

# UTBLICK

## THE CORRUPTION ISSUE – THE DISEASE THAT KEEPS GROWING



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



This is the last Utblick issue for the year 2020 – but probably not the last article we will ever publish on the topic of this issue – namely corruption. Corruption truly is a growing disease that infects even the most stable of democracies. It sustains itself by latching onto any weaknesses in the system, which sadly, are easy to both detect and rip apart further. I do not think I am alone in feeling helpless, exhausted and utterly dismayed by the state of the world. Our issue on corrup- tion is probably not one that helps to diminish that feeling.

Yet, there is a glimmer in the darkness. A glimmer that keeps fighting against the dark abyss. A glimmer fed by our desire to continue to shine a light on the issues, try to find different solutions, try to mi- nimize the symptoms and the spread of the disease. We do this not only by staying at home to keep the very real COVID-19 pandemic at bay, but also by building stronger institutions and resisting autocratic incumbents and other actors that want to take the power away from the people. Because that is what this essentially is about. That is what corruption does. It takes away the power of the people. But I think there is importance in highlighting the issues. Only when we know what the problem is can we solve it. So if this inspires you, share it and it might just make that glimmer even stronger.

In this issue, we offer you six articles that zoom into different aspects of the very difficult and large question; is corruption a disease? and how do we deal with it? Apart from that, we also have a reading list for those of you who want to curl up with a good book as the days grow darker and colder, and a featured article concerning the futu- re of US environmental politics. This is also my first issue of Utblick as the new Editor-in-chief, as well as for the rest of this year’s staff members. As usual, the magazine is to be found in different campuses as well as online. We hope that you find our new issue informative, interesting and hopefully empowering rather than discouraging.

Best wishes!  
Sara Razi Ullah



## A short walk through corruption

– by Uwe Fromm –

**Aksel Sundström is an Associate Professor and senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. His major research interests are the relationship between corruption and effective environmental politics, especially in low-income countries, and the study of political representation, focusing on the absence of women and youth in political institutions (such as parliaments, cabinets, and local councils).**

While speaking to him on the phone, I had the pleasure of accompanying Aksel on his short walk home after a lecture he had given to find out his thoughts on corruption, as well as the significant challenges it brings and ways to combat them.

**If you would try to explain to a person that has never experienced or heard of corruption before, what would you say corruption means?**

– I think corruption is about breaching a norm of impartiality. When using that definition, I would describe corruption as the absence of impartiality amongst government officials. More generally, a definition I think is used by organizations such as Transparency International, corruption would be the abuse – or misuse – of entrusted power for private gain. I think this is a useful definition, even if it is a little vague. Especially the terms ‘abuse’ and ‘misuse’ are vague terms, but they help us to understand the direction. Think, for example, about something that is quite common in lower-income countries: Public servants are not serving the public, but in fact, they are serving themselves, or their allies. A typical behavior would be the well-known situation where someone possibly has to pay to get access to services that one would actually be entitled to. That is called ‘non-collusive corruption’. You might also find yourself in situations where citizens collude with government officials to get away with law violations, which means that, basically, criminal actors engage in collusion with officials to, for example, cut down timber and thereby violate legal regulations. These would be two good examples to start with, I think.

***“Corruption, to me, would entail a severe breach of the principle that all people matter equally.”***

**You touched on this a little already, but to get more precise, what, in your opinion, would be the most severe effect that a corruption problem has on society as a whole?**

– If people believe that the system of a society is affected by corruption, the basic understanding that one person equals one vote is violated. Corruption, to me, would entail a severe breach of the principle that all people matter equally. Because if you can take influence through the amount of money or power you have, you obviously violate the principles that all voices are to be heard equally.

**As you focus on corruption among state officials, do you think that there is also a political system that can be seen as beneficial for a corrupt system to develop?**

– Well, this is a very large question. What research tends to find is that in hybrid systems, you have a lot of corruption. So, in really authoritarian systems, the dictator could potentially severely punish corruption, and in democracies, the people could – maybe – hold politicians accountable. I think this is not an easy question to answer. What we do know is that there is also a correlation between the share of women in government and the amount of corruption in society. But I think this is a very difficult relationship to disentangle because the cause of direction is probably running multiple ways here. But a no-brainer would be having a free press. This might not be sufficient, but it is at least necessary. Any political action that hinders a free press from operating would, in my opinion, be a big red flag! For example, when I hear about governments that try to hinder the free press, I immediately think about risks with corruption because without a free press, there is no one that can pull the break if there is a scandal.

**So, how can you detect ongoing corruption?**

– This is a very interesting question because these measures are often based on the perception among experts or among citizens. As researchers, we tend to ask the people if they perceive contracts or bidding as corrupt. But there is interesting data coming out from the European Union, where researchers look at more objective indicators. I believe that, at the local level in Europe, at the municipal level, a typical red flag is if contracts are awarded in single biddings. That is an indicator that something is not as transparent in the bidding process as it should be according to the EU legislation. The amazing thing about this indicator is that it is possible to harmonize it across Europe because it is a harmonized legalization. Therefore, the same rules should apply to all municipalities.

**In an article you wrote about corruption in South Africa, I read that there are different anti-corruption measures with some impact, like increasing the wages for civil servants and protection against violence. Do you see another measure that could be valuable in the fight against corruption?**

– To be honest, I wouldn’t count too much on increasing wages. This is probably not really going to solve the problem. At least in low-income countries. I mean, it is probably rational to take bribes, so I don’t really see why higher wages would make a *big* difference. If we knew the answer, there would probably not be a big problem with corruption. But if we look, for example, to South Africa, where I did the study on which my article is based, I would say at least ensuring that whistle-blowers are kept anonymous and safe, that to me would be the first step. But that alone will not solve the problem. After all, most countries have that. But I think that I will not be able to answer this question fully.

**On the opposing end – what factors are, in your opinion, most favorable for corruption to take place? You have already mentioned the absence of a free press and insufficient whistle-blowing mechanisms, but is there anything else that really fuels corruption?**

– Personally, I also think a big problem is closed networks in the political elite, having few ‘newcomers’ and a system where the same people stay in power. I mean, these types of networks are predestined to develop systems of favors and favors in return. So, finding mechanisms and ways that ensure that the political elites are more frequently challenged and re-

placed, I think, would make sense. Doing this is very complicated, and it has to be done within the democratic structures, but to me, that would be the main reason why newcomers – female politicians, young politicians – why these factors could potentially disrupt the status quo. I think, often, this is the problem; that you do not disrupt this status quo. But in very deeply corrupt systems, even newcomers could be of the ‘same old family trees’. So, you want outsiders that are not part of politics, but that is a fine line to walk because you do not want to end up in a populist stance, where arguing for the problem of the political elites is only [meant] to tear down a system. That is probably what Trump did successfully when he talked about ‘draining the swamp’. This was rhetoric against corruption in Washington, and I do not think that led to much.

**I would like to use the last question to look a little into the future. In your opinion, is there any specific area in corruption research that our readers should be paying attention to?**

– I am very interested in the role of young politicians and if they will make a difference when entering the [political] arena. In some countries, we see youth quotas today, and I am very curious to see if these quotas can help bring in outsiders. Similar to gender quotas, it will be interesting to see how these quotas are being used, or also misused. In some countries, gender quotas have been quite effective in getting outsiders. In other countries, these gender quotas were misused by recruiting more supporters for the incumbent parties. So this will be an interesting development with youth quotas, and to see if this will challenge the status quo. These youth quotas have been in place, especially after the Arab spring, but so far in very few numbers and probably not on a sufficient scale.





# Staying out of the hands of corruption

– by Turkan Omari –

*Money laundering, illicit financial flows, fictitious invoices, nepotism, embezzlement, fraud and extortion, these acts are some of the most common practices that humanitarian organisations must overcome to continue their operations.*

Humanitarian assistance is mostly provided in developing countries that often suffer from high levels of corruption. It is often a great challenge, understanding whether the planned aid is actually being allocated to its designated group, which can range from women, children to minority groups and those who are financially weak. Corruption in these contexts is a disastrous outcome, but corruption is also a phenomenon that affects all countries. No country is immune to this disease, no matter the level of economic or social development. However, the forms and intensity of corruption can differ from state to state, as in some societies, the tolerance level and attitude towards corruption differs. Looking at the statistics of **Transparency International** it is nothing but a fact that corruption does exist in all countries.

However, the nature and complexity of corruption is often underestimated by the public, as it is multi-layered and complex to deal with. As **Albert Einstein** famously put it, “In theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they are not”. A perfect description of the challenge that corruption poses for humanitarian operation, where proving and persecuting corruption is often rigid.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) often find themselves in difficult situations while operating in corrupt environments. In order to achieve both operational efficiency and accountability to their stakeholders, NGOs/INGOs have to tackle corruption, but doing so often causes them to either halt their projects or freeze them for unspecified periods of time. A form of corruption that NGO/INGOs often face is bribery, e.g. when transporting crucial supplies to an affected area, they often run a risk of border guards demanding some type of payment (bribe) in exchange for leaving them alone. Other forms of corruption these organizations face are that during procurement of resources and services, suppliers might form cartels to limit their chances of receiving contracts. All of the above-mentioned, often put staff in moral dilemmas in which the ethical principles of humanitarian assistance, such as impartiality, are threatened.

When Transparency International was founded in 1990, a link between corruption and development had been discovered. Corruption proved to be a major obstacle to international development as well as to human rights, democracy and peacebuilding, which are at the core of NGOs/INGOs operations. Existing NGOs were driven towards adopting anti-corruption strategies. Since then, humanitarian organizations are regarded as the flag bearers of anti-corruption. Nevertheless, to combat corruption, NGOs/INGOs have incorporated an effective Corruption risk management, and other technical procedures to improve transparency and efficiency of procedures. For example, the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)**, has implemented its own anti-corruption regulation in which they follow through on all levels of its organisation, guided by an absolute intolerance for any form of corruption or kickbacks. Furthermore **Openaid**, which is run by SIDA, includes information about all Swedish humanitarian agencies handling funds and is built on open government data. This data shows when, to who and for what purpose Swedish aid has been disbursed as well as what results have been achieved.

It is important to point out that humanitarian organizations are not always successful in their battle against corruption. Many do not understand the real scope and character of corruption within humanitarian operations; instead it is treated as if it is a different area of focus, rather than viewing it as an inherent obstacle in humanitarian operations. Consequently, neglecting to integrate corruption risk management in humanitarian projects. In other words, corruption is not treated as relevant for the active humanitarian operations, instead the main focus is to provide for the most vulnerable. However, many INGOs/ NGOs including SIDA, with years of experience in the development sector, are treating corruption as a systematic behaviour and as a question of power. By shifting the traditional way of managing corruption as a legal and technical mechanism that can only be tackled by the enforcement of rule of law. This does not imply that law enforcement is not important however, more emphasis must be made on preventing and reducing the opportunities for corrupt acts to incur and to change the incentive structure.

The battle against corruption is yet to be won, and as the world is coping with an increasing risk of new civil wars, climate change challenges and consequences of a pandemic, the road to a less corrupt world remains to be built.



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# THE CROSSROAD BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND EXTINCTION — A EUROPEAN STORY

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– Julian-Alexis Kasapov –

Bulgaria has long been a forgotten member on the very South-Eastern border of the European Union. Bordering Turkey, Greece, Romania and North Macedonia the country is instrumental for one of the Union's pan-European networks connecting the Middle East and the Balkans with the rest of the Union. Despite having been an EU-member since 2007, Bulgaria is still considered the poorest and most corrupt member state. Adding to this, the unprecedented demographic crisis that the country faces threatens the future of the country. Recent scandals relating to corruption, culminated in large anti-government protests. People poured into the streets with the hope of altering the course of action of the despairing political climate that has left hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians emigrating abroad in pursuit of alternatives.

## Looking into the history

In order to make sense of the present it is useful to look back to the past. During the Cold War, Bulgaria was considered one of the Soviet Union's fiercest allies, leaving the people tied to the Kremlin in a way that Yugoslavia managed to circumvent. Hence, when the Berlin wall came down in 1989, and Bulgaria ousted the communist regime, people were in the literal sense of the word, hungry from lack of access to food but also figuratively speaking hungry for Western living standards. The transition to democracy was to say the least – turbulent, with extortion and assassinations becoming everyday practices in politics and business. Even the post-commu-

nism prime minister Andrei Lukanov was assassinated for in turn having murky ties to the communist elite. Adding to this mayhem was also the fact that the communist party's 45-year long rule had eradicated any alternatives to the ruling elite. Hence, during the transition period, the elite remained indirectly in control and they continued protecting their political and economic interests, described as a “patronage” democracy. As it has become clear with the years, it is a trend that spread throughout the Eastern bloc



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countries; yet it is a trend that for the moment being, seems to have affected and continues to affect Bulgaria more than any other member-state. Boyko Borissov, a fireman by profession, is the incumbent prime minister of Bulgaria. During the turbulent transition years, he was appointed as the personal bodyguard of the late communist leader Todor Zhivkov. He quickly got familiarised with the political elite in the country and

made a name for himself. Therefore, it did not surprise anyone when he, in 2005, became elected mayor of Sofia and in 2009 launched his political party GERB. His party has been in power ever since, with the exception of a tactically arranged interim government in 2013 and he is now on finishing off his third mandate. Although GERB at the European level, officially belongs to the European People's Party (EPP), that includes Angela Merkel's party, there have been no notable signs of Borissov and his party appertaining to the values set out for all EU-members such as rule of law or media independence. In an article published by Opendemocracy, an independent media outlet focusing on promoting democratic values, the author openly states that,

***“Unlike other European ‘strong men’, Borisov is not fascistic, antisemitic or xenophobic. Unlike other macho leaders in the region, he does not even have a problem with gay people. This makes him, I’ve been told by EU officials, somehow “safe” when it comes to democracy.”***

Yet he has time and time again been accused of embezzlement, favouritism, intervening in the judicial system and maintaining illicit relations with Bulgarian oligarchs such as Delyan Peevsky. At the age of 21, Peevsky without any prior experience became a MP for the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in 2001. This was when the party was centred around its founder Ahmed Dogan, who himself is known to have been a member of the

former communist security service and the notorious elite. Delyan Peevsky, has since acquired a group of newspapers and media outlets including 13 newspapers, a few radio channels, two national TV channels and multiple printing houses; this excludes multiple, digital media sources that also belong to him. Furthermore, he owns Bulgartabac Holding AD, the largest Bulgarian tobacco exporter and several other enterprises, some of which are not disclosed to the public, making him the richest MP in the government. Boyko Borissov has at multiple occasions awarded national tender to Peevsky-held companies. Reporters Without Borders estimate that 80% of print media in Bulgaria is controlled by the oligarch-MP.

## The future lies in the present

It is well-known that Borissov's government allocates EU resources to media outlets under-the-table, with the wish of encouraging recipients to be pro-GERB. Just to illustrate the situation, Bulgaria and Romania both joined the EU at the same time, yet Bulgaria ranks 111 as opposed to Romania that makes it into the top 50 ranking [no.48] of the 2020 World Press Freedom Index. The EU, with this information in hand, continues to allocate funds to the country; while it is clear that there is no significant progress made on aspects such as independence

### PROPOSED EU BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

	2021-27 allocation (euros)	Percentage change from 2014-20
Bulgaria	8.9 billion	+8%
Croatia	8.8 billion	-6%
Czech Republic	17.8 billion	-24%
Hungary	17.9 billion	-24%
Poland	64.4 billion	-23%
Romania	27.2 billion	+8%
Slovakia	11.8 billion	-22%

Source: European Commission, September 2019





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of media, judicial independence, corruption and other values, that the EU “promotes”. Even the Bulgarian dissident, Petar Boyadjev, who nowadays lives in France has in an interview iterated how Bulgaria although in Europe, could not be considered civilised enough to belong in the EU. He explains that it is saddening to see that the EPP continues to portray Bulgaria as prospering, when in reality, it is not. All the while, the ones that continue to suffer from this are the people.

The people, who for a long time had been going about their business were disrupted this summer when an opposition leader revealed how the previously mentioned Ahmed Dogan, who is associated with Peevsky, had enclosed a part of a public beach to build a giant hacienda. At the same time receiving protection from the National Service for Protection, without actually being eligible

for it. This revelation that, 30 years after starting the transition to democracy the same people are still exploiting their power to enrich themselves, created a public outrage. People stood outside for days and nights, camping on the streets and barricading themselves in a peaceful manner. Yet the government managed to avoid the pressure of resigning and have since, continued their embezzling and misconduct. The resolution that the European Parliament adopted in response to the protests and the increased public demand for accountability, is vague and unrelieved. It states that violations exist but that Bulgaria, in broad terms, does comply with the goals set out for it. An MP from the ruling GERB party took the liberty to, during a session of parliament, confidently exclaim that, “We’re not worse than North Korea. In fact, we’re not worse than most European countries,”. This if something, could act as an indication of the experienced remorse by those in charge when confronted with the conclusions from the resolution. It was considered an achievement by the protesting public to have managed to have the EU shed some light on the troubled reality in the country;

yet it goes without saying that this is not enough for the situation to change, and sadly enough, the EU and the EPP knows this.

### A nation fading away

The population crisis the country is facing is one that many other Eastern bloc countries are also facing. However, Bulgaria, being one of the few Balkan countries to have made it into the union, continues ranking the highest on the list of populations declining. The young capable workforce is emigrating in search of better wages, security, and rule of law. The National Statistical Institute said that the population shrank by approximately 50 000 in 2018 continuing a trend from previous years. The institute estimates that in 2050 the population will be 5.8 million and continue decreasing if the economy does not substantially improve.

There have been some efforts put into place to attract businesses and people from abroad, some of which have been successful. However, none of them seem to really address the main issue which is that the circle of corruption and malfeasance in combination with open borders, drain the country from the workforce. The country needs to improve its living standard. Even if there are business opportunities and they create formidable circumstances it will not improve if people continue preferring to leave.

*The prospect of what this could entail, corresponds well with the Bulgarian saying: Болен здрав носи- An ill person carries a healthy one on his back.*

This story is long, uncertain and prone to change, yet, if it is for the better or for the worse remains to be seen. It should be noted that Bulgaria has come a long way in comparison to thirty years ago but it is still lagging behind in comparison to its neighbours. Aware of the breaches that take place there, the EU should take an active stance in preventing embezzlement and other non-democratic practices taking place. As the opposition figure that triggered the protests expressed, “If the EU were more aware of what is happening on its Eastern borders, it would be stronger,”. Corruption is a disease, one that in the Bulgarian case could lead to self-annihilation unless the citizens with or without the support of Brussels, manage to turn the trend around.



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## How the COVID Crisis opened new avenues for police corruption

– by Morgan Young –

**The pandemic has brought citizens across the globe into increasing contact with police as they enforce public health measures. Unruly citizens feel they can bribe their way out of them, and some officers are using the pandemic as a pretense to abuse their power.**

### The Growing Market for Bribes

Mask mandates, stay-at-home orders, closed borders, and quarantine facilities have provided the space for a “global pattern of police abuse” in the era of the coronavirus, according to anti-corruption group Transparency International. From Guatemala to Madagascar, the organization has received hundreds of reports. In some, officers take advantage of essential workers as they come and go from work. In others, they accept bribes from those who want to leave quarantined areas or stay out after curfew. The South Africa-based non-profit Corruption Watch provides further evidence for the trend. The organization has received more reports of police corruption in the first half of 2020 than in all of 2019, most of which were made after the country declared a national state of disaster and enforced a national lockdown.

Roadblocks in particular, intended to regulate the movement of citizens and control the spread of the virus, have been frequent sites of extortion. Zimbabwe is one among many countries confronting rampant bribery at checkpoints, according to national police spokesperson and Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi.

«Bribery is a serious offense and we do not condone corruption in our rank and file,» he said, «All those found on the wrong side of the law, will be arrested.»

The Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services has even organized a hotline to receive the growing number of complaints raised against police misconduct during lockdown. These announcements came in April, at the peak of the first wave of outbreaks. But in October, Home Affairs Minister Kazembe told a different story about where the ultimate blame lies for police corruption:

“We are doing our utmost but what I want to make very clear is that corruption is not committed by one person. [...] The police cannot corrupt themselves. I am kindly asking the citizenry to stop corrupting the police, we are the ones who are paying the police [bribes].” He implored civilians to report instances of extortion and make use of cellphone cameras to provide evidence.

Sometimes crooked officers are in fact caught and punished; Constable Tatenda Mtigwa was manning a lockdown roadblock in Masvingo, a town about 250km south of the capital Harare, when he was caught red-handed coercing a bribe from a motorist.

*The pleading driver was taking his mother to the hospital in the center of town when Mtigwa insisted a bribe was his only way through.*

Senior officers witnessed the entire exchange, and Mtigwa was charged with criminal abuse of duty as a public officer. But the chances of achieving justice, as demonstrated in this case, hinge more on the discretion of other officers and the police administration itself than on the clarity of your video recording. Kazembe’s orders make it sound almost too easy to weed out corruption. But in places where favors for a small fee is more of a norm than a taboo, it is never quite that simple.

Nigeria witnessed a similar surge in police corruption when the national government announced a shutdown of interstate highway travel. A team of investigators travelled across the country to find the policy arbitrarily enforced in what they described as an “extortion bazaar.” Commercial bus companies followed regulations and closed shop, but the bus drivers simply continued their normal routes in unmarked vans. They charged higher rates in anticipation of the many roadblocks, where the only ticket through is 500 or 1000 naira. In effect, the interstate shutdown did not keep people from moving about the country. With enough spare cash you could go almost anywhere you like, even if it would take you longer to get there. If the police were serious about keeping a road closed or a gate shut, one could always drive along the village backroads. But while the gate could be avoided, the extortion could not; village youth set up their



own makeshift barriers where they demanded small tolls from determined motorists.

### Inequality in Sharper Focus

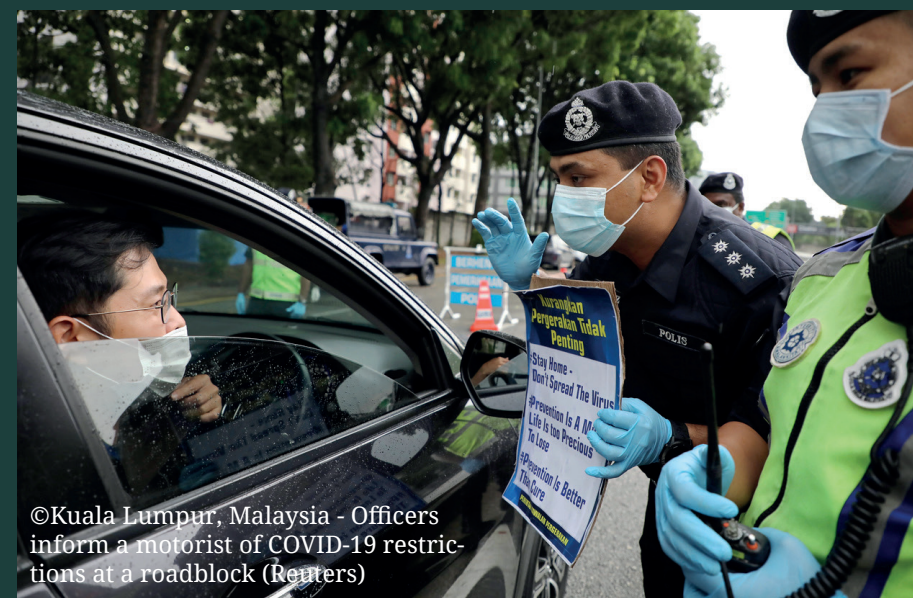
The pandemic has forced governments to make tough decisions about the trade-off between public health and commerce in order to keep working people afloat. And bustling centers like Mumbai in India have gotten creative in their attempts to promote both. In early summer, the city government allowed shops to open under an alternating “left-right” rule. Shops on the right side of the road can open one day, followed by the left side on the next day.

But even in this balancing act, the poor and vulnerable disproportionately suffer abuses from police much in the same way that they face the pandemic’s most serious economic impacts.

One Mumbai incident involved officers patrolling a market street when they found a 14-year-old boy selling eggs on the wrong side of the road. They demanded a small bribe from him to avoid consequences, which he insisted he could not afford. The officers proceeded to flip his wooden

cart onto the street, costing the boy much of his stock and putting additional burden on his already vulnerable finances.

But civilians are not always the victims in the global epidemic of corruption; while the poor are often the victims, the wealthy are more regularly instigators. Well-off and emboldened travelers have been caught soliciting bribes in order to flout measures and avoid punishment. During the United Arab Emirate’s rigorous three-day sanitation plan, a young man from India was detained when he was found strolling outside of his hotel. Going outdoors was only permitted with a valid work permit for essential industries, and all were required to wear a face-mask. The subject was arrested for having neither and was brought to the closest police station. There, he attempted to tip the officer 2000 dirham to be left alone, only adding to his criminal charges. A similar situation unfolded in Singapore when Chen Long, a Chinese national on a work permit, was arrested at a transit station for defying a mask mandate. He was caught with his mask pulled down around his neck while smoking, even after repeated orders to pull it over his



©Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Officers inform a motorist of COVID-19 restrictions at a roadblock (Reuters)

mouth and nose. Officers escorted him into a private room to be interviewed, at which point he offered 50 dollars to avoid fines and be on his way, a move that earned him for weeks in prison.

### A Crisis of Trust

Police and security forces should not be discredited entirely; it is safe to assume that many, if not most, resist attempted bribery. Overall, they are fulfilling an indispensable role now as they have in many crises before. However, records of excessive force and corruption do not help their reputation when trying to gain community trust during a pandemic. This is especially true for regions suffering protracted conflict or military occupation. For India’s newly annexed Kashmir region, the coronavirus lockdown in many ways appears only an extension of the politically motivated lockdown they first witnessed in August 2019.

In these contexts, how are civilians expected to believe military police when they suddenly proclaim curfews and checkpoints as a protective measure for the community’s health?

The implications that distrust has on noncompliance are especially dire now. Rebellious civilians, under the belief that they are defying injustice, can fill the role of contagion carrier just as well.

Harvesting bribes from vulnerable motorists and pedestrians, therefore, is only one way in which security personnel can contribute to a larger deficit of public trust. And this is not the first time we have seen public health campaigns crippled

by widespread distrust. A Nigerian vaccine drive against polio in 2017 was complicated by rumors of a government plot; parents removed their children from school, fearing that the military was injecting their children with the monkeypox virus. Distrust of military police in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a large reason why the country’s Ebola outbreak has endured so long. Officers are often the organizers and overseers of emergency medical response, alienating many civilians to the point of noncompliance and even violence against healthcare workers.

The pattern of reported bribes across the globe reflects largely what is already known about cultures of corruption and where they can be found. The Indian and Chinese solicitors both come from countries tied for 80th place in Transparency International’s corruption ranking. Meanwhile, the Emirates rank 21st and Singapore holds an impressive fourth place internationally. It becomes less of a shock, then, that the two tourists in this case even dared to try, all the while the officers remained unswayed.

But even if the rise in reports of police corruption does not tell us much about where it is likely to occur, or where to look for it, it does reveal how an effective crisis response can be sabotaged by partiality and exploitation. The police have taken on the distinct role of public health enforcers; in many parts of the world, they are the only agents of pandemic response that people encounter.

It is easy to imagine how distrust of a corrupt police force can cascade into doubt of the pandemic plan as a whole.

And an equalizing shock like COVID-19 can only be met with universal enforcement of public health measures, regardless how sly your tongue or how fat your wallet.



©Kampala, Uganda - a protestor is arrested while demanding more food relief during the pandemic (Sumy Sadurni/AFP via Getty Images)



# RISING AUTOCRATIZATION AND FALTERING DEMOCRACY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

– By Isabel Wilson –



As the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a state of emergency worldwide, governments have taken the chance to act upon financial incentives and expanded their control. Many states have justified the indefinite extension of executive powers by describing the pandemic through metaphors of war, demanding that measures are taken for the common good. Increasing autocratization enables crackdowns on freedoms and undermines countries' ability to respond effectively to the crisis. The effects of human rights repression and corruption of the economy are likely to be felt for decades to come.

fringement on rights can affect people's security, livelihoods, and access to health care. Therefore, it is important for governments to see to it that measures are reasonable and actively involve the participation and awareness of the people affected. However, the practices that have developed over the year suggest that this would be the exception rather than the norm. Under the guise of the public health crisis, some governments have abused the state of emergency as a cover to seize disproportionate power that have little to do with the outbreak.

Many have applied a militant rhetoric and described the pandemic using metaphors of war, endorsing the notion that protection of

*Under the guise of the public health crisis, some governments have abused the state of emergency as a cover to seize disproportionate power that have little to do with the outbreak.*

Inasmuch as COVID-19 is a rampant viral outbreak, governments have no choice but to adopt extraordinary measures to combat its spread and save lives. International human rights law permits imposing restrictions on civil liberties – such as the freedom of movement – in times of national emergency, which may alter democratic rights and proceedings. Leaders generally need to declare a state of emergency to obtain the authority to legally close borders, impose quarantine and track infected people, but negligent in-

human life should outweigh democratic principles. Under these circumstances, states have been tempted to deprioritize checks and balances on executive powers and management of corruption risks, making way for alarming regressions toward authoritarian governance and autocratization of rule. When transparency and accountability are no longer fundamental to government rule, the response to the pandemic presents opportunities for corrupt officials, brokers and vendors to use direct emergency





procurements, gouge prices and pilfer available health supplies. Even worse, by using the metaphor of war to legitimize these sorts of actions, criticism of the leaders' handling of the pandemic could easily be silenced under accusations of treason.

As COVID-19 has triggered a global response, authoritarian and illiberal practices harming democracy seem to have occurred in almost every region, taking a special toll on weak, newly formed democracies and semi-authoritarian states.

### Shockwaves from Asia

The very origin of COVID-19 can be traced back to corrupt activities; the zoonotic disease was first transferred to humans in a marketplace in Wuhan, China that had conducted illegal trade of exotic wildlife. China's initial response, with its authoritarian information politics, was to downplay the spread and suppress the facts of a looming international crisis both before and after the death of whistleblower Dr. Li Wenliang in February. Authoritarian regimes might have an advantage in forced mobilization of the masses, but the Chinese Government proved the dreadful consequences of their suppression as the virus continued to spread to several other countries. The justification of operating under a closed autocracy to control the virus appears even weaker when compared to democracies such as South Korea and Taiwan, which managed to maintain low death and infection rates without violating fundamental democratic principles.

China also took advantage of the world's initial state of disarray to dial up the pressure on Hong Kong. During the first months of the spread, Beijing dismantled over two decades of non-interference in Hong Kong's affairs by undermining its autonomy and persecuting dissent against the mainland government. China sent the military to public squares occupied by pro-democracy protesters, using social distancing rules to justify criminal charges. In September, international media outlets reported heatedly when it turned out that police had tackled a 12-year-old girl to the ground near a protest when she was in fact out to buy school

### *China also took advantage of the world's initial state of disarray to dial up the pressure on Hong Kong.*

supplies. Two months later, all of Hong Kong's pro-democracy lawmakers announced their resignation after Beijing forced the removal of four of their colleagues on the grounds that they were deemed a threat to national security. It is plausible that the effects of the pandemic can lead to Beijing wiping out the only democratic territory China currently has.



©Fred Moon / Unsplash

### Sethbacks in Africa and the Middle East

As the virus spread, patterns of autocratization did too. In the Middle East, the pandemic allowed semi-authoritarian regimes to constrict democratic progress and strengthen centralized power. The president of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, prolonged the state of emergency that has been in effect since April 2017, initially implemented to combat terrorism and drug trafficking. The president approved amendments which allegedly granted him and security agencies additional powers to contain

the virus, such as closing schools and universities, but also banning public and private meetings, protests and other forms of assembly. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave the internal security agency authorization to infringe on people's privacy by allowing them to track citizens through secret cell phone data developed for counterterrorism. By tracking individuals' movements, the government can dole out prison sentences to those who break isolation orders. More importantly, the prime minister managed to delay his scheduled hearing on corruption charges.

Newly founded democracies have been hit hard by the pandemic as well. As reported by the BBC, several countries in Africa have been plagued by the misuse of funds intended for COVID-19 relief. In Kenya, investigators are set to endorse the prosecution of approximately 15 top government officials and businesspeople for the corrupt handling of \$7.6 million meant for medical supplies for healthcare

workers and hospitals across the state. Another report into the use of South Africa's COVID-19 relief fund has also raised suspicions of fraud and possible overpricing. The report revealed that there had been poor insight into the large sums of money spent on personal protective equipment, which were equivalent to a staggering 10% of the country's gross domestic product or around 500 billion rand.

### Diminishing democracies in Europe

What might be considered an even more disturb-



ing aspect of the pandemic is older and more stable democracies using the crisis as a justification for cultivating authoritarianism. As stated in the study 'The COVID-19 Pandemic, Authoritarianism and Rejection of Sexual Dissenters in Poland' by Golec de Zavala and others, Poland's right-wing government reacted to the pandemic by turning to increasingly authoritarian rule. The increase was followed by the amplified emphasis on national cohesion and resulted in a decision to reject ideas that are non-conforming to conservative sexual norms. In the early months of the pandemic, authorities quickly tried to implement a nation-wide abortion ban outlawing almost all forms of abortions, except in cases of rape and danger to the mother's life. Later in the year, Poland was the site of large-scale protests opposing the ban.

However, the biggest shock for Europe happened within the European Union as Hungary's parliament permitted a state of emergency without a sunset clause, which allowed Prime Minister Viktor Orbán a carte blanche for autocratization. It meant that the Orbán-led government, for an indefinite amount of time, could suspend existing laws and implement new ones without outside scrutiny, turning Hungary into the EU's first non-democracy. Tensions between Budapest and the European Commission in Brussels have continued into autumn as the commission's rule of law report harshly criticized Hungary for not having a fully independent judiciary and thereby failing to comply with obligations under EU legislation.

#### Authoritarian behavior in the Americas

In the West, facts concerning the pandemic have been warped in a different way. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, the United States and Brazil were the two countries with the largest confirmed number of COVID-19 deaths.

*However, contrary to other regions where the pandemic has been overplayed as a means of expanding centralized power, the U.S. and Brazilian presidents Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro have actively downplayed the danger of COVID-19 in order to silence substantial criticism against their authority and crisis response.*

In May, the Supreme Court in Brazil ordered the release of a video of a closed-door meeting in which Bolsonaro participated. The video showed the Environmental Minister making plans to use the pandemic as a smokescreen to advance the assault on Indigenous lands in the Amazon by deregulating activities like deforestation. Moreover, Bolsonaro has, on several occasions throughout the year, justified the virtual absence of the government in the handling of the health crisis by calling the virus a figment of the imagination. In November, he even commanded the nation to go about business as usual so as to not look weak. Bolsonaro's actions are hazardous to the lives of the Brazilian people, not to mention the lives of indigenous communities in the Amazon and the longevity of the Amazon rainforest as a carbon sink combating climate change and one of the most biodiverse places in the world.

During the recent presidential election in the U.S., the Trump administration made several attempts to undermine the legitimacy of mail-in voting despite its advantages of social distancing, most notoriously by withholding financial support to the national postal service USPS. Despite Trump's allegations of voter fraud, U.S. election officials found no evidence that the mail-in voting system was corrupt. Nevertheless, several measures were taken to control voter turnout through mail-in votes. Among other things, the Trump administration blocked several thousand mail-in ballot requests, made it impossible to implement a universal mail-in voting system in all states, and required explicit reasons, such as old age, to grant the ability to vote by mail. The obvious downside to Trump's refusal to acknowledge the election outcome is that this contributes to the spread of disinformation and misinformation, similarly to Bolsonaro, risking the lives of the country's citizens by claiming that the pandemic is mostly under control. Trump's nonacceptance has also meant that the incoming administration under Joe Biden cannot access funds meant to facilitate his transition, or even take part in critical COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans.

#### Will it ever reverse?

The COVID-19 pandemic has put an emphasis on existing health disparities and social injustices, requiring that governments around the world play a bigger role in the economy to provide lifelines to people's livelihoods. However, examples

of national responses show that autocratization and uses of public office for private gain is more common than not, risking a deeper economic impact and loss of societal cohesion. According to the World Bank, the quest to end poverty has suffered a setback of mammoth proportions, which has resulted in what is expected to be the first rise in poverty in over 20 years, and will likely force people who once escaped extreme poverty back into it. A paper from the International Monetary Fund reaffirms these sentiments through the study of past pandemics, which suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic's toll on the economy is likely to have long-term consequences for at least one generation. Moreover, a study from the Varieties of Democracy Institute states that a legitimate justification for autocratization and negative economic impacts from the perspective of saving lives might not exist at all. In their study, they find no relations between violations of democratic standards for emergency measures and COVID-19 death rates.

As the virus continues to claim lives, discontent is conversely likely to rise against the leaders who ignore that fact. In regards to future outcomes, one can question their legitimacy if governments raise the stakes of autocratization and repression to silence dissent. Even from the perspective of regime survival, but more importantly from a human rights perspective, it is of the utmost importance for the international community to act and reverse countries' ongoing assault on democracy.





# read to rest

Somehow, even this unpredictable, difficult and exhausting year is finally coming to an end. However, for the problems mentioned in this issue, in our articles online and the global pandemic that we are still faced with, there does not seem to be an end in sight. In order to stay sane, people have turned to the things that bring them comfort. Whether that is food, bingeing shows or trying to switch off the news every now and then. In my case, I have found the company of some great books. Books that kept me steady, grounded and also provided a small escape from reality. I wanted to share the books that I read this year with you. Enjoy!



## Amat Levin – *Slumpens Barn*

One of the most worthy reads of the year is *Slumpens Barn*. The book is unfortunately yet to be translated, but to all our readers who speak Swedish, it is a must-read. Levin is a journalist whose aim is to understand the historical connection between Sweden and Gambia, as it is unique. It is not only a story about a colonial past that Sweden likes to forget. But also a story of Levin trying to understand his personal history, and a story of a diaspora that is thriving in culture, arts and politics. The story is compelling, fascinating and hopeful. It is easily one of the best books from Sweden in 2020.



## Brit Bennett – *The Vanishing Half*

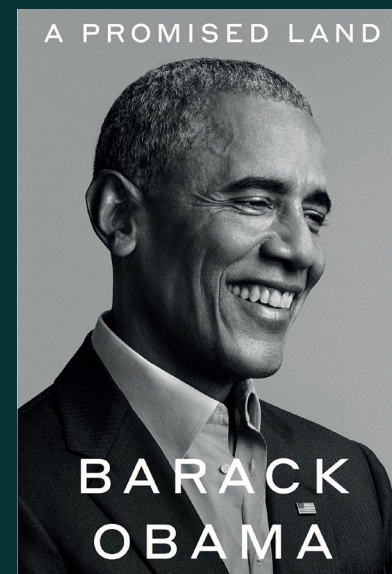
If you have not heard about Brit Bennett by now, I assume you are living under a rock. Bennett debuted with her novel *The Mothers* – a beautiful, engrossing and well-written story about motherhood and family. This year, she published *The Vanishing Half*, yet another story that is poignant, fascinating, and unbelievably good writing. It is a story about two twin sisters, who grow up together but end up living in two contrasting worlds that never intersect – until one day, when one reality splits apart.

It is a story about race, womanhood, and class. Something that Bennett writes with clarity, even while what drives the story forward is sisterhood. This should be deemed one of the best books of the year. And if you are not a reader, I can tell you the amazing news that Bennett signed a contract with HBO for the adaptation of the book, something to anticipate in the coming year.



## Suad Ali – *Dina händer var fulla av liv*

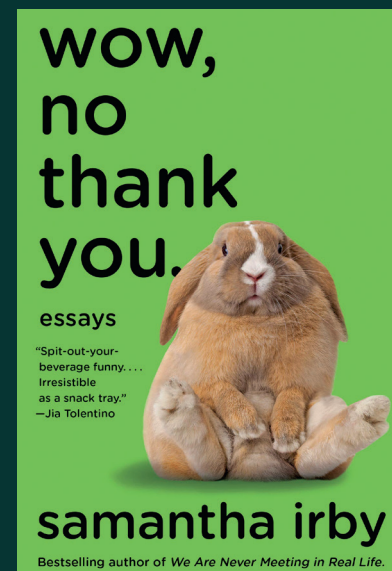
When writing about meaningful books to come out of 2020, there is no way that I would leave this book out. *Dina händer var fulla av liv* is a story about a woman grown up in Mogadishu's affluent neighborhoods being forced to flee to the cold and desolate country that she meets as a refugee in Sweden. Ali manages to describe a story that can be heard and seen in many immigrant homes, of trying to find refuge but finding nothing but a harsh, lonely, and difficult life. Yet, it is also a story about hope and the power that a woman holds within herself to create a new life. This story will not be easily forgotten. It is real, it is heartbreaking but it is also far too short.



## Barack Obama – *A promised land*

One of the most anticipated stories of the year has just been published. It is of course the first half of former president Barack Obama's biography depicting his political schooling and upbringing up until his first few years as President of the United States. In his own words: "I wrote my book for young people—as an invitation to bring about, through hard work, determination, and a big dose of imagination, an America that finally aligns with all that is best in us."

The book arrived yesterday in my mailbox, which means that by the time you read this, I have probably finished it, after which you can be sure to call me up for an opinion on it. I expect that it is written in the same manner that his presidential speeches were; captivating, poised and powerful. Because despite all his flaws (and some of his policies), the man sure knows how to deliver a speech.



## Samantha Irby – *Wow, no thank you.*

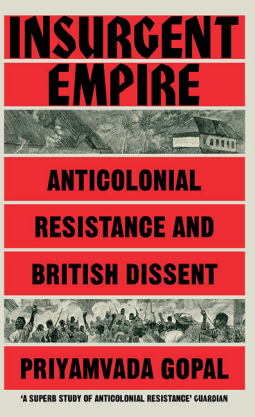
Anyone who knows me knows that I love Samantha Irby. Her demeanor, her humor, her way of explaining experiences I thought only I had. I follow her newsletters, her writings on the internet, and so obviously I have also read her books. This is her latest essay collection, in which she talks about her life with her wife and two children and also recounts the terrible friend dates she is having, trying to establish herself in a new home, in a new city. You should look her up, read this book or any of her other ones that you find interesting. Read her, laugh, feel good and then tell me all about it.

# or...



# read to learn

We also wanted to share some books and other magazines that can be useful in learning more about different issues, if you rather spend your time diving deeper into reality.



Priyamvada Gopal – *Insurgent empire - Anticolonial resistance and british dissent*

In this brick of a novel Priyamvada Gopal re-examines the colonial history of the British. In this historical account, something is very different compared with our history books in school. Instead of viewing “colonial subjects” as just that – subjects, our helpless victims – Gopal tells the stories of the people that resisted and fought the colonial powers. The people from the West Indies to East Africa, Egypt to India, did not just give up and surrender all power to the British. People revolted. People fought. People made themselves heard. The stories of the anti-colonial struggle are rarely heard, which makes this book an important one to share. This book feels empowering, because it is. I hope you find that too.



Astra Taylor – *Democracy may not exist but we will miss it once it is gone*

This year has been one of many questions but one that is asked by lots of people around the world, which also becomes clear from our writers’ different takes on corruption, is that people are worried about their democratic states’ stability. And there is reason to be. Taylor manages to get to the core of the question “are we living through a crisis of democracy?” in democracy may not exist but we will miss it once it is gone. It offers an understanding of what might happen in the near future, but also reminds us of the value that democracy has, and why we need to continue our fight against incumbents and other actors who oppose it. A reminder that is important at all times, but what feels especially important right now, when the cracks in society are ever more starkly visible.

– Julian-Alexis Kasapov –

Below you will find two news outlets whose work I think is worth highlighting. If you have not heard of them I hope they will at least bring you new perspectives, no matter what topic you are interested in.

**Politico EU:** An independent, non-partisan news agency that tries to reflect a broad scope of news in a way that brings our minds back to real journalism. What I find great is that they have a UK/U.S/EU edition which, to a great extent, provides current news, analyses and debates without requiring any premium subscription. For those who prefer listening to news, they do also come out with frequent podcast episodes incorporating correspondents from both the U.S and the EU into their programme.

**Foreign Policy:** Another great news agency that, contrary to Politico, does reporting on global news. However, what you will gain in scope is what you will pay in order to access it. They carry out quite an aggressive marketing campaign persuading you to subscribe, making it almost impossible to read anything on their page without accidentally ending up among their subscription alternatives. In today’s society, which is overflowing with information, they are perhaps attempting to salvage “free speech”, by remaining an outlet sponsored by readers, but this freedom does little good if people do not have access to the publication. The reason I recommend FP is that, as a student, you receive a discount of 50% and the ability to access all exclusive interviews and take part in elaborate and interesting articles. But a pro-tip to all students out there is to see if your university is a registered user, which would allow you to access it for free.

## WILL BRAZIL EVER FREE ITSELF FROM THE SHACKLES OF CORRUPTION?

– by Felix Sjögren –



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Corruption has been ravaging Brazil for the last six decades, and the recent scandal *Operation Car Wash* is the biggest one yet. Current President Jair Bolsonaro was hailed as an anti-corruption candidate, but now he too has been accused of corruption. So, what is Brazil supposed to do?

Brazilian author **Luiza Sauma**’s *Flesh and Bone and Water* tells the story of a boy by the name of André. He falls in love with Luana, the daughter of the family’s *empregada*, as is the portugese word for maid used in the novel, and subsequently flees after tearing the family apart.

The book’s dialogue illustrates a rigid disdain for politics and politicians among the Brazilian people, regardless of their class. Set in the ‘80s, it shows that corruption has been festering in Brazil for decades: from the military dictatorship

starting in the ‘60s, to President **José Sarney** in the ’80s and ’90s, to the more recent presidents **Lula da Silva**, who faced prison, and **Dilma Rousseff**, who was impeached. And most recent, of course, is **Jair Bolsonaro**. This begs the question: will Brazil ever free itself from the shackles of corruption?

The corruption scandals in Brazil seemingly follow one after another, and are so intricate they are almost impossible to separate. Particularly convoluted is the so-called *Operation Car Wash*, in which presidents, senators, members of the lower legislative house, state governors, CEOs and other businessmen have been implicated. The investigation began in 2014 and was, until very recently, ongoing.

The operation, named after a petrol station used for money laundering, has uncovered a major network of corruption involving the state-owned oil



company **Petrobras** and their plans for building the petrochemical complex **Comperj**.

In Petrobras's search for contractors, engineering company **Odebrecht** founded a cartel with other companies looking to obtain building contracts. They took turns with these contracts and could therefore dictate the price and heavily overcharge Petrobras. Part of their profits were then laundered and used to bribe Petrobras's executives and Brazilian politicians.<sup>[4]</sup> The investigation has resulted in countless warrants and former President da Silva receiving a sentence of initially nine and a half, and later twelve, years in jail.

More recently, current President Jair Bolsonaro, the leader of the right-wing Social Liberal Party who ran on an anti-corruption message, has been accused of severe nepotism in trying to protect his wife and sons from prosecution.

They, in turn, are accused of funneling taxpayers' money and public funds by employing people who agreed to kick back some of their salaries as well as keeping ghost employees on their payrolls. Bolsonaro, in an ill-fated decision, fired the chief of police. This led his Justice Minister **Sérgio Moro**, who was formerly the judge to oversee *Operation Car Wash*, to resign in an extravagant fashion by holding a 40-minute speech laying out the President's interference with police work.

These investigations have, of course, highlighted the vast corruption in the Brazilian elite, but also led to massive unemployment. The halt of Petrobras's different projects has caused the elimination of 500 000 jobs in Brazil alone, and countless more in the rest of South America. Itaboraí, the city in which Comperj was supposed to be built, initially saw an influx of workers and the economy booming, only to be left with 40 000 people unemployed.

So, what can be done when corruption and the economy are so interwoven? What can be done when hundreds of thousands of people ultimately are dependent on corruption for work? How is Brazil supposed to balance counter-corruption and economic prosperity?

This question poses a conundrum – a seemingly unbreakable cycle of contradiction. For the

government to change things, there must be trust. However, there cannot be trust as long as the government does not change. What comes first, the chicken or the egg?

The answer to this question is hard-sought. The natural and most sensible one is that the government carries the responsibility for its people and therefore must take the initiative. But is the government of Brazil already too broken? Are its institutions beyond salvation? Perhaps what Brazil needs is a new chicken.

In trying to understand what a Brazilian makes of all this, I spoke to Lidiane Castro, a Brazilian PhD student currently studying in Spain. She made the Brazilian attitude towards corruption quite clear: "It's always been there. Politicians are corrupt, so it doesn't matter whom you put in charge. It will

always happen because that's the way it works."

When I asked about the interplay between

corruption and the economy, she immediately brought up the rise of President Bolsonaro. Because of the disastrous impact of *Operation Car Wash* on the economy under Lula and the Workers' Party, Bolsonaro could garner support from disgruntled voters who saw, first hand, the effects of corruption.

Speculating about the future, Castro is not entirely optimistic, expressing worry about the right-wing rhetoric spreading throughout Brazil and the world. "[Bolsonaro] propagates hate and fake news. [...] When ignorance takes such a huge role in society, it's very easy to make people afraid, to make them do things and accept things and make terrible choices."

It is difficult to analyse the situation in Brazil. In a place where corruption is found at virtually every level of government, what hope is there to be had? One thing is clear: the government of Brazil is much like André in *Flesh and Bone and Water* – it lacks honesty and accountability. Luana on the other hand, much like the Brazilian people, wishes for something better but doubts whether it will come.

One can only hope the government of Brazil feels the same shame and guilt for running away as André did.

## What comes first, the chicken or the egg?





# A Certainly Uncertain Future for US Environmental Politics

– By Marko Stankovic –

As the dust is settling, and we are still awaiting **Donald Trump** to concede his loss to president-elect **Joe Biden**, one collective sigh of relief could be heard from the pro-environmental community all over the world. Over the last four years, President Trump has spent his time calling climate change a “hoax”, denying science and mocking environmentalists all over the world, not the least, young activist **Greta Thunberg**. He even fulfilled one of his core promises before joining office in 2016 - leaving the *Paris Agreement* - which officially happened the day after the US elections in November 2020. While President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to re-join the accords on his first day in office, this does not automatically restore things to how they were before Trump’s presidency. With a seemingly pro-environmental president-elect, we ask ourselves, what can we expect from US environmental politics in the next four years?

President Donald Trump spent the last four years working to undo much of the environmental laws and regulations that **Barack Obama** enacted during his time as president. Under Trump; the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement, reversed over 100 environmental laws and regulations, and alienated almost every pro-environment actor there is. Trump ran on reviving the fossil fuel industry, as part of his “America First”-slogan. One example of this is the domestic coal-industry. However, this energy source has seen a 31% decrease in the electricity production during Trump’s Presidency since 2017, according to reports by the **New York Times**. Coal simply is not profitable anymore in the US, which is evident by the fact that a larger proportion of the electricity production in the US, comes from solar- and wind power today, than from coal.

Further, the America’s Pledge initiative brings together several states, cities and companies that together have obliged to follow the Paris Agreement even if the current President did not on a federal level. Where Presi-

dent Trump failed the environment, non-federal actors and the private sector prevailed.

With a demand for environmental action in the US, which President Trump in several ways failed to address, it leaves President-elect Joe Biden in a peculiar situation, with a whole world, and future generations’ expectations on his shoulders.



## Praise from the environmental community

President-elect Biden’s vocal commitment to environmental issues has received a lot of acclaim from environmental scientists, politicians and climate activists, around the world, claiming that the US once again has a President who puts science above fiction.

Biden’s environmental policies, put forward during his campaign include, among other things, a target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and plans for a two trillion dollar investment plan in green recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and creation of green jobs. While this has been described as the most ambitious cli-

mate policy plan a presidential candidate has put forward, according to **BBC**, Biden faces several instrumental challenges in his way forward.

First of which is - depending on the US Senate election in Georgia in January 2021 - the Republicans are set to win a majority in the Senate. This means that they will most likely have the power to block, and halt, the proposed policies that Biden puts forward. While the president-elect will have ways to enact some of his environmental policies either way, stiff opposition from the Senate certainly will not make his life easier.

Second, while Biden has been vocal about the importance of working towards a sustainable future, President Trump was not. This not only hurt the reputation of the United States as an environmental leader, but also damaged the trust of the US as a reliable negotiating partner on climate issues. Simply rejoining an agreement will not be enough, Biden would have to show through domestic actions that the US can and will be an actor to reckon with.

Thirdly, the US has been said to have lost its momentum on climate issues. While President Trump reversed some 100 environmental laws, he also worked to dismantle several domestic environmental agencies. Replacing several high-ranking climate officials, with climate sceptics. Previous senior employees of the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, have therefore called for a restart of US environmental governance, which means that president-elect Biden will have a lot of work to do.

On a separate note, the future of fracking has also become a central question in the US energy production, according to pre-election analyses by **Forbes**. While Trump has clearly been pro this way of producing natural gas, it has been criticised for posing dangerous threats to the environment and to humans. Even though Biden has been saying that he will not out-

law fracking, he has not been entirely clear on the future of it. Therefore, it will be an important aspect to keep an eye on going forward.

## Within striking distance of the Paris Agreement

Still, calculations by the *Climate Action Tracker* show that if Biden follows through on his pledges it would put the global community within a reasonable distance to reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement. In a best-case scenario Biden’s pledges could reduce US emissions by about 75 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide, and by estimation of the Climate Action Tracker, could reduce global heating by 0.1C by 2100.

With the EU pushing forward with its Green New Deal and China surprising everyone with pledging to reach net zero emission by 2060, we could end up with having three of the world’s largest emitters, committed to reaching net zero emissions. A



scenario which certainly would be welcomed by every pro-environmentalist around the world.

Even though the climate clearly was not a prioritized issue during Trump’s presidency, there have been positive signs as well. For example, in the continued increase of solar and wind power, the decrease of coal power, and development of local and regional climate initiatives. This has shown that climate efforts in the US are not solely dependent on whoever the president in charge is.

And while the election of Biden as president does not automatically solve the climate issue, it certainly steers the climate discussion in the right direction. Perhaps this is how we could see Biden’s inauguration in its initial stages, as a symbolic win for the climate, and more importantly, as a more climate oriented United States.





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- UTRIKESPOLITISKA FÖRENINGEN -

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G Ö T E B O R G