

The Health of Democracies during the Pandemic: Results from a Randomized Survey Experiment

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The Erosion of Civil Liberties in Democracies

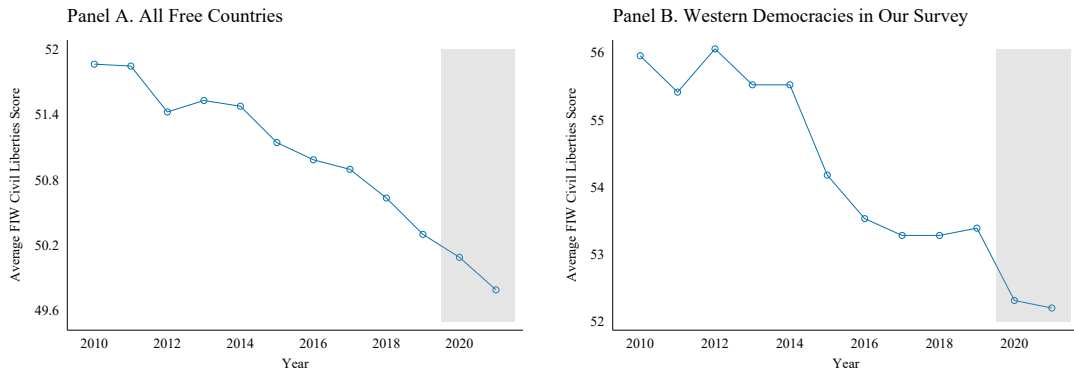


Figure 1: Freedom in the World Civil Liberties Score, 2010–2021

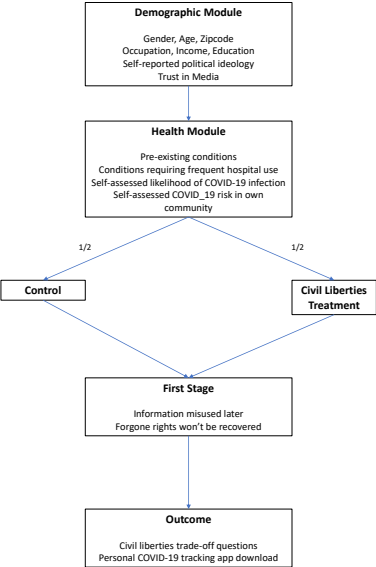
Survey and Measurement

In-Depth Cross-Sectional Survey

- 8,206 respondents;
- France, Germany, Italy, UK, US;
- Late-March to mid-April 2020.

- Core civil liberties trade-off module + “minimum lives need to be saved”;
- Experimental module that provides information on the drastic measures adopted by China and South Korea and the potential for persistence of such policies

Survey flow



Core Trade-off Questions in Both Surveys

- *On a scale of 0 to 10, to what extent do you agree with the following statements:*
- I am willing to ... during a crisis like the current one for the health and well-being of society.

Domain	Detail
Generic rights	sacrifice my own rights and freedom
Generic rights	limits on rights and freedoms of others
Right to privacy	relax privacy restrictions
Democratic procedures*	suspend democratic procedures
Democratic procedures [†]	tolerate public health risks to fulfill civic duties
Democratic procedures [‡]	government controlling the media
Economic hardship	endure substantial economic losses

* Procedural fairness [†] Self determination [‡] Free press

Lives Saved (*cont.*)

Preamble: During the epidemic, the government...

Privacy

- ...can track smartphone locations and social contact data of the **citizens who tested positive for COVID-19.**
 - ...can track smartphone location and social contact data of **all citizens.**
-

Movement

- ...**closes the national border** to prevent foreigners from entering.
- ...**recommends** citizens do not leave their homes except for limited, permitted reasons.
- ...**arrests** citizens who are outside their home if they do not have government permission.

Preamble: During the epidemic, the government...

Closures

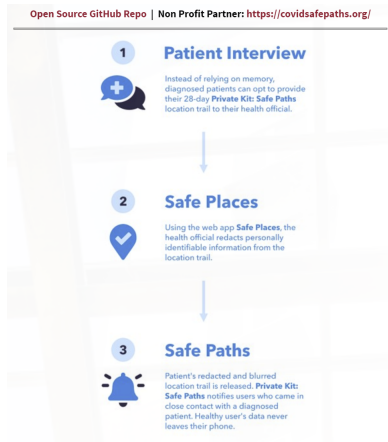
- ...**closes** restaurants, bars, and entertainment businesses.
- ...**closes** all non-essential businesses.
- ...**closes** all schools.

Economic well-being

- ...implements a set of public health measures that **double the unemployment rate**.
- ...implements a set of public health measures that **triple the unemployment rate**.
-implements a set of public health measures that **cut the pay of low income workers in half**.

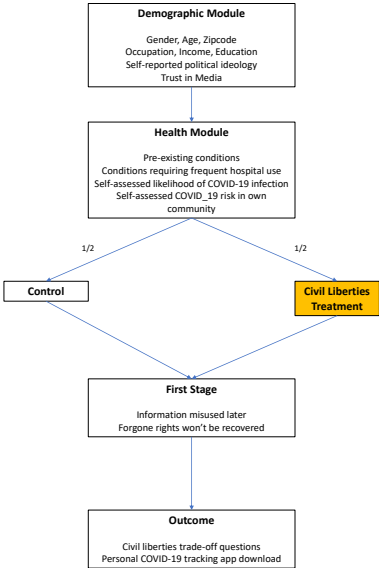
Right to Privacy: COVID-19 tracking App

- Recently, several apps have been developed that help track who has been infected with COVID-19, and that help contact those who have been in close contact with infected individuals.
- MIT has developed such an app.
- Interested in finding out more about it?
 - Yes, show me the link to the app's website
 - No, thank you



Experimental Design

Civil Liberties Treatment



Civil Liberties Treatment

Goal: highlight the potential for long-run erosion of rights; examples from China and South Korea control efforts.

1. Present the epidemic curves in China and South Korea;
2. Describe the policies the two countries enacted to curtail the virus:
 - Aggressive stay-at-home orders; door-to-door temperature screenings; forcible quarantine; use of personal GPS to track people and, in some cases, revelation of personal information of individuals who contracted COVID19.
3. Highlight how short-term restrictions put in place during a crisis can sometimes extend much longer.

Civil Liberties Treatment (*partial*)



We are currently facing perhaps the biggest crisis of our generation. While we must act quickly and decisively, we should also take into account the **long-term consequences** of our actions.

Policies that could help successfully fight the COVID-19 epidemic, such as a large increase in government surveillance, may be abused and may remain in place even after the epidemic ends.

Civil liberties treatment (*partial*)

Information about the patients is **collected and publicly shared by the government** in stunning detail.

Such information, obtained by the government to fight the COVID-19 epidemic, can potentially be used in many ways beyond the crisis itself.

For example, in South Korea, people used publicly released information to identify COVID-19 patients, and harassed them and their family members.

hwan1235 (@hwan1235) · March 23, 2020
The level of detail provided by @ Seoul_gov for each and every COVID-19 case in the city is astounding.

Last name (which I've obscured)
Sex
Birth year
District of residence
Profession
Travel history
Contact with known cases
Hospital where they're being treated

성명	성	생년	주소	직업	여행	연락처	진료기관
김민준	남	94	서울 강남구	학생	한국	연락처 없음	연세대학교
김민준	남	94	서울 강남구	학생	한국	연락처 없음	연세대학교
김민준	남	94	서울 강남구	학생	한국	연락처 없음	연세대학교
김민준	남	94	서울 강남구	학생	한국	연락처 없음	연세대학교
김민준	남	94	서울 강남구	학생	한국	연락처 없음	연세대학교
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Among others, the following policies have been implemented to control COVID-19 in these countries:

- People need a **government-issued permit** to leave home;
- Individuals who do not comply with quarantine orders could face **one year in jail**;
- The government uses **artificial intelligence (AI)** to tag whether citizens have high risk of contagion, based on **smartphone locations, online behavior, and credit card activity**;
- The government **posts information** about the activities and locations of individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 on **social media**;
- Government officials go **door to door** for health checks, and force individuals who are suspected to be ill into **quarantine**.



Findings

Estimation

$$Y_i = \alpha_{c(i)} + \alpha_{w(i)} + \alpha_{h(i)} \\ + \theta \cdot T_i + X'_{ic(i)h(i)w(i)}\Omega + \mu_i$$

- α_c country fixed-effects, α_w week fixed-effects, and α_h “hotspot region” fixed effects
- T_i treatment indicator
- Control for a limited set of demographic characteristics such as sex, age, income, education, political affiliation, and pre-existing medical conditions

First Stage Results

	Worried Collected Info Misused Later (1)	Worried Forgone Rights Won't Recover (2)
Civil Liberties Treatment	0.264*** (0.020)	0.083*** (0.022)
Mean of Outcome	-0.127	-0.040
Observations	8196	8196

Effects of Civil Liberties Treatment

Outcome Variables	Civil Liberties Treatment		Mean of Outcome	Observations
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Panel A: Overall rights and freedom</i>				
Willing to sacrifice own rights	-0.142**	(0.062)	6.497	8196
Willing to sacrifice others' rights	-0.171***	(0.061)	6.461	8196
<i>z-score: willing to sacrifice rights</i>	-0.058***	(0.022)	0.000	8196
<i>Panel B: Protection of privacy</i>				
Willing to relax privacy protections	-0.043	(0.069)	4.886	8196
Unwilling to accept: track sick people	3.594***	(0.750)	51.059	8196
Unwilling to accept: track everyone	2.778***	(0.754)	57.438	8196
Contact tracing app	-0.008	(0.010)	0.357	8196
<i>z-score: willing to sacrifice privacy</i>	-0.072***	(0.021)	-0.001	8196
<i>Panel C: Democratic rights and institutions</i>				
Prefer strong leader	-0.035	(0.022)	2.406	8196
Prefer delegating to experts	0.031	(0.019)	2.929	8196
Willing to sacrifice free press	0.061	(0.071)	4.875	8196
Preference for democratic system	0.015	(0.017)	3.243	8196
Willing to suspend democr. procedures	-0.054	(0.070)	4.850	8196
<i>z-score: willing to curtail democracy</i>	0.006	(0.021)	-0.001	8196
<i>Panel D: Rights to movement</i>				
Unwilling to accept: close national border	1.272*	(0.751)	39.533	8196
Unwilling to accept: recommend stay home	1.398*	(0.758)	39.988	8196
Unwilling to accept: arrest if outside home	1.429*	(0.770)	53.009	8196
<i>z-score: willing to give up mobility</i>	0.047**	(0.022)	0.000	8196

Conclusion

- Upon exposure to the information treatment, treated subjects
 - Became more worried about long-term erosion relative to the control group
 - Became less willing to sacrifice specific and generic rights of both self *and* others
 - Expressed higher reluctance to adopt restricting policies
 - Especially those affected rights to privacy
- However, we found no effect of the treatment on support for democratic procedures

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 - Expressed higher reluctance to adopt restricting policies
 - Especially those affected rights to privacy
- However, we found no effect of the treatment on support for democratic procedures
- Thank you!

APPENDIX

Civil liberties treatment

As the entire world is fighting against COVID-19, countries such as **South Korea and China** stand out as examples that have successfully contained the outbreak.

The figures on the next screen show that the number of new cases of COVID-19 in these countries has **decreased to close to 0** during the past few weeks.

Civil liberties treatment (Cont'd)

Civil liberties treatment (Cont'd)

To achieve such success in containing COVID-19, **these countries have rolled out perhaps the most aggressive disease containment efforts in history.**

Civil liberties treatment (Cont'd)

Civil liberties treatment (Cont'd)

Information about the patients is **collected and publicly shared by the government** in stunning detail.

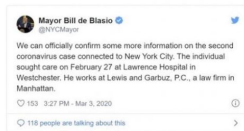
Such information, obtained by the government to fight the COVID-19 epidemic, can potentially be used in many ways beyond the crisis itself.

For example, in South Korea, people used publicly released information to identify COVID-19 patients, and harassed them and their family members.

Here released @ [profile] 23h
The level of detail provided by @Secout_gov for each and every COVID-19 case in the city is astonishing.

Last name (which I've obscured)
Sex
Birth year
District of residence
Profession
Travel history
Contact with known cases
Hospital where they're being treated

ID	姓	性	生	住	職	行	接	院
001	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
002	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
003	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
004	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
005	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
006	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
007	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
008	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
009	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
010	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
011	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
012	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
013	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
014	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
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023	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
024	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000
025	0.0	00010	00	0001	0000	00	00	0000000



Civil liberties treatment (Cont'd)

Appendix: Core Trade-off Question in both Surveys

I am willing to...

- **sacrifice my own rights and freedom** during a crisis like the current one, in order to maintain the health and well-being of the whole society.
- impose strict limits to **the rights and freedom of other people** during a crisis like the current one, in order to maintain the health and well-being of the whole society.
- **relax privacy protections** and let the government access my personal data during a crisis like the current one, in order to allow the government to make timely and accurate decisions
- **to suspend democratic procedures** and give the "country leader" more power during a crisis like the current one, in order to ensure swift government actions.
- **tolerate public health risks in order to participate in elections and other civic duties**, even during a crisis like the current one
- support the **government controlling the media** during a crisis like the current one, in order to ensure effective and uniform communication between the government and citizens.
- endure **substantial economic losses** during a crisis like the current one, in order to maintain the health and well-being of society as a whole