

Civil Liberties in Times of Crisis

Marcella Alsan, Luca Braghieri, Sarah Eichmeyer, Joyce Kim, Stefanie Stantcheva, David Yang

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 - Political philosophers sometimes consider civil liberties as “sacred values,” rights that should not be subject to trade-offs (e.g., Aberle et al. 1950; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Tetlock 2003).

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1. What are citizens willing to sacrifice, and what are they steadfast in supporting no matter what the circumstance?
2. How does this vary across countries, between individuals within countries, and over time?
3. How do threats to security affect this trade-off, and what does variation in the willingness to sacrifice rights across groups reveal about social inequality?

⇒ *This paper aims to answer these questions in context of COVID-19 pandemic.*

COVID-19 pandemic

**The
Guardian**

Coronavirus
outbreak

**New US measures threaten civil rights
amid coronavirus pandemic**



**In Modi's India,
Rights and
Freedoms Erode
Further Amid
COVID-19**

The New York Times

***France Weighs Its Love of Liberty in Fight
Against Coronavirus***

The French are cautiously considering digital tracking, which has proved effective in Asia. But can a country that so prizes personal freedom and privacy ever accept it?

**THE
WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN** 🇦🇺

**Covid-19 pandemic shows how fragile our liberties
are**



NATIONAL & WORLD AFFAIRS

**Restricting civil liberties
amid COVID-19
pandemic**



**As civil liberties erode, Canada must not allow
COVID-19 outbreak to infect the rule of law**

Government can suppress civil liberties in the name of protecting them, but how far will it go?

The New York Times

***Spain, on Lockdown, Weighs Liberties
Against Containing Coronavirus***

Empty streets. Shattered stores. Spain has joined the number of countries struggling to balance public health with freedoms especially prized in a relatively young democracy.

The Telegraph

**Under cover of Covid, the Government has launched an all-out assault
on British civil liberties**

Few among us will doubt ministers' good intentions - but you know what they say about the road to hell

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- Document significant heterogeneity across countries and demographic groups in willingness to sacrifice rights for public welfare.
 - Citizens disadvantaged by income, education, or race are less willing to sacrifice rights than their more advantaged peers in every country: suggesting civil liberties as “luxury goods.”
- Estimate that 1 s.d. raise in health insecurity increases willingness to sacrifice civil liberties by approx. 72-92% of gap between Chinese and US citizens.
 - Qualitatively and quantitatively similar results leveraging either naturally-occurring variation or experimental approaches.

Surveys and measurement

Two large-scale online surveys

1. Longitudinal survey:

- 535,657 responses from 300,000 unique respondents;
- 13 countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, UK, and US;
- 1,000/country each week, from March 2020 to January 2021.
- Core civil liberties trade-off module: willingness to sacrifice ...

2. In-depth survey:

- 13,352 respondents;
- China, France, Germany, Italy, South Korea, UK, US;
- Late-March to mid-April 2020.
- Core civil liberties trade-off module + “minimum lives need to be saved”;
- Experimental module that provides information on public health consequences of unchecked COVID-19.

1. Core civil liberties trade-off module:

- *I am willing to sacrifice my own rights and freedom during a crisis like the current one for the health and well-being of society.*
- In addition to general rights and freedom, 7 questions covering domains such as privacy, democratic procedures, free movement, free speech.

Trading-off civil liberties: measurement

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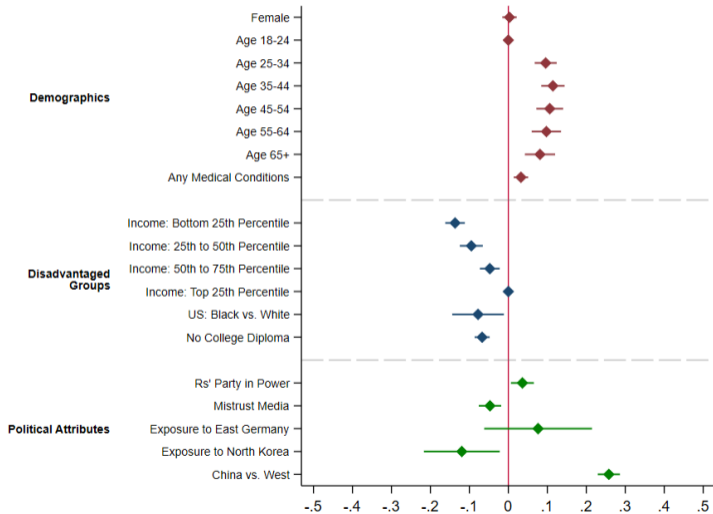
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2. “Minimum lives need to be saved” module:

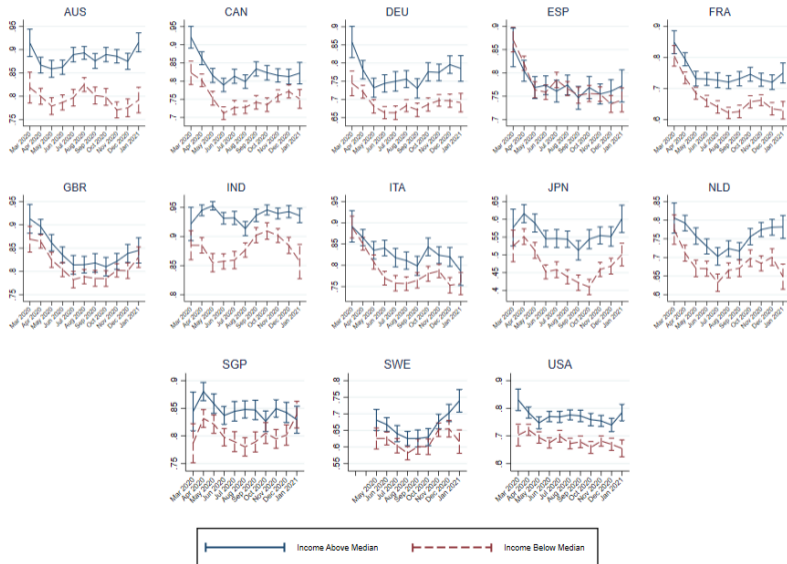
- *Out of every 100 people who would have otherwise died in [your country] because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some will be saved if one of the following policies is implemented. What's the minimum number of lives that each of the following policies would need to save in order for you to support it?*
- E.g., the government can track smartphone location and social contact data of all citizens.
- Total of 11 questions covering privacy, free movement, unrestricted business activities.
- Insensitive to whether asking the question in relative (above) or absolute scale;
- Answers strongly predictive of behaviors such as downloading tracking apps, donating to NGOs related to civil liberties, and supporting petitions that advocate liberties.

Civil liberties as “luxury goods”

Patterns within countries

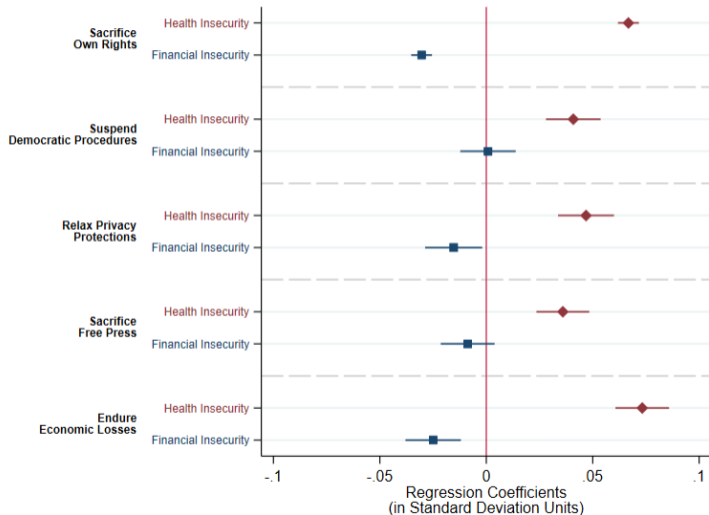


Civil liberties as “luxury goods”: across countries and over time

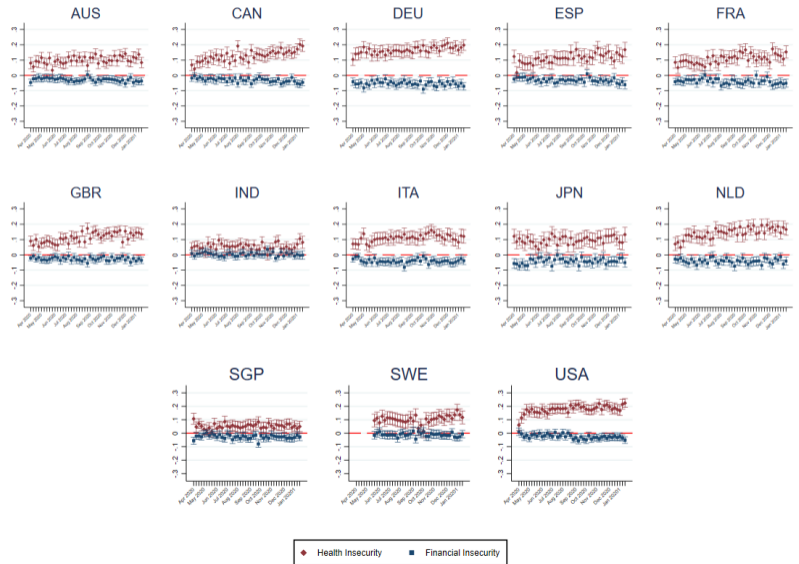


Health insecurities and trading-off civil liberties

Insecurities & sacrificing civil liberties



Stable pattern over time



Empirical approach #1: COVID-19 mortality fluctuations

- Instrument for health insecurity using short-term fluctuations in local COVID-19 mortality (using longitudinal survey):
 - Conditional on local COVID-19 cumulative mortality, variation in policies to combat the disease, individual-level time-varying subjective financial insecurity, and views of government effectiveness.
- As a baseline, we estimate the following model using two-stage least-squares:

$$Y_{ik} = \alpha_{j(ik)} + \alpha_{t(ik)} + \gamma_0 \cdot \text{Health insecurity}_{ik} + X'_{ikj(ik)t(ik)} \Omega_0 + \epsilon_{ik} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Health insecurity}_{ik} = \alpha_{j(ik)} + \alpha_{t(ik)} + \gamma_1 \cdot \text{COVID-19 incidence}_{j(ik)t(ik)} + X'_{ikj(ik)t(ik)} \Omega_1 + \kappa_{ik}, \quad (2)$$

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- Alternative specification with individual FEs:
 - Unobserved individual characteristics correlated with health insecurity may affect attitudes. We take advantage of the panel component of the survey that approximately 83,000 respondents participate in multiple survey waves over the sampling period.
- First stage: Kleibergen-Paap F-stat = 148.70.

Empirical approach #1: COVID-19 mortality fluctuations (*result*)

	Sacrifice <i>Indiv FEs</i> (1)	Own Rights <i>Country FEs</i> (2)	Sacrifice Free Press (3)	Relax Privacy Protections (4)	Suspend Demo. Proce. (5)	Endure Econ. Losses (6)
Panel A: OLS Estimates						
Health Insecurity	0.023*** (0.002)	0.096*** (0.003)	0.057*** (0.003)	0.065*** (0.004)	0.059*** (0.003)	0.095*** (0.004)
Panel B: Reduced Form						
COVID-19 Incidence	0.007*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.012*** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)
Panel C: 2SLS Estimates						
Health Insecurity	0.107*** (0.028)	0.094*** (0.031)	0.202*** (0.064)	0.122** (0.047)	0.302*** (0.056)	0.128** (0.058)
Kleibergen-Paap F-statistic	115.656	104.300	54.007	65.218	88.432	39.053
Mean of Outcome	0.747	0.750	0.615	0.575	0.575	0.571
Number of Unique FEs	65313	197	196	197	197	196
Observations	230089	359380	71847	71804	71811	71805
Controls:						
Demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial Insecurity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Government Effectiveness	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Policy Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lagged COVID-19 Prevalence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Week Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Fixed Effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual-Level Fixed Effects	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Empirical approach #2: information treatment

- COVID-19 has been not only a health but also an economic crisis. The experimental intervention helped isolate the former channel:
 - Help respondents better understand the exponential nature of disease transmission, the consequences that such exponential growth poses to a healthcare system that cannot adjust at the same rate, and the justification for policies aimed at flattening the epidemic curve;
 - Exponential growth bias should cause people to underestimate the threat that an exponentially-spreading disease poses to the healthcare system.
- Instrument for health insecurity using random assignment to the information treatment (using in-depth survey).
- First stage: Kleibergen-Paap F-stat = 57.73.

Empirical approach #2: information treatment (*result*)

Outcome Variables	Health Insecurity (OLS)		Health Insecurity (2SLS)		Mean of Outcome	Gap btw. China and U.S.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		
<i>Panel A: Overall rights and freedom</i>						
Willing to sacrifice own rights	0.063***	(0.005)	0.170**	(0.084)	0.724	0.224
Willing to sacrifice others' rights	0.066***	(0.005)	0.137	(0.084)	0.705	0.203
<i>z-score: willing to sacrifice rights</i>	0.156***	(0.012)	0.369**	(0.185)	0.000	0.512
<i>Panel B: Protection of privacy</i>						
Willing to relax privacy protections	0.033***	(0.006)	0.226**	(0.091)	0.577	0.393
Unwilling to accept: track sick people	-2.114***	(0.422)	-12.475**	(6.150)	48.855	-5.843
Unwilling to accept: track everyone	-1.440***	(0.420)	-15.497**	(6.356)	54.572	-8.957
Contact tracing app	0.036***	(0.006)	0.241***	(0.090)	0.475	0.268
<i>z-score: willing to sacrifice privacy</i>	0.103***	(0.012)	0.715***	(0.190)	0.000	0.778
<i>Panel C: Democratic rights and institutions</i>						
Prefer strong leader	-0.054***	(0.012)	0.762***	(0.210)	2.672	0.614
Prefer delegating to experts	0.102***	(0.012)	0.832***	(0.174)	2.909	-0.058
Willing to sacrifice free press	0.002	(0.006)	0.237**	(0.093)	0.600	0.422
No preference for democratic system	-0.110***	(0.011)	-0.042	(0.125)	1.733	n.a.
Willing to suspend democr. procedures	-0.014**	(0.006)	0.155*	(0.082)	0.446	n.a.
<i>z-score: willing to curtail democracy</i>	0.004	(0.013)	0.743***	(0.183)	-0.001	n.a.

Conclusion

- Individuals are often willing to trade-off civil liberties to alleviate health insecurities, especially among those who are socioeconomically advantaged: civil liberties as luxury goods rather than sacred values.
 - A 1 s.d. increase in health insecurity raises willingness to sacrifice rights and freedom by: 9.4 pp (panel), 10.7 pp (repeated cross-section), 17 pp (information treatment).

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- Interpretations:
 1. Shape of citizens' indifference curves may be altered due to the crisis experience, resulting in a persistent change in the underlying willingness to sacrifice rights and freedoms for a given level of health security.
 2. Respond to increase in either objective (e.g., actual epidemic burden) or perceived (e.g., salience of the pandemic) health threats, moving along the indifference curve between health security and civil liberties due to changes in "prices."
 - Even transient moves along the indifference curve could result in long-term individual and societal consequences through enduring changes to institutions and norms.