and multilateral dialogues, and encourage putting the topic on the agenda of Indian Ocean regional organisations, such as the IONS and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

In addition, the ODISS showcases how combining research and real-world experience can help gain policy attention, as illustrated by the inclusion of the environmental security issue in France's defence policy for the Indo-Pacific. Similar initiatives could be replicated by regional organisations to strengthen data collection for robust and actionable assessment of climate risks. Such projects will benefit regional organisations and their member states, increasing their capacities in assessing and managing climate-security risks, especially in the maritime domain.

The European Union (EU) could also increase its involvement in this field, mainly by funding projects. Since 2012 and the creation of its Green Diplomacy Network—an informal group of environment experts within the foreign ministries of member states—the EU has started to develop its own climate diplomacy to shape international cooperation on mitigation and adaptation to climate change (23). For instance, the European Defence College offers participants an opportunity to work on global climate change scenarios and the related risks for peace and international security; and in November 2020, the External



European Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic service and combined foreign and defence ministry, published the "EU Climate Change and Defence Roadmap," (24) identifying actions in capability development and international cooperation. Nevertheless, a comprehensive approach to climate security requires policy coordination, which is sometimes missing in the EU (25). For instance, there is a lack of cooperation on climate security issues within the EEAS, especially in terms of thematic versus geographical expertise. While discussions are underway within the EU for the adoption of a regional strategy for the Indo-Pacific, France should seize this opportunity to place environmental security at the heart of the EU's external policies.

Finally, more multinational cooperation will be needed in HADR. Existing institutional structures and the capabilities of many Asian militaries have not yet adapted to the requirements of HADR-oriented missions (26). There is also a lack of coordination between military and civil actors involved in the management of regional crises. This calls for an expansion in the scope of existing maritime security cooperation, to include climate security-related programmes, capacity building and training on humanitarian norms. The Association of South-East Asian Nations could become a leader on this front, in partnership with Western countries.

Conclusion

Environmental security offers many avenues of cooperation, especially for defence ministries. However, the issue has not yet been put on the agenda of global governance, mainly because of the lack of political interest and funding within each state.

To become a core part of the international cooperation plan, environmental security issues cannot be the mandate of defence ministries alone. Focusing on only one specific kind of climate change impact, such as economic or human, will lead to other aspects being neglected. There is a strong need for the establishment of inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms—within a country and bilaterally.



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3

NEW WORLD ORDER

3.1

Why the Trading System Needs Even More Multilateralism Today

—

Ankai Xu and Nicolas Albertoni



The multilateral trading system was built on the rubble of the Second World War. The early architects of the international economic system envisioned a world where business and commerce intertwined across nations such that countries would refrain from entering conflicts.

The creation of the world trading system came at a time of uncertainty. As the Second World War was still raging, global leaders convened at Bretton Woods, US, in 1944 and negotiated plans to establish an International Trade Organization (ITO). Although the ITO never came into fruition, in its place came the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was limited in scope and was designed solely for trade in goods. In the years since, the world trading system has grown from a provisional ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ among 23 contracting parties to one that deals with trade rules and settles trade disputes.

Today, the multilateral trading system comprises 164 member governments covering 98 percent of international trade. At the heart of the agreement is the principle that countries cannot discriminate goods and services from members of the agreement (the most-favoured-nations principle) or discriminate between domestic players and foreign imports (national treatment). The important principles have gradually expanded into a comprehensive rulebook over the past seven decades, covering trade in goods, trade in services and trade-related intellectual property rights.

Accompanying more comprehensive trade policies is an unprecedented expansion in international trade. According to data from the World Trade Organization (WTO), world trade in 2018 in volume terms was about 40 times greater than in 1950. The share of trade as a percentage of world GDP grew from about 5 percent in 1950 to 23 percent in 2018. Although a plethora of new trade agreements emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century, over 80 percent of international trade still takes place under the most-favoured-nation terms (1). This is especially true for less developed countries and small enterprises that could not afford to deal with the complexity of regional trade rules. A set of simple, fair and multilateral trade rules shields the small and poor members of global society from the law of the jungle.

A distinct aspect of the current economic context is that it occurs amid greater interconnectedness through global value chains (GVCs), which features “production



networks that assemble products using parts from around the world (known as intermediate goods). Today, 80 percent of world trade is driven by supply chains run by multinational corporations. Trade in intermediate goods is now nearly twice as large as trade in final goods and is especially important in advanced manufacturing” (2). Manufacturing and service activities are now increasingly organized across countries, enabling companies to take cost advantages of different countries and allowing economies to join the supply chain without having to develop the full capacity of production.

Globalisation has offered enormous opportunities for producers and consumers, allowing suppliers in developing countries to join the value chain and thus contributing to improved living standards for billions of people around the world. But, at the same time, the international trading system has also faced great challenges. In many parts of the world, automation and technological advances have resulted in improved manufacturing output even as large parts of the workforce have been left without jobs. Without a safety net and programmes to equip workers with new skills, those who may have lost out on jobs to technological advancement and globalisation may grow discontent. Future advancements in digital technologies could also lead to a loss of white-collar jobs in advanced economies. It has been argued that the wide adoption of digital communication technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic could accelerate the trend towards more services sector jobs in competition with employees teleworking from abroad or software robots replacing particular office tasks (3). Crucial to addressing these challenges are domestic policies to enhance social protection, ease worker mobility, and ensure that the benefits of technological progress and globalisation are more widely shared (4).

The interconnections from global supply chains have given companies, organisations and individuals more opportunities, but they also pose potential risks in a context of high global uncertainty. As the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates, one shock in a region can transmit to another country within hours or days. No country is self-sufficient in the face of a global crisis, and trade provides an important and cost-effective way to ensure that the critical supplies reach those in need. Germany, the US and Switzerland supply 35 percent of medical products to the world, and four countries—Singapore, the US, Netherlands and China—export more than half of the world’s respirators and ventilators (5). The flow of vital medical supplies, critical agricultural products and other goods and services across borders are key to support the health and wellbeing of all people. As the world’s largest producer of generic drugs, India’s decision in early 2020 to end a ban on the export of antimalarial drugs that may help treat victims of the coronavirus demonstrates a commitment to address



the global pandemic (6). More recently, India has been a driving force in the global efforts to manufacture and distribute lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines.

Globalisation has made the world more connected than ever. The fragmentation of production and the new manufacturing bases in developing countries over the past 20 years have increased—not diminished—the ability of countries to respond to the unexpected spikes in demand experienced during the pandemic (7). International trade and cross-border supply chains not only lead to higher efficiency and lower costs of medical products, but also enable large scale research and development to develop new medicines and medical technology (8). The key to addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century is not less multilateralism but more multilateral cooperation. Contingency plans and coordinated efforts to build a stockpile of critical goods, more diversification of production locations and suppliers, and prompt government action to ease strict regulatory requirements are crucial to bridge the gaps in medical supplies and ensure speedy recovery of the health, economic and social systems (9). Implementing these policies require decisive, robust and coordinated efforts internationally.

The need for more international cooperation extends to other global challenges as well. Efforts by WTO members to curb subsidies that contribute to the depletion of global fish stocks illustrates the transboundary nature of environmental challenges, and that only by cooperation can nations overcome free-rider problems (10). The emerging digital economy requires more concerted efforts to address policy challenges and countries are working to harmonise digital trade policies, reform tax systems, tackle income inequalities through the WTO and other international fora.

Pandemic-induced economic challenges and trade uncertainties are not a threat but an opportunity to ‘multilateralise’ new and deeper trade integration in future WTO agreements (11).

Globalisation has made the world a better place in many aspects. People growing up in a globalised world are more mobile, open-minded and cosmopolitan than previous generations. The solution to the challenges of globalisation does not come from building walls and barriers or isolating, but rather from working together to address global issues.



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3.2

Multilaterals as Catalysts for Private Sector Investment in Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure

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Mercado



Since multilateralism first emerged and became institutionalised in the aftermath of the Second World War, the world has changed profoundly. In the past 75 years, Asia and the Western world have made significant economic progress. To continue with this progress, more and better civil infrastructure is needed to enable sustainable economic growth and social progress, lift more people out of poverty, and provide better-quality services for the public.

The current macroeconomic climate amid the COVID-19 pandemic will potentially slow down public infrastructure investments across developing Asia and the world. In Asia, as elsewhere, most infrastructure has been funded from government budgets. Given this adverse situation, sovereign financing is unlikely to ramp up, further exacerbating the need to capture alternate financing sources.

Renowned architect Lord Norman Foster has this to say on tackling the infrastructure challenges of the developing world: “There are many challenges ahead. In a world that is expanding at 7 percent, with finite resources, a significant proportion of the world’s population needs infrastructure to raise the quality of life.” The world’s infrastructure gap is widely recognised. To address the substantial infrastructure financing gap in Asia-Pacific, the region will have to significantly increase its current investment from its gross domestic product (GDP). According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Pacific leads all other Asian subregions, requiring investments valued at 9.1 percent of GDP; this is followed by South Asia at 8.8 percent, Central Asia at 7.8 percent, Southeast Asia at 5.7 percent, and East Asia at 5.2 percent of GDP (1). Developing Asia needs to invest US\$26 trillion in infrastructure financing through 2030—or US\$1.7 trillion annually—to maintain growth and tackle poverty, while addressing climate change (climate-adjusted estimate); without climate change mitigation and adaptation costs, US\$22.6 trillion will be needed, or US\$1.5 trillion per year (baseline estimate). Substantial expenditure on new (greenfield) and existing (brownfield) public infrastructure is needed but cannot be satisfied solely from government coffers. Where will the extra funding come from in the current scenario?

One way to close this funding gap is by promoting public-private cooperation, which would in turn attract increased private investments in infrastructure. Upstream, governments must confront the challenge of producing enough well-structured, bankable projects to satisfy market needs and to close the gap. Downstream, there



are adequate private sector resources and know-how to bridge the gap. Improved public investment and maintenance, and increased private sector financing, are much needed for the delivery of sustainable infrastructure. Partnerships between the public and the private sectors not only can provide new sources of capital but also can bring discipline to projects in the development, construction, and operation phases (2). Development finance is key to private sector investment delivering high-quality infrastructure in developing economies.

Multilateralism in the form of international finance institutions and multilateral development banks (MDBs) like ADB have a pivotal role to play in not only the traditional mechanisms for infrastructure financing using public budgets as the primary source, but also in innovative and competitive private sector financing solutions. MDBs can take action for the Sustainable Development Goals by designing tailored financing options through a common platform supporting green infrastructure projects and helping catalyse private sector investments.

MDBs do have an important tool to jump over certain obstacles that may block the flow of private finance for development. These in-house ecosystems are their private sector lending arms or private sector windows. The ADB's Private Sector Operations Department, IDB Invest or the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC) are rightly seen as key actors in the challenge of moving from billions to the trillions of private sector finance necessary to fill the infrastructure funding gap.

The catalysing role of MDBs is exemplified by ADB's Strategy 2030 (3), which sets the course for ADB to respond effectively to the Asia-Pacific's changing needs. Under the aegis of Strategy 2030, ADB will expand its private sector operations, to reach one-third of its total operations in number by 2024. ADB will catalyse and mobilise financial resources for development by strengthening collaboration with multilateral, bilateral, and private sector partners. It will seek finance from commercial and concessional sources targeting a substantial increase in long-term co-financing by 2030, every US\$1 in financing for its private sector operations will be matched by US\$2.50 of long-term co-financing.

To better illustrate the catalytic role of MDBs in general, and ADB in particular, in mobilising private finance—a role that has till date been largely overlooked by research on development finance—I draw from my experience with a project that I led towards financial close (November 2019), for which physical completion is expected by the end of 2021.



The Riau independent power producer (IPP) project in Sumatra, Indonesia makes news for all the right reasons (4). The 275-MW power plant, supported by ADB and private sector participants, will help secure Indonesia's energy future and provide local communities with more affordable and reliable electricity. In addition, the use of combined-cycle gas-fired power generation (i) will improve the environmental sustainability of the current energy mix in Indonesia by displacing diesel and coal as more polluting fuels for electricity generation, and (ii) could increase the penetration capacity of renewable energy sources in the national grid. A combined-cycle power plant uses both a gas and a steam turbine; the waste heat from the gas turbine is routed to the nearby steam turbine, which generates extra power. Therefore, combined-cycle plants are more efficient and eco-friendlier than traditional (simple-cycle) gas-fired plants. Furthermore, gas engines and turbines can respond more quickly than coal-fired units, and, thus, are better suited to responding rapidly to load fluctuations. In turn, this can enable greater use of intermittent renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar.

ADB's support for the Riau IPP helped accelerate and magnify financing necessary for any large-scale infrastructure investment, which has remained a challenge in Indonesia. As a lender, ADB provided a US\$70 million direct ("A") loan from its ordinary capital resources and invited and worked together with IFC (co-lending US\$50 million) on its first joint infrastructure project in Indonesia. As a mobiliser, ADB arranged a US\$82-million ("B") loan funded by commercial banks, with ADB providing an extended political risk guarantee (PRG) to the participating banks for the first time in Indonesia. Furthermore, ADB administered a US\$20-million parallel loan from Leading Asia's Private Sector Infrastructure Fund, supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). ADB's role as A/B lender and provider of its PRG product to commercial banks, and cross-MDB collaboration enabled the project to secure a substantial amount of long-term debt—US\$222 million.

Amidst COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery, increased MDB funding for relief responses will spur a greater reliance on private sector investment to build back more resilient emerging economies, and especially to narrow the infrastructure financing gap. In April 2020, ADB announced a US\$20 billion package to address the immediate needs of its developing member countries amid COVID-19. As part of ADB's Comprehensive Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (5), I was invited to contribute to ADB's first infrastructure COVID-19 assistance at its epicentre in Wuhan, China (6). In May 2020, ADB assisted natural gas distributor China Gas to finance LPG for new hospitals that were hastily being constructed to meet the growing demand for beds to treat COVID-19 patients. The US\$20-million loan



enhances the resilience of cities in China through the sustenance of uninterrupted energy supplies to meet basic human needs and support economic activity in the most affected areas. ADB's loan will also have a catalytic role in mobilising further commercial bank loans. ADB's additionality also includes the client increasing the scope of its gender-responsive community activities in Wuhan and, a year after the outbreak of COVID-19, extracting gender-sensitive lessons from the epidemic's impact and the company's response.

I believe that both ADB interventions are compelling models and excellent instances of development in Indonesia and China. They illustrate the ADB's mandate well to help close the yawning infrastructure funding gap, to help increase access to private sector finance in developing Asia, and to support project sponsors and clients to ensure that infrastructure is green and enduring.

The imperative is for MDBs to work together, as in the ADB-IFC-JICA-supported Riau IPP, and to address immediate crises, such as the COVID-19 response in Wuhan. MDBs must find new ways to help the private sector invest more—and more effectively—in improving people's lives, even as the future is uncertain. The role of MDBs, beyond as bankers, is to try to pioneer environmentally and socially sustainable investments and build resilience in the pursuit of infrastructure and economic development in developing economies.

MDBs' private sector lending arms are expected to build distinctiveness in lessons learned and best practices in catalysing private sector finance for development at scale given global infrastructure investment needs. These private sector windows also present unique opportunities for impact, pushing the frontiers of collaboration with multilateral and bilateral partners by strengthening public-private strategic alliances in designing ingenious project financing. This cross-collaborative work is critical to structuring more infrastructure investment initiatives in developing Asia and the world. MDBs now have a meaningful role “in helping to steer a course between the immediate threat of COVID-19 and the long-term need for infrastructure to support growth” (7).

Time, expertise, coordination, commitment, perspective and passion are the necessary ingredients for such catalysts to be successful wherever needed. It is only by working together that multilaterals can develop resilient and sustainable infrastructure that is the backbone of the global economy and is so urgently required to connect people and enhance the quality of life worldwide.



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3.3

Europe in the Post- COVID-19 World

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Lucas Maurer



“This is the time for cooperation. This is the time for science and solidarity. This is the time for all humanity to rally around a common cause. And you can count on Europe to always play for the team,” said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the World Health Organization’s 73rd assembly in May 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (1).

But is this really the case? Europe’s initial response to the pandemic showed its unpreparedness and a profound lack of solidarity, but there have been improvements since then. What impact has the pandemic had on the multilateral system and what can Europe do to help preserve it? The European Union (EU) response to the pandemic shows that while the crisis has significantly challenged the multilateral system, cooperation and EU co-leadership are more needed in the post-COVID-19 world.

Slow Start

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent socioeconomic crisis had a profound impact on countries around the world. While the health crisis is far from over and the full scale of its economic impact will depend on how fast an effective vaccination can be deployed, and if it will also protect against future mutations of the coronavirus, it is already clear there will be far-reaching implications. The impact on the global economy is already more severe than during the 2008 financial crisis (2), and there is a widespread expectation that the pandemic and its aftermath represent a profound change to the global order. But it could also be a window of opportunity.

The EU was overwhelmed at the beginning of the crisis, as were most other countries. The first reactions in Europe were suboptimal and focused on the national level. Border controls were quickly established, and there was a profound lack of solidarity among the member states, with restrictions imposed by some on the export of personal protective equipment (notably, face masks), even as others in the union were struggling to tackle the crisis. Most telling is that when Italy, among the hardest-hit countries in the early months of the pandemic, sought assistance, it took its European partners longer to provide such support than it did for China, Russia or even Cuba and Albania (3). Despite calls for unity at the pan European level, the early months of the crisis were marked by a lack of solidarity and a disregard for established rules



of the single market and the Schengen area. Indeed, most actions taken during the initial phase of the pandemic were dependent on the competence of the member states, notably in health, and therefore the EU as such was not able to act more swiftly in these areas. This, however, led to many seeing the EU response to the crisis as insufficient and the grouping losing public support (4). The most visible expression of this feeling was the “heartfelt apology” offered by von der Leyen to those that felt abandoned during the worst phase of the pandemic (5).

However, as outlined some days later by High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell, “handling the corona crisis is a marathon, not a sprint” (6), and a shaky start does not mean that one cannot win in the end.

Indeed, the EU has since then advanced significantly in its fight against the pandemic. Over half a million EU citizens have been repatriated to their home countries from around the world (7). Moreover, coordination at the EU level has increased on a wide range of subjects, including the reopening of borders, keeping trade open, joint procurement of medical equipment, supporting research on vaccines, diagnostics and treatments, as well as relaxing state aid rules to allow for government support to the economy to save jobs and companies. This also included emergency purchases of private and public financial securities through the European Central Bank or agreeing on the screening of foreign direct investment to protect critical assets and infrastructure (8).

The EU can function efficiently and effectively in addressing the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic since its competencies in those areas are strong. The most important response in this field was the agreement on the next EU budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework, for the 2021-2027 period (9). Despite the initial resistance—notably from ‘the frugal four’ countries that positioned themselves against grant-based support to the most-affected member states (10)—and a long negotiation marathon, the outcome was a big step forward. The key achievement is the agreement that the EU can borrow funds totalling 750 billion euros on the capital markets as part of the ‘Next Generation EU’ package, leading to common debt. These funds are earmarked to support those countries and economies hardest hit by the pandemic. The funds are to be repaid over a long period from the EU’s resources, representing a major step forward in European integration and serves as a visible sign that “we now feel sufficiently interdependent and united to make commitments together for the coming decades” (11), as outlined by Borrell. Furthermore, the Council agreed on a tax contribution from member states to the EU budget based on non-recycled plastic



packaging waste—the first time a new EU own-financing resource has been agreed on since 1988 (12).

In Defence of Multilateralism

On the global level, the pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses in the interconnected global system and accelerated existing crises, strengthening already existing trends. First, a stronger competition or even confrontation between the US and China might become the defining feature of global politics in the years to come (13). Second, the trend of de-globalisation has accelerated as the pandemic revealed vulnerabilities linked to overdependence on foreign suppliers and global supply chains, particularly in the health and pharmaceutical sectors. Third, attacks on the post-Second World War global order, including by the creator of this order (the US) have continued. The US is also said to have actively undermined multilateral efforts to fight the pandemic by cutting funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) due to the organisation's alleged China bias (14). The pandemic was the first major international event since the beginning of the twentieth century to see the US not take a leadership role in crisis response. This lack of leadership at the global level brought multilateralism under further strain, evident by the limited multilateral reply to the pandemic (15), with Borrell even calling it “a real crisis of multilateralism—the G7 and G20 are absent, the UN Security Council is paralysed and many ‘technical’ organisations are turned into arenas where countries compete for influence” (16). While the US administration under President Joe Biden has already announced a different approach, notably by re-joining the WHO and is planning for a Global Summit of Democracies, it is clear that the lack of leadership has damaged multilateralism at the time when China presented itself more assertively on the world stage.

Given the absence of global leadership to defend multilateralism, there are increasing calls for the EU to take up the mantle. Indeed, the EU has always defined itself as a strong supporter of multilateralism and already has included this aim in its 2003 Security Strategy (17). The pandemic has created an opportunity and emphasised the need for those who believe in multilateralism to come together in its defence. As the world's largest trading block and largest provider of development assistance, the EU is “not only well-placed, but almost doomed to play this leading role” (18).

European leaders understood the need for the EU to play a stronger role in global affairs even before the pandemic hit—ahead of assuming office as European Commission president, von der Leyen called for a geopolitical Commission and for “the European Union to be the guardian of multilateralism” (19). The new



strategy on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism (20) underlines the union's willingness to take on this role. It outlines, as stressed by EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen, "our ambition on inclusive multilateralism, our strong commitment to renew it" through specific actions (21). It is in the EU's interest to engage in the defence of multilateralism, as not only a core value of the EU but also a key factor in defeating the pandemic and preventing such outbreaks in the future. According to Borrell, the EU "will only be able to control this disease if it is controlled everywhere" and "Europe has a key responsibility to defend effective multilateralism and help developing countries in need" (22).

Furthermore, the EU must avoid, as far as possible, getting mired in the US-China rivalry as well as for this rivalry to have lasting negative consequences for the international system, putting even further pressure on its institutions. Although the EU is culturally and historically aligned to the US—and the new Biden administration in Washington DC provides opportunities for closer cooperation—it is also important to continue to engage with China. The EU has made it clear that it sees China as a partner, competitor and systemic rival (23), thereby acknowledging the interest and the capacity to work with China on several key issues of crucial global importance to find compromises.

Notably, the EU must also find a way to balance a desire for more market control, de-globalisation and security (amid rising de-globalisation sentiments) with global engagement. It must focus on increasing strategic autonomy, mainly reducing dependencies and increasing diversification, protecting critical infrastructure and strategic activities (24), or the "capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible," as outlined in the November 2016 Council conclusions progress in implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence (25).

It will be paramount for the EU to engage with other like-minded democracies on these issues, especially the defence of the multilateral rules-based system. The EU will need to strengthen its cooperation with all willing countries, particularly strategic partners like the US, Japan, India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Korea, as outlined in the 'Borrell Doctrine' to "make multilateralism great again" (26).



The Way Ahead

According to Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of European integration, “Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises” (27). Actions by European leaders during the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath are no exception to this and have shown that there is scope for a stronger Europe. Changes implemented during the pandemic will shape the future of Europe, with likely further integration in the follow-ups to the Multiannual Financial Framework and the ‘Next Generation EU’ package.

There have been calls within and outside the EU for stronger European leadership, notably to save multilateralism, which has drawn increasing support from EU citizens, even as some remain relatively sceptical (28). Although the EU already appeared to have been acting on this before COVID-19 struck, the grouping’s foreign policy strategies amid the crisis reiterates its commitment to live up to the promises of defending multilateralism. This will be key to address the current global health crisis and other challenges that require a strong and united multilateral response, such as climate change, biodiversity loss or ecological degradation.

The views expressed are purely those of the writer and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European External Action Service.

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3.4

Battle of Development Narratives: EU-Africa Relations in the Multipolar World

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Loes Debuysere



As the world has changed from a unipolar hegemony to a multipolar one with competing global powers, the Western development paradigm that seeks to grant assistance to ‘underdeveloped’ nations has openly turned from an allegedly altruistic project into an endeavour of geostrategy. By tracing the roots of its discourse, it is clear how development has always been part of a geopolitical and geoeconomic project. For the European Union (EU), the world’s largest development donor, to set up a new partnership with Africa, one of the largest aid-receiving regions, beyond donor-recipient relations and offer a credible alternative to Chinese influence in the region, it must radically revisit its development narrative.

Civilising vs Developing the Global South

The modern Western development discourse emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War amid fading colonialism. In his famous 1949 inaugural address, US President Harry Truman said: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” (1).

Subsequently, a programme of development assistance came up to bridge the gap between the so-called ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ nations. As the developed nations had managed to become rich and prosperous, they sought to benevolently assist underdeveloped countries to do the same. Over 70 years since Truman’s speech, development cooperation is still often seen by Western citizens as an altruistic way to grant assistance and aid to peoples suffering from misery and poverty.

What was erased from this development narrative, however, is that colonial plunder and exploitation had pushed underdeveloped nations into a state of “primitive and stagnant” economic life (2). It has also been forgotten that “scientific advances and industrial progress” in the developed West could only flourish during the industrial revolution due to the resources extracted from the colonies. The new development discourse, as first expressed by Truman, served to depoliticise global inequality and brushed aside the role that extractive colonialism and Western intervention had played in ‘underdeveloping’ countries in the Global South.



Rather than civilising the savages, as had been the rhetoric during colonial times, the goal of ‘development cooperation’ became to develop the poor and disadvantaged in the Global South by having them adopt a Western style of modernisation. Admittedly, the blatant racism underpinning the colonial project gave way to a belief that all beings should be equal. However, the Eurocentric underpinnings of colonialism remained firmly in place. The technical solution for global inequality was adopting a highly individualised, competitive growth model based on free market politics. The fact that such a model may not be ecologically sustainable or difficult to replicate in another context due to a highly interdependent world was disregarded (3).

Indeed, in the globalised world economy, the growth of the West depends on access to cheap labour and resources, generally found in the Global South. Economic development in Europe and the US has coincided with land grabs, tax evasion, climate costs and rigged trade deals in developing countries, which make it structurally difficult for the latter to develop. Economic anthropologist Jason Hickel calculated that for every dollar of development aid that developing countries receive, they lose US\$24 in net outflows through, for example, payments on debt, intellectual property rights and, most importantly, illicit capital flight (4). Bluntly put, this means that countries in the Global South are developing rich countries rather than the other way around (5).

At the same time, despite World Bank rhetoric claiming the opposite, a UN report found that extreme poverty is not being eradicated in recent decades (6). Philip Alston, the special UN rapporteur on extreme poverty, argues that the “international community mistakenly gauges progress in eliminating poverty by reference to a standard of miserable subsistence rather than an even minimally adequate standard of living”. In short, the ambitions of development aid are too low, and it is hard to claim that the current Western development model is convincingly working in Africa, for instance.

The West, Not the Only Kid on the Block

A key exception and a relative success story of development has been China. Interestingly, this has been thanks to China’s state-led development strategies, in defiance of the free-market model pushed for by Western powers. Economists like Ha-Joon Chang have argued that “only protection can build developing countries” (7). Similar to the way in which now rich countries like the US and UK once developed,



he argues that developing countries should insulate themselves temporarily from global competition to prepare their industries for international competition.

As it developed economically, China became an important foreign aid, trade and investment partner in Africa. While having been engaged in foreign aid since the 1950s, China has stepped up its efforts since the mid-90s. It has also increasingly shifted from charity to a model of ‘common’ rather than one-way development through, for example, concessional loans. Not having been a colonial power itself in Africa, China has the advantage of pursuing a form of South-South cooperation, which provides a more balanced starting point for foreign aid. The narrative surrounding Chinese aid, as also embodied in the country’s 1964 Eight Principles to foreign aid, is one of solidarity, win-win, no intervention and mutual respect (8). There is no conditionality involved.

Chinese aid has attracted plenty of criticism. Some argue that China is pursuing an imperial agenda through debt traps rather than increasing the well-being of African nations. There is also scepticism about the effectiveness of Chinese development support or the fact that a lack of conditionality may increase the likelihood of capture by local political elites (9). Experts on Chinese foreign aid, however, warn that there is a major lack of nuance and knowledge about China’s role in Africa among biased Western critics (10). Whether China’s claim about pursuing a win-win relationship with Africa actually holds true probably depends on the sector in which Chinese investment takes place. But what is interesting, is that the more ‘equal’ and reciprocal Chinese development narrative is generally well received among African citizens (11).

Europe’s Response

In reaction to this changing geopolitical reality, the EU has put the historic partnership with Africa high on the political agenda. The EU recently voiced its ambition, via a roadmap for a new 2020 Africa Strategy, for a “partnership of equals” beyond donor-recipient relations (12). Paradoxically, this roadmap has been largely unilaterally drafted, disregarding some key priorities for Africa (such as poverty, health, access to the internet) (13). Moreover, this paper commitment to an equal partnership is far from new. The Lomé Convention of 1975, which determined the relations between the European Community (predecessor of EU) and Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, already stated: “Anxious to establish, on the basis of complete equality between partners, close and continuing co-operation, in a spirit of international solidarity” (14).



The Lomé Convention is a predecessor of the 2000 Cotonou Agreement, which is currently under renegotiation. These international treaties have settled post-colonial relations between Europe and former colonies in the ACP regions, yet economic relations inherited from the colonial era have largely been kept intact (15). The EU still trades manufactured goods in return for primary goods, in what is often seen as a hierarchical and unbalanced centre-periphery trade relation. Consequently, the Cotonou deal has been charged with being “an unwieldy and ineffectual relic of the past” to even being a manifestation of “imperial power Europe” (16).

One contested aspect of the Cotonou pact has been the introduction of the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with four different regional blocs in Africa. These EPAs were criticised for undermining regional integration in Africa through ‘divide and rule’ tactics, even when it is widely recognised that intra-ACP trade is key to move away from the export of raw materials towards the export of intermediate and finished goods (17). While the EU has made modifications to these EPAs in 2014 (through, for example, the introduction of an asymmetrical tariff agreement and a promise to include a development package), there is evidence that these concessions have not been sufficient and the anticipated developmental and poverty-eliminating outcomes have not been achieved (18).

The post-Cotonou agreement, which will also include three regional protocols (on Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean), is now being negotiated at the same time as a new continent-to-continent EU-Africa strategy. While the African Union (AU) has pushed for an EU-AU agreement outside of the outdated EU-ACP structure, some African member states and the EU have been less willing to fundamentally rethink the ACP framework (19). While the concerned African member states are reluctant to transfer powers to the AU and wish to hold on to official development assistance (ODA) dependence over the AU’s push for regional integration, the EU and especially the European Commission (Directorate-General for International Partnerships) have been reluctant to give up the existing institutional structures, instead preferring to keep the clientelist relationship with ACP countries.

A New Development Narrative

However, if the EU wishes to establish an equal partnership with Africa, one that goes beyond a colonial legacy and is a convincing alternative to the Chinese model, it not only needs to radically rethink this ACP framework, but also its development



narrative. To adapt to a new world of great powers, a key question will be which development model Africa will follow in the decades to come. This requires a new development narrative that not only goes beyond altruistic or charity-driven support, which is fundamentally imbalanced, but also beyond a purely interest-driven geopolitical project (20). Instead, a truly reciprocal partnership should be aimed at, one that safeguards European interests without harming the interests of African states.

Concretely, for this to happen, the EU needs to question the Eurocentric, depoliticised and authoritarian tenets of its current development narrative and model (21). While once hegemonic, the Western model of development cannot claim to be morally superior in today's multipolar world. Rather than claiming such superiority, which can be perceived as a continuation of a colonial civilising mission, the EU should refrain from prescribing interventions in African people's lives that these people themselves may disapprove of. Not only does this run counter to democratic principles, but it also overestimates the appeal and feasibility of a Western economic growth model that is based on unprecedented exploitation of nature and highly individualised consumerism.

Negative conditionality, dubious from a point of view of joint ownership and democracy, no longer works at a time when recipient countries have other alternative sources of unconditional support (for instance, aid from China) (22). Rather than conditioning development aid to achieve political and economic change, the EU should put forward a convincing external agenda underpinned by its "egalitarian aspiration" (23). Fostering socioeconomic equality and dignity—as most European welfare states attempt to do—is a less arrogant and more credible way to build equal partnerships with external partners (elites and civil society alike), yet one that can lead to democracy in the longer term as substantive social equality is a prerequisite for political democracy. Most importantly, such an egalitarian model respects the political and economic sovereignty of third countries or continents—indispensable if one wishes to build an equal partnership—while also contributing to the EU's own interest in stability in its neighbourhood and beyond.



Model	Development cooperation	External agenda based on egalitarian aspiration
Narrative	Developing the Global South	Achieving global social equality and dignity
Characteristics	Depoliticising: poverty as a technical problem	Politicised: acknowledges power relations between global North and Global South, rooted in (neo-) colonialism
	Eurocentric: Europe as ideal and superior model	Multipolar: adapted to plurality of powers
	Authoritarian: imposes interventions (geared towards free trade and liberal democracy) through aid conditionality	Democratic: without political and economic conditionality yet based on joint commitment to socio-economic equality
Relationship	Donor-recipient relation without reciprocity	Equal partnership based on reciprocity

Source: Author's own

There are several ways in which the EU can credibly put forward this egalitarian aspiration in its relations with Africa, while dismantling the problematic Eurocentric, depoliticising and authoritarian tenets of its current development narrative. One is taking the global lead in cancelling (not just suspending) Africa's debt, by assertively pursuing the current commitment for "coordinated international debt relief efforts," as outlined in the European Council conclusions in June 2020 (24). As Africa's debt crisis can be traced to the colonial era when major foreign trade defects, high export dependence and high concentration on a few commodities started to characterise the continent's economy, the EU has a historical responsibility to help Africa get rid of this suffocating debt trap (25). If they want to achieve social equality, African governments should be able to invest in education, health and the economy, rather than having to prioritise debt repayment.

Second, the EU and its member states need to foster a fairer global economic trading system. The development of Europe has gone hand-in-hand with the underdevelopment of the Global South. Today's global economy perpetuates this underdevelopment through global supply chains that rely on cheap labour and environmental exploitation. To address these problems, at the very least, concrete proposals that address tax evasion and avoidance by European companies operating in Africa should be included in the EU's new Africa Strategy. Overall, Africa loses



US\$50 billion a year in illicit financial flows, which is much higher than the ODA flowing to the continent (26). If they want to build fairer societies and eradicate poverty, African governments need to be able to collect taxes from foreign companies.

Thirdly, as today's world consists of a multiplicity of regional powers, there is an urgent need to democratise the major institutions of global governance—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO)—so they become less Eurocentric (27). In fact, such reforms are a prerequisite for a real multilateralism that the EU seeks to foster. For the IMF and World Bank, this would require reallocating voting power beyond the 2016 voting reforms (because now, middle- and low-income countries, which together constitute some 85 percent of the world's population, have only about 40 percent of the vote (28)); for the WTO this requires levelling the playing field for all members through, for example, more transparency (29). With the historic agreement being that the IMF and World Bank are ruled by a European and US national respectively, the EU and its member states should play a role in making global economic governance more democratic. For African societies to pursue the egalitarian aspiration, they need to be able to have an equal say about the conditions and conditionalities attached to development support by international financial institutions.

Finally, a fundamental rethinking of the EU's development practice and narrative is timelier and more necessary amid the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. While the EU has, at last, started to address the problem of 'Brussels so white' by pledging to hire more people from racial minorities in the institutions, there has so far not been an open discussion about the impact of BLM on the EU's external action and attitudes towards Africa, let alone about colonial reparations (30). While the EU generally hides behind the fact that only seven member states used to have colonies, which in fact erases from the story that European integration in itself was deeply embedded in colonial history (31), it will have to address the colonial tenets of its development practice if it wishes to compete with China. While China can sell its own success story as a developmental model, the EU will first need to acknowledge that its own development only took place thanks to the exploitation of former colonies. Until it fully acknowledges this fact and adapts its development narrative accordingly, the EU will be unable to develop a partnership of equals with Africa.



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3.5

Long Live Multilateralism

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Nasim Pourghazian



Multilateralism is the coordinated diplomatic interaction between three or more stakeholders in international politics, but can be interpreted differently by different stakeholders. Sometimes it is understood as not only a diplomatic approach, but one that is committed to certain principles and set of values (1). The value basis of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN)—where many nations work towards a common goal to enable diversity and strengthen the weakened voice of the neglected majority—has inevitably led to a tug of war between the true values of multilateralism and the increasing use of multilateral networks for individual countries’ geostrategic purposes (2). This coupled with the rising criticism of the UN system’s inability to respond to the growing global governance challenges has led to the questioning of the need for such an institution. Is it an excessive layer in global governance or does it still play a pivotal role in enabling the international community to work together?

At the very core of multilateralism lies an interdependency that is key to the equilibrium needed to maintain peaceful global governance that promotes collaboration and equity. Functioning through an architecture of organisations, institutions and procedures based in treaties, international law and essentially in the UN charter, the UN has been imperative in preserving peace and addressing common global threats since its creation (3). Significant UN attainments beyond the domain of peace and security include the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the creation and later achievements of specialised funds, programmes and technical agencies (4)—such as the elimination of smallpox by the World Health Organization (5), the non-proliferation treaty of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade of the World Trade Organization (6). Although the UN is often referred to as one entity, it is important to understand the complexity of its structure with five principal organs, 17 specialised agencies and many funds and programmes that give life to the decentralised and massive organisation that can be largely divided into the political, developmental and humanitarian parts of the UN.

Although the UN Charter is still as relevant now as in 1945, there is a well-acknowledged need to reform the functioning of the institution to uphold its legitimacy (7). According to article 108 of the UN treaty, changes to the UN structure and governance are



extremely difficult because they must be adopted by two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of the members of the United Nations, including all the five permanent members of the Security Council (8). Although the UN is the defender of democratic values on a global scale, it is restricted by the permanent members of the Security Council to fulfil this goal for its own governance mechanism. Thus, the idea that the international society should act collectively through the UN Security Council to protect populations from war, ethnic cleansing, genocide and other crimes against humanity is a normative aspiration that is constantly challenged by the inability of the five permanent members to act cooperatively. The conflict in Syria is one recent demonstration of the level of dissonance that has led to a paralysis of action (9). The UN preaches democracy and supports its values in countries all around the world, but cannot live by its own rule due to structural limitations that reflect an old political order that no longer corresponds to what the world looks like today. Multilateral platforms such as the UN are used by member states to pursue their own national interests (10), clearly exemplified by how Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin were recent advocates and defenders of multilateralism in contrast to former US President Donald Trump (11). This is, however, not a new phenomenon, nor bound to disappear as global politics have always been the foundation underlying the multilateral order and will remain a structural force. That said, multilateral institutions must function within those parameters and other realities of our time, making UN reform and adaption to the global scene it operates in even more crucial (12).

Beyond the criticism of the UN, it is hard to deny the importance that it has had for globalisation and peace and the interlinkages between countries. Although it is easy to criticise the UN for shortcomings and mistakes made as part of its global machinery, it is hard to imagine how the world would have looked, or what global threats or diplomatic disasters would have been a reality if the institution did not exist. We take the UN for granted now, but would have had to re-invent it to protect ourselves from the consequences of unilateral hegemony if we found ourselves in a world without the UN or an equivalent (13). One could claim that the very reason why the UN and multilateral institutions are being criticised is exactly because they contribute to the destabilisation of a stagnant world order in which a few powerful states bully other countries. Indeed, the strongest opponents to the UN today are powerful heads of state and private entities who feel they are held back by the slow multilateral apparatus and have less to gain from it than what they can achieve unilaterally or bilaterally. The truth is that the UN has helped give a voice to many smaller states by making sure they are at the negotiating tables and have an opportunity to act internationally and exercise influence that by far exceeds what their size otherwise would have allowed



(14). The broad multilateral diplomacy of institutions like the UN does not only give a more inclusive platform for smaller states, but it also offers a better chance to deal with complex challenges as the joint efforts mean a better ability to legitimise the achieved results, thus making them more sustainable.

But the UN's multilateral diplomacy also has difficulties and limitations. Other than being more costly and time consuming than bilateral agreements or unilateral action, multilateral negotiations often broaden the agenda to take into account the many different objectives and interests of the parties involved. This may result in the outcomes of multilateral agreements being less specific and concrete because they are characterised by compromise and finding the lowest common denominators across a variety of stakeholders, which in turn requires trade-offs. As such, there is an inversely proportional relationship between legitimacy and effectiveness, where more legitimacy is achieved at the price of effectiveness and vice versa (15). Furthermore, UN action ultimately requires collective action, bringing the need for trust and equal commitment between stakeholders, which is easier said than done. But perhaps the most important aspect of all is the fact that implementation of UN agreements depends on the parties involved without any functioning enforcement or sanction mechanisms in place to ensure action (16). Instead, the UN depends on observation, monitoring and review mechanisms to improve the chances of implementation where member states allow such support. The lack of enforceability is indeed a problem for the implementation of agreements but also reflects the unwillingness of member states to politically support the development of such mechanisms. Another limitation is the progressive decrease of budgetary support to the UN system that is meant to serve the whole planet and all its inhabitants with total funding per year that is about half the budget of New York City, making the UN increasingly dependent on private businesses and philanthropies to continue its operations (17).

To conclude, the UN can be described as the conscious and moral compass of the global community—the goodwill that everyone wants to demonstrate and be associated to, but nobody wants to invest in. The work of the UN is embedded in the UN Charter, which is a set of values that, in principle, all member countries have signed off on and want to live by. As with all aspirational values, it has led to unrealistic expectations on the UN coupled with an insufficient budget and political constraint. The UN is a creation of the global community to serve the global community, and so it ultimately mirrors the action and support of its own source of existence. On the question of its relevance, the simple answer is, yes, it is relevant because it represents the world we strive to create and maintain- a world that respects all equally and provides safety and positive development for all. Meanwhile, it is also necessary for the creators,



nurturers and users of the UN—the 193 member states and their people—to decide what they want. The self-improving goal of the UN reflects commitments that the world wants to uphold but for which their engagement, support and continuous devotion is necessary. If all countries want a UN that is effective and whose recommendations become reality, they are the ones who need to pledge and deliver on resolutions and commitments.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis, with its fast spread across borders and devastating effects on health systems and economies in countries of all income levels, has illustrated the importance of global solidarity and intergovernmental cooperation. Meanwhile, countries' unilateral decision-making, closed borders and naval-gazing at the onset of the pandemic shed light on the fragility of global collaboration mechanisms and raised questions around governments' readiness to support each other in times of difficulty. As the world faces more complex global challenges, the UN is more needed now than ever before to help develop legitimate and realistic international solutions. The pandemic might be exactly the crisis needed to force global unity and confrontation of the long-needed structural change to the UN system, and the current multipolar order might be the right political environment to push that agenda. The UN is in need of reform and the institution has been struggling to achieve it for the past four decades, but the question is, are member states ready to allow it?

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3.5

The Complicated Relationship Between Liberalism and Democracy

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Jan Hornát



The term liberalism means many things to many people and its understanding is contingent on time and context. Liberalism can thus be termed an “essentially contested concept,” the meaning of which shifts and turns depending on individual persuasion (1). When coupled with another “essentially contested concept”—democracy—we find ourselves in a semantic chaos, with few straws to clutch. Indeed, the coupling of liberalism and democracy has far-reaching implications not just on how political institutions are designed, but also on interpersonal relations, authority patterns, work ethics, and the freedom of action and decision. Liberalism predetermines our behaviour in the family and society, and also determines the behaviour of states within the international system.

If we hardly agree on the meaning of liberal democracy, how can society be ordered along its lines? The concepts of liberalism and liberal democracy have become too flexible and have been stretched to justify even contradictory policy choices that societies have simply become confused about. The public discourse reflects this confusion; the current version of political “liberalism” is discarded by alleged “conservatives”, whose sociopolitical agenda is nonetheless formed by the core tenets of classical liberalism—as when former Czech President Vaclav Klaus, a self-proclaimed “liberal” in the 1990s and currently a “conservative”, calls for the decoupling of liberalism and democracy to save “Western civilization” (2). Perhaps this lack of structure in the very sociopolitical ideology that undergirds systems in the transatlantic region (3) is a testament to what Zygmunt Bauman labelled “liquid times”—an era lacking firm structures, which leads to fluid institutions and identities (4). While some may view this “liquidity” as an opportunity to reformulate and reinvent humanity, others become lost within the lack of structure and anticipate social anomie and atrophy.

In times like these, it is convenient to remind ourselves of the basics—to probe the evolution of the coupling of liberalism and democracy and clarify the function of pairing the two concepts. Only then will we be able to understand the current friction points and the calls of some political representatives and pundits for the decoupling of the two, even their turn toward “illiberalism”.

Why Societies Developed ‘Liberalism’

Ancient societies maintained two key characteristics—one, they were often strictly hierarchical, with very little opportunities for vertical social mobility; and two, they



were communitarian/collectivist to the point that individual will barely existed, as it was subsumed and predetermined by the will of the community (5). The individual was thus tied to a particular social stratum within the set hierarchy and his or her life choices were contingent to the needs and wishes of the community. Of course, such structures were determined by survivalist instincts as the more tightly knit and cooperative communities increased their chances of survival with regards to material subsistence and coping with external threats.

The hierarchical communitarian life, which was functional at first, eventually became a tool of repression. It constrained the individual through various forms of enslavement and serfdom and defined what is “the public good”. The arbitrary use of power by elites to coerce individuals into a system they designed and naturally sought to maintain lead to rebellions. To rid themselves of this oppression, society had to “invent the individual”. In Europe, it was mainly an impulse from Christianity—which acknowledged the physical side of the human body that was bound to Earth and the spiritual side that was emancipated from earthly confines—that helped form the initial prerogatives of human individuality, hence leading to ideas of equality of individuals (6).

The “inventing of the individual” was a lengthy process as it necessitated the dissipation of old structural hierarchies, which the upper echelons vehemently resisted. These revolutionary ideas of individual emancipation culminated in John Locke’s thinking, who is often viewed as the “father” of liberalism (7). Locke was basically a dissident in post-civil war Britain and though his vision of the role of government seems conservative today, it was radical in the seventeenth century. Locke’s “classical liberalism” urged that the government (the state) existed only to protect the “life, liberty and estate” of individuals and that if it overstepped or failed in its role, subjects had the right to rebel and replace rulers (8). Inspiring thinkers of the American and French Revolutions and the Enlightenment, Locke’s idea led to the emergence of the doctrine of “natural rights” of individuals—the notion that each individual is endowed with the prerogative to own things, to be free and to rebel against authority. Though in Locke’s world, slaves were still considered an individual’s “estate” and thus protected by the right to own property, his visions sowed the seeds of our contemporary political systems.

In a liberal society, the individual maintains a set of “natural rights”, which are primarily political and civil, and these protect him or her from the arbitrary use of power. Such rights give individuals tools to protect themselves not only from state power infringing upon their liberty, but also to guard themselves from majoritarian



society. The *raison d'état* is the protection of an individual's rights, so if most of society decides to indiscriminately strip an individual of his or her property, life or liberty, the state shall maintain the means to stop such impulses. Liberalism thus forms a "protective bubble" around every individual—it should protect the rich from the poor, who might want to accrue their wealth, but it should also guard the poor from the rich, who might want to displace them due to aesthetic reasons; and both the rich and the poor should be equally guarded against the excessive power of the state.

Liberalism thus placed the individual at the centre of all human activity and emancipated him or her from coercive hierarchies and communities prevalent in human history. The more extreme forms of liberalism suggested that individuals are sole proprietors of their bodies, carrying the responsibility for their decisions and as such owe nothing to society/community. They are atomistic beings making self-interested decisions on their own behalf and since every individual is unique, there can be no agreement on what is the public good. If there cannot be agreement on the public good, then there does not exist an authority that can legitimately impose the definition of the "good life" upon anyone. In this sense, the state needs to be neutral towards defining the public good (9).

Simply put, the initial purpose of liberalism was to support the liberation of the oppressed individual. Moreover, it formed a perfect pair with democracy. Political thinkers from Plato to James Madison saw democracy as "ochlocracy" or mob rule. If everyone was given a political say, then society would devolve into anarchy or dictatorship as the masses would be easily swayed by demagogues. In a strictly procedural democracy, the power of the majority would trample any minority. However, when the components of "natural rights" and liberalism are conflated with democracy, then the power of any majority is put in check. So, while democracy without liberalism may turn into a "dictatorship" of the majority, liberalism without democracy can deviate into a "dictatorship" of propertied elites.

Where Liberalism and Democracy Stand Today

Though all societies in the transatlantic region accept the notions of liberalism and its individualism, not all members of these societies are "individualists" but are to some extent "communitarians" or "collectivists". Studies show that indeed the Western societies are composed of citizens harbouring some form of "collectivist cultures" that "interpret self as an extension of their in-group", place "higher value on vertical relationships" and accept "many individual obligations to their ingroup"



in return for “high levels of social support and resources” (10). What British-Indian political scientist Bhikhu Parekh wrote in the early 1990s about the non-Western perception of liberal democracy is thus pertinent to segments of societies in the West itself:

“...the democratic part of liberal democracy, consisting of such things as free elections, free speech and the right to equality have proved far more attractive outside the West and is more universalizable than the liberal components ...As (non-Western societies) understand it, liberalism breaks up the community, undermines the shared body of ideas and values, places the isolated individual above the community (and) encourages the ethos and ethic of aggressive self-assertions...” (11)

It can thus be argued that liberalism has simply gone too far and too fast in deconstructing or fuzzing vertical relationships (hierarchies) and decoupling individuals from their communities (12). With the loss of community and the atomisation of individual behaviour comes a loss of shared identity and thereby the uprooting of the individual. Hence the increased demand for nationalism and protectionism on one side of the political spectrum and an increased demand for politics that reaffirms and dignifies a variety of identities on the other. As liberalism set out to emancipate the individual from pre-existing oppressive structures, it continues in this undertaking till today. Women and ethnic, racial and sexual minorities are perceived to be constrained by hierarchies and communities beyond their control and thus deserving to be relieved (as demonstrated by the Black Lives Matter and MeToo Movements). The collectivist counterargument claims that the instrumental differentiation of identities only further decomposes the community (13).

The said struggle of the individualist and collectivist cultures is manifested also in the economic sphere. Over the years, liberalism has adopted another dimension that operates in parallel with the advocacy for individual freedom. The liberal thought has come to support that if society works best when individuals are fully emancipated from structural constraints that hinder their potential, then the same should apply to markets. This economic dimension of liberalism wishes to shield markets from arbitrary state and majoritarian power, just like its social-liberal counterpart wishes to shield the individual. Both strands of liberalism, however, coexist in difficulty.

Social liberals claim that when markets are emancipated and unregulated, the individual loses a portion of his or her democratic freedoms—particularly the “natural”



political and civil rights as corporate interests enmesh with political campaigns. While social liberals assert that only an active and redistributive state can ensure that no one is trapped within pre-existing structures and everyone can fully realise their potential, economic liberals counter that an activist state inherently limits the individual freedoms that form the core of liberalism (by limiting, for example, economic freedom by paying excessive taxes and redistributing them to others). As is clear, both arguments are grounded in the classical liberal position, yet they are irreconcilable.

Most politicians, political parties and voters in the transatlantic region are liberals—they understand the world through the prism of liberalism—even though current public discourse adheres the liberal sticker to left-wing politics. Yet the liberals' visions for society part along the collectivist/individualist continuum. Progressive (left wing) liberals are individualists when it comes to social issues, but collectivists in the economic sphere. Conservative (right wing) liberals are collectivist in social matters and individualist in economic issues. Unfortunately, liberalism does not provide a clear answer to bring the two sides together.

The constant skirmish between collectivist and individualist attitudes leads to confused calls for the separation of liberalism and democracy or for building “illiberal democracies”. Note how this is manifested in the proposition of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban:

“[...] the Hungarian nation is not simply a group of individuals but a community that must be organized, reinforced and in fact constructed. And so in this sense the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach.” (14)

If the bounds of the sociopolitical ideology undergirding our systems have been extended to the point that the ideology has become unworkable, democracy must step in as the arbiter that helps to amalgamate and distil opposing positions. That is why the two are paired. The tension between progressive and conservative liberalism may become oppressive, defying the core tenets of liberalism. Only the respect and trust in the results of the democratic process can save liberalism from itself and preserve the long-fought-for individual freedoms. After all, the main virtue and bottom-line of liberal democracy is that it permits citizens to change their rulers peacefully (15).



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4

DEMOCRACY (AND POPULISM)

4.1

Reversing the Wedge Between Liberalism and Democracy in the Strongmen Era

—
Joanna Micah Eufemio



The world is witnessing a dramatic increase in the popularity of strongmen in politics, a growth that appears inversely proportional to the level of people's trust in liberal methods of governance. Populism, which almost always gives birth to strongmen regimes (1), is not an inherent counter-thesis to liberal democracy; nonetheless, the current reality in a lot of strongmen-led countries paints a vivid picture of a wedge driven by populists between democracy and liberalism, as liberals are being accused of preventing people—through institutions, norms and policies—from realising their collective will, and hence, threatening democracy.

It was not too long ago when it seemed that liberalism would drive the world to where we thought we wanted to go—free democracy, open markets, people-centred governance. It is unclear exactly when or where this vapour of disapproval towards liberalism began, but it somehow managed to seep in across continents. In some countries, the narrative is slowly being shaped by isolated manifestations of discontent, just enough to elicit uncomfortable adjustments from the ruling elite; in others, the discontent was so pronounced that it enabled strongmen to completely dominate the national narrative and transform it into a dramatic protest against the so-called “liberal elitists.”

Regardless of the *when* and *where*, if proponents of liberalism wish to revive its relevance in the strongmen era, it is imperative they address two fundamental and more important questions: *why* and *how*. Albeit at a varying degree, there are traces of common reasons and methods through which strongmen propel into power by riding, if not steering, the waves of disgruntlement in different parts of the world—from superpowers such as the US and Russia, to post-colonial states such as the Philippines, Nicaragua and Hungary.

Refocus: Highlight Ends Instead of Means

Populists are winning in the game of public perception—promising to address a pressing threat or a long-neglected need swiftly, no matter the cost—often trumping on civil liberties. Recent history shows that when the populace buys into a politician's purpose, they will not care so much about the methods by which this purpose is achieved. Populists sell an idea and if their selling point still resonates with the public,



the latter is willing to look past certain “inconveniences” and even dismiss extreme actions as “necessities” to shake the status quo.

Among other reasons, strongmen thrive because of popular support to a core narrative, often involving a notion of an enemy or a threat. In Russia, the enemies were ‘Western vultures’; in Egypt, secular elites; in Hungary, Muslim migrants (2). Regardless of these narratives’ (in)validity and (il)legitimacy, one cannot deny two factors that have driven the voting public to subscribe to them—clarity and relatability.

To some, the problem is as real as it can get, such as relating the overall immigration problem to a scuffle in the local neighbourhood or an unpleasant encounter with a migrant at a convenience store. At a bigger scale, individual experiences are amplified when related to similar sentiments of other members of a community, although the process through which this amplification occurs is being significantly accelerated by social media.

As more populist campaigns succeed and give birth to strongmen in politics, thereby threatening the gains made towards a liberal world order, proponents of liberalism must reassess how to package their ideals in a manner palatable and appetising for the voting public. Free market, free trade, free democracy, these are all good to hear. However, one cannot expect someone passively benefitting from these freedoms to be more passionate than a neighbour actively inconvenienced or harmed by the ‘enemies’ that populists point to.

To stand a chance at regaining popularity, liberals should start refocusing from advocating means—ways on how society must operate—to convincing the public on the ends—what kind of society we are heading towards. Essential to this is locating where the ‘individual’ lies in the whole gamut of liberal ideals, and clearly communicating how these abstract ideals relate to daily real-life dilemmas. At this point in history, when it is much easier to get the votes of the dissatisfied than the hopefuls, liberals need to seriously rethink their rhetoric.

Popularity and approval are gained by promoting a cause that speaks to the public directly, and nothing speaks more directly to the disenfranchised than results that can be felt. The next best thing is a promise, which populists have handed out so generously. In the arena of public perception, populist sentiments eclipse liberal ideals not necessarily because the former offers a better paradigm. It may simply be because populism promises the stars while the liberals keep trying to sell to the world a blueprint of an aircraft that may or may not take us there.



Repair: Strengthen Institutions

Dominating public perception, however, will not be enough in the long run. Some argue that populist regimes led by strongmen are self-destructive, as they will be vulnerable to the same unease and discontent that catapulted them into power if they fail to translate their rhetoric into concrete results. Past the buy-in phase, it will boil down to the capability of strongmen to deliver on their promises. Unfortunately for the proponents of liberalism, while falling behind in the arena of public perception, they seem to not have much of an advantage in results delivery either.

The irony of free elections being an avenue where the people cast their protest votes against existing liberal ways has never been more pronounced than it is now. Upon closer examination, these protest votes are not as much against the fundamental ideals of liberalism as against the methods often associated with liberal rule, marred with messy, rigid and inefficient processes. As observed by William Galston, “it seems that the aim of contemporary populism is ‘illiberal democracy’—a governing system capable of translating popular preferences into public policy without the impediments that have prevented liberal democracies from responding effectively to urgent problems. From this perspective, populism is a threat not to democracy per se but rather to the dominant liberal variant of democracy” (3).

The demand for a responsive governing system contributed to the increasing popularity of leadership styles that banner strength and decisive action over the bottom-up way of ruling, despite the threats the former poses on individual rights and the rule of law. Populist candidates capitalise on the distrust towards government and institutions to put forward their agenda. Intentionally or otherwise, populist candidates tend to weaken institutions in the guise of radical change. In what was coined as ‘the populist paradox’, leaders whose rise and rule exploit the vulnerabilities of existing systems to combat corruption tend to use their office to further weaken institutional venues by bypassing them, co-opting them with political appointees, and ousting critics (4).

Imperfect as they are, institutions were established and were able to withstand the test of time for a reason. Institutional mechanisms developed through deliberative democracy, despite being criticised for inefficiency and ineptitude, were products of a long process of building, adjustment and rebuilding. We have yet to see whether the haste that populism offers can ultimately outweigh the stability that liberal institutions have long been delivering. If we look, however, at the global experience in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, examples across the globe provided hints of the



weaknesses of strongmen regimes, both in terms of transparency and responsiveness in running governments.

Hopefully, it will not be long before the voting public realises that the way to go is to repair and strengthen institutions, not undermine them. In this area, there exists an opportunity for liberals to reclaim its relevance: to offer solutions to inefficiency and rigidity, rather than being its face.

Recalibrate: Liberalism for Whom?

Repairing institutions, however, is easier said than done, especially with conservatives seemingly too preoccupied in preserving them in their present state. It will entail a conscious and large-scale effort among proponents of liberal ideals to discard and relent traditions and adapt to the evolving demands of the times. For this to even begin, a recalibration of the fundamentals of 'liberalism' may be necessary. But first, it is important to understand why anti-establishment movements were able to drive a wedge between liberalism and democracy.

In 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin boldly declared that “the liberal idea has become obsolete.” Liberalism is now being criticised left and right—some only questioning the liberal economic doctrine, while others go as deep as denigrating its social doctrines on secularism and individual rights (5).

Liberalism is in crisis but is not irredeemable. However, the current tact of prominent liberal proponents arrogantly dismissing the populist trend as uneducated and irrational is simply not the answer. Neither is defending liberalism in its entirety or counting on the hope that liberalism will repair itself.

The apparent truth is that liberalism has been a tool of oppression and marginalisation. There needs to be an acknowledgement that while democracy, rule of law, individual rights and equality—the core of liberalism—are still fundamentally desirable, there are clear losers in the methods being employed to achieve these. Further, this acknowledgement needs to translate into a recalibration, with some bias for the nations, communities and individuals who are bearing the pain that liberalism is responsible for.

In a system where the objective is to protect individual liberty through minimal intervention, and a free hand inadvertently results in the exploitation of individual rights, a major recalibration is needed.



If critics are correct that liberalism had outlived its purpose, perhaps it is time to reformulate one—individual liberty not for the sake of liberty but targeted for the marginalised and the vulnerable.

“Liberalism is not a utopian project, it is a work in perpetual progress” (6). Liberalism has had a relatively long history of triumphs but unless it evolves at a pace proportionate to the rise of populism, it runs the risk of being sidelined. The wedge driven by populists between liberalism and democracy emerge not only from differences on dogma or philosophical notions, but from real-life experiences—hunger, unemployment, loss of a sense of identity. As such, reversing this wedge will entail correction in multiple levels—matter, matter and method.

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4.2

The Infiltration by New Right and the Threats to Our Political Culture

—

Franziska Fislage



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a key topic of discussion in the media was the growing impact of populism on political culture and the political order. The February 2020 election of Thomas Kemmerich of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) as Minister-President of the federal state of Thuringia in Germany gained international attention, as it marked the first time since the Second World War that a candidate was elected head of state government by the Christian Democrats (CDU), the liberals (FDP) and the right-wing, and partly right-extremist, party Alternative for Germany (AfD) by a ‘parliamentary trick’— AfD members did not vote for their own candidate but unexpectedly shifted their votes to the liberal candidate, Kemmerich. This was contrary to common political behaviour in Germany. Even though the move was not illegal, Kemmerich’s election with votes from right-wing members of parliament broke a taboo in German politics. With this shift, the AfD wanted to—and did—expose and ridicule the parliament and parliamentary procedures. A government crisis in Thuringia followed. One day after the election, FDP leader Christian Lindner suggested that Kemmerich should withdraw from the post of minister-president, which he did. After several weeks of consultation on how to deal with this scandal, former prime minister Bodo Ramelow from the left party Die Linke was re-elected by the parliamentarians. This incident gained certain attention as it reveals the populists’ strategy and the threat to Germany’s political culture by questioning the common understanding of political norms and procedures.

Globally, populism has changed the way politicians communicate on social media as well as in parliaments. Populists and extremists have infiltrated the democratic political culture, altering what is deemed acceptable in public discourse. Democratic principles are routinely attacked by right-wing political parties’ anti-pluralistic tendencies. Populists resort to inflammatory rhetoric, making statements against migrants or minorities or other “enemies” of “the nation” or “the people”. A constitution, laws, checks and balances, and a common understanding of dos and don’ts are essential to develop a political culture for the stability of a democracy. This also includes the acceptance of fundamental principles of the constitution and its procedures, trust in political institutions, and pluralism. These aspects are increasingly questioned by populists and extremists. This common understanding is under threat due to populists’ anti-pluralism and anti-constitutionalism.



Links Between Populists and the New Right

The New Right plays a major role in developments regarding the change of political culture. As a group of intellectuals, the New Right is more a network of people than an organisation with a clear structure (such as a political party or an association). The New Right does not want to achieve political power through governmental responsibility but through a predominance of their positions (1). For instance, in 2017, Steve Bannon, once a chief strategist to former US President Donald Trump, founded The Movement, a Brussels-based transnational organisation that aims to build a network among national-conservative and right-wing-populist parties and like-minded supporters (2).

The New Right's basic assumption is that political change has to follow a mental change ("cultural revolution from the right"). This "cultural revolution from the right" implies a change in the political culture, leading to a medium-term or long-term political reorganisation. For the New Right, it is important that their positions dominate in public discourse before they can be implemented. The New Right clearly wants to overcome the democratic state based on a constitution and rule of law and shift it from a pluralistic understanding of democracy to a homogenous one, and from an individual understanding of human rights to human rights for nations (3). The New Right's main focus is on establishing institutions or think tanks, such as the Institut für Staatspolitik (Institute for State Policy) and the Bibliothek des Konservatismus (Library of Conservatism) in Germany and spreading their ideas and views via publishers, newspapers and journals, such as *Sezession* and *Blaue Narzisse* (4). In Italy, Bannon helped to build up the Dignitatis Humanae Institute (Institute for Human Dignity), a right-wing Roman Catholic institute (5).

In the past, the New Right did not seek to link their ideas to a political party, but this has now changed. Bannon, for instance, tried to connect The Movement with several European parties (6). Similarly, the New Right in Germany has strong links to the AfD. With the entry of the AfD into parliament in 2017, Götz Kubitschek, a key figure in Germany's New Right and who also oversees the Institut für Staatspolitik, sensed that his own ideas could also enter parliament (7). Kubitschek is also working on strategies for AfD policies, consulting several AfD politicians and is influencing the work of the party via Der Flügel (The Wing), which was led by Björn Höcke who is also the head of the Thuringia AfD (8). Although Der Flügel has officially been dissolved after an executive order of the AfD party board in 2020, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution maintains that there is no secured knowledge that the intraparty organisation has truly been disbanded. The entry of the AfD into the German



Bundestag (federal parliament) led to a boost of the New Right scene. Some analysts have said that every second AfD parliamentarian in the Bundestag has staff linked to the New Right or right-extremist milieu. Moreover, former staff from the Institut für Staatspolitik are now also working in the parliament (9). Similar developments are happening in other European countries as well, such as in France (10).

Protecting Political Culture and Political Order

The increasing links between the New Right and the AfD in Germany and Bannon's attempt to connect with political parties show that the New Right has infiltrated politics. In Germany, the New Right has found a parliamentary outlet for their ideas and efforts of "cultural change". At the first glance, the election of a liberal candidate Kemmerich in Thuringia might not appear to fit into the populist strategy of being the alternative to established parties. But this move fits perfectly into the New Right's destructive strategy. Kubitschek even praised Höcke for his constructive-destructive strategies in Thuringia (11). The AfD wanted to expose and ridicule the parliament, the main stage for discourse and conflict resolution. The polarisation created through this act is an attempt to destroy the political culture, which includes achieving a broad orderly consensus. Although the incident might not seem like much to worry about, it might be a sign of things to come.

Countering Populism and the New Right

As populism increases globally, it is important to understand all aspects of it, including having an awareness of the tricks applied by the New Right and populists. Political parties must think outside the box and be sensitive to right-wing parties' behaviour, such as recognising that a party need not vote for its own candidate anymore, and that the change in political culture goes beyond the atmosphere and tone in debates. It is also necessary to keep an eye on the other strategies of the New Right and populists, to protect the political culture from a change towards right-wing ideas. This includes having an awareness of and also exposing their strategies. It is only if the strategies used by populists and extremists are exposed for what they are that their potential impacts can be weakened. Therefore, alliances among established democratic forces, such as politicians, political parties, networks, organisations and institutions, are more important than ever to analyse and tackle populist and right-wing threats. It is only by working together and by sharing information that they can protect the democratic political culture from further infiltration by populists, extremists and the New Right.



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4.3

The Borders That Bind Us

—

Patrick Sandoval and
Mitali Mukherjee



My mother-in-law, Ave Maria Didic Alberti, was born in June 1942 in Idrija, a town rich in mercury mines in the far eastern reaches of the Alps, in present-day Slovenia, 40 kms from the current Italian border and 60 kms from the historic port city of Trieste. The people of Idrija, who had for centuries coexisted peacefully with their neighbours within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had, after the First World War, come under the rule of Benito Mussolini and his Italian fascist regime. The year that Ave was born, the Second World War was well underway. The US victory against the Japanese at the Battle of Midway was marking the turning point in the Pacific War. In Europe, the second half of 1942 saw a reversal of Nazi German fortunes, with strategic defeats in North Africa and Stalingrad. The news of the mass murders of Jewish people by the Nazis had started to reach the Allies.

Ave's mother, Tea, was an Italian schoolteacher who spent her childhood in the care of German-speaking nuns, and her father, Stanislao, was an ethnic Slovenian doctor who studied medicine in Bologna and Prague and began his practice in Vienna. In 1943, Ave's father had only recently returned to his family home in Idrija to continue his career as a doctor when Josip Borz Tito's Yugoslav Partisans descended on the town. A doctor was in need, and Stanislao was taken by the communists to serve Tito's troops on the battlefield. Towards the end of the war, a bomb ripped off one of his limbs; he spent two months in a field hospital before Europe attained peace. Ave's parents were then conflicted with the decision of remaining in Idrija, now under Communist Yugoslavian rule, or moving to the recently created Free Territory of Trieste, under Anglo-American administration, where Ave's maternal grandmother, a staunch supporter of Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph, ran a successful business. After considering what the repercussions might be for the family in the years to come, they packed up and moved to Trieste.

Trieste's very particular geographical location, situated at the end of a long strip of rugged karst terrain along the Adriatic coastline, has made for a turbulent yet vibrant history. For centuries, Trieste was the Austro-Hungarian Empire's most important seaport. After the First World War, in the 1920s and '30s, fascism reigned over Trieste and the city's Slavic population was subject to persecution, harassment and forced 'Italianisation' of names. In 1943, in response to Mussolini surrendering to the Allies, Hitler's troops invaded Northern Italy, controlling Trieste for two years. Tito's Partisans took Trieste by force for 40 days in 1945, killing scores of Italian



soldiers, acts of violence that according to some historians amount to genocide. Great Britain and the US then took over administration of the city as a Free Territory for seven years—the southernmost outpost of Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain,’ separating the Communist East from the West—until Trieste finally returned to the now democratic Italian Republic in 1954, where it has sat mostly placidly since. Some of Trieste’s oldest inhabitants joke that they have lived in six countries without ever having left their city. Others dub Trieste the “cold-weather Jerusalem”. Trieste, during the twentieth century, was a microcosm of some of Europe’s gravest problems—ethnic cleansing, forced migrations and identitarian politics.

Ave was the only member of the Slovenian minority in the Italian primary school she attended in Trieste. There was no escaping the burden of her Slavic surname, Didic. She remembers being called “sciava”, a derogatory term used by the majority Italian-speaking Triestini to address the Slovenians. She has recollections of her presence seeming bothersome, a disruption to the ‘Italianness’ that the authorities in Rome wanted to promote nationwide. She never feared for her safety, yet a profound sense of injustice did grip her community. People were classified by their ethnicity, political inclinations or particular family history. A widespread distrust of ‘the other’ prevailed. The repercussions of this tension were felt by Ave’s family in their everyday lives. When asked, she says she can relate to the way today’s immigrants in Europe might feel. Ave does not have fond memories of her childhood in Trieste and recalls dreaming of a future life unscathed by predetermined identities.

Today, Trieste’s diverse past is present on its streets—Spritz cocktails are served with Slovenian cheese, and Austrian sausages and goulash is more of a staple than pizza. Italian, Slovenian and German can all be heard at the outdoor tables of the Caffè degli Specchi, which claims to serve more coffees than any other café in the world. Catholic churches, Orthodox churches and synagogues are all within walking distance of each other. Like her adoptive city, Ave was a product of three distinct cultural and linguistic worlds—the Slavic family to which she belonged ethnically and linguistically; Italy, which gave her a national and cultural identity; and the Germanic influence that her grandmother, who was brought up under the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburgs, had on her.

Upon finishing high school, Ave moved to Switzerland to study law and learn French in Lausanne. There, she met Günther, a young German diplomat-to-be, whom she married in 1967, moving with him to Bonn, the then German capital, where Günther was completing his entry into the *Auswärtiges Amt* (German foreign ministry). Ave used her language skills to find a job at the Italian Embassy. Following the law of



the time, Ave acquired her husband's German nationality, which she continues to hold today. She accompanied her husband to postings in Ankara, Turkey and La Paz, Bolivia, where her first daughter, Vania, was born. Her relationship with Günther came to an end, and she moved back to Bonn, to work in the university.

At a party in Bonn, she met Manuel, a young Spanish diplomat on his first assignment abroad. They soon married and had a daughter, Beatriz. With Manuel and her two daughters, she lived in Montevideo (Uruguay), Madrid (Spain), Washington DC (US), Brussels (Belgium) and Panama City (Panama). Apart from the difficult adaptation of her daughters to the constant shifting, her life as a diplomat spouse provided her with the global lifestyle she had longed for as an adolescent. Contrary to her childhood in Trieste, while traveling the world with Manuel, she felt accepted everywhere, though she was aware that she was a privileged immigrant.

Ave is now settled in Madrid, a city she loves. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, she was a regular at the Madrid opera and at its many theatres and cinemas, watching arthouse films from every country imaginable. She reads for hours in the six languages she speaks. The rest of the time she travels; Ave relaxes for a few weeks every year in Provence, France, at the country home of a lifelong friend, she travels to Munich, Germany, every summer to spend time with her psychiatrist friend Heidrun and attend the Salzburg Festival, and she visits her two daughters and five grandchildren wherever they may be living in the world, whether it be Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Bosnia or India. Every Christmas, the entire family gathers in Duino, a small village just outside Trieste, to enjoy the holidays by the fire, watching movies and eating Triestine specialties. Ave finds time to buy and decorate the Christmas tree, cook for an army of guests, entertain visitors from all corners of the globe, and play with every grandchild, never losing her positive nature.

Ave's story is not only the story of Trieste, but also the story of modern Europe. Born to an ethnic Slovenian father and Italian mother on the fault lines of Europe's most severe nationalist clashes, her life was shaped both by the bumpy trajectory of one of Europe's most diverse cities, as well as by the borderless peace and stability which the European Union has brought to the continent she calls home. Her daughter Beatriz often asks her why she does not give up her German passport and become Italian or Spanish, to which Ave consistently responds, "I don't care about my passport; I'm European".

§



As Europe lived through one of its most defining periods in history and Ave came into the world in Italy, on shores far away in India, equally powerful changes were afoot when another life came into being.

§

Ranjan Banerjee was born in pre-partition India in East Bengal—now Bangladesh—in 1941. It was a time when calls for independence were at a fever pitch. People were ready for change, and change was coming.

He was my mother's uncle, Ranju to the family and *Choto Dadu* (junior grandfather, loosely translated) for me.

Although his siblings and he were born in Dhaka, now the capital of Bangladesh, his prescient academic father could sense the approaching fault lines for independent India. By 1943, the family had moved to Calcutta (now Kolkata), West Bengal, to begin a new life at the Indian Institute for the Cultivation of Science.

As the heady elation of Independence lingered in the air, Choto Dadu's formative years were reflective of those times. India witnessed its first nationwide election, with the Indian National Congress winning under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In the meantime, Choto Dadu savoured the merriment of youth. He was the popular bloke who knew the best digs for food and music, the one with dashing looks, suave clothes and hair, and certainly the neighbourhood 'Romeo' with all the young ladies keen for an introduction, and perhaps even a drive in his shiny black Vauxhall.

By 1960, the country was in flux. It was a period of change, often painful for the nation. This was a decade when India saw war, want and loss. In 1962, India witnessed a brief border war with China. In 1965, Indians lived through a second war with Pakistan.

And perhaps in congruence, the young man was struggling to find his own voice as well.

Choto Dadu was now studying at Calcutta University. He was a student of Physics, blessed with academic brilliance. But he was also a young man who did not want to follow the path his father had. This young scholar wanted to see more of what the world had to offer. He was ready for an evolution of his own.



As India elected a new prime minister and a woman (Indira Gandhi) assumed leadership of the nation, Choto Dadu made his journey from the bustling city of Calcutta to the cold climes of Canada.

At the time he made the journey, it was neither commonplace nor widely approved, the idea of moving to another country. After all, what greater joy than the familiarity and uniformity of being around people who spoke, dressed, thought and mostly lived just like you.

But he was looking for something else. The intoxicating and enigmatic promise that vibrant multi-cultural societies whisper in your ear, of showing you places, people, words and ideas that you have never experienced before. Of opening your mind and altering it forever.

Canada was many wonderful things, but it was also not an easy transition. Struggling with a new way of learning, unsupportive guides and professors, he eventually abandoned his hopes of getting a PhD and moved quickly into the folds of the working world.

It would be a long time before his family in India saw him—once briefly in 1967 when he returned as a newly married man, and then in the full kaleidoscopic version in 1984.

The nation was witnessing ordeals of different kinds. In the October of 1984, Prime Minister Gandhi was assassinated by her bodyguards. In December the same year, a gas leak at the Union Carbide pesticides plant in Bhopal left thousands dead and numerous others permanently disabled.

Perhaps these traumatic events placed the country on the brink of vital transformations, even though we were not fully aware of it yet. It was in the context of this time and place that I first met Choto Dadu.

The impact was instant and massive. No one spoke quite like him, and I had never heard these world experiences before—rushing to the Louvre on a six-hour layover at Paris to quickly catch a glimpse of the Monalisa, casually slipping Indonesian phrases and their meanings into a conversation, speaking with equal ease with the cab drivers and the ‘high and mighty’ ones in our family. This man was not just a lesson in himself, it was like seeing a whole other world!



Here was a man who knew and understood so much of the world. Not through the pages of a book, or through hearsay, but through the people he had met, the sights he had seen. Choto Dadu was a life etched with experience.

The 1990s heralded one of India's most important policy pivots—an economic reform programme begun by Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. India was ready to open the borders of its economy and I was ready to open the borders of my mind.

Fortuitously we got to see and experience more of the man and the rich tapestry of his life in the years to come. He and his family were posted to New Delhi, India, for a while. That meant long dinners and lunches at his beautiful home hosted by his wife, a lady with luminous intelligence and humour. Conversations with them were always replete with stories from every imaginable corner of the world, and always created in everyone who listened to a tender yet excruciating urge to see the world and experience cultures this way.

He was the only person I knew who would laugh at angry drawing-room discussions around Pakistan and point out that there were no two communities and nations that were more similar in their ways and thoughts.

As the saying goes, the days they pass slowly, but the years, they seem to fly. My sister and I went on to finish our studies, pursue careers and over time, build families of our own.

Marriage took my sister to the US while I stayed on in India. For me, the changes I was beginning to see my country undergo cemented ideas that Choto Dadu had first planted. The idea that democracies are healthiest and most nourished when they allow for different cultures, communities and ideas to collide yet coexist. The idea that freedom of speech and thought and expression does not build hate, it builds arcs of knowledge, each drawing from the other and reinforced by it. The idea that building bridges is the only way to find any meaningful understanding with another human being. And most importantly, that opening the window of diversity, of acceptance of different cultures and ideas can create ripples of change, not just in an individual but in countless others that individual may touch.



What is more human and real than the sense of wonder, learning and compassion that human connect brings with it? In a world that has been ripped apart by a pandemic, the primal response is to put up walls, both physical and virtual, to protect one's citizens.

Yet, the greatest learning and empathy reveals itself only when walls are brought down. And for the sake of generations to come, my hope is that our nations continue to build living spaces that nurture many "Choto Dadus" who in turn become windows to new worlds for their children and their children's children.

5

TECHNOLOGY

5.1

Exploring the Prospects for Higher Education

—

Utkarsh Amitabh



Lynda Gratton and Andrew J. Scott, authors of *The 100-Year Life* (1), offer three defining features of work in the twenty-first century. First, people are likely to live much longer; being a centenarian will be commonplace. Second, the lifespan of organisations will significantly reduce, so long-term employment will become a thing of the past. Third, the concept of retirement will fade away, partly due to financial reasons and partly out of choice.

Combining these factors, it is easy to visualise how one might have to spend several more years learning and unlearning to build a viable portfolio of careers. If higher education institutions are not doing their job, what are our alternatives?

Historically, education was an amorphous bundle of core skills, soft skills, critical thinking, signalling value and networking. What we are witnessing now is the great unbundling of education where different companies and communities are attempting to capture one part of the bundle. For instance, the Lambda School, an online technical education programme, is focused only on core skill building to make people of all backgrounds ready for careers in the computer sciences.

Changing Focus Areas

The unbundling of education has brought about four tectonic shifts—career choices driven by the return on investment (ROI), a move towards lifelong learning, shorter durations, and new business models.

Usually, the period after a recession or emergency—such as the one we are currently experiencing—sees a spike in ROI-driven career decisions. About 80 percent of students surveyed at the University of California, Los Angeles (2), said that education was a means towards employment. Clearly, there is a mismatch between what students want and what traditional universities offer. Students want to learn tangible skills like coding, marketing and sales in a condensed timeframe. One can argue that this is short-term thinking that will backfire, but this does not discount existing customer demand.

The second shift being witnessed is a move towards lifelong learning. The traditional model was to conclude all education, including a graduate degree, as quickly as possible and apply that learning in a job. This model no longer works. The new normal



is to have study/learning time interspersed throughout one's work life. This is a huge opportunity for entrepreneurs and investors. The 26-35-year-olds looking for self-improvement/lifelong learning constitutes the largest opportunity in China, much greater than K-12 or test preparation (3). While this spending analysis is focused on China, it is likely to be true for the rest of the world as well.

The third shift is that students want to pursue courses of a shorter duration. Because of the focus on lifelong learning, students are keen to spend lesser time on one block of learning. Make School, which also has an offline campus, is a two-year programme with extremely high employment rates. There are many similar examples. The rationale is that if we must go to school multiple times, then one block school should not be too long. People want to make their time count and capitalise on the latest trends.

Lastly, there is a shift in business models. The growing popularity of income share agreements reflect changing attitudes where students are not willing to make huge, one-time payments upfront. This not only changes the student financing market but also forces educational institutions to focus on student outcomes, specifically their employment.

Waves of Disruption

The unbundling of education will bring about disruption in multiple waves. The first wave will include channels of learning hard skills with direct employment prospects. Think of coding bootcamps, MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses) with certifications and nano degrees. These are high arbitrage opportunities but very few such disruptions have worked at scale so far.

A big reason people choose to go for higher studies is to network, and this is where the second wave of disruption is likely. Alternatives to traditional networking in the form of co-working spaces, accelerators, private networks, curated associations and peer-mentoring communities are likely to add another area of massive disruption.

Students empowered with hard skills and networks will make a huge push for soft skills. Several innovations can be expected in this space in the coming years. The ones that will work are likely to be able to demonstrate tangible benefits for students and young professionals. There might not be a need to go to college to pick up soft skills or network.

Studying or working at an elite institution or organisation signals competence to our network. It also increases our perceived social value. The fourth wave of disruption



is likely to be the emergence of organisations where membership, association or affiliation signals equal or greater competence.

The late Clayton Christensen, a Harvard Business School professor, famously said that 50 percent of all colleges will go bankrupt in the coming decade(s). The COVID-19 crisis has pushed many more colleges to collapse than estimated. The ones that survive will adapt to the great unbundling of education and combine two essential components of learning in the twenty-first century—artificial intelligence (AI) and communities.

AI + Community = Future of Learning

The factory-inspired, nineteenth century model of education made sense when there were severe limitations on teaching resources. But AI can help us overcome such constraints by leveraging three of its defining features—perception, recognition and recommendation, thereby creating personalised learning for students and more free time for instructors.

An AI-powered higher education experience will operate on four planes—virtual teaching, learning assessment, opportunity matching for internships and jobs, and mentoring from peers and experts.

Imagine Sally sitting in Beirut. She is enrolled in a distance learning programme that brings together leading data science professors from around the world and awards a degree valued by the most coveted employers. She attends lectures in a co-working space. There is a video camera at the front of the room that uses facial recognition and posture analysis to take attendance and figure out if Sally is paying attention. Maybe she is unwell and not able to concentrate. All this data is fed into her student profile and a customised homework plan is created for her. Sally completes her assignment with some help from her peer mentor, with whom she is matched based on her learning needs. They build a friendship and, over time, start working on complex data sets together. They figure out a way to optimise an algorithm that is precious to one of the programme sponsors. After several rounds of back-and-forth, they decide to patent their solution and work on their idea independently. They move from a full-time degree programme to a flexible-part time option designed for entrepreneurs.

The example might sound compelling, but it is bound to fail in the short term. Today, there are innumerable digital learning platforms powered by AI that are struggling to find customers. Even when students sign up, only 3 percent (5) end up completing



course requirements.

Research presented by Dr Susan Dynarski from the University of Michigan makes it abundantly clear that while online education works for mature learners (6), it can harm academically weak students and compromise on conceptual learning. Clearly, the AI-powered education technology model is missing something critical. That is why there is an urgent need to complement AI-based learning tools with the power of communities. This approach will humanise the way we think about higher education and technology.

No matter how sophisticated our gadgets become, it is hard to relate to shiny, dark screens. Humans have a fundamental need to belong, learn and share. We need meaningful communities as they are force multipliers. They make learning fun and create a peer-to-peer accountability mechanism that shapes a culture of learning. AI enables personalisation at scale.

Only by combining both AI and communities will higher education be relevant and prepare students for the adventures of the fourth industrial revolution. The good news is that traditional educational institutions are not the only ones that can create this customised offering. The decoupling of education means that far more players are now competing in the market. This is likely to democratise learning and make it accessible to far more than those who can afford to pay a US\$250,000 for an advanced degree.

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5.2

**Smart Working is the Way
Ahead**

—

Nicolò Andreula



What if the COVID-19 pandemic could turn into an opportunity to improve human lives, businesses and cities? Global social distancing measures imposed at the height of the pandemic triggered the largest remote-working experiment in history—it used to be the privilege of freelancers and digital nomads, and became business-as-usual for months for any nine-to-five employee. The issue is that, unfortunately, working from home does not necessarily mean being more productive or happier...yet. Smart working could be the answer, but how does it differ from remote working? What benefits can smart working bring to people's quality of life, corporate income statements and urban sustainability? How can smart working be sustained during the pandemic and beyond?

Rise of Smart Working and its Advantages

The COVID-19 outbreak led to the largest experiment of remote working globally, despite it neither being planned nor people being fully ready for it. Although, 88 percent of global HR managers surveyed in March 2020 said their organisations encouraged or imposed remote working solutions (1). The months after showed that it is possible to use virtual communication to interact with clients and colleagues for a sustained amount of time without having to always be in the office or travelling to meet key partners and stakeholders. But what good does this new way of working bring?

Research shows that the potential of smart working can be unleashed in terms of benefits for workers, enterprises and societies, especially if applied at a large scale. Most examples considered here are from Italy and China, as there is a wide amount of research available since the two countries were hit early by the pandemic. For employees, smart working is a way to optimise schedules, save commuting time and costs, and achieve a higher quality of life. In Italy, there are more than 13 million job commuters (over 20 percent of the total population) that spend, on average, 70 euros (US\$85) per month and 72 minutes a day to reach their workplace, costs that could well be reduced by a permanent or quasi-permanent smart working schedule (2). Furthermore, smart working raises employees' wellbeing and flexibility, as demonstrated by a study conducted by Politecnico di Milano, claiming that 80 percent of employees who shifted to smart working have seen improvements in their work-life balance (3).



On the corporate side, smart working may result in higher levels of productivity and access to wider workers' pools, lower fixed costs and enhanced retention rates. In Italy, it has been argued that, on average, smart working could raise productivity by 15 percent and trigger a 20 percent reduction in absenteeism (4). And in 2015, employees of a Chinese travel agency who shifted to smart working were found to take shorter breaks and less sick days, generating a 13 percent increase in productivity (5). Moreover, the flexibility brought by the transition to this new way of working can also help to improve the attractiveness of job positions for millennials—in 68 percent of the cases—as well as to reduce employee churn rate: studies have found that smart workers are 13 percent more likely to stay in the same company on a given year (6,7). Furthermore, smart working helps companies have access to a much wider pool of workers since it goes beyond standard physical, geographical and organisational boundaries, opening doors also to new forms of working arrangements, such as outsourcing and crowdsourcing of tasks. According to the most optimistic sources, this may lead to a substantial labour cost reduction of up to 80 percent. Another experiment conducted in China estimated savings by almost US\$2,000/year per smart worker, due to the reduction in required headquarters space and related rental and utility costs (8).

Societies at large can also benefit from this practice, which brings lower road congestion and pollution, more social inclusion and higher fiscal revenues. For example, a study conducted between 2017 and 2019 in Mantua, Italy, showed that, by not going to the office, 250 smart workers avoided emissions equal to 42 tons of CO₂, a figure comparable to the effect on the Earth's atmosphere of 2,792 trees (9). The pandemic-induced lockdowns allowed for spontaneous experiments conducted at an unprecedented scale—each country reduced many types of pollution, experiencing almost immediate effects on various environmental aspects. For instance, in Spain and France in April 2020 actual nitrogen dioxide concentrations diverged 61 percent and 52 percent, respectively, from expectations thanks to lockdown measures (10).

From a societal standpoint, the benefit of labour pool inclusivity should also be considered. Smart working broadens job opportunities for people with difficulties in accessing offices, such as those with motor disabilities or who have family members needing assistance at home. For example, in the UK, there is a 30 percent employment gap between disabled workers and non-disabled ones, which could be significantly reduced thanks to more flexible working arrangements (11). Finally, by increasing the number of employed people, smart working could also raise the number of taxpayers and reduce subsidy costs.



Smart Working vs Remote Working

Now that the benefits to companies, people and societies have been defined, it is important to understand the key difference between smart working and remote working, as the latter is what most companies and workers have experienced during the lockdown period.

Remote working is not always “smart”, especially if forcedly conducted from home, without giving employees the flexibility of working where, when and how they want. In fact, smart working means being able to choose when and where to perform the assigned tasks—going to the office when it makes the most sense or staying at home or in a nearby co-working space when one wants to avoid unnecessary distractions or commuting costs.

The key mistake that many companies have made has been thinking that remote working is automatically smart. Without taking the necessary precautions, transformation measures and adopting the right mindset, abrupt and not well-thought shifts can lead to severe issues of disorganisation, underperformance and psychophysical malaise. Examples from Yahoo and IBM sustain this view—the former reversed its decision to introduce smart working in 2013 because employees seemed too relaxed and always focused on other things, whereas the latter went back the same way after introducing smart working in 2017 because, besides cost cutting, there was no increase in creativity nor productivity (12,13).

Therefore, to avoid backlashes, unnecessary risks, and negative side effects on workers’ productivity and wellbeing, the transition towards remote working needs to be performed by considering five key areas of action:

- **Cybersecurity:** Cyberattacks have become a daily struggle for businesses, with hackers trying to illegally access information every 39 seconds. Investing in prevention technologies is not the only defensive measure against data breaches (14). It has been estimated that nine out of 10 successful cyber intrusions are caused by people’s mistakes or carelessness, not by technological flaws (15). The probability of successful “people-based attacks” goes up when workers are not in the office, since, experts say, our minds tend to follow less stringent confidentiality protocols in places usually associated with leisure time. In this sense, the transition towards smart working could exacerbate the situation and make corporate infrastructures more vulnerable (16). While VPN and antivirus software for personal computers are essential to reduce the exposure to malware,



conducting dedicated training programmes to increase employees' awareness about cybersecurity best practices and behaviours is the most efficient way to address the problem.

- Mental and physical adaptation to the new circumstances should be considered with attention: Working from home, being isolated from colleagues and far away from social relations may have deep psychological consequences, such as increased depression and anxiety. Furthermore, by cutting commutes to and from the office, remote working further triggers a sedentary lifestyle, promoting weight gain and obesity, doubling the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and decreasing concentration (17). That is when personal responsibility comes into play in adapting to this new work “virtuality” in a healthy way, finding, for instance, gathering places and opportunities such as co-working spaces, libraries, internet cafés, gyms, cooking academies or cultural associations.
- A work culture based on trust and intrinsic motivation: Extrinsic incentives, such as bonuses, promotions and threats of punishment, act as strong motivators for employees, but actually only work for jobs that require low intellectual effort and are usually repetitive. In the long run, they lead to a decrease in motivation and a loss of interest (18). That is why companies are striving to unlock the intrinsic motivation of their workforce. For instance, to increase creativity and productivity, Google encourages its staff members to spend 20 percent of their time on what they find beneficial for the company, without control; Google News, Gmail and AdSense were all born out of that amount of time (19). To motivate and empower employees, it is important to satisfy their need for autonomy, mastery and purpose. An extremely positive example is the one of Best Buy, a multinational consumer electronics retailer based in Minnesota, US, reached a 41 percent increase in productivity after adopting a results-only work environment model (20). Similarly, a Chinese company proved that empathy is a powerful tool to encourage smart workers, as it strengthens connections, promotes inclusion, and creates a sense of community (21). How can this be achieved in a virtual environment? By increasing virtual social interactions such as video calls, intranets, photography competitions, maintaining spaces to express one's opinion freely and including the team in the decision-making process with constant feedback sessions (22).
- Objectives and key results: Planning business objectives and measuring results is a key element for achieving remote working success. Employees may be working from home for the first time and may find themselves not knowing what to do.



To align their work and results with those of the organisation, they should be individually provided with clear objectives and key results to achieve. The objectives and key results goal-setting framework has been widely used by companies such as Google, LinkedIn and Twitter to get their people moving in the same direction, and transparently measure their performance with respect to the goals set.

- **Working spaces:** Hot-desking is a strategy that commutes the new organisation and working culture—a solution with no assigned desks, reducing office size and space management costs while offering greater flexibility to employees. Another option could be desk hoteling, which implies the possibility of reserving workstations. This worked for E&Y in Cleveland, US, which almost halved its office size and retained the same number of employees (23). Generally, offices should be smaller and more distributed throughout the territory to be more easily manageable and reachable in case of need.

Making Smart Working Work

Together with a company's effort, aids coming from the public sector are crucial for this cultural shift to happen. Infrastructures, laws and incentives should be aligned and made available for companies and people willing to have a smarter and more sustainable future.

- **Infrastructures:** Smart working needs a higher upload bandwidth capacity. To make the transition feasible, governments should commit to ensure adequate connectivity access. In Italy, for example, ultrafast broadband covers only 24 percent of the population, versus an EU average of 60 percent, making 11 million Italians unable to efficiently work from home (24). During the lockdown, the website of the National Institute for Social Security crashed while handling 13 times lesser data than the ones managed by PornHub every day, despite spending 560 million euros in 10 years (25).
- **Laws:** In Italy, the 2017 law on agile work stimulated 60 percent of public offices, and 17 percent of large companies and SMEs to introduce smart working (26). However, the required procedures relating to the communication of individual agreements to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and to the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work have not been as effective. A negative reaction was registered by 45 percent of large companies due to additional complexities and greater onerousness in the adaptation of individual agreements or policies. The Italian experience shows that the “devil is in the details”, and that



the adoption of a law formally fair but practically difficult to enforce triggered a general backlash. This calls for more careful and far-sighted planning in countries willing to follow the same path.

- Incentives: In Italy, Regione Lombardia has granted 4.5 million euros of non-refundable aid to help companies introduce smart working (27). In the US, the Colorado Mutual prosperity programme has offered economic incentives for firms that decide to hire people living in the state's rural areas and let new employees work remotely for at least three days a week (28). Nevertheless, it is also crucial to ensure that the right to be disconnected is guaranteed (29). Corporate cultures often underline the importance of being constantly online and available, which results in employees feeling that they cannot unplug from work, not even in their free time, leading to longer workdays and more severe health problems. National laws can help in this sense as well: Italy and France have already introduced some rules to balance corporate interests with the protection of workers' private lives. Smart working should not be seen as a new type of contract, but rather as a new way of organising activities and tasks, and the right to disconnect and rest must be granted to every employee.

Overall, there is a need for a new social contract involving companies, people and governments. The former should grant employees higher autonomy and independence, thus enabling commuting time and costs savings; on the other hand, workers should guarantee the same or higher productivity. Of course, organisations should commit to provide more advanced technological systems and proper training programmes to ensure that the transition is smooth and flawless. From their side, governments should put in place an updated and simplified bureaucracy, infrastructure upgrades and monetary incentives to foster more inclusive working environments, cultural transformation and higher productivity.

So, what comes next? From the companies' standpoint, a change in management strategies is required to enable an efficient and sustainable shift towards smart working. To be feasible, this should be implemented while revising organisational charts and incentives, upgrading digital skills, harmonising workspaces in line with the new culture, and establishing clear and flexible rules.



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5.3

Is Hydrogen the Answer to Global Electromobility Woes?

—

Krzysztof Michalski



What kind of electric car propulsion will become the most efficient and the cheapest—a battery or a fuel cell using hydrogen? Are battery electric cars only an interim generation? What kind of future will it be? Certainly, one with limited fossil fuels. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that if we do not take decisive steps, global temperatures will rise by 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 (1), leading to more frequent natural disasters. One possible solution to slow down climate change impacts is to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels through, for instance, the internal combustion engines of millions of vehicles all over the world. The need to reduce fossil fuel dependence and reduce CO₂ emissions has spurred the search for new energy sources and the development of electromobility (the use of electric vehicles, or EVs).

The electric car is not a new phenomenon. The first EVs came long before the internal combustion engine. At the turn of the twentieth century, the market for electric cars was almost as large as for steam-powered vehicles. They were quiet, easy to operate and performed well; in fact, the first car to exceed 100 km/h was electric (2). However, electric cars soon fell out of favour due to developments in the internal combustion—engines were becoming more reliable and powerful at lower production costs.

The modern car industry is on the cusp of a change—the looming end of the ‘combustion era’ and the coming of the ‘era of electromobility’. In 2019, electric car sales reached 2.1 million globally, surpassing the previous record year (2018) and taking the global EV numbers to 7.2 million (3).

Electromobility is currently ruled by battery-operated EVs, powered by electricity stored in lithium-ion batteries to transfer to an electric motor. Unlike traditional cars, there is no combustion process, no oxidation of hydrocarbons and no exhaust fumes with numerous chemical compounds, all harmful to health. Apart from the minimisation of emissions, a battery-operated electric car is in many ways more comfortable than one with an internal combustion engine. Once started, electric cars can reach full engine capacity immediately, which is nearly impossible for vehicles equipped with a combustion engine. The simple design also makes electric cars less prone to failure as there is no need to change filters and oil. Moreover, EVs are easier to control and are far less noisy than regular cars.



Yet, internal combustion engines are still more popular than battery-operated EVs. The biggest cause for this is the price; exorbitant production costs are to blame for the high prices of batteries. The price will fall with improvements in the production process and the development of recycling technologies for old batteries. But batteries still have many limitations—an important hurdle to overcome is accumulating more energy in batteries, enabling them to travel longer. Additionally, at low temperatures, energy consumption increases, further reducing the travel range. For now, battery-operated EVs are not long-distance cars.

The lithium-ion battery is only one electromobility solution. Another option, that is increasingly being discussed, is hydrogen (4). EVs can also be powered by electricity generated from the simplest yet most abundant natural element. As with battery-operated EVs, no harmful substances are emitted during reaction in the electrochemical equipment (fuel cells) of a hydrogen-powered car. The devices produce electric energy due to the chemical reaction between hydrogen with oxygen. Hydrogen could be the answer to all the issues raised by battery-operated EVs, including range limitations, charging requirements or the environmental impact of lithium-ion battery production. Hydrogen operated EVs will also be more cost-effective. The time required to charge EV batteries reduces their availability for use. It can take about five minutes to refuel a hydrogen-powered battery and it has a larger range, which translates into higher operating profits. Hydrogen filling stations take up less space than battery car charging stations, serving the same or a greater number of vehicles.

Hydrogen-powered cars are expected to make up a large proportion of the vehicles on our roads in the future; by 2030, hydrogen could be the fuel that runs 10 million cars (5). But for now, the number of fuel cell-run EVs is limited. Although hydrogen is an easily available fuel, there are still very few hydrogen stations. Hydrogen fuel cells technology need to be developed at a quicker pace than that of lithium-ion batteries. It may be practical to use hydrogen for trucks and buses now, and for long distances in a few years. At the moment, batteries outperform fuel cells in terms of cost and infrastructure development for large-scale implementation. The costs of fuel cells, hydrogen tanks and hydrogen fuel have meant hydrogen-run EVs are costly, making battery-operated cars the preferred sustainable transportation option for now.

Nevertheless, hydrogen will significantly impact progress in transport electrification and as an electromobility fuel. Hydrogen is not just a fuel, but more a universal carrier and a way to store energy. It can retain energy surpluses generated during the night when electricity demand is low or from renewable sources. It is not a substitute



for fossil fuels, but is the perfect inclusion in conventional emission sources being replaced by emission-free renewables. Its use will also solve the problem of long-distance energy transmission. Hydrogen will also have many economic benefits beyond the transportation section. It is also anticipated as a simple and cost-effective way to store solar or wind energy.

Electromobility is the future of transportation. Over time, the cost of producing lithium-ion batteries and hydrogen fuel cells will need to be reduced such that EVs are affordable for all and can quickly replace traditional internal combustion engines. Hydrogen fuel cells are unlikely to be the single successor to internal combustion engines, but will power the turn to EVs alongside lithium-ion batteries. They can enable the electrification of those segments of the transport sector where the use of batteries would be too expensive or even impossible, such as trains or heavy trucks. However, with hydrogen already being used in an increasing number of areas such as the chemical industry, it should not just be seen as a fuel for the cars for the future, but as a universal, future-oriented energy carrier that, when used properly, will help maintain carbon neutrality.

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5.4

Democracy: Debugging in Process

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Suneera Madhok



Democracy and technology are the two most defining themes of the twenty-first century. Recently, the general belief seems to be that democracy is in crisis. Many seem to have one gnawing concern—is democracy failing? How do we fix democracy? Is this the end of democracy? A Google search of these three phrases gives 52,800,000 hits on the first, 56,000,000 hits on the second, and 247,000,000 on the last. But we must ask ourselves, is it the very concept of democracy that is perceived to be failing or is it liberal democracy that is receiving a pushback? Could it not be said that democracy is in an evolution churn, same as the disruption we see across every aspect of life?

What is Democracy?

Democracy is a derived Greek word meaning power to the people or rule of the people. It does not have a static definition, but it does commonly consist of certain minimum criteria notions such as:

- Citizens' elected representatives
- A free and fair electoral process
- Rule of law
- An independent judiciary
- A system of checks and balances on the power of the government through independent institutions and agencies, and
- All citizens to be equal before the law, with equal opportunities, irrespective of gender, religion, caste, creed

In addition to these, liberal (meaning free) democracy advocates for freedom of the individual, thereby presupposing recognition and protection of basic individual human rights and freedoms, which includes a right to live with dignity and the right to be able to express oneself freely, while limiting political powers. This protection of basic fundamental rights guaranteed under the law is what is most widely considered as modern-day democracy.

One of the key fulcrums of good governance is the provision of systemic checks and balances vide independent well-functioning institutions. The biggest obstacle to this is political games and partisan agendas. Gone are the days where political parties were meant to be adversaries not sworn enemies, as is the case today. The polarising



rhetoric and demagoguery leave no room for compromise, and any deviation from the original stance would be akin to showing weakness. Adding to the furor is the rise of populist governments formed on the strength of the fear and anger of a growing population that is increasingly feeling “left behind”.

But what does this mean for the ordinary citizen? Freedom of speech is coming under attack now more than ever before. In India, for instance, there has been the longest internet shutdown in the world (1); clampdown on dissent in every form (2), including arrests under stringent and archaic laws (3); tax raids (4); open calls for Hindutva vigilantes (5) and a Hindu *rashtra* (nation) (6); a bullied media (7); and compromise of near all institutions (8). On the other hand, what do the tenets of democracy mean to a citizen who does not even earn minimum wages after 20 hours of manual labour, nor access to the basic necessities of food and shelter?

Rise of Populism

Globally, we are seeing a surge in populism and a resultant rise of majoritarian authoritarianism, with multiple factors likely to have attributed to this retreat into nationalism. These include the advent of the internet bridging real-time connectivity, the growing divide between the rich and middle class, the growth of information and communication technologies, globalisation, multiculturalism, modernisation, inflation, and rising expenses.

Illiberal leaders and parties, once elected to power, use their legislative majorities to amend the electoral system; subvert balancing processes by using executive power to subdue the independence of other critical and gatekeeping institutions like the judiciary, election commission or central agencies; reinterpret the mode of application of rule of law; rewrite history; deepen polarisation in society; delegitimise the opposition by labelling it anti-national; denounce all protests by dubbing the protesters as terrorists or inspired by some ‘enemy country’; promote xenophobic nationalism and establish monopoly claim to represent the nation; and create and thrive on public paranoia in seeing an “enemy” in minorities and migrants (9).

This ‘us vs them’ politics played by the strongmen leaders of today is corroding society and creating a divide where the followers are blinded to any errors by their great chosen ones. Can you be both populist and democratic? The short answer—yes.

It is not necessary that all illiberal democracies are fascist governments. Instead of attacking illiberalism, it is important to understand what is causing the global rise



of populism. Is the majority feeling excluded? Does the rise of technology play a role in this? Do populists believe they are restoring/reforming democracy to the hidden ignored majority trampled upon by the elite minority? It is perhaps ironic that in a world where technology connects and breaks through borders, distances, religion, sex—and is perhaps the only true secular realm there is—our nations are increasingly retreating into nationalism, populism and almost fascism.

“Hate speech and oppression can effectively paralyse any hope for progress via democratic decision-making,” and promoting them is a “relatively inexpensive way for unethical leaders to maintain the status quo—and their power...Countries that embrace authoritarianism are more likely to do violence to their own people (generally the poor, immigrants, sexual minorities, religious minorities, etc.) and are more likely to blame any problems that the country may face on those people—and on enemies beyond their borders...Thus, more energy is expended demonizing the other than addressing actual problems...While the powers that be are spending their time raising hatred and fear, the problems that their country faces continue to deteriorate thanks to their misgovernance” (10).

Role of Technology

People often oscillate between technology being the problem or the solution. Must it be an either-or situation? It is important to harness informed technology so that we protect against and mitigate the very risks that are likely to play spoilsport in our attempt to strengthen the efficacy and accountability of government functioning. There is no denying the tremendous force and power of deploying this ever-evolving computer science that has completely seeped into our daily lives. At the same time, the devastation its manipulation can wreak is equally, if not more, terrifying (11). However, it is the new frontier, and it is here to stay, and our dependence on it is only going to increase. If there was any semblance of doubt before, the past year has surely shown the world otherwise. COVID-19 unified the world like never before. Leading experts from across the globe shared knowledge, technology and science in their tireless fight against a common enemy. With most countries announcing simultaneous lockdowns in early 2020, and life coming to a standstill, technology became the hero. There was rapid innovation by companies to provide protective equipment and home and industrial sanitisation, awareness campaigns, almost immediate business pivots to adapt to changing consumer needs, a multitude of services moved online, platforms such as Zoom reached erstwhile unimaginable heights, and humankind showed how resilient and empathetic it can be in the face of the unknown. Technology has made working from home and ordering essential items and being able to stay connected



with family and friends extremely convenient. On the other hand, our gadgets have become an extension of our bodies, our digital footprints and data are increasingly vulnerable to cyber threats, and one internet outage or tech glitch could prove fatal.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** Recent years have shown gaping holes in the existing mechanisms meant to protect against government overreaching. When a party wins elections with a resounding majority, it can override any opposition to its conduct, leaving citizens vulnerable to authoritarian practises. Parliamentary debate is bypassed, and proceedings are merely a cacophony. In such instances, it is even more imperative that the separation of powers between the different branches is maintained and all interactions recorded to ensure transparency and avoidance of misuse. The independence of the judiciary, media and key institutions of the independent agencies play a crucial role in curbing excesses of a majoritarian government. Mandating digital communication for all government officials and members of parliament can be a starting step in maintaining digital records, as well as logged reasoning for every decision taken to introduce accountability and minimise corruption. Metadata and digital trails can be deployed to keep track of our representatives in times of crisis. A recent example is US Senator Ted Cruz being caught on video flying to Cancun, Mexico, when Texas, the state he represents, was hit by a winter storm and severe cold wave that caused widespread death and destruction (12). Funding into political campaigns must be reported, in whatever form and all spending must be presented for audit with public records available for the same. All decisions, tenders or projects granted to related or conflicted persons must be subject to the scrutiny of a truly independent agency. The Election Commission must have a centralised application for legislators or representatives where all details pertaining to them must be freely available to all citizens including details on pending legal cases, assets, tax reports, business interests and allegiances. Just as for other roles, persons who are insolvent or accused of acts involving moral turpitude and previous convictions of serious crimes, must be automatically barred from contesting elections.
- **Effective Decision-making:** In India, a common complaint of businesspersons is the labyrinthine bureaucratic process. Automation of applications for permissions, licenses and compliances could assist in faster processing and ease of doing business, as well as eradicating the need for satisfying middlemen wants and delays caused by bureaucracy and red-tapism. Technology can



enable digital tabling of proposed legislations with exchange of comments and feedback shared during parliamentary proceedings or at the local/ state level to be available for public record. Constructive discussion and progressive debate can be encouraged by implementing a point-based system for legislators basis their participation, to be adjudged by the chair of the houses of parliament. Additionally, data from various departments can be processed simultaneously to provide macro as well as micro level reports in minimum time so that all factors are considered while taking decisions without the negatives of siloed sectors.

- **Rule of law:** The use of digital transcripts, virtual courtrooms, submission of documents in digital form, online portals for listing of cases and record of precedents, among numerous other new measures, has assisted in bringing to the judicial system renewed efficiency and enabling prompt justice and ease of filing (13).
- **Voter Inclusivity:** Democracies are based on free and fair elections. This is also where technology can play the most pivotal role by enabling larger voter inclusion. Without taking away physical polling booths, the need for digital voting is vital and can streamline the electoral process drastically. Lesser resources are required on ground thereby decreasing the cost to the exchequer of holding elections, votes can be counted in real time, and citizens who cannot be physically present in their voting jurisdiction can also participate in the electoral process. Additional features can be the online registration of voters, monitoring tools, transmission and recording of results, and the tabulation of results.
- **Unifying and Magnifying Platforms:** Social media is widely criticised for its use in the dissemination of misinformation, misuse by trolls and spreading negativity. This is significantly outweighed by its power to bring life to crucial campaigns, such as the #MeToo movement or the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, and giving momentum to public interest issues like climate change. It is the quickest way to highlight atrocities in different parts of the world and bring people together despite geographical distances. The internet provides a space and voice for victims, and information on resultant proceedings alike. It has also transformed the way information is consumed, shared, processed, disseminated and even how it is recorded. Factual information against propaganda, reporting of events or injustices and citizen journalism are just some examples of how technology facilitates transparency.



- **Citizen Participation:** With the advent of the internet, there has been a sharp increase in public engagement on politics and relevant topics. The access to information while not always factually correct, has sparked civic participation, which is far better than apathy. The greatest danger to our future is apathy (said primatologist Jane Goodall), and the price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by ‘evil men,’ according to Plato. Even Albert Einstein said, “the world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything” (14). Technology can make cities “smart”. Transport, sanitation, education, administration, safety, emergencies, and grievance redressals can all be facilitated and serviced through a single citizen portal. The same may also be used for regular applications and permissions, and inviting referendums and feedbacks on relevant topics. With time such technologies can be expanded to rank local officials and bodies, thereby creating a direct system of accountability where the elected representative has to continue to earn their seat through good governance, and is dependent on the vote from their local district, and not on the basis of the party they belong to.

The Flipside

- **Privacy Concerns:** Fears related to the use of technology are not new, and countries are already working towards protecting against these. The General Data Protection Regulations passed by the European Union in 2016 (15) and India’s Personal Data Protection Bill (awaiting enactment) (16) are examples of protective provisions that may be implemented to safeguard the exploitation of citizens’ private information. This will only further evolve as time goes on.
- **Misinformation:** The menace of false propaganda and data is not new, but is significantly heightened by digital platforms and instant messaging in this viral world. The 2016 US presidential election has been riddled with controversy. It is widely presumed that the misinformation campaign led by Cambridge Analytica against Hillary Clinton, speculatively upon the behest of Russian influence, resulted in former US President Donald Trump winning the election despite not winning the popular vote (17). Brexit is another example of misinformation leading to a referendum most did not understand at the time of casting their vote (18). The onus is on individuals to fact-check claims before blindly sending forwards.
- **Hacking:** With the upswing in technology-enabled warfare, countries must fortify domestic security measures and build the necessary firewalls and encryptions to



protect against spyware, hacking, data theft and similar threats, irrespective of whether technology is to be used as a tool for enhancing democratic principles.

- **Government Surveillance:** China and Russia openly surveil every digital and physical step made by their citizens, and control access to external applications and knowledge via a great firewall. In the UAE, certain functions such as video and voice calls on social messaging apps is restricted. India too has been pressuring Big Tech to give it unhindered control over private data exchanged by citizens in the name of national security and the implementation of the recent intermediary guidelines provide worrisome wide sweeping powers to the Government and effectively put an end to end to end encryption of social media platforms (19), blocking of dissenting pages on Facebook (20), suspending opposing handles (as is being seen in the tussle with Twitter) (21), and the demand for access to video recordings of meetings (such as those on Zoom) (22). Unless living a completely offline life, one no longer has much control on non-interference by the government.

Appropriate and well thought out protocols, standards, regulations and legislative action to curb excesses, monopolies and/or manipulations by Big Tech companies including provisions to increase opportunities for local businesses and vendors balanced with checks on authoritarian interference by governments; increased accountability from technology companies; a reform of competition laws to keep the market field levelled for both domestic and international players; use of informed technology by governments; citizen awareness on how their data can be misused and how to protect against it; fact checking before sharing; and crucial investment by nation-states on sophisticated security measures to protect against miscreants, can provide some counter to the downsides of technology from escalating. Democracy can be exponentially strengthened by using existing digital infrastructure and tools to increase participation by citizens in the electoral process and in local governance. Building involvement from the grassroots up, where any misdemeanour by local representatives can be easily logged onto a digital platform along with electronic evidence, may result in instilling some level of hindrance from corruption.

Conclusion

There is no aspect of our current lives that technology does not touch. Digital transformation can improve efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of governance to promote sustainability and increase accountability and civil participation. Digital technologies can also pose risks to democracy and governance, especially concerning



privacy, data protection and undue surveillance. Political establishments and the public need to adapt. “Parliaments, political parties and governments need to evolve quickly to keep pace with the citizens they represent and serve. Joining their citizens on the latest technological platforms is critical if governments are to maintain public confidence” (23).

Rebuild. Reform. Repair. Fix. We need to see the current resistance to liberalism as an opportunity for growth, to upgrade the system of checks-and-balances and reengineer institutions to withstand the pressures of autocratic governments. With every great crisis comes great disruption, paving the way for a new tomorrow. With technology exponentially changing the way we consume, live, function and travel, how can we imagine remaining stagnant in the democratic ways of yesterday? Democratic functioning too needs to embrace technology to move to the future. Technology has the potential to increase the efficacy of decision-making and problem solving, if harnessed and implemented correctly.

The truth is, our world is drowning in compassion fatigue, mounting expenses, increasing taxes, gentrification, daily technological advancements, natural disasters and pandemics, and the ever-widening gap between the haves and have nots has never been more glaring; there is just no space left for a human being to care for anything other than themselves. Survival of the fittest has perhaps never been more relevant. Those funding political campaigns have only their self-serving interests in mind, and the legislator—never mind the ideals they originally got into politics for—falls into line to ensure the seat remains. And so the cycle goes. Transparency in funding is needed, and technology can and should do this.

There will always be two sides to every coin. Politicians may be corrupt and self-serving, but we do still have governments. Is there a viable alternative? If democracy is in fact for the people, by the people and of the people, then the people themselves need to rise to the responsibility and stop being complacent armchair critics. If there is one thing the pandemic has taught us, it is that technology is the one force that has the potential to infiltrate every realm of our lives, and that human beings can innovate and adapt much quicker than we expected ourselves to. As times change, so must our systems and our erstwhile notions about the details these comprise.

Churn and disruption are good. Historically, it has always been crisis that compels one to change, else complacency seeps in. We need only look at the US President Joe Biden’s victory over Trump’s nationalistic attitude to be reassured that the



tide will always shift. With every great evolution, there are risks involved. If we simply stay in the same place, we will never grow. So is the case with democracy. It must evolve, adapt, and reform with the changing times. The sheer magnitude of benefits and opportunities that technology provides is there for all to see and yet its extent is still imperceivable. If we fail to harness the best practices to increase our daily governance efficiencies, it will be us who will be the losers.

It is time to change the narrative from doomsday gloom to pragmatic optimism. Fix the bugs, simplify the algorithms, do a series of A/B and beta testing and soon a new version of democracy will be ready for an upgrade. Like every technological software out there, democracy too is a work in progress.

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