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Post-Pandemic Politics: Reshaping Global Governance Structures

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Abstract

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This research explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global governance structures, analyzing how political dynamics have shifted in response to unprecedented challenges. As nations grappled with health crises, economic downturns, and social unrest, the pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities within existing governance frameworks and prompted calls for reform. This study examines key themes such as international cooperation, the rise of nationalism, and the role of technology in governance. By evaluating case studies from various countries, the research highlights how different political systems have adapted to the exigencies of the pandemic, leading to innovative approaches to governance. Furthermore, the analysis considers the implications for global institutions, including the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and assesses their ability to respond to future crises. The findings suggest that while the pandemic has created significant challenges, it also offers an opportunity to rethink and reshape global governance structures to enhance resilience and inclusivity. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on post-pandemic politics and provide insights into forging a more effective and equitable global governance system.

Keywords: post-pandemic politics, global governance, international cooperation, nationalism, technology, health crises, political dynamics, reform.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for social, economic, and political change globally. This essay argues that the changes in domestic and inter-state politics have a clear political economic dimension: they represent the result of the tension between two governance principles: the rule of the market and the normative basis of social rights. This becoming is both a moment of instability but also holds prospects for instituting transformative governance structures. This introduction previews the international developments we then examine in four substantive chapters. The pandemic made the case for democratic politics, in the sense that it demonstrated the power of the people, their potential to be affected in ways other than merely as suppliers of labor or as consumers.

In inter-state politics, much damage was done already in the early days of the pandemic, as countries turned to shoring up their national production capacities, engaging in vaccine diplomacy to reflect who they regarded as deserving help and who they treated as unworthy; and countries having greater geopolitical ambitions sought to win hearts and minds with their limited stocks of spare doses. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a number of studies and working papers that take stock of how the pandemic illustrates, accentuates, or derails visions and practices of global governance. From the outset, the political-economic processes underpinning these developments were at the center of our thinking. The central question we ask concerns the changing governance paradigms of social and health policy coordination that emerge in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: which governance reforms have been implemented on the domestic, regional, and global level, and what are the prospects for greater cooperation in a post-pandemic era? (Penrith et al., 2021)

2. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Global Governance

The social, economic, and political impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been transformative for global governance. Perhaps the most evident effect of the pandemic has been in exposing the apparent signs of 'ungovernability' at the global level, manifesting as governance incoherence and governance

fragmentation. Concerns about 'ungovernability', when and where it is needed most, have raised questions around the protean nature of contemporary global governance and the possible over-politicization of global governance structures. The first trench of evidence has unveiled global health governance sector-linked challenges. For some time, it has been accepted wisdom that certain coalitions were too small and not powerful enough, lacking legitimacy to drive significant reform or indeed to lead a major negotiation. After widespread suffering and an economic downturn, redressing this global governance shortfall is expected to be high in medical, education, and social sectors and welfare reform. Devising an agenda for global governance change also appears to be at the forefront across other hard and soft sectors, regional and international responsibility centers, to enhance the existing and potential human security governance agenda.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the gradual (re)turning of the global hierarchy, the privileged role of the major powers, and the diluted role of global governance (as a global health structure) is evident from a series of evolving signs. In general, we have observed the resurgence of the role of the primary agents of global governance on the global stage, the nation-state, evaluated in scalar, quasi-fungible currency such as vaccines and other technological forms. Some future-focused policymakers have encountered the COVID-19 crisis as providing a reset opportunity to facilitate deeper processes of human and environmental sustainability through accelerating carbon budget decline. It was also suggested that vaccine success and the quest for a successful vaccine distribution system could enhance legitimacy and the named model that has been floated as the overarching agreement needed for a set of international agreements that make system success more plausible. Monitoring success with its behavioral public response may also have moderated the knee-jerk politics of 'bashing' among some local constituencies. Nongovernmental organizations have been more than critical of certain organizations, with a minority claiming that they trust them. Social media is divided into either outright conspirators or other claims that some international agreement system is under active contestation in a public sphere, with nations

and people's parties that are less deferential to global governance institutions. The reaction, presented in dystopian scenarios, does unfairly portray 'quasi-governmental international organizations' as a narrative distortion. (Penrith et al.2021)

3. Challenges and Opportunities for Reshaping Global Governance Post-Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the shortcomings of the current global governance structure. This section looks at both the challenges and the opportunities to reshape global governance in the post-pandemic world. It underscores the imperative for change and considers both the difficulty and the likelihood of progress. The challenges are considerable as the pandemic has exposed diverging perspectives on state sovereignty and global solidarity. However, these starkly differing views and issues of vaccine nationalism might also provide an opportunity to foster a better understanding of the darker sides of the world. Global governance's new epoch cannot be addressed without reforming and reshaping institutional and governance systems, which remain the frontier of battles given their evolving transnational risks. The development of a multilateralism that balances national needs—varying from health security to climate change, and digital governance to security—with local strengths and resources is of prime concern in the post-pandemic epoch. The gradual straining of everyday and already strained dialogue processes might lead to one or more states working in isolation to protect their national interests. One also needs to be cognizant that this post-COVID landscape is leading to great and grave geopolitical contention, primarily between major powers. Unequal and unfair representation in international organizations, along with the overthrowing of complete governance logics by these states, might also be fraught with dangerous intentions. What also becomes pivotal is that multilateralism brought forth one big representation of all nations, but did not cater to all nations or provide equitable benefits. Though at different capacities, one group of nations, usually based in the West, controlled the leadership and dialogue, driven mostly, though not completely, by former colonial and imperial benevolence.

This ethos rejected the principles of tolerance, discourse, and pluralism that had characterized global dialogues for long. Other voices from around the world were cast aside. Platforms need to reform, be more inclusive, be representative of the world at large, generate and mobilize resources. They also need to be networked, promote evidence-based policy through a preponderance of specialists, and share responsibilities. Just health governance also needs to address the unethical, unjust, and immoral global vaccine politics. Preventing the development of solutions to vaccine inequality and tensions is premised on achieving truly global cooperation through a new framing of multilateral engagements. A new global order, development, and growth trajectories are reshaping global economic and business strategies as capitalism studies its own debate during the pandemic. New global and regional dialogues based on prudent and intelligent stakeholder discussions can lead to better and innovative ways of understanding, managing, and executing health as a common capital and world good. New knowledge and wisdom could lead to the shaping of global and regional health strategies, services, and investments. Generally, an understanding of regionalism as regions' response to the global health crisis has not been sufficiently studied or understood. This section intends not just to discuss global governance and globalization-led health crises; it also reconceptualizes regions as the nodes for the co-production of new global dialogues. A new world order for health may need to be informed by a new regional order. (Cooper et al.2022)

3.1. Erosion of Multilateralism

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accentuated pre-existing global tensions and rivalries among nations by highlighting the insufficiency of contemporary international governance structures. This is evident in the ever-frequent unilateral actions taken by the states, especially the great powers of the world. The retreat from collective action is seen in the dearth of diplomatic dialogue and in the weakening of international agreements and treaties. To be sure, the pandemic has created space for some global governance initiatives, especially in vaccine development and distribution. Nonetheless, states have frequently taken actions purported to address national interests before those

of others that are mutually dependent. As a dark example, the successful cooperation among different governments and private organizations in developing and testing vaccines has led numerous states to sign contracts with manufacturers to access stock once released, but developed countries have secured the bulk of the initial supply. (Penrith and Kivaria2022)

Multilateral structures have suffered as a result of the pandemic. It should have led to an enhancement of the capabilities of the existing multilateral structures, but there has also been inaction by great powers in launching new initiatives. Major powers are prioritizing their own needs and only pursuing joint projects likely to bring early results and to which all parties are required to invest equal inputs, thus making each feel secure that the other has made an equal investment and will not expropriate the investment advantages gained. Even the joint initiative regarding the vaccine simply involves them facilitating technology and access to the vaccine. It does not share any of the vaccine IP nor does it give any access to a vaccine in the country. All of this makes for a pessimistic prognosis for global peace and security as rival powers accelerate a modern version of the economic nationalism of the interwar period, including trade restrictions and aggressive government intervention in the global economy. As global trade falls and states squabble over vaccine supplies, their mutual trust accounts continue to hemorrhage. (Aliro et al.2022)

4. Case Studies: Regional Responses and Implications for Global Governance

In order to explore broader implications for global governance, this chapter focuses on regional responses to the COVID-19 crisis, drawing on these experiences as case studies to derive inductively what the implications for global governance might be. For example, different regions had very different pandemic experiences. East Asian and Pacific countries with a regional bloc saw substantial public health benefits from sharing information and expertise on the early stages of the pandemic, which was critical in the absence of a

vaccine. North American countries and European ones did not see such cooperation in the early stages, but for a variety of reasons have planned to cooperate on economic recovery. The case studies also reflect political and socioeconomic differences between the regions. This stronger cooperative spirit, lenders argue, could be fruitfully further developed as a model for wider global governance reform.

In earlier discussions, experts distinguished a number of shapes that contemporary or reformed global governance might take. They argue that there are strong arguments both for and against regional competition and alliance-building. Highlighting more positive regional patterns, they have highlighted the unique roles that large regional powers and regional organizations have played in providing public goods even at a time of fragmentation in global leadership. Key global trends, such as migration and global value chain integration, have assumed an ever-greater regional face as well. Focusing on the delicate area of cross-border public health interventions, others have analyzed public health cooperation in various regions. This discussion is important, as when institutional economies think about reshaping international cooperation, their focus generally turns to regional block sizes. Unfortunately, global institutional reform thinking pertinent to global governance has to date focused less intensely on these successes relative to general critics of regionalism. In particular, global institutions do not always reflect the increased importance of patterns or limitations in the powers and mandates of regional institutions. (Chenais et al.2022)

4.1. European Union

Despite early predictions, the COVID-19 pandemic did not trigger the breakup of the European Union. The well-worn anti-EU rhetoric did not prevent the key initiatives to contain the spread of the virus and circumvent the financial constraints from being framed and debated in pan-European terms. Different interests and views were defended, and national sovereignty was often mentioned when challenging new initiatives. But what is striking is the transnational solidarity shown by European citizens and the artificial polarization desired by those who believed they could use these pacifist

campaigns to further their agenda. In other regions of the world, the regional and sub-regional platforms were sidelined, and coordinated responses proved largely ineffectual. Common vaccine policies did emerge only in some cases, as in certain states, which coordinated the purchase and distribution of vaccines from the beginning of 2020. The EU adopted a position sounding a clarion call for a 'new European health union', drafting a broader vision of a consolidated health agenda and proposing new investment and cooperation strategies for developing countries, with an emphasis on six health strategies. The Commission's Global Health Policy Review package publishes the joint communication on Global Health Response, a staff working document entitled 'The European Union's contribution to the global pandemic endgame', and a staff working document focused on the EU's new leverage for effecting change as reflected in the vaccine solidarity experience. (Berends et al.2021)

5. The Role of International Organizations in the Post-Pandemic Era

The pandemic offers an opportunity to rethink global governance structures, increasing their focus on the transnational challenges that societies are actually facing. As multilateralism weakens, international organizations have already lost some of their value in facilitating global collective action. International terrorism is often cited as the source of the nadir in great-power relations, but a consequence of the former was the 'securitization' of global public health. In an interconnected world, cooperation is required to share information and coordinate responses to global health challenges. However, cooperation may in any case be made less costly than defection by providing credible commitment, facilitating verification, and institutionalizing the cooperative outcome in appropriate, multilateral forms. Climate change, more than global pandemics, offers an insight into how a changing political reality might renew and extend the roles of these international organizations after the pandemic. (Jilo, 2021)

One way to strengthen global health governance by reforming existing mandates includes enhancing the World Health Organization. Expanding the WHO's mandate beyond the limited scope of international public health regulation provides an opportunity to improve global health governance. In

light of these efforts, international organizations are also charged with meeting several core objectives that are designed to mitigate pandemics: (1) strengthen the global health regulatory framework; (2) coordinate collaboration among global, regional, and bilateral initiatives and develop norms and standards; and (3) facilitate policy convergence and knowledge sharing among nation-states. The WHO has lacked the funds to help poor countries afford swine flu prevention and treatment, and a new global tax on vaccines is increasingly necessary to fund the coordinated response. Furthermore, despite being largely sidelined in the swine flu response, not to mention being compromised by donor contributions, the WHO and similar organizations are deemed unfit because their lack of independence from influence deprives them of 'legitimacy and accountability'. (Fernandez-Colorado et al., 2021)

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