Imagined continuities:
Political scenarios after the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

While it is too early to know the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that the fallout will affect human interaction for years to come. This includes our health, our private lives, our professional lives, our politics, our economies, our societies and our environment. No country will be immune. Indeed, even if we are to find an effective medicine or a vaccine, our thinking has already been touched — the range of political possibilities has moved beyond what was conceivable at the start of 2020.

The COVID-19 virus has hit at a time of increasing challenges to governance and a widely-recognised trend of gradual autocratisation in many regions of the world.[1] If a crisis is bound to accentuate existing trends, then democracy is in serious danger.[2] But crises also bring opportunity and can radically change politics. In our daily lives, the pandemic may bring about changes to where and how we work, how we arrange our cities, how we meet in groups, where we organise events, how we shop or how we think about our mental and physical health. The socio-economic and political pressure for change will be immense and the ability of states to adapt and self-correct will be vital. Democracies may therefore be better placed to weather the storm than is commonly thought.

This paper sketches out the medium-term consequences of the pandemic for democratic governance around the world based on a comprehensive overview of current trends and evidence. While much has been written about the short-term implications of the COVID-19 fallout for politics, there is surprisingly little published analysis with a longer time horizon beyond papers focused on economics. Much of the analysis has also focused on the policy response, with less attention paid to the more practical implications for supporters of democracy. The paper is written through contributions from organisations on the frontline of supporting democracy around the world and therefore reflects on the practical steps that could be taken to innovate and safeguard democracy in the coming years.[3]

The paper has two sections. The first looks at the likely and credible outcomes of the pandemic that are relevant for democracy. The second looks at possible medium-term scenarios for democracy as a result of these trends. The paper concludes with a series of questions emanating from the exercise that we plan to take forward in further analysis and debate in the coming months.[4]

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1 Lührmann, A. & Lindberg S.I (2019): 'A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?' Democratization, Vol.26(7), pp.1095-1113.

2 Haass, R. (2020): The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It. Foreign Affairs. Available here.

3 The paper is part of a stream of work looking at the future of democracy support following a review of European democracy support conducted in 2018 – 2019. See - European Partnership for Democracy (2019): 'Louder than words? Connecting the dots of European democracy support'. Available here.

4 EPD plans to engage with civil society groups, government administrations, multilateral institutions, citizens, academics and journalists in the coming months in critically examining the paper and establishing long-term recommendations for democracy support in the future.

Trends

Whether through an acceleration of existing developments, the creation of new political dynamics or a reverse course of current trends, COVID-19 has already begun to shift politics and institutions in all manner of regime types. In the battle of ideas at the global level, the pandemic is likely to accentuate the ideological divisions between two major fault lines: democracy vs authoritarianism and globalisation vs nationalism. Neither of these divisions are new and much of the debate may hark back to the key debates that dominated international relations for the second half of the 20th Century. Beyond this, there are a host of important changes to our political environment that will have critical implications for democratic politics moving forward.

The following section looks at the likely and credible outcomes of the COVID-19 outbreak that are relevant for democracy. Most of these trends in our political systems are visible already. The first part is divided into 5 large trend areas: Socio-economic issues, increased tension between different levels of governance, political engagement, democratic institutions, and the increase in digitalisation. The second part looks at the two aforementioned meta-level fault lines.

Socio-economic problems

Almost without fail, governments around the world have responded to the health crisis with expansive monetary and fiscal policies designed to keep the economy afloat. The Federal Reserve of the United States alone has responded with up to USD 2.3 trillion in lending and stabilised world demand for dollars through international swap lines and repurchase agreement (repo) operations with other central banks.[5] It is hard to underestimate the full impact of the crisis on the flow of goods, services and capital, financial markets, sovereign debt, corporate debt and employment. World trade has collapsed and for a period in late March normal market functioning was in question.[6] Just like in the Global Financial Crisis, the emergency measures of governments will have deep and long-lasting distributional effects (within and between countries) that will also be felt politically.

The Eurozone is under renewed pressure as the spread between different government bonds rekindled divisions between 'southern' and 'northern' economies. During the European sovereign debt crisis of the last decade, fundamental problems in the Eurozone led to the temporary abrogation of democratic politics with the installation of technocratic governments in Greece (Papademos) and Italy (Monti). Major unanswered questions on the future of the European Union on fiscal policies, burden sharing and on the nature of decision-making have again risen to the forefront of public debate. It is highly likely that new political dynamics will emerge just like they did after the Global Financial Crisis, when there was a marked increase in the electoral appeal of populist parties, predominantly on the far right.

Aside from these market interventions in the US and the EU, the global oil market has also been greatly affected by the crisis, with repercussions for the politics of oil producers, particularly authoritarian states.[7] At one point in mid-April, the price of futures of West Texas Intermediate oil fell into negative territory as the oil price took a major hit from disputes in OPEC+ and a collapse in world demand.[8] While not all states that rely heavily on

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5 Cheng, J., Skidmore, D. and Wessel, D (2020): 'What is the Fed doing in response to the COVID-19 crisis? What more could it do?'. Brookings Institute. Available here.

6 Tooze, A (2020): Shockwave. London Review of Books on 16 April 2020. Available here.

7 Mulder, N and Tooze, A. (2020): 'The Coronavirus Oil Shock Is Just Getting Started'. Foreign Policy. Available here.

8 The price of West Texas Intermediate futures fell to USD -33.67 on 20 April 2020. In effect, meaning that people were paying USD 33.67 for oil to be taken off their hands.

oil are authoritarian and several democracies will be adversely affected, rents from oil are a major source of government revenue for a wide range of authoritarian states (including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, Venezuela, Algeria and Angola). All such states will have fewer resources, placing stress on the political equilibrium and dynamics between political elites.

More broadly, there is widespread recognition that the current response both in terms of government lockdowns and economics is worsening inequality.[9] While governments and central banks have needed to act quickly, the response has favoured the asset-rich[10] and the crisis has accentuated capital flight from developing countries.[11] At the same time, millions of people around the world have become unemployed or been furloughed. In a widely cited editorial, the Financial Times called for "radical reforms" to be put on the table, highlighting redistribution as part of the policy mix.[12] Fears over social justice and the protection of citizens have already emerged as key concerns of citizens in multiple states. The looming climate crisis cannot be separated from the socio-economic trends brought about by COVID-19 either as policy proposals from different fields that were unthinkable several months ago will become realistic political possibilities.

The response to the crisis has had a disproportionate effect on a wide number of disadvantaged groups. The UN released a policy brief early in the crisis that underlined the negative impact that measures to combat COVID-19 are already having on women and girls around the world simply by virtue of their sex.[13] The pandemic also highlighted both the economic and structural problems in the care sector – including the value accorded to care by society - that have increased the burden on women around the world, increasing the obstacles to political participation. More recently, the OHCHR noted the "devastating impact" of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities.[14] The 'Black Lives Matter' protests in the United States linked to police discrimination may be a harbinger of further civic movements that utilise the crisis as a catalyst to demand reform.

Increased tension between different levels of governance

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the relationship between local, national and international structures as well as the mechanisms of decision-making on key policy issues to the fore of the public debate. It has also given states an opportunity to centralise power and exposed the inability of some multilateral structures to deal with international challenges.

The most direct and obvious impact of the crisis has been a centralisation of power at the level of the nation state. The immediate response to the crisis saw a major crackdown on fundamental freedoms and limitations on checks on government power.[15] While applying states of emergency and certain restrictions on people's freedoms can be warranted in order to halt the spread of a pandemic, these have in many cases been disproportionate and applied in a politically motivated

9 Fisher, M. & Bubola, E. (2020): 'As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread'. The New York Times. Available here.

10 In a general sense, this has meant that the young and asset poor lose out the most. The divisions are also compounded by the purchase of corporate bonds rated as junk by the Federal Reserve and problems of loan access for smaller business, but there are also alarming cases of large businesses receiving government support.
See: Rushe, D. and Chalabi, M (2020): ''Heads we win, tails we lose': How America's rich have turned the pandemic into profit'. The Guardian. Available here.

11 Gallagher, K., Kiring, W. and Ocampo A.J (2020): 'Calibrating the Covid-19 Crisis Response to the SDGs'. United Nations. Available here.

12 Financial Times editorial Board (2020): 'Virus lays bare the frailty of the social contract'. The Financial Times. Available here.

13 United Nations (2020): Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. Available here.

14 Bachelet, M. (2020): Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities needs to be urgently addressed. OHCHR. Available here.

15 Braun, F., Brechenmacher, S., Carothers, T. (2020): How will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally. Available here.

manner.[16] Two months into the crisis, 84 countries operated under a state of emergency, 32 countries had imposed restrictions on freedom of expression, 111 countries had imposed measures that affect freedom of assembly and 27 countries imposed restrictions that affect citizens' privacy.[17] Governments that were already gradually eroding democratic space are unlikely to easily let go of the unchecked power provided by states of emergency that compromise the ability of citizens to hold them accountable.[18] [19]

Looking at the internal structures of governance, the COVID-19 crisis revealed the importance of cooperation between central and local government, and supranational governance structures working together both in terms of controlling the outbreak and leading the recovery.[20] Political systems always need to deal with the push and pull between the centre and the local, and in recent years this has manifested itself in a greater emphasis on devolutions in many states.[21] The immediate response to the pandemic led to a greater focus on the centre as if turning back to the very core of the Hobbesian (even Weberian) emphasis on the state. But debates have also arisen on whether unitary systems or federal or more devolved systems are better suited to deal with a pandemic.[22] This was particularly visible in countries where there were discrepancies between the measures taken by the federal government and state or provincial governments, such as the US, Germany and India.[23] Urban governance and resilience has also gained prominence. Cities have shown to be particularly at risk during the pandemic because of their size, connectivity, population density, and service-oriented economy.[24] It is not inconceivable to imagine that the pandemic leads to a shift in population density in some states, altering constituencies and voting patterns.

At the international level, the crisis has highlighted both the importance of multilateral cooperation but also placed significant strain on the current governance architecture. With the politicisation and securitisation of the pandemic, COVID-19 has become an opportunity for countries such as the United States and Brazil to move to withdraw from international structures such as the World Health Organisation (WHO).[25] [26] The European Union struggled to respond collectively in March, laying bare the difficulties of dealing with emergencies in multilateral fora, but has eventually coalesced towards the need for an intergovernmental approach at EU level.[27] Meanwhile, the United Nations has struggled to reach consensus and produce meaningful action on the COVID-19 pandemic at the level of the Security Council where both a global action plan for COVID-19

16 International Centre for Non-Profit Law (2020): Coronavirus and civic space: preserving human rights during a pandemic. Available here.

17 International Centre for Non-Profit Law (2020): COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker. Consulted on 18 May 2020. Find the tracker here.

18 Applebaum, A. (2020): 'The People in Charge See an Opportunity'. The Atlantic. Available here.

19 Lührmann, A., Edgell, A. B., Maerz, S. F. (2020): 'Pandemic Backsliding: Does Covid-19 Put Democracy at Risk?' Available here.

20 Vampa, D. (2020): 'The territorial politics of coronavirus: is this the hour of central government?'. Democratic Audit. Available here.

21 Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Gill, N. (2003: 'The Global Trend towards Devolution and its Implications.' Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, 21(3), 333–351.

22 Gaskell, J and Stoker, G. (2020): Centralised or multi-level: which governance systems are having a 'good' pandemic?, in LSE British Politics and Policy. Available here.

23 Hodge, J. (2020): Federal vs State Power in the Rush to Reopen amid Coronavirus Pandemic, in Just Security. Available here.

24 Agarwala, P. and Vaidya H. (2020): Can COVID-19 fill the void of City Governance for Urban Transformation?, for UN Habitat. Available here.

25 Dellanna, A. (2020): Coronavirus latest: Brizail's President Bolsonaro threatens to leave WHO, for Euronews. Available here. Cohen, Z. et all (2020) 'World Health Organization: Trump administration begins formal withdrawal from World Health Organization'. CNN. Available here.

26 Miller, A. and Sokolsky, R. (2020): 'The United States and the New World Disorder: Retreat for Primacy', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Avialable here.

27 This proposal called for an increase in the budget through a recovery fund with a mix of grants and loans to member states.

and calls for a ceasefire in conflict areas were defeated.[28] The growing influence of China and other authoritarian regimes within the UN system, such as accusations of bias levelled at the WHO, poses additional questions for human rights in the multilateral system going forward.[29]

Political engagement

The intensity, medium and the face of political engagement will most likely change as a result of the crisis. Civic engagement has taken on new forms as street protests, public gatherings and free speech online are being limited and it has boosted new forms of civic engagement and solidarity.[30] Online protests, e-petitions, and other forms of online activism have flourished, even in contexts of censorship such as Hong Kong where protests moved to the popular game 'Animal Crossing'.[31] Balconies have been the stage for calls of solidarity with white flags and songs, but also for noise protests.[32] [33] Protestors have used cars to gather and disrupt the public space in a safe way.[34]

As citizens are deprived of the fundamental freedoms that enable them to live their lives, many have grown acutely aware of the importance of their rights and freedoms and become increasingly willing to stand up for these rights – particularly young people. This heightened awareness comes at a time of autocratisation in new and long-established democracies, and may serve as a wake-up call for those who have previously taken democracy for granted. Protestors have defied public safety measures and bans on

demonstrations in support of various political and social causes. The 'Black Lives Matter' protests around the world have also shown an intensified global solidarity of civil rights movements and may show that the lockdown period was simply a blip in the steady upward trend in global protest. It is possible that the mental distance to connect with people on other continents has shrunk in the absence of normal physical interaction and allowed global solidarity and connection to deepen.

Increased needs for connectivity as an enabler of accountability and participation will, unfortunately also increase opportunities for cracking down on dissent. Internet shutdowns and online censorship under the banner of fighting disinformation have already become far more prominent, and speech online is likely to be more policed than ever before. In Hungary, a law criminalising the spread of misinformation around the coronavirus is limiting journalists' access to information and has a major chilling effect on COVID-19 reporting.[35] A number of countries – ranging from Romania to Russia - have changed the rules regarding freedom of information requests, while elsewhere journalists have not been allowed to ask questions during press conferences.[36] [37] The Chinese government silenced doctors and citizen journalists when the virus first appeared in Wuhan. Internet shutdowns in Indian-administered Kashmir and Rakhine state in Myanmar have been keeping doctors from obtaining information about the virus.[38] All of this is occurring when public information on the virus and the government's response are essential for ensuring citizens' health, and when journalists and civil society organisations are among the only accountability mechanisms to scrutinise

28 ReliefWeb (2020): UN Security Council Fails to Support Global Ceasefire. Available here.

29 Tang, J (2020): 'China's Bid for WIPO Fails, but Beijing's UN Plan is Still on Track', RFA/EuropeNews/. Available here.

30 Civic Space Watch has embarked on mapping the numerous solidarity actions organised by civil society amid the COVID-19 crisis. See the tracker here.

31 BBC (2020): 'Animal Crossing removed from sale in China amid Hong Kong protests'. Available here.

32 Della Porta, D. (2020): 'Social movements in times of pandemic: another world is needed'. Available here.

33 The Guardian (2020): 'Brazilians take part in pot-banging protests against Bolsanaro's coronavirus response'. Available here.

34 BBC (2020): Coronavirus protests: the moment a man in scrubs confronts drivers. Available here.

35 Walker, S. (2020): Hungarian journalists fear coronavirus law may be used to jail them. The Guardian. Available here.

36 ARTICLE 19 (2020): Advances in freedom of information under threat during coronavirus pandemic. Available here.

37 Civicus (2020): civic freedoms and the covid-19 pandemic: a snapshot of restrictions and attacks. Available here.

38 Ibid.

executive decisions.

While civil society organisations have demonstrated their ability to quickly organise solidarity actions and channel citizens' concerns to governments in the height of a pandemic, many are also under increased pressure. The lockdown has affected civil society employees too, with many organisations having to reduce or furlough staff.[39] Many have struggled with the additional workload of moving activities online and postponing activities, and others struggled to engage in community building when social distancing was the norm. In addition to these practical challenges, potential reductions to development funding will put pressure on civil society organisations in many developing and established democracies.

The Great Depression of the 1930s and the recent Global Financial Crisis were both followed by intense economic insecurity and a sharp growth of populist and nationalist political forces who exploited the fears and insecurities of citizens. The crisis response could very well lead to further disillusionment and nationalism, embedding the power of political parties at far ends of the political spectrum.[40] At the same time, the failure in responding to the pandemic by populist leaders in the United States and Brazil, amongst others, has also exposed many weaknesses in their political approach, such as a systematic overestimation of their own competences and an overwhelming ignorance of science.[41] [42] The growth of nationalist and populist parties could therefore go both ways, but what is clear is that the credibility of political leaders has been shaken, and the narrative on the response to the crisis will be heavily contested.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit at a time of deep political division within many nation states

around the world. A crisis of this magnitude can provide an opportunity for societies to pull together in order to overcome the shared challenges or lead to a fundamental reorganisation of a divided politics.[43] At the same time, the crisis has laid bare the stark divisions in societies between different income and ethnic groups as well as differing opinions on a response strategy from different political families. At the global level the response does not seem to have been conditioned by political belief – the Brazilian President (right) has taken similar steps to the Swedish government (left) while the Spanish government (left) response was similar to that of the Polish government (right).

Democratic institutions

As of late August 2020, over 70 countries and territories around the world have decided to postpone national or subnational elections due to COVID-19, including 33 national elections and referenda.[44] In addition, numerous voter registration processes, civic education programmes and other election preparations have been stalled. Election campaigning has moved online, with public debate largely limited to media and online engagement removing in-person political debate from the election process.[45] This limits access to political participation and information for people without or with limited connectivity or those with fewer digital skills - in both cases disproportionately harming women – and furthers the pre-existing trends damaging civil debate and increasing polarisation online.

As governments move to online and postal voting, new opportunities for electoral fraud are created that are difficult for election observers to monitor. International electoral observation missions - an

39 Civil Society Europe (2020): Europe's recovery after the pandemic and Civil Society. Forthcoming.

40 McCaffrey, D. (2020): Will COVID-10 usher in a new wave of populism in Europe? Euronews. Available here.

41 See: Booth, M. & Lassa, J. (2020): Are populist leaders a liability during COVID-19? The Conversation. Available here as well as Linkser, D. (2020): COVID-19 and the challenge of populism. Forbes. Available here.

42 Ibid.

43 Quarcoo A. and Kleinfeld, r. (2020): 'Can the Coronavirus Heal Polarization?'. Available here.

44 International IDEA (2020): Global Overview of Covid-19 Impact on Elections. Consulted on 28 August 2020. Overview available here.

45 James, T. (2020): Should elections be postponed because of coronavirus? The Conversation. Available here.

important external accountability mechanism — are unlikely to resume in the same manner again any time soon, and domestic and regional observation will be greatly limited by continued distancing measures. With elections postponed and stalled globally, international institutions will have very little common ground for jointly condemning indefinite postponements of elections and elections held in unfair conditions. These changes also provide an opportunity to improve the digital infrastructure for elections. The past two decades have seen various experiments with online voting but there has, as yet, been no major breakthrough that has assuaged the fears of electoral administrators in many states. Still, the crisis provides the opportunity for some states that have effectively managed their response to test new methods for organising elections (as in the South Korean election in April 2020).[46]

The same challenges and opportunities to working online also apply to other political institutions such as Parliaments and political parties. Parliaments around the world will play a major role in the scrutiny of the executive branch in the coming months particularly with regards to emergency legislation.[47] Yet, governments in Serbia, Sri Lanka, North Macedonia, Jordan and Nepal have seen fit to dissolve their Parliament or go into an unscheduled recess.[48] The Hungarian government even managed to pass an emergency law in Parliament allowing it to rule by decree without any time limit and used a subsequent law to reduce state financing to the political opposition. Those parliaments that continue to operate will also need to adapt to social distancing requirements but can at least engage in oversight of the executive branch. Political parties face the same challenges to organising and campaigning and will place even greater emphasis on digital engagement.

While national health experts became trusted public figures, in some countries public trust in politicians dropped significantly, which was likely to be linked to the speed and effectiveness by the of the response to the crisis by governments.[49] [50] The increased decision-making power of unelected experts brings to the fore the tension between the decisions of politicians and those of technical experts.[51] On one side are arguments against providing 'scientific' answers to questions on how to balance different societal interests and, on the other, attempts by politicians to dismiss facts in political debate.[52] This crisis will not resolve the debate but it is likely to provide evidence on the importance of evidence itself.

In many states, the flow of money related to the pandemic has presented opportunities for graft. Examples from Azerbaijan, Zimbabwe, Poland, Brazil and Uganda demonstrate the potential for corrupt practices in the procurement of medical equipment. Parliaments are at a temporary disadvantage but could be able to use their role of oversight of state budgets as a mechanism for holding those responsible to account. In some jurisdictions, executive decisions have generated concerns on respect for the principles of judicial independence and the separation of powers, particularly related to the opening and accessibility of courts, validity of digital hearings and the suspension of defendants' rights.

Increase in digitalisation and control of the digital sphere

While the global economy is sliding into an economic recession, the dominant forces in the online space are seeing unprecedented growth rates and increased political clout. The

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46 Spinelli. A. (2020): 'Managing Elections under the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Republic of Korea's Crucial test. International IDEA Available here.

47 Ibid.

48 See the Pandemic Democracy Tracker by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Available here.

49 A survey taken mid-pandemic by the University of Antwerp shows only a third of Flemish Belgians trust their politicians are competent – an all-time low.

50 Strandbert, T. (2020): 'Coronavirus: US and UK governments losing public trust'. The Conversation. Available here.

51 Ketels, C. (2020): We follow the science – Sweden's approach to COVID-19 between good technocratic intentions and muddled political leadership. Available here.

52 It should be noted that disagreements between experts often exacerbate the problem.

surge in online shopping has boosted revenue for major online sales platforms like Amazon[53] and the need for entertainment at home has resulted in profit increases for the streaming-entertainment giant Netflix.[54] Google has seen major increases in the usage of their applications Google Classroom, YouTube, Duo and Hangouts Meet.[55] Facebook is experiencing record usage, as WhatsApp and Instagram allow friends and families to stay connected, even if the company is expecting major cuts in ad revenue.[56] While the sudden move to online work and entertainment increased user activity of the major tech giants, it also led to a sudden boost of a handful of medium enterprises like Zoom and Houseparty.[57] However, the majority of small and medium enterprises are facing tremendous losses already, further reducing competition for the dominant digital market players.[58] The crisis has rapidly accelerated the process of digitalisation in a way that is entrenching tech giants in their dominant market positions. It has given these corporations even more data on our habits and preferences boosting the business-model that underpins what many refer to as 'surveillance capitalism' or the commodification of personal data.

While the big tech companies have grown resulting from the crisis, they have also come under increased scrutiny for their role in providing a space for disinformation and conspiracies around the virus to spread. Where previous efforts to limit the spread of disinformation and provide more transparency had been weak at best, companies seized on the opportunity to improve their public image with an unprecedented interventionist approach, including dedicated public information centres and content takedowns.[59] [60] As a result, the platforms have a direct line of contact with those seeking to regulate them, while governments rely on what private company representatives tell them about their response, without any other form of oversight.

In the European Union, the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a Joint Communication on tackling COVID-19 disinformation[61], calling on platforms including Twitter, Facebook and Google to inform on how they are tackling disinformation and promoting verified information. The Joint Communication raised concerns that it placed increasing pressure on tech companies to monitor and remove content on their platforms, relying on automated content takedowns, with a reduced and remote workforce.[62] Ways to address the lack of oversight have been suggested[63] in order to strike a balance between the moderation of content online, international human rights standards and the need to avoid the regulation of speech. There is a clear risk that any form of self-regulation by the platforms without any democratic oversight is perpetuated after the pandemic, based on leaders' positive experience during the crisis, regardless of the bad track record in the past and the underlying profit model that benefits from the spread of disinformation, conspiracies and sensational news.[64] [65]

53 CNN (2020): Amazon hiring 100000 new distribution workers to keep up with online shopping surge caused by coronavirus Available here.

54 Barro, J. (2020): The companies that stand to profit from the pandemic. New York Intelligencer. Available here.

55 Koeze, E. & Popper, N. (2020): The Virus Changed the Way We Internet. The New York Times. Available here.

56 Swartz, J. (2020): Business in the Age of COVID-19. Market Watch. Available here.

57 Neate, R. (2020): Zoom booms as demand for video-conferencing tech grows. The Guardian. Available here.

58 Dwoskin, E. (2020): Tech giants are profiting and getting more powerful even as the global economy tanks. The Washington Post. Available here.

59 First Draft (2020): Coronavirus: How are the social media platforms responding to the 'infodemic'? Available here.

60 Wong, J. C. (2020): Tech giants struggle to stem 'infodemic' of false coronavirus claims. The Guardian. Available here.

61 European Commission (2020): Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right. Available here.

62 ARTICLE 19 (2020): On the EU Communication on tackling coronavirus disinformation. Available here.

63 ARTICLE 19 (2019): Social Media Councils. Available here.

64 See for instance the assessment of the EU code of practice against disinformation by the European Regulators Group of Audiovisual Media here.

65 Donovan, J. (2020): Here's how social media can combat the coronavirus 'infodemic'. MIT Technology Review. Available here.

Tech companies have approached governments with a variety of technological solutions to the health crisis, ranging from location data sharing[66] to more controversial contact tracing apps.[67] Telecommunications companies and public authorities have entered agreements on the sharing and retention of telecommunication data, including location data and information on personal communication.[68] Likewise, Google and Facebook are gathering location data to analyse social distancing interventions and people's movement. These various data sharing arrangements and applications infringe on certain human rights, such as the right to privacy[69] while there is no evidence at this time that apps would help limit the spread of the virus.[70] In addition to clear risks for human rights, the mass gathering of citizens' geolocation and other data sets a dangerous precedent for a further rollout of surveillance technologies. The debates around contact tracing apps suggest European governments are not shy about adopting further surveillance technology – but even if these technologies are initially deployed with public health in mind, they set a dangerous precedent that can be used by autocratising states to police and repress dissent.[71]

Meta trends

Democracy vs Authoritarianism

The response of different regime types to the pandemic has received significant international attention. At the start of 2020, commentators around the world highlighted the fact that as an authoritarian state, it was difficult to trust the numbers released by the Chinese government. As Iran became the next hotspot for the virus, it seemed that the greater transparency of countries such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan had led to a better response to the risks.

That all changed once the European continent became the next epicentre of the outbreak and the Italian government decided on the need to mimic the draconian measures installed by the Chinese state as cases began to rise exponentially. Dealing with health systems under heavy stress, the only clear response seemed to be to follow the restrictions on citizens common to autocratic states. Indeed, the World Health Organisation had praised the response of the Chinese government as early as late January 2020.[72]

The pendulum may now have swung back towards praising the response of democracies because of the greater faith in the health figures in recent months - but there does not appear to be any clear pattern in effectiveness linked to regime type. Singapore and Germany have been praised as successful examples, Iran and the United States have not. Nevertheless, because of the lack of transparency in many authoritarian regimes it may be some months or years before it is clear what the real health impact has been. Commentators have variously suggested that trust in government[73], female leadership[74], prior experience with deadly virus outbreaks and state capacity all have important correlations with the success of government responses to the crisis. Despite this, it is the divisions

66 Privacy International (2020): "Covid-19 response: Corporate Exploitation". Available here.

67 The platforms have been in constant contact with those planning to regulate them, like for instance the "weekly calls with Mark" describes fondly by European Commissioner Thierry Breton, see here.

68 Privacy International (2020): Covid-19 response: Corporate Exploitation. Available here.

69 Access Now (2020): Privacy and public health: the dos and don'ts for covid-19 contact tracing apps. Available here.

70 Ada Lovelace Institute (2020): COVID-19 Rapid Evidence Review: Exit through the App store? Available here.

71 See here for a detailed analysis of the risks of contact-tracing apps and immunity passports, and the ways these can be abused for repressive and discriminatory uses, by the European Digital Rights network. See also here for how Zoom came under scrutiny after suspending the account of a US-based Chinese activism group after they had staged a Tiananmen com memoration on the platform, showing the political importance of these private actors.

72 Nebehay, S. and Farge., E. (2020) 'WHO lauds Chinese response to virus, says world 'at important juncture'. Reuters. Available here.

73 Fukuyama, F (2020). 'The Thing That Determines a Country's Resistance to the Coronavirus'. The Atlantic. Available here.

74 Henley, J. and Roy, E.A. (2020) 'Are female leaders more succesful at managing the coronavirus crisis ?'. The Guardian. Available here.

between autocracies and democracies that have become the issue of greater focus and this is often because of the characteristics that people associate with democracy such as transparency and accountability.[75]

The pandemic has accentuated the slowly developing collision course between China and the United States under the Xi Jinping and Donald Trump presidencies. But in Europe, as the Chinese government has started to follow the disinformation tactics of the Russian government (and so called 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy[76]), opinions are hardening. Following the decision to describe China as a 'systemic rival' in 2019[77], the EU called out China for its disinformation tactics in April 2020.[78] Should the tension between democracies and authoritarian states become more acute it is likely that a more bipolar or black and white categorisation of political regimes will play a greater role in international relations. This 'harder' categorisation would pose problems for foreign policy actors like the European Union that have built their policies around a more nuanced or 'softer' distinction of political regimes.

Nationalism vs Globalism

The other meta-trend that will permeate across various different policy fields is the division between nationalism and global cooperation. The first response to the crisis in many instances involved the closing of borders, the breakdown of global trade and the hoarding of medical supplies. Politicians of different ideological stripes have called for a fundamental rethinking of global supply chains, a re-localisation of food production and increases in state aid for enterprises. At the same time, groups across the political spectrum are encouraging greater international cooperation in response to the pandemic, including in vaccine development, humanitarian aid and a new

common approach to tax avoidance. In addition, multiple countries have turned to the IMF requesting emergency financing or debt relief, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.[79] Coping with the economic fallout has been a global endeavour that has not seen countries withdraw from international cooperation. Yet, businesses are re-thinking the way they operate - the Economist Intelligence Unit released a report arguing that companies will pivot towards regional supply chains.[80]

Several companies will also see increased state ownership or involvement either through bailouts, conditional loans or corporate bond purchases increasing the likelihood of domestic political priorities impacting investment decisions. Based on the evidence so far, the movement of goods and labour will face greater restrictions beyond the initial periods of health-related controls.

These countervailing forces are pulling politics and politicians in directions that do not fit the ideological (right/left) distinctions of the 20th Century. Political parties everywhere will see the crisis as an opportunity for specific policy priorities and it will certainly open space for political entrepreneurs all over the world. The way in which both democracies and authoritarian states react to these forces will have an important bearing on multilateral cooperation both politically and in the economic sphere.

75 Ben-Ami, S. (2020) 'Democracies Are Better at Managing Crisises'. Project Syndicate. Available here.

76 Hille, K. (2020) 'World warrior' diplomats reveal China's ambitions'. The Financial Times. Available here.

77 European Commission (2019) European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council: EU-China – A strategic outlook. Available here.

78 van Dorpe S. (2020) Politico: China put pressure on EU to soften coronavirus disinformation report. Available here.

79 See the IMF COVID lending tracker.

80 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020) The Great Unwinding: Covid-19 and the regionalisation of global supply chains. Available here.

The next decade

In order to be able to develop and prioritise policy and programmatic responses to the crisis, supporters of democracy must engage in long-term thinking to complement the shorter-term concerns foremost in their minds. Constructing plausible scenarios is not without pitfalls – indeed, it is fraught with significant problems and complexities – but the exercise provides those seeking to allocate resources with valuable information on the potential outcomes that can be shaped or will shape their actions. This paper constructs 4 scenarios for democracy over the medium-term – the grey middle, bifurcation, catalysts and state breakdown – using the meta trends and trend areas identified above in order to complement the shorter-term implications that have been the subject of most written analysis thus far.[81]

The trends section points to the fact that many possibilities exist for different elements of political regimes, both positive and negative. For example, participation in politics may increase while governments collect more data on citizens at the same time. There are thus multiple areas of overlap and interlinkage between the different trends. But broadly speaking, beyond the highly unlikely possibility of things remaining the same, there are three options for regimes. Either democracies and autocracies both suffer equally as a result of the pandemic, democracies suffer more (and autocracy benefits) or autocracies wilt under the pressure of poor performance (and democracy benefits).

Our scenarios build on this to look at the implications for democracy globally in order to help us answer the following question: What are the possible scenarios for democratic governance in the next decade as a result of the pandemic?

We want these scenarios to provide food-for-thought for supporters of democracy and to help thinking move beyond a 'business as usual' approach. The pandemic is an era-defining moment and it has expanded the 'Overton window'[82] in multiple policy areas relevant to democracy. Each of the 4 scenarios features a general explanation of what the future will look like and a summary of the different outcomes along the 5 trend areas of socio-economic issues, different levels of governance, political engagement, democratic institutions, and the increase in digitalisation.[83]

81 The formulation of the 4 scenarios was based on an identification and analysis of different variables that emanated from the over view of current trends. These variables were chosen based on the fact that they will have an important bearing on the future of democracy. We looked at the interaction between the different variables at a meta-trend level and took account of the sequence of different events in each scenario. The following criteria were applied in the final selection of the scenarios: a) policy usefulness b) plausibility c) differentiation and d) a balance of different outcomes.

82 The Overton window is named after James Overton and denotes the range of policies politically acceptable to the main stream population at a given time.

83 The Annex of the paper provides an overview of the different outcomes that were deemed as plausible under each scenario from a much longer list of potential trends.

Scenario 1: The grey middle (a move towards hybrid forms of governance)

This scenario is based on a continuation of the processes of democratisation and autocratisation of the last decade as democracies that were once thought to be 'established' slide towards a mix of authoritarian and democratic politics. At the same time, the trend of holding elections will mean that authoritarian regimes continue the gradual move towards hybrid regimes or flawed democracy that started in the 1990s. As democracies autocratise and autocracies democratise, nation states will sit in a grey zone that mixes open and closed elements of a political system.

Due to the fact that democracy will be steadily and stealthily eroded in states where it was once thought to be consolidated, it will exist mostly in name only. As a result, support for democracy as a form of governance will slowly evaporate among citizens, undermining the appeal of democracy worldwide. This will in turn further the erosion of democratic norms as citizens become disillusioned with the formal structures that grant little meaning to participation beyond elections or completely disengage from politics. Pockets of experimentation with citizen engagement will persist but not to any degree that elicits widespread imitation.

The levers of government will continuously be exercised towards maintaining the power of the incumbent government above all else. This will mean that many of the trappings of democracy will remain, such as freedom of speech or assembly, but these will be undermined by a concentration of media in the hands of the government, a judiciary that becomes less and less independent, a manipulation of politics between elections, a majoritarian concept of democracy and covert surveillance of citizens. Socio-economic rights are largely in place, while civic and political rights are restricted and the ability of civil society to hold government to account is damaged. As such, the institutions of accountability in democracies will be gradually corroded but never destroyed.

In the digital sphere, the market will continue to be dominated by a handful of extremely powerful companies from the US and China that own over 90% of the digital market. These companies will become increasingly involved in political affairs and will cooperate with governments on a number of different fronts, including immunity passports, tracking apps, the development of smart cities and CCTV due to their market advantage in the digital sphere.

As countries compete more fiercely in the economic realm, the 'race to the bottom' on economic policy will mean that inequality persists and worsens around the world. Countries in the upper GDP bracket will see a squeezed middle class as a result of both slow economic recovery and a move towards clientelism, with an increase in corruption undermining a level playing field in the business sector. This will exacerbate the situation of already disadvantaged groups hit by the use of a majoritarian concept of democracy. In poorer states, economic growth will improve the lives of many people but will mostly benefit those closest to political power. Countries that are reliant on the price of commodities will continue to be vulnerable to economic recession as no political space exists to debate changes to the economic model of development.

International cooperation will continue at a very low level of ambition except on key areas of mutual concern like climate change or global trade. The state will remain at the core of the international system and will dominate domestic politics as well.

Scenario 2: Bifurcation (a return to greater distinction between regime types)

In this scenario, the trends identified above will lead to a gradual consolidation into two blocs of political regimes with an authoritarian group willing and able to repress democratic practices and a group respecting democratic principles and practices. Unlike during the Cold War, the distinction would not focus on economic ideology or the economic system – in fact, levels of economic performance would continue to converge as countries adopt advanced technologies. Rather, the fact that further health, climate, environmental and economic crises are likely, will gradually lead to a position where countries stake out their credentials on the global stage according to government performance. This will suppress the prominence of rights and promote the importance of protection in many countries. Such a scenario implies a serious risk of a more hostile context for international relations with a much larger role for China on the global stage.

International cooperation will be extremely limited and severely undermine cooperation on key areas of global interest including climate change and nuclear proliferation. While some cooperation will persist, particularly in the economic sphere, disputes over the legitimacy of different political systems and distrust of each other's intentions will dominate international relations. This division will lead to a greater focus on democracy and democratisation in the foreign policy priorities of democracies as a means of exerting international influence and legitimacy. Integration between regional blocs made up of similar regimes will deepen in response to the more hostile international environment.

Participation in democracies will be geared towards shaping policy priorities (e.g. on health, tax, education) rather than changing or updating the political system. While turnout in elections will rise due to an increase in youth participation in politics around the world, experimentation with new forms of democratic politics will be rare due to a lower appetite for risk among citizens.

In general, political institutions will struggle to adapt to the changing social structure of the new digital age and remain stuck in the outdated models of the 20th Century.

Economic inequality will initially rise but, within democracies, it will eventually fall as capital flows become more fixed to geographic and political zones and public debt forces governments to employ more progressive taxation. Equally, demands for social justice and greener politics, particularly among youth, will lead to changes in the political party landscape within democracies, continuing the fragmentation seen today. This scenario leads to new, changing coalitions based on conservative or liberal thinking around issues of racial integration, LGTBQ rights and sexual and reproductive rights. The impact of the health crisis, failures of neo-liberal policies and the pressure from state capitalism within the authoritarian bloc will mean that democracies place significant emphasis on the state.

The internet will split into two different spheres as the digital realm takes a more prominent role in politics. In autocratic regimes, technological advances will give governments greater power to monitor and control the online life of citizens at vastly reduced cost. Democracies will also take far more control over the online sphere by reducing the power of big tech companies through anti-trust legislation and enacting far-reaching policies to combat disinformation, increase transparency and set-up public service platforms. All political regimes will try to harness the power of big data in a digital 'arms race' to improve government performance. In democracies, parliamentary oversight of such activity will increase following scandals linked to government overreach.

Scenario 3: Catalysts (democratic breakthroughs in key states)

In this scenario, the pressures brought about by the crisis in the medium-term will lead citizens across the world to demand change in all manner of regime types. While citizens in democracies will seek change through the ballot box, consultations or protest, many autocracies will be unable to fend off demands for fundamental change. As democracy retains its global appeal, citizens will demand a greater say in political affairs, exposing the core vulnerability of authoritarian states.

When such demands occur in states with major international or regional power - particularly China, Russia and Saudi Arabia - it will have clear knock-on effects beyond their borders (reducing authoritarian patronage)[84] and would thus usher in something that would resemble a fourth wave of democratisation.[85] Some of the changes will be branded as 'revolution' while others will be less abrupt but all will share the same citizen-led demand for change. This will be particularly prevalent in authoritarian states with populations that are young and that are expected to increase significantly over the next decade.

The democratisation of political power within existing democratic structures will see a greater focus on deliberative forms of democracy, increasing participation and the importance of local level decision-making. Due to the power of citizen-led change, the inclusion of different groups in politics will increase in aggregate across the world, providing more space in particular for young people and women in decision-making structures. Nevertheless, these changes to political systems will not lead to an automatic consensus on policies – democratic politics will continue to be messy, based on compromises and polarised opinions that take time to coalesce into policy consensus. The democratic world will whine with experimentation and competition as democracies trial structural mechanisms such as citizen assemblies, sortition, referenda, online consultations, and party reform that are mimicked and

gradually improved. These events will lead to an era of democratic innovation and institutional reform that better reflects the socio-economic realities of the 21st Century.

At the international level, nation states will cooperate on a wide range of policy priorities but will take significant time to arrive at collective agreement. This includes the steady reduction in economic power of Big Tech companies, that will face growing public pressure. International structures will be set-up to oversee global content-hosting platforms, audit algorithms and data usage, hold platforms accountable and regulate the global online ecosystem. International agreements on tax avoidance will lead to a new regime that ensures a more equitable system of taxation and capital flows – which will, in turn, undermine the capacity of authoritarian states to engage in the illegal appropriation of wealth.

The democratic breakthroughs in key states will not be smooth sailing – elites will not abandon political and economic power without attempting to maintain control of key state functions. In some cases, change will be orderly while in others it will result in low scale violence. In addition, citizens leading the political transformation will sometimes become disappointed with the slow pace of change and the lack of economic benefit leading to some calls for a return to the previous regime.

Yet, the changes will have a profound impact on the normative discussions on political regime that mean that change over the long-term will trend heavily towards democratisation – increasing the likelihood of effective democratic governance. As authoritarian power systems become discredited, focus will shift to different types of democracies and which is best suited to different economic or societal goals.

84 A detailed account of the importance of external authoritarian influence and patronage can be found in Levitsky, S. and Way, L (2010) "Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War", Cambridge University Press.

85 The presence of different waves of democracy was popularised by Samuel P. Huntington. The first 'long' wave occurred in the 19th Century, the second after World War 2 and the third from the mid-1970s.

Scenario 4: State breakdown and the renewal of the state

The public health and socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 combined with climate change will lead to an increase in conflict around the world as well as the interrelated economic and political collapse of states. This will happen in different regions but will be most acute in poorer societies that are less able to adopt measures to tackle the virus or cope with the economic fallout. The fight for diminished resources in different countries will result in increasing migration and violent conflict that spills over across borders and undermines effective governance, including in many democracies.

The international system will be unable to cope with such change on such a vast scale leading to a lost decade of development, a focus on state capacity to the detriment of democracy and the beginning of a new political era. The overarching themes in this scenario will be an immense increase in inequality both within and between states and the power of big data.

States that have not suffered breakdown will place an overwhelming focus on the restoration of stability in key regions of the world in line with their foreign policy interest. This will lead to a redrawing of state boundaries in attempts to ensure new consensus and stability. A corollary of these trends will mean greater state power in rich economies as the state re-emerges as eminent in policy and economic thought. Non-state actors will become key political forces in countries suffering from state breakdown, including organised crime groups and militias that are able to operate in jurisdictions beyond the state. In some cases, this will mean power is exercised at the local level in both conflict and safe zones within a failed state territory.

Entities that exercise power will all have access to massive data on citizens in whatever jurisdiction they operate. In certain regions, the services of the state will be provided by Big Tech companies that have expanded into the health and education sectors or by organised groups that have acquired digital capacity and wealth in countries in crisis. This will be accelerated by the need for many states to cut costs due to the debt burden created by fighting the pandemic.

International cooperation will function poorly, with greater emphasis on regional cooperation where possible. Democracy will not be viewed as a priority on the international stage or in most national settings. In line with this, human rights concerns related to the use of new technologies in increasing state capacity will fall on deaf ears. The breakdown of the state will slow but not prevent climate change due to a reduction of economic output in many states but resource depletion will continue particularly for raw materials related to energy and digital hardware.

The classic institutions of accountability in a democracy – the parliament, political parties, a free media, civil society and the judiciary – will become ineffective due to state breakdown or unequal access to power. The concentration of economic power will reduce the voice and participation of the masses in political decision-making, creating long-term stress for democracy worldwide.

Debating the future

The substance of this paper should have made one thing as clear as day - the impact of the pandemic on the exercise of political power around the world should not be underestimated. The fallout has already begun. From Hong Kong, to Belarus, to Mali and Lebanon, the effects of the pandemic are accelerating change or fundamentally altering the political equilibrium. The situation in Hong Kong, Belarus and Libya also shows the limited tools the international community has to positively influence democratisation, especially when important powers such as China, Russia, the United States and the European Union are not aligned.

For supporters of democracy, scenario 3 (Catalysts) is the most ideal, followed by scenario 2 (Bifurcation). Both scenarios 1 (The grey middle) and particularly 4 (State breakdown) are positively disastrous for democracy around the world. There are surely multiple scenarios that we have missed, but categorising likely outcomes has helped us make some important inferences for democracy moving forward. As with all scenario exercises, the key is not to identify which will triumph but instead to consider what factors might affect the likelihood of each scenario coming true. From the perspective of what the democracy support community can do to influence these factors, several questions arise.

1. While democracy support has focused on some key processes and institutions (e.g. elections, parliaments and political parties) can we do more to address democratic practice and culture through key policy challenges faced by democracies (e.g. environmental degradation, debt management, migration, education or health)? The scenarios point to this being vital for democratic governance moving forward and could help to show that democracies can successfully tackle key issues while strengthening their democratic systems.

2. While the global balance between democratising and autocratising states has been shifting backwards in the past decade, progress in a relatively small number of countries (especially weaker democracies) could reverse the swing and provide important examples of success. Are we looking closely enough at what it would take to achieve progress in such countries, and whether there might be regional champions (or even sub-national examples) that could play a stronger demonstrative role?

3. In a world in which crises and instability are likely to be more frequent, could more be done to support democratic crisis responses? This could involve developing stronger practice on the role of oversight institutions to hold the executive to account in an emergency, building cultures of transparency that ensure the public have adequate information about government performance, helping states to identify what reinforces public trust in institutions or new research into the links between crisis time decision-making and democratic politics. This is one possible step in helping to avert the disastrous consequences of state breakdown.

4. The exercise pointed to the fact that democratic politics and geopolitics will play an increasingly important role in the future of digitalisation and, by extension, of human behaviour. But what are the policy areas that should be prioritised? And how can supporters of democracy promote democratic principles in the digital sphere? Given the size of the major tech companies, cooperation between multiple organisations and engaging with governments on regulation are obvious starting points.

5. The policy frameworks and mechanisms of support for democracy have been spelled out many times, but are they adequate to deal with the fallout from the pandemic? Perhaps - and really

what is needed is a renewed push or greater financial commitments. Yet, this paper points to the fact that our old ways of working will also come under significant pressure. It may therefore be the right moment to debate a revitalisation of democracy support: bringing in new players, experimenting with different democratic innovations, setting longer-term strategies or investing in different digital technologies.

Several other questions were also raised in the exercise such as the relationship of the democracy community to the growing importance of protest movements, the specific conditions that are necessary for engagement on democracy in foreign policy and the different ways in which greater participation could be harnessed to tackle polarisation or arrest democratic erosion.

While it would be foolish to take this exercise as gospel, we want it to provide a basis for discussion among civil society groups, government administrations, multilateral institutions, citizens, academics and journalists about the future of democracy and the steps that need to be taken to support it. We hope it comes at the right time.

Annex: A summary of the trend areas per scenario

	Socio-economic	Levels of governance	Political engagement	Institutions	Digital sphere
Key themes	*Inequality // Social justice // Public Debt // Natural resources and climate change*	*Centralisation of power // Local democracy // International cooperation*	*Protest // Participation // Polarisation // Restrictions to space // Deliberative democracy*	*Separation of powers // Judiciary // Parliament // Elections // Parties // Rule of Law // Media*	*Data surveillance // AI transparency // Government control of the internet // Big Tech*
Grey zone	- Inequality will worsen around the world due to an economic 'race to the bottom' between countries - Increased corruption due to a lack of independent oversight - Disadvantaged groups are further marginalised due to a majoritarian concept of democracy and economic inequality	- Low ambition from states in the international sphere - Cooperation between states on key issues of mutual interest such as climate change and trade - Local level decision-making will suffer from centralisation of power	- Support for democracy falls worldwide as it exists in name only (high citizen apathy) - A majoritarian conception of democracy means elections retain a crucial role in political turnover - Pockets of experimentation with new democratic methods	- Independent institutions are steadily brought under executive control - Economic coercion is used to underline free media - Parties are made to be subservient to the government	- Major technologies companies retain and expand economic and political power - Digital surveillance services are provided by companies to governments - Little transparency in the digital sphere
Bifurcation	- Changes to trade and taxation mean that inequality will fall in democracies and also in some authoritarian regimes (particularly in response to issues of public debt) - Continued pressure on natural resources and the climate change - Greater role for the state in the economy	- International cooperation is severely undermined - Focus on the importance of the central state all around the world - Democracies retain or increase their focus on democracy abroad as a means of putting pressure on non-democracies - Integration between states in regional blocs of likeminded leaders/regimes	- High turnout at elections in democracies, particularly from youth - Low scale experimentation with innovative forms of democratic engagement - Repression of regime-threatening protests in authoritarian states	- Political parties will fragment due to changed concerns from voters and divisions that continue to break the 20th century mould. - Democratic institutions retain key powers in democratic societies - Autocracies undermine the Rule of Law unless there is a clear economic cost harming performance	- Different spheres of internet based on separate rules - Increased control of the digital sphere in authoritarian states, including surveillance of citizens - Increased control of the digital sphere in democracies through government regulation with strong parliamentary oversight - Reduction in power of the Big Tech companies, although they will remain predominant market players
Catalysts	- International agreements set up regime able to tackle cross-border corruption - Action is taken by states to tackle climate change although this is too slow - Policy problems linked to inequality and social justice persist but benefit from increased citizen engagement	- Increase in the importance of local-level decision-making - High degree of international cooperation on issues of common concern - Strong levels of vertical and horizontal accountability of central government	- Popular experimentation with deliberative and participatory mechanisms - Major citizen-led protests and elite pressure lead to fall of many authoritarian regimes - High levels of participation in democracies - Continued polarisation and debate on key policy issues	- Experimentation leads to slow improvements to the functioning of core democratic institutions such as political parties - Renewed emphasis on the importance of the separation of powers	- Reduction in the power of technology companies in the digital sphere - International regulations slowly come into force structuring the digital world - Democratic oversight of the online public sphere
State Breakdown	- Less rapid acceleration of climate change due to state breakdown - Lost decade of development in many states - Immense increase in inequality within states with a disproportionate negative impact on women and minority groups	- Greater inequality between states reduced the scope for international cooperation - International cooperation is dedicated to the restoration of state power in crisis zones - Focus on the state as core political concern for any nation - Local level decision-making becomes vital in crisis zone, especially through non-state entities	- Citizen engagement with politics will suffer around the world - Violence and state breakdown will undermine civic and political space - Protest will continue to be a key form of political expression in states not suffering from breakdown	- Democratic institutions will become ineffective in many states because of state breakdown - Concentration of economic power will undermine the functioning of the media and political parties	- The use of private data of citizens by corporations and governments will become widespread - Major technology companies will provide key government (public) services - Increase in power to holders of data whether state or non-state actors

About EPD

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) is a non-profit organisation supporting the development of democracy worldwide. As a network of European civil and political society organisations, EPD advocates for a stronger presence of democracy support on the EU's agenda and facilitates the exchange of knowledge among practitioners. Throughout its work, EPD also seeks to contribute to the effectiveness and the quality of the programming and implementation cycles of democracy support at the EU level.

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